Philosophical reflections on the pedagogy of the art museum: Toward an experiential practice

Pamela Clelland Gray

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School of Historical and Philosophical Studies
University of Melbourne
Declaration

This is to certify that

i. This thesis comprises only my original work towards the PhD,

ii. Due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used,

iii. The thesis is less than 100,000 words in length, exclusive of footnotes and bibliography.

Pamela Clelland Gray

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Preface

This thesis investigates discourse and practice that has informed the pedagogy of the public art museum. Combining historical analysis with philosophical investigation it establishes germane theoretical ground for an emergent pedagogic praxis that recognises human agency in learning and the importance of aesthetics. It draws on the philosophical thinking of Hans-Georg Gadamer, John Dewey, Jacques Rancière and Immanuel Kant whose work in different, but significant ways provide orienting ideals and principles for articulating an emancipatory hermeneutic pedagogy.
Philosophical reflections on the pedagogy of the art museum:
Toward an experiential practice

Abstract

Declaration

Acknowledgements

Introduction

Chapter One: Framing disciplines: Art, the museum, and art history

Chapter Two: The work of art in the museum

Chapter Three: Hans-Georg Gadamer: The experience of art as participatory act

Chapter Four: John Dewey: The experiential standpoint: Knowing as an emergent property of experience

Chapter Five: Emancipating the spectator into a participator

Chapter Six: Making room: Sensible intuition and discursive cognition

Conclusion

Bibliography
Abstract

This thesis investigates discourse and practice that has informed the pedagogy of the public art museum. The broad context for the thesis is recent museological research and institutional strategies that emphasise the subjective and collective agency of audience. Contemporary scholarly reflection on museums gives attention to the active agency of audiences in the process of knowledge production, thus reflecting concern for a social relationship between things and people. Focussing on education programming for adult audiences this thesis brings into question the efficacy of traditional pedagogical practice in the contemporary art museum. It argues that programming underpinned by ideas of expert art historical knowledge no longer hold authority over how contemporary museum audiences view or interpret works of art.

Examination of the epistemological foundation of museum pedagogy is critical to redistribute knowledge and practice in order to augment the potentialities of the art museum’s educational impact and import. Education can no longer be thought of on the model of a straightforward transfer of information from one who knows to many who do not, but conceived in a more emancipatory and transformative way.

The confluence of art and education in the museum cannot be about art alone. Beyond knowledge about art lies the possibility of knowing oneself, in solitude, and in community with others, through art. Museum pedagogy requires a broader disciplinary base in order to trace the relations between viewing works of art in the museum and the life-world of visitors. The thesis is premised on an understanding of art as a unique form of knowledge that exceeds its historical framing. Art asks or wants something of us as beholders, it insists in the performative and sensual dynamics involved in making and engaging with the world. It therefore implicates the agency of the viewer; potentially prompting prolonged engagement and speculation.

Combining historical analysis with philosophical investigation the thesis establishes germane theoretical ground for an emergent pedagogic praxis that recognises human agency in learning and the importance of aesthetics. It is not within the scope of the thesis to present a method or pedagogic model; a single model does not serve the cause of museum education. The thesis is an interdisciplinary study weighted toward philosophical reflections that orient toward an experientially nuanced pedagogy. The research method draws on the philosophical thinking of Hans-Georg Gadamer, John Dewey, Jacques Rancière and Immanuel Kant whose work in different, but significant ways provide orienting ideals and principles toward the articulation of an emancipatory hermeneutic pedagogy.
Introduction

There are strong indications that among the loose federation of sciences dealing with knowledge and cognition – the cognitive sciences – there is a slowly growing conviction that [the] picture is upside down, that a radical paradigmatic or epistemic shift is rapidly developing. At the very center of this emerging view is the belief that the proper units of knowledge are primarily concrete, embodied, incorporated, and lived. This unique concrete knowledge, its historicity and context, is not ‘noise’ that occludes the brighter pattern to be captured in its true essence, an abstraction, nor is it a step toward something else: it is how we arrive and where we stay.

Francisco J. Varela 1

This thesis is a speculative study that seeks to articulate theoretical perspectives to ground an experiential and relational museum pedagogical praxis. It is motivated by a commitment to the present importance of art museums; it seeks, through philosophical reflections, to determine praxial grounds for new alternative approaches to enable visitors’ meaningful experiences of works of art in the museum. It is premised on an understanding that art making and art experiencing are richly personal, corporeal, cognitive, emotional, and perceptual, inherently social practices. 2 It is not my intention in the scope of the thesis to provide prescriptions for a model of practice. Rather, I seek to formulate theoretical approaches for structuring engagements with works of art in the museum that can be defined as ‘pedagogy as praxis’ that resists any sharp theory practice dichotomy. Praxis, a multidimensional concept that includes active reflection and critically reflective action, should, in the spaces of the art museum be guided by an informed ethical disposition, dedicated to personal and collective flourishing, grounded in the primary intent to enrich people’s everyday lives. 3 It is distinct from habitual behaviour of repetitive practice and involves what music educators, David Elliott and Marissa Silverman, have called full human ‘personhood’, 4 they explain further:

Our intrapersonal and interpersonal experience of the arts — our individual and shared feeling and thinking; our teaching and learning; everything we conceptualise, do, or desire, — stem from our status as

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3 Elliott, Silverman and Bowman, Artistic Citizenship: Artistry, Social Responsibility and Ethical Praxis, 7.
beings who posses, undergo, enact, and ‘perform’ our individual and collective personhood(s). The nature of praxis is provisional and contingent, to be reconsidered in the light of experience and the changing particulars of individuals, groups, situations or contexts involved. In the spaces of the art museum praxial induced inquiry defines an approach to visitor engagement with works of art that seeks to contribute to effective personalised learning opportunities and increased human agency.

My purpose in this thesis is not to write a comprehensive exegetical analysis of the theoretical works I draw on, nor is it my interest to prescribe a fixed model of pedagogical practice, but rather to open space for theorising an emergent ‘pedagogy as praxis’ in the art museum, that is inclusive of critical thinking and action, as well as emotions, techniques, motivations, aims, values and ethics, and all their interactions. The disposition of praxial induced museum pedagogy requires for its calibration that it emerge through collaborative cultures of situated museum practitioners responsive to specificities of particular and changing contextual and socially embedded settings relational to the people involved. Contra to a prescriptive educational practice which seeks to shape behaviours to pre-specified ends, my approach to attuning pedagogy as praxis involves what educationalist Peter Abbs describes as “an opening out of the mind that transcends detail and skill and whose movement cannot be predicted.” To this end I explore a range of philosophical ideas drawn from the work of the theorists I have selected who provide promising perspectives to support praxial induced museum pedagogy. While there are other theorists who could shed valuable light on the concerns and questions that the thesis explores, those I have chosen, Immanuel Kant, John Dewey, Hans-Georg Gadamer and Jacques Rancière, offer helpful and pertinent insights for attuning pedagogy as praxis. Broadly, these include interdependency of subjective and objective forms of knowing; the intuitive and the cognitive and embodied, aesthetic appreciation and active reflection, and critically reflective action, a conception of art’s social embeddedness that nuances modes of human communication, knowledge as concrete and experienced, and emancipatory pedagogies of equality. Each of the theorists whose philosophical work I investigate in the following chapters have been selected for the reason that they address (albeit in different ways) important questions concerning human agency, pluralism, democratic participation, the role of cultural practices in human experience, all concerns that are at the forefront of contemporary progressive museological research.

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6 Marissa Silverman and David J. Elliott, “Arts Education as/for Artistic Citizenship,” in Elliott, Silverman and Bowman, Artistic Citizenship, 90.
The thesis argues that there are – generally speaking – insufficient opportunities or scope for visitors’ aesthetic, personal and cultural experiences relevant (to their life-worlds) when they encounter works of art in visitor-education programs in our public art museums. The history of public art museums shows these are institutions, which, by and large, *tell us what we are to think* or how we are to feel about the works on display. They do this in part by their often-exhaustive use of an authoritative art history (which has itself evolved alongside these public museums) and other voices of expertise. This thesis argues for a reconsideration of the ontology of art in the light of the experience of art in conjunction with the epistemology of art history. It draws on the work of several key philosophers, art historians, museologists, and other commentators who are concerned with how we experience and come to understand and appreciate works of art. The thesis aims to explore theoretical perspectives that might inform the structure and agency of a pedagogy that facilitates the experience of art through an experientially oriented praxis.

This thesis therefore asks: *how can the pedagogy of the art museum be re-imagined to more meaningfully connect works of art with the lives of visitors in order to enable conditions for certain imaginations and subjectivities to emerge?*

Historically, art museum pedagogical practice has evolved along with the traditions and systems of art history. Yet, art is a source of *knowledge* that exceeds art historical knowledge. Art history is thus arguably an inadequate tool for eliciting other forms of knowledge the experience of art can give rise to. Research indicates that the experience of viewing art in the museum solicits different experiential modes that include affective, perceptual, communicative and cognitive dimensions.\(^8\)

The interdisciplinary research method of this thesis is grounded in several decades of my own professional practice in major Australian art museums. Predominantly theoretical, this methodology has to some extent limited the scope of my research. This approach has been necessary to address a perceived disparity between the art museum’s theoretical espousals of late twentieth-century cultural critique and the dispersal of those theoretical insights in its public educational practice. This study is one of the first to explore art museum pedagogy from a philosophical perspective. Its initial aim is to set the theoretical terms for further work in the field of research and practice.

Philosophy, a cognate discipline to art history, can offer valuable insights for rethinking museum pedagogy. A philosophical framework potentially allows for the augmentation of reflexive registers of personal engagement with works of art.

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that yield value and educational importance beyond the museum. This thesis investigates philosophical ideas and perspectives that offer insights for the elaboration of possible new orientations for museum pedagogy. It seeks philosophical approaches to determine a more liberal theoretical ground for a pedagogy that incorporates hermeneutic experience, aesthetic perception and experimental inquiry, repositioning the spectator as an active participator. It explores the traditional pedagogical dimension of the public art museum and interrogates the institution’s disciplinary frameworks, discourses, practice and protocols with a view to scoping new possibilities for museum pedagogy.

A motivating impetus for undertaking this thesis is the current limited critical research on audience reception and response to works of art in the museum. Until quite recently very little in-depth research work had been undertaken on the discourses of the public art museum, such as the museological or art historical practices that determine how the visitor is brought to an encounter with art, how these discourses ascribe positionality to the viewer, enable or disable agentic engagement and experiential understanding and experimental inquiry relational to those works encountered. While there is a large body of museological literature on the educational practices of the art museum, scant attention is given to critical questions raised in this project. Further research is required to achieve a more philosophically nuanced understanding and grounded theory of viewer experience of art in the museum. A notable extant contribution to museum research that opens pathways for an enhanced understanding of the experience of works of art is Teaching in the Art Museum: Interpretation as Experience undertaken by Rika Burnham and Elliot Kai-Kee at the J Paul Getty Museum,9 which situates this area of practice in a broader philosophical context.

The scope of this project is an investigation of philosophical ideas that positively contribute to an expanded understanding of the interpretation and experience of art for museum audiences. As has been noted, it is not my intention in this thesis to propose a single methodological approach or pedagogical model; no single model could or does serve the cause of museum education. Rethinking pedagogical practice necessarily entails an approach to art engagement practices that acknowledge a socialised, historicised individual while recognising a conception of knowledge as a process of production (not reproduction) within socio-cultural contexts. Interpretation of objects and events of the past can only be constructed in the present.

**Defining art**
Conceptions of art and aesthetics in Continental and Analytic traditions of philosophy have developed in response and critical relation to major traditions

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and thinkers like Immanuel Kant and George William Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831), among others. While approaches to art associated with Continental Philosophy are more historically and experientially oriented, the Analytic philosophical tradition is rooted in the analysis of concepts and emphasises concerns about the nature of art and the aesthetic qualities of objects in an ahistorical way. Pragmatism, which is seen to constitute a separate school of philosophy, conceives of art as serving a practical function: art is conceptualised in terms of its effects on audience, the enhancement of experience and thought and promotion and continuity of a cultural community. John Dewey, a major figure in classical pragmatism, challenges the dualism between theory and practice and insists on the agency of audience in an encounter with artistic phenomena; a central feature of his theory of experimental knowledge.

The tradition of Continental Philosophy gives art and aesthetics significant importance in the work of most major thinkers in the field. Working in the Continental philosophical field, Hans-Georg Gadamer’s hermeneutical aesthetics offers important theoretical reflections on the experience of art in ways analogous to Dewey’s. Taking a different approach to the analytic tradition, Continental Philosophy understands art as exemplifying meaning and truth, emphasising art’s historical and social situatedness. Gadamer’s hermeneutical aesthetics is not primarily concerned with theorising art, which Gadamer resists in the interest of giving attention to the work of art per se, to avoid reducing it to a secondary importance as evidence of social or historical phenomena. As Nicholas Harvey suggests, Gadamer’s interest is in how works of art of which we become conscious, come into being in our experience. Continental philosophy, in general, brings forth questions concerning art’s role and value in culture, politics and everyday life, that is, what art does, rather than what art is.

It has been argued that the phenomena of art are, by their nature, too diverse to submit to the requirements of a satisfactory definition. For philosopher Morris Weitz (1916-1981) the concept of art is an ‘open concept’ not emendable to necessary and sufficient conditions. Indeed, for Weitz, the very possibility of creativity in art requires this openness. However, not all philosophers agree with Weitz’s scepticism about finding necessary and sufficient conditions for art. Rather than look for intrinsic properties of objects, including aesthetic or formal properties, attention has turned to extrinsic and relational properties, notably of social and historical, or ‘institutional’ nature. Proponents of such relational

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10 The role of art and aesthetics in the works of Continental philosophers is evident in Phenomenology, Existentialism, Hermeneutics, Psychoanalysis, Critical Theory, and Poststructuralism.


properties as providing an essence of art are exemplified in the work of Arthur Danto, George Dickie, and Jerrold Levinson, although their approaches are significantly different.  

Approaches to defining art within Analytic Philosophy are rooted in the analysis of concepts and examination of issues about the nature of art. George Dickie’s ‘institutional theory’ defines art as an artefact to be presented to an ‘artworld’ public. The defining characteristic of art in this account is based on how works of art relate to art institutions and art practices. It holds that an object can only become art in the context of the institution designated as the ‘artworld’. Taking a different but related position, Jerrold Levinson’s ‘intentional historical definition’ of art places emphasis on the importance for appreciation of past works. For Levinson a work of art is a work of art in virtue of it being regarded by an individual with a certain attention that is sensitive to the history of art. Historical theories of art hold that for something to be art, it must bear some relation to existing works of art. In the Transfiguration of the Commonplace, Danto argues that a definition of art requires considering the distinction between works of art and their visually indiscernible counterparts. Danto emphasises the context and historical nature of art, for Danto there are historical constraints on what sorts of objects can be considered works of art in given historical moments. For instance, the equivalent of Andy Warhol’s 1964 Brillo Boxes could not have been a work of art in fifteenth century Florence. Danto’s view is that Warhol’s Brillo Boxes expose a basic theoretical dimension of art that shifts over time in different historical climates, and forces an abandonment of an aesthetic theory of art.

Art as object, event, or performance
Taking a more open approach, one which parallels Ludwig Wittgenstein’s account of the family resemblance of ‘games’, Weitz proposes that we do not need a technical definition of art just as we do not need a definition of ‘game’ as a prior condition for using the word. For Weitz ‘art’ can denote an object, event or performance because it bears some relevant resemblance, or family relation, to an agreed upon paradigm, just as a game can be applied to an activity because it

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14 Lamargue and Olsen, Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art, 10.
bears some relevant resemblance to some paradigmatic game.\textsuperscript{22} Weitz argues that ‘art’ itself is an open concept: “that the very expansive adventurous character of art, its ever-present changes and novel creations,” make it impossible to ensure any set of defining properties.\textsuperscript{23} Weitz writes:

The problem of the nature of art, is like that of the nature of games [...] If we actually look and see what it is we call ‘art’ we will find no common properties — only strands of similarities.\textsuperscript{24}

Weitz’s notion of strands of similarity applied to the art museum implies the art community and the museum itself endorse the designation of an object or event as art. Weitz’s description of art as an open concept is valuable in that it captures art’s theoretical and practical mutability that is contingent on the socio-historical factors of the society in which it has its existence. Accordingly, it can be usefully applied to art in the context of the art museum, which is itself, always already changing in response to broader changes concerning art’s role and value in culture, politics and everyday life.

Conceptions of art and aesthetics: Kant and Hegel

Kant’s \textit{Critique of Judgment} (1790) introduced and advanced many of the critical terms at play in modernist art analysis, beauty and the sublime, aesthetic reflective judgment, intellectual pleasure in aesthetic appreciation, the role of works of art as productive exemplars in art making, and the crucial regulating function of \textit{sensus communis} in training artists, critics, and other viewers of art.\textsuperscript{25} Kant and Hegel have been highly influential in the ensuing discussions of art and aesthetics since the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. To the present, Kant’s \textit{Third Critique of Judgement} has particular importance and relevance in its marking out of aesthetics; first, as a discreet domain of human experience, and second, the capacity of aesthetic reflective judgment to augment our communicability and sociability. Kant’s conception of aesthetic reflective judgment provides the framework for a conception of art that continues to be pertinent in the present. For Kant, art is the occasion for attuning our subjectivities inter-subjectively. By Kant’s account, the ethical dimension of art is not literal or direct, rather, its significance lies in its capacity to raise consciousness of attitudes embedded in our concepts, providing an occasion for reflection, critique, and revision of those concepts.\textsuperscript{26} Kant’s aesthetics can be

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\item \textsuperscript{23}Weitz, “The Role of Theory in Aesthetics”, 16.
\item \textsuperscript{24}Weitz, “The Role of Theory in Aesthetics”, 15.
\item \textsuperscript{26}Jennifer A. McMahon, \textit{Art and Ethics in a Material World; Kant’s Pragmatist Legacy}, (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 27-28.
\end{itemize}
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seen to offer not only an important way of understanding the distinctive characteristics of our pleasure in (beautiful) art but also a framework for understanding the deeper significance of art and beauty in relation to other domains of human experience. Similarly, in this aspect, the philosopher John Dewey’s (1859-1952) twentieth century pragmatist philosophy demonstrates a Kantian legacy. Dewey’s community of inquiry is developed within the parameters of Kant’s conception of sensus communis explicated in the Third Critique; Kant’s aesthetic theory is a precursor to pragmatist aesthetics. Sensus communis in Kant’s account is the idea that aesthetic reflective judgments are always made with an idea in mind of what one thinks others would judge — judgement indirectly makes reference to the endorsement of some conception of community. For both Kant and Dewey, aesthetic reflective judgments exemplify the responsiveness of our thinking to continually evolving norms. Kant’s aesthetic theory explains the development of methods to generate occasions for the exchange of taste and sensibility. In addition, as contemporary philosopher Jennifer McMahon argues, by that fact, Kant implicitly accommodates the idea of an institutional theory of art; that is, organised cultural practices (as in art museums) that represent community-based intentions and community-based endorsements, but do not identify the purpose of such institutions. McMahon goes on to explain:

Aesthetic reflective judgments [...] offer a structure through which to further, usually unwittingly, our evaluative concepts for the purpose of furthering the conditions of sociability and community [...] The feeling with which art is concerned is public, not private [...] This feeling is embedded in concepts which, when alluded to through art, evoke an experience and associated attitudes, images, constructs, and configurations that engage our cognition.

In contrast to Kant, Hegel turns his attention to the meaning and content of works of art per se. Hegel understood the visual arts as the means by which a culture’s essential ideas were expressed and communicated. Hegel identifies the sensuous or material character of art as its distinguishing feature. Presented in his aesthetic lectures in Berlin between 1817 and 1829, Hegel’s perspective on art provided both a model and a catalyst for systematic art historical enquiry.

28 McMahon, Art and Ethics in a Material World, 77.
29 McMahon, Art and Ethics in a Material World, 63.
30 McMahon, Art and Ethics in a Material World, 180.
31 McMahon, Art and Ethics in a Material World, 78. McMahon notes: “We do not need to avoid this conclusion because, unlike Kant we have ... the resources of various philosophical theories of meaning, language and perception to show how cognition contributes to how and what we feel.” 78.
applicable to all times, places, and cultures. Hegel understood art as the expression and representation of some deeper ideal concerned with divinity, as an evolutionary process expressing the intrinsic and unique expression of individual societies.

Art as it is conceived in the thesis

In the following section I aim to make clear the conception of art being employed in the thesis. My interest is in what art does. Made by people for engagement by people, works of art invariably embody people’s understandings, desires and values, both personal and collective. Works of art and art making, replete in human significance, are grounded in social endeavours and encounters, regardless of the meanings they embody. Experiencing art can be richly personal, corporeal, imaginative, affective, conceptual, and perceptual, it consists of participative actions, and events, and interpersonal engagements. Central to art’s meaning and its import are the ways in which its scope can connect to individual circumstances, dispositions, experience, and needs. The interpersonal and intrapersonal experiences that an encounter with art facilitates, feeling and thinking, both individual and shared “stem from our status as beings who posses, undergo, enact and ‘perform’ our individual and collective personhood(s).” A work of art has as many meanings as there are viewers, people bring all kinds or past knowledge and experiences to their engagement with works of art, they understand and interpret works of art differently. However, this does not mean that all interpretations are equally valid; understanding is gained both in terms of the visual presentation of the work and the historical context relating to it. Works of art demand our sustained and recurring attention; the greater systematic thought brought to an encounter with a work of art the more we will gain from it. As cultural theorist Mieke Bal has proposed, meanings of works of art are plural, a work of art, it is not to be understood as a given with a meaning, but as an effect of the possibilities of meaning produced by viewers, where meaning is shifting rather than fixed, although these meanings are not arbitrary, depending as they do on the detail and nature of the work.

The word ‘art’ has a wide variety of meanings, changing theoretically and practically according to the society in which it has its existence. Defining art itself

has been problematic and taken up in a range of disciplinary fields. Broad theoretical perspectives and issues have at different historical moments influenced changing conceptions of art. Discussion about the nature of art itself and the experience it occasions has been associated with the field of aesthetics. Defining beauty and its place in art, and art itself, and its relationship to aesthetics has been problematic.

The traditional art museum’s overriding concern with logical order and unity positions works of art as ‘knowable’ objects of disciplinary analysis through classificatory systems according to historical context, and effectively limits our experience of art. Presented in national schools and historical periods according to linear chronology art becomes significant for what the work points to, what it can be taken to be indicative of, or serve as evidence for. These disciplinary structures and processes, including discourses of universality, and evidentiary pedagogy, have privileged the object at the expense of the viewer’s existential experience. The elucidation historical and theoretical exemplarity brings to works of art is greatly significant, however, only after we have submitted to looking itself, can we formulate appropriate questions to ask of the academic or historical record that surrounds a work of art. It is not the intention of a work of art to be understood only historically, where the role of the observer is to recover the artistic intention through a rational cognitive process; art offers itself in a presence and is open to possibilities of apperception. Art has the capacity to invite repeated response. The existential experience of art, which the pedagogic resources of the museum might better promote, encompasses both cognitive and aesthetic experience as well as art’s affective and phenomenological event. I advocate an existential–phenomenological understanding of art that relates it to human experience, and a reoriented theoretical elaboration of the viewing subject, to which the theoretical elaboration of the work of art bears a supplementary relation.

The theory of art is a comprehensive explanation of art dealing with a set of phenomena, while art historical method guides a particular way into an art historical question or problem. Art historians rely on an interpretive method to determine the meaning of works of art; the approach adopted depends on the interest the art historian or curator brings to the work, the questions she or he wishes to ask of it, circumscribed by the methodological tools being employed. The museum’s interpretive methodologies frame objects and determine the way

36 Sociologists, philosophers, anthropologists, art historians and art critics have debated the question of what is art, its essential nature and is social importance, or lack of it. An associated philosophical question has been the nature of creativity.
39 Klonk and Hatt, Art History: A Critical Introduction to its Methods, 5.
they are spoken about, how they are placed within the contexts of discourses that shape meaning. Interpretative methods deployed are structured by a commitment to some underlying belief about art and its history; its role and meaning in human experience.

Terminology and museum typology

The argument in this thesis is situated within (and, to some extent, in opposition to) contemporary art museum public education practice, that area of museum practice that performs a pedagogical address about works of art to its visiting publics. Museum pedagogy is the theory and practice performed between what the institution provides for its publics to experience; ideally, through acts of perception, interaction, and assimilation of a work of art by an individual that leads to their “acquisition of knowledge or the development of skills, or attitudes.” Pedagogy is not simply about the social construction of knowledge, values and experiences; but as cultural critic Henry Giroux claims, it “is a performative practice embodied in the lived interactions among educators, texts, objects, and institutional formations.” A key definitional element of performative museum pedagogy emphasises the ethical implications surrounding the social agency of visitors in performing, or enacting, the museum’s pedagogic practice. This understanding of pedagogy brings to the fore questions concerning the scope and nature of visitor participation. The work of art is a presentation of meaning to someone: its meaning is not static or exhausted; any interpretation is never fully completed. The viewer, he or she, must work with the work of art to explore it to gain knowledge from it: meaning lies not wholly in the work itself, nor wholly in its realization by the viewer, but somewhere between the two.

Art educationalist Charles Garoian identifies the performance of visitor subjectivities as a pedagogic strategy through which viewers can engage museums and their works of art critically. He writes, “viewers’ agency enables their use of museum culture through which to imagine, create, and perform new cultural myths that are relevant to their personal identities. In so doing, a critical dialogue is created between the viewers and the museum.” By seeing, saying, and doing the museum viewers perform their subjectivities through the perception of a work of art.

41 Klonk and Hatt, Art History: A Critical Introduction to its Methods, 1.
42 André Desvallées and François Mairesse, (eds), Key Concepts of Museology, (Armand: Coln, 2010), 31, 32.
This thesis imagines a pedagogical practice that invites conversation about a work of art, incorporating the viewer’s personal and social knowledge and experiences, and repositions him or her as a performer, a critical participant who engages and enables their creative and political agency within museum culture. While works of art are conserved and preserved for posterity in the museum they also represent the potential to enter into a dialogue with history, for visitors to expose, examine, and critique cultural codes.48 Works of art invite the possibility to imagine new ways to see the world and ourselves, and take into account the content introduced by us as viewers.

The art museum and the art gallery are terms that can be used interchangeably to denote an institution dedicated to the collection and exhibition of art. In this dissertation the term ‘art museum’ is used to refer to a non-profit, permanent institution in service of society, open to the public. It acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits works of art for purposes of education, study, and enjoyment.49 The museum typology with which this inquiry is concerned could be referred to as a ‘universal survey museum’, an institution that seeks to tell a story of art through collections that aspire to showcase the breadth of art.50 Instituted in the Enlightenment, the concept of the universal survey art museum is a manifestation of society’s growing belief in the spread of knowledge and intellectual inquiry. ‘Universal survey’ was the mode of display in municipal and national art museums in Western Europe emergent in the late eighteenth and into the nineteenth century, where the organising principle was the universal, historical survey of canonical works of art. It was the first art museum typology to emerge and from its beginning was identified with the idea of the public art museum.51

The art museum is an important (typically informal) educative site, that at a time of rapidly diminishing physical public forums, should arguably be critically reappraised as an increasingly powerful site of educative influence.52 Informal learning sites like the museum can, ideally, take on a subtler conception of the relationship between knowers, knowledge and the processes of knowing, moving away from the cognitive ‘rigor’ commonly associated with formal educational settings. The cultural resource of art museum collections has an important role to play in developing peoples’ relationship to their world and lives.

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Learning is not merely a form of cognition, but can be thought of as an act of making which takes artistic making as its paradigmatic case; described by educationalist Aaron Stoller as, “deeper than brute cognition and close to what artistic communities have termed ‘makers knowledge’ – a phrase which attempts to draw together cognitive knowings, moral, and aesthetic meanings under a form of habit: a capacity to act.” In this understanding, “knowing and learning [...] is the capacity to enlarge experience through making and doing.” By the institution encouraging visitors to an experimental inquiry of works of art, rather than simply consuming what is presented, or delivered, there is greater opportunity for connection with what is encountered, and for visitors to claim access to those works, and themselves. However, giving visitors permission to step out of prescribed roles as passive consumers means museum educators must also relinquish their identities as ‘purveyors of knowledge’, surrendering control over the dominant museum narrative, a provocative and emancipatory move. Such a move allows the museum to forge a new pedagogical relationship with museum visitors, permitting greater awareness of the museum as a public sphere of discourse.

A critical dialogue between the museum and its visitors enables what Garoian describes as ‘critical pragmatism’ to take place. Drawing on a pragmatist philosophical perspective critical pragmatism emphasises the openness of culture to critical change, to knowing as a critical form of inquiry, to reflexive understanding as emancipation, by means of critical pedagogy. Importantly, critical pragmatism values polyvocality, participation, experience, dialogue and interaction as the sites where knowledge takes place. A critical pragmatist perspective in the context of the museum enacts pedagogy as a dialogic process, challenging the expert-centeredness of monologic practices through self-reflexive hermeneutics. In a play between the public narratives of the museum and visitors’ private narratives it supports personal voice, critical agency and prior experience. This requires open risk-taking pedagogy on the part of the art museum to become a dynamic, dialectical, and political space through which audience agency and new awareness can be forged.

54 Stoller, Knowing and Learning, 55.
56 Lisa Yun Lee, “Museums”, 244.
57 Lisa Yun Lee, “Museums”, 244.
Art is a unique, non-propositional form of knowledge, cognitive and aesthetic. A principal premise of the thesis contends that epistemological and ontological discord in traditional museum pedagogy limits the value of personal experiential knowledge that a viewer brings to and constructs in a transactional engagement with a work of art. The systematic historical study of art is in a tensive relationship with art as aesthetic phenomena, which are not reducible to the rational sphere. The aesthetic offers special challenges to art history: the sensuous experience of aesthetic phenomena (the aggregate of subjective individual experience) is in tension with the study of art traditionally predicated on systematic, scientific and objective conditions for knowledge. I propose that to modulate this tension in art museum public pedagogy we need to reorient the conditions that scaffold the ontology of art in the museum, to rethink its epistemological framing, in conjunction with hermeneutic and relational pedagogic processes that reposition the viewing subject in relation to the work of art.

Processes of interpretation are multiple, not singular, they proceed, as Hooper-Greenhill observes, from a range of perspectives or inquiry positions. Works of art may be curated and exhibited to explain certain art historical movements, stylistic innovations, or to identify and describe iconographic content. However, visitors respond to works of art in diverse ways while operating within a personal framework of interpretation informed by their past experience and the content they bring to the encounter. No approach can be a comprehensive account of a work of art; meaning is not fixed but changes in different temporalities, spatial and contextual settings. Art objects and events participate in socialised relationships and in dynamic interactions, they change meaning and value as a result. Works of art may embody "the ideas and values of past social formations," as Hooper-Greenhill notes, yet they can only be understood in the present; the interpretation of a work of art is in part embedded in already existing cultural experience and knowledge of the viewing subject.

A sub-theme of the thesis seeks to map museum pedagogy that positions ‘culture’ as generative rather than merely reflective. As cultural theorist Stuart Hall defines it, culture is a set of practices and processes that are concerned with the production and exchange of meanings – “the giving and taking of meaning [...] which in their performance construct meanings, values and subjectivities.” This understanding of cultural practice makes human agency in cultural knowledge production central to an analysis of museum hermeneutic and pedagogic processes. The idea of culture as constitutive, rather than reflective is

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63 Hooper-Greenhill, Museums and the Interpretation, 12.
therefore deeply implicated in interpretative and learning processes and practices of the art museum.⁶⁴ The need for analysis of the discourses that produce cultural meaning in this setting is crucial. As eminent museologist Hooper-Greenhill argues:

Cultural symbols have the power to shape cultural identities at both individual and social levels; to mobilise emotions, perceptions and values; to influence the way we feel and think. In this sense, culture is generative, constructivist [...] Culture, as a set of signifying practices, does not stand apart from and, through art objects, reflect society. It plays a more important role; it constructs society, through the images it creates of social possibilities and the stories it tells of social achievement. Museums are deeply involved in constructing knowledge in this way through those objects, peoples, narratives, and histories that they bring to visibility or keep hidden. These processes set agendas for imagination and interpretation.”⁶⁵

Missing literatures

I acknowledge that many and disparate disciplines coalesce in the nexus of the art museum’s theoretical and practical discourse. The scope of the thesis makes it necessary to restrict the range of literature explored in order to deeply investigate the literatures that most directly relate to the issues that the thesis engages with. The most relevant literatures span art history, art historiography, museology, philosophical aesthetics, learning theory and cultural studies. Nevertheless, there are other fields of research and other bodies of writing relevant to this speculative inquiry. Yet, the limit of space compels restriction on addressing them, although they offer relevant insights toward theoretical orientations for elaborating possible new orientations for museum pedagogy. A principle strategy of the thesis draws on philosophical and cultural theories less frequently addressed in the literature of the art museum’s public educational dimension. The theorists I have chosen embody elective affinities that provide rich potentialities for theoretically elaborating new perspectives on sociopedagogic practices for the art museum. The choice of theoretical thinkers explored I justify on the ground that each, representing different historical moments and theoretic standpoints, offers salient ideas that can be threaded through a museum pedagogical praxis based on relational perspectives that aligns with new ‘imaginaries’ to structure for the museum visitor encounters with works of art. I have not sufficient scope in the thesis to engage deeply with affect theory, which is as a mode of analysis useful because it elucidates connections between works of art and persons, as well as the connections between expository agents of exhibitionary practices and processes, and

⁶⁵ Hooper-Greenhill, Museums and the Interpretation, 13.
mediation, it accounts for feeling and it is sensed before cognition occurs. Research on museum experience and knowledge production that builds on this project will benefit from fulsome engagement with affect theory. Below, I summarise three other fields of writing that open up alternative avenues of investigation around the issues with which the thesis is engaged. These include relational epistemology and learning, audience reception theory of art, and museum visitor research, which have not been comprehensively engaged with due to limitations of space. The span of the thesis is broad and draws on diverse relevant literatures, there is further research to be done in the fields of research and writing briefly discussed below, which would open up valuable perspectives on the central question the thesis raises.

**Relational epistemology and learning.**
The literature on museum learning is broad and includes diverse theoretical perspectives, aspects of which I discuss in the thesis. I give particular attention to the work of pragmatist philosopher John Dewey’s theories of experiential learning and inquiry and Jacques Rancière’s critique of a distributive model of education. However, emerging literature around theories of socio-pedagogic practices and relational epistemology offer a way forward to further elaborate the phenomena of relational perspectives between museum visitors and works of art. In recent research, Lyn Froggett and Myna Trustrum present a theoretical perspective on the relation between people and their experience of objects in the museum. Froggett and Trustrum draw on museological literature and psychoanalytic object-relations theory to show how the relationship between an art object can be a vital link between subjective experience, museums, and wider society. Their work discusses the evocative and symbolic uses of the museum object as an ‘aesthetic third’ for personal and social ends. Drawing on Donald Winnicott’s theory of object relations, Froggett and Trustrum explore the phenomenon of ‘intermediate space’ — the third space, the transitional phenomena, the area of human experience and meaning, where experience of an object transpires. This is the space of experiencing between the inner and outer world, and is contributed to by both. The ‘transitional space’, as Winnicott describes it, is the bridge between the viewer’s subjective experience and the objective reality, it brings into focus the **relational space** where experience is realised. The application of Winnicott’s theory of object-relations, particularly

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69 Froggett and Trustrum, “Object Relations in the Museums: A Psychosocial Perspective”, 482.
the notion of ‘transitional space’, to the visitor encounter with works of art offers new insights for theorising museum engagement from a psychosocial perspective.

In addition, the work of social anthropologists Jean Lave and Etienne Wegner has been influential in changes taking place in museum pedagogy over the last several decades. Corollaries between Lave and Wegner and Dewey’s theoretical conceptions of social learning embedded in relationships and situations of co-participation, justify further elaboration to theorise socio-pedagogic art museum practice? Had space permitted, Lave and Wegner’s seminal work on situated learning and ‘communities of practice’ brought into dialogue with John Dewey’s ‘community of inquiry’ could potentially elucidate theoretical parities and disparities that may be pertinent to evolving pedagogy as praxis.

**Reception theory**

Based on the idea that the meaning of a text is located somewhere between the reader and the text, reception theory implies a shift in emphasis from the production of a work of art to the perception of the viewer. Thereby, exemplifying a shift, that is central to the principle argument of the thesis. In the context of art, reception theory refers to the way an audience actively decodes a work of art. As a branch of literary studies, it draws on philosophical aesthetics. Reception theory, first used by German theorist Hans-Robert Jauss (a student of Gadamer’s and phenomenology) in the late 1960’s, analyses how figural patterns of meaning intrinsic to the work become extrinsic. Reception theory offers valuable perspectives that open up art history and the contextual positionality of the perceiver to fundamental questions concerning the self, the work of art, and society and so has some overlap with key themes of the thesis. In particular, its recognition of preconceptions and prior experience of both the art historian and the museum viewer, that is brought to the experience of art. However, I have only been able to give passing attention to reception theory, specifically David Freedberg’s work on the transformative power of visual images, which emphasises the capacity of images to elicit powerful emotional

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response for beholders. Reception theory can offer future research insights into what occurs in the transitional space, or the interstice between the work of art, the viewer, and the museum itself, however, due to a limit of space in the current project I have chosen to address these matters through the hermeneutic lens of Gadamer’s aesthetic philosophy, which touches on some of the concerns of reception theory.

Audience research and the cultural value of engaging with museums

Visitors have their own agendas and motivations for visiting art museums. Audience research suggests visitors are ‘active meaning-makers’ or ‘knowledge producers’. Their responses to what they encounter in the museum are informed by their prior knowledge and understanding, as well as associated ideas and assumptions they bring (consciously or unconsciously) with them to the museum. Museum audience research often focuses on visitor segmentation and motivation, or on the effectiveness of specific exhibitions. Visitor studies, including studies of experience and expectations of visitors are crucial in terms of museum management and audience development. Although there is a large body of literature about the effects of museums on audiences, museum researcher Ceri Jones contends that we know relatively little about how museum audiences value their experiences, and how these might impact on their life outside the museum. In accord with Jones, authors Carol Scott, Jocelyn Dodd and Richard Sandell, argue that as visitors assume greater agency in museums, research that makes user-value the purpose of studies is timely and overdue. In light of the changing role of museum visitors as co-interpreters, co-producers and definers of value, these authors argue that the scarcity of studies that provide a nuanced and sophisticated understanding of visitor experience seems out of step. Scott, Dodd, and Sandell comment that although there is “evidence of meaningful visitor experience, we have surprising little evidence that positive encounters in the museum accrue to the public realm and what kind of social difference and change might result.” For art museums this form of information is important to build long-term audience participation and engagement and to communicate effectively with communities. Furthermore, it is the base for

understanding the return of public investment and provides a form of evidence aligned with aspirations of equality, well-being, citizenship, and social capital. I have not addressed this field of research because the kind of research that would be most germane to my inquiry has not yet been done.

Theoretical reflections
The thesis draws out specific aspects of Kant’s aesthetic reflective judgment that contribute significant theoretical formulations that I argue have positive bearing on the relational ordering between works of art and what they occasion in the experience of those who encounter them. For instance, Kant’s formulation of inter-subjectivity facilitates the furthering of culture, and the cultivation of sociability and our capacity for communicability. The reflective content of art on account of the particular experiences it occasions provides opportunity for reflection which grounds art in community exchanges. The ideas that I draw from Kant’s Third Critique, which bring valuable insights for articulating experiential museum pedagogy, are further explicated in Chapter Six.

Later critical relations to Kant’s work negotiate further iterations of theoretical conceptions of what art brings forth in aesthetic reflective judgment. From a pragmatist standpoint, Dewey stresses the need to integrate art making and art experience with personal and community life; art making as Dewey sees it, is an inherently social practice, with potent transformative social forces. When art and art making are separated from or elevated above everyday life — as self-sufficient entities, they are stripped of their power to make meaningful social differences. In Art as Experience, Dewey asserts his opposition to canonising artists’ creations as objects that exist to be worshipped, he writes, “when an art product once attains classic status, it somehow becomes isolated from the human condition under which it was brought into being and from the human consequences it engenders in actual life-experience.” Similarly, Gadamer shows ambivalence to Kant’s notion of subjective aesthetic consciousness in Truth and Method, Kant is, nonetheless, an important influence on his hermeneutic philosophy. Gadamer’s argument is that objectivity is neither possible nor appropriate in hermeneutics and meaning is not equivalent with the artist’s intention. A work of art can be read in more than one way, discovering if there is a better interpretation of a work of art is a matter of time and argument, or conversation. What a work of art means is a result of what happens through the experience of the person encountering it, and is relational to what they bring to it. The most appropriate interpretive approach understands prejudice, tradition and context not as impediments, but necessary conditions of hermeneutic

83 Dewey, Art as Experience, 1.
knowledge. In the late twentieth century the philosophical ideas of Kant, Dewey, and Gadamer are radically reoriented in the philosophy of Rancière. A central concept of Rancière’s philosophy is the principle of equality, which he develops as an emancipatory pedagogy that downplays the need for an explicator to be an authority in terms of knowledge. Equality, for Rancière, must be taken as an axiomatic assumption, which cannot be proven. His work offers challenges to presumed roles in museum practices, opening avenues for the redefinition of museum pedagogy, for reimagining possibilities for education and the arts in this setting.

Chapter One - Framing disciplines: art, the museum, and art history

The inception of the public art museum in the late eighteenth century was coextensive with the emergence of the discipline of art history, the autonomous categorization of ‘Art’, the rise of aesthetic philosophy and the discipline of museology. In Chapter One I analyse the implications of the classification of ‘Art’ as an autonomous field in the eighteenth century, the disciplinary technologies that shape its museological framing. I move then to give an account of contemporary critique that accompanied the museum’s inception. A final section of the chapter examines the development of art historical scholarship in the nineteenth century, which evolved alongside, and was to a large degree determined by, the organisation of the art museum. In particular, I give attention to the methodological tools of the immensely important and influential early twentieth century art historical scholarship of Erwin Panofsky (1892-1968). My purpose here is to excavate an example of prominent art historical scholarship in order to elucidate its principles and its influences on museum curatorial and pedagogical practices.

Chapter Two - The work of art in the museum

Development of aesthetic philosophy in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century helped shape new aesthetic relationships in the art museum. The transfer of ritual objects to the museum and the development of aesthetic theory constructed a new category of value for art. In Chapter Two I explore the correlation of aesthetic theory and art history as they simultaneously, albeit discordantly, shape the interpretive and scopic practices of the art museum. I briefly discuss the ramifications of Plato’s action against art in Book X of the Republic, and art’s subsequent aesthetic confinement in museums from the late eighteenth century. Moving to the contemporary context in a second section of the chapter I explore the art museum as a site of critical and post-critical analysis, which has in the last decades spawned new perspectives and cultural practices that reconstruct relationships between viewing subjects and works of art. Here I draw on the writing of Michel Foucault, which has significant implications for museum practice. In particular, Foucault’s conception of
‘effective’ or ‘general’ history which involves a rejection of the notion of a continuous, smooth, progressive, totalising, developmental history, which is helpful in that it suggests tools for examining museum practices in order to open up, understand, and evaluate these practices so they can be reconsidered. The final section of the chapter brings into focus the work of post-critical museological research. I comment on research by three collaborating institutions, Tate Britain, London South Bank University, and the University of the Arts London84 (2009-2011), published as Post-critical Museology: Theory and Practice in the Art Museum in 2013.85 The post-critical position is not intended to find the museum wanting from the remote distance of analytical critique. On the contrary, as Andrew Dewdney and co-authors David Dibosa and Victoria Walsh explain, “it seeks to develop a position which brings together academics, museum professionals and others in productive ways in order to open up new avenues of meaning and purpose through the agency of audiences.”86 Understanding what their audience is doing in the art museum is, Dewdney and co-researchers argue, an urgent and primary challenge for thinking about the museum of the future.87

Philosopher Diarmuid Costello observes that since the 1980s the discourse of aesthetics has been notable by its absence in art history. He argues that the marginalisation of aesthetics in post-modern art theory can be attributed to the success of the twentieth century art critic Clement Greenberg.88 Greenberg’s ill-founded appropriation of Kant to underwrite modernist art theory, Costello argues, “mediated the art world’s subsequent rejection of both aesthetics in general and Immanuel Kant’s aesthetics in particular.”89 Although art theorist Thierry de Duve’s work has shown Greenberg’s reading of Kant to be ill-founded, many art theorists hold to Greenberg’s appropriation and reject Kant on the basis of damage done to his name by Greenberg.90 Costello suggests the problem for aesthetics locates around Greenberg’s focus on Kant’s theory of taste, at the expense of his theory of art, “ignoring Kant’s apposite remarks on fine art, genius and aesthetic ideas, in favour of an account that takes natural beauty and

84 This research project was funded by Arts and Humanities Research Council through the Diaspora, Migration and Identities Programs, UK (2009-2011). http://www2.tate.org.uk/tate-encounters/ Accessed 2 August 2016.
86 Dewdney et al, Post-Critical Museology, 2.
87 Dewdney et al, Post-Critical Museology, 205.
decorative motifs as its paradigm.”

Recently, in art history and art theory, “aesthetic considerations have been rehabilitated as the analysis of experiential and perceptual qualities of historically reconstructed artworks,” thereby freeing aesthetics from “concerns with beauty and taste which art historians tend to treat with great suspicion.” As Francis Halsall and co-authors Julia Jansen and Tony O’Connor argue, the archaeology of art history and theory reveals an uneasy relationship with philosophical aesthetics. However, philosophers working within phenomenological, hermeneutic and post-structural frameworks, associated with Continental Philosophy, have continuously ascribed aesthetics an important role in their philosophical thinking. Increasingly, art historians, philosophers, artists and curators, and museum educators, renegotiate traditional aesthetics across disciplines to recover the fundamental importance of aesthetic questions.

Chapter Three - Hans-Georg Gadamer: The experience of art as a participatory act

A central precept of hermeneutic philosophy holds that something of value and significance exists beyond the visible and the literal meaning of images and objects. Part of what art does is bring our attention to things, new things and new presentations of things previously known. Through observation, feeling and thinking we make connections between the familiar and the unfamiliar. Chapter Three explores Hans-Georg Gadamer’s (1900-2002) aesthetic hermeneutic philosophy and its account of the interpretive processes that come into play in an act of interpretation. Intrinsically dialectic in nature, Gadamer sees interpretive understanding as involving the viewer’s openness to a work of art, thus enabling the work to assert a viewpoint, which, when grasped by the viewer, is integrated with the viewer’s and the work’s history. Resembling a conversational mode, or dialogism, the work of art is experienced as a personal encounter, an active reciprocity between viewer and image. Hermeneutics provides ways for visitors to inquire into the forces that structure the thoughts and feelings they call their own. As Cheryl Maszaros argues, it offers access to “the realm of significance that cannot itself be seen [...] the visible is therefore significant not for its own sake but because it affords a glimpse of something beyond the object itself,” the subtle and complex interrelations between the seen and the unseen. Philosophical hermeneutics offers a theoretical ground for

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93 Francis Halsall, Julia Jansen and Tony O’Connor, Rediscovering Aesthetics: Transdisciplinary Voices from Art History, Philosophy and Art Practice, (Stanford University Press, 2008).
evolving a tertiary educational practice to augment, on the one hand, ‘just looking’ strategies which focus on the descriptive attention to what is literally given in a work of art, and on the other, the transmission of ‘received’ (mostly art historical) information.\textsuperscript{96} Several orientations of Gadamer’s hermeneutic philosophy are pertinent to the educational concerns of the art museum, opening up promising pathways for rethinking pedagogy. First, his idea of historicity and understanding entail important transformation of the concept of knowledge and truth, that knowledge and truth are not exhausted by knowledge accessible through the modern scientific method.\textsuperscript{97} Secondly, Gadamer’s idea of ‘fusion of horizons’ applied to the experience of a work of art is understood as the emergence of a new horizon of meanings that opens new possibilities of understanding that are valuable to the one who understands, and to his or her particular historical situation.\textsuperscript{98} Interpretation, preconceptions and prejudices are primordial in the experience of human understanding for Gadamer.

\textbf{Chapter Four - Knowing as an emergent property of experience}

John Dewey’s (1859-1952) philosophy of education sits at the centre of progressive thinking about museum pedagogical practice. His analysis and critique remains relevant for contemporary museology.\textsuperscript{99} For Dewey, education embodies both pedagogy and social components. The socio-political implication of Dewey’s philosophy is that education is the means by which society is shaped and passes on its culture so it can live beyond one generation.\textsuperscript{100}

Various forms of visitor-education programs are offered in most art museums. However, until the last few decades little research had focused on programs tailored to adult education.\textsuperscript{101} Adults have a rich background of knowledge and experience, they learn in both independent, self-reliant modes, and in interdependent, connected and collaborative ways.\textsuperscript{102} Within the domain of adult programming art museums have a remarkable capacity to respond to the education aspirations and desires of participants, notwithstanding the varying and conflicting needs and value systems. Recent research findings indicate many adults are seeking experiences that lead to personal growth and transformation; participants value programs most highly when they lead not only to new skill,
but also to new perspectives, attitudes, insights, and appreciations. The potential for considered adult museum programs that generate transformative experience has, generally speaking, been overlooked. John Dewey’s philosophy of experience, I suggest, presents important understandings for developing a program typology that gives attention to these considerations. For Dewey, inquiry is an embodied process of understanding and learning in which the entire person is involved. Chapter Four investigates Dewey’s notion of ‘reflective education’ articulated in his theory of inquiry and experiential philosophy, which offers fruitful ground on which to base a pedagogy that fosters meaningful experiential transaction between works of art and viewers.

Dewey developed a metaphysics of experience, which unifies the traditionally separated philosophical categories of metaphysics, ontology, and epistemology by grounding them in human action in the environment. For Dewey, education must start from experience and that experience becomes the basis for reflection, and thinking. Practically applied to the museum this entails visitors are active participators in inquiry, that they are provided with something to engage with, think about, interpret, and study. Secondly, they must afford the means and time to engage in reflection, and dialogue that draws on immediate and past experiences. The implication of Dewey’s ontology, which centres on experience, is that the very notion of knowing and learning are dyadic concepts, which are inter-subjectively brought into being.

Dewey’s account of our responsiveness to works of art has significant implications for the public pedagogy of the museum; specifically his claim that through an experience of art we undergo a transformation of self, a broadened perspective, a change in attitude, an expansion of knowledge. Dewey posits that accumulation of experiences of art expands our emotions and perceptions and thus liberates us, influencing future experience while fostering changes that endure over a temporal span. In this way, art-centred experiences can be said to be educative.

**Chapter Five - Emancipating the spectator into a participator**

The field of cultural practice in which the art museum engages raises theoretical questions about the socio-cultural practices of seeing and looking, learning and knowing. The public pedagogy of the art museum has traditionally been performed through a monologic presentation of rehearsed specialist information pertaining to works of art. However, over recent decades museum pedagogy has embraced constructivism, a theory that understands knowledge not as comprising truth about an independent reality to be discovered and transmitted

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103 Sachatello-Sawyer et al., *Adult Museum Programs*, xxii.
but explanations constructed by humans engaged in meaning making in cultural and social communities of discourse. Contemporary constructivist theories of education hold that people construct their own understanding and knowledge of the world, through experiencing events and things, reflecting on those experiences, and sharing them with others, we actively create of our own knowledge.

Emancipation plays a central role in modern educational theories and practice, thus making equality an educational concern. While theoretical and historical contextualising of works of art is a crucial educational tool in museum education, if over predominant it can override or inhibit viewer agency in the process of coming to know and understand a work of art — the appearance of subjectivity — the coming into presence. Such an annulment of viewer agency negates ethical protocols of equality implicit in education and contemporary learning theory and limits the potential experience a work of art may offer. Chapter Five draws on contemporary philosopher Jacques Rancière’s ideas of emancipatory spectatorship and education in his works *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation* (1991) and *The Emancipated Spectator* (2009). I analyse Rancière’s work to highlight the educational significance of viewer agency and ‘positionality’ in relation to the museum’s authoritative ‘expert’; promoting a move to educational equality by reducing the gap between the one who knows and the one who is supposed not to know, the one who speaks, and the one who is supposed to listen. Rancière articulates an approach to understand and ‘do’ emancipation from the angle of education. For Rancière emancipation entails a “rupture in the order of things,” a rupture that makes the appearance of subjectivity possible. An emancipated community is, for Rancière, a community of translators rather than a community centred on the transmission of pre-existing interpretations. For Rancière, a truly democratic education must work on the level of the senses, on the level of sensuous intuition. Rather than decoding a work of art, which as Tyson Lewis argues, “is a transmission model of reception that grants creative agency to the artist,” the spectator for Rancière translates the work of art. The act of translation opens up a space between intent and content, leading to dissensus rather the consensus concerning the work of art. For Rancière, dissensus is political and aesthetic

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“in that it makes visible what had been excluded from a perceptual field, and that it makes audible what used to be inaudible.”

A second theme of the chapter explores the work of cultural theorist Mieke Bal which examines the ‘language’ of the art museum to foreground the various relations that can be negotiated between the museum and its visitors. My interest here is to analyse expository practices to highlight ways of bringing audience into practice – to incite active engagement with works of art, by bringing audience into dialogue, externalizing peoples’ experiences of art in the social spaces of the museum.

**Philosophical reflections on the pedagogy of the art museum**

Awareness of theoretical approaches and art historiographic contexts can contribute significantly to our understanding of a work of art. Various and changing methods of art history have been a dominant explanatory paradigm for the interpretation and mediation of art deployed by the museum for much of its history. The power of art lies in its capacity to engage our consciousness, or as Arthur Danto suggests, “to overcome the gap between art and life,” to foster the conditions for reimagining other possibilities for the world, new perspectives on the world and our lives within it.

This thesis seeks to investigate ways to reorient the epistemological ground for art museum pedagogy, toward a dialectical relationship between art’s semblance and art’s theoretical explanation, to find a way of approaching how and what art *thinks* in its own medium. It presents philosophical reflections on the pedagogy of the art museum that orient ideals and principles for an experientially inflected praxis. It aims to determine a more liberal theoretical ground for a pedagogy that, in the terms of philosopher Simon Critchley, resists drowning art’s power in theory that represses its capacity by fitting it into an explanatory historical paradigm that is fundamentally historical. The thesis seeks fresh avenues to approach art engagement practices in the museum that move beyond pre-existing frameworks that have historically polarized art as either an ‘objective’ form of systematic rational knowledge or a ‘subjective’ experience based on personal feeling, emotion or aesthetics.

In *The Infinite Demand of Art*, Critchley argues that trying to understand art from the standpoint of some theory is “inevitably to miss the phenomena. It is to reduce a visual, spatial or medial language to a theoretical metalanguage [...] to reduce art to ideas about the thing, but not the thing itself.” With Critchley, I

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112 Rancière, *The Philosopher and His Poor*, 226.
see the relationship between art and theory as dialectical and recognize the need for “the act of elucidation, of reflection” as essential, for, “all art is concept [...] but art is not simply conceptual and the concept should not exhaust the perctet.”  

Reflection on art, Critchley argues, shows the concept’s need for a moment of “sensuality or better, spatiality, which stands apart from the concept.” Museum pedagogy can counterpoint art’s theoretical and historical exemplarity by determining an approach to engage with art in its own terms, through a modality that gives space for the perceptual and the conceptual, opening access to the event of art and its phenomena, through the interaction of those encountering it.

Aesthetic concerns arise from encounters with works of art that are related to several interdependent domains of art practice – to the production of art, to art criticism, to art history – as well as to our general understanding of works of art. Works of art are the paradigm case of aesthetic objects. The experience of art and understanding of art are not distinct processes, our emotional and intuitive response and our intellectual analysis merge with one another. Aestheticians Michael Parsons and Gene Blocker maintain that our direct response and critical analysis, creation and reflection, in the experience of a work of art are not sharply differentiated, but affect each other. The interdependence of these levels is most shown, Parsons and Blocker suggest, by aesthetics which we can think of as an analysis of ideas with which we think about art (and other things). Aesthetics reflects the connections of art with life, which is what makes aesthetics important. What is aesthetic about a work of art is the experience of its presentation. That which can be perceived, and its aesthetic qualities, are those that appear to the senses that can be grasped in perception. These might be qualities of texture, colour, or form, or complex qualities that carry a sense of human significance or meaning.

An encounter with a work of art in general involves several levels of experience: our direct perceptual or creative experience, the level at which we interpret works of art historically or critically, and the level at which we reflect on the general implication of our interpretations. As Parson and Blocker claim, these three levels interpenetrate and affect each other constantly, while we can distinguish them theoretically, they are very much connected together in experience. The work of art therefore requires our ‘attention’ as beholders; it implicates us by prompting our speculative inquiry, requiring prolonged time for understanding and reflection.

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117 Critchley, “The Infinite Demand of Art”, 3.
119 Parsons and Blocker, Aesthetics and Education, 23.
120 Parsons and Blocker, Aesthetics and Education, 23.
The pedagogy of the art museum has, at different historical moments, privileged either the intellectual analysis of art, and on the other hand, aspired to make works of art more experientially accessible to the public, promoting an aesthetic experience of art. A traditional transmissive pedagogy deployed in the museum through the nineteenth century values monologic transmission of information to visitors, principally through an interpretive methodology of art history. Consequently, audience has been positioned as ‘passive’ receivers of information at an intercessional distance from the work of art itself. Art museum pedagogy has indeed shifted in the last decades towards ‘on the floor’ practices that recognise that engagement with a work of art requires ‘inquiry’ through a process of active participation enabling dialogic interaction with the phenomena of the work, and its complex relations to real life. Anticipation that our observations and thoughts about the work of art will yield meaning and come together into a coherent whole drives the inquiry; our sense of the work is continually amended, extended, and clarified.\textsuperscript{121} The constant revision of our sense of the work of art in the light of our thoughts and observations, our hermeneutical reflection, is what Gadamer terms the ‘hermeneutic circle’ on which an interpretation is based.\textsuperscript{122} For Gadamer, the ‘hermeneutic circle’, is an essential repeated movement from the whole to the part and vice versa. The hermeneutic circle is constantly expanding since our conception of the work of art is relative to individual aspects of it, parts of the whole are integrated into ever larger contexts; meanings are provisional, and our understandings of a work of art are never complete.

For Kant, the art object is independent of all historical narrative; it is an object for which the subject does not even have a concept. In \textit{The Third Critique} Kant posits that beautiful art is purposeful without a goal; that it provokes our active attention to the process of venturing, of exploring, with no interest in the booty.\textsuperscript{123} This experience is one wherein our bonding with the world is much more intimate than the usual subject–object relation. Kant’s theory of mind, which ascribes a metacognitive role to the harmony of the faculties of imagination and understanding stimulated by (beautiful art) is educationally valuable for cultivating experiential dispositions associated with imaginative speculation and non-propositional ways of knowing.

\textbf{Chapter six - Complete Communication: sensible intuition and discursive cognition}

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) seems to suggest that our experience of a work of art makes a difference philosophically; art, when experienced, communicates to

\textsuperscript{121} Burnham and Kai-Kee, \textit{Teaching in the Art Museum}, 61.
us something we can know no other way. In Chapter Six I address three key ideas in Kant’s aesthetic philosophy. First, Kant’s concept of *aesthetic ideas* gives positive value to the work of art: art not only permits the human mind to leap beyond what empirical perception and conceptual knowledge can grasp, it does so in a way that is communicable from one human being (the artist) to another, which Kant indicates requires *cultivation* and training. Second, Kant’s notion of the free play of the imagination and understanding stimulated by beauty is seen as irreducible to our ordinary mode of experience because it has a self-reflexive character, facilitating enlarged reflective thought, characterised as a ‘distinctive mode of receptiveness’. For instance, through an encounter with (beautiful) art (and indeed other content) we are not only experiencing the world, but also our mode of experiencing the world. Third, Kant seems to imply that there is always an excess of meaning in art, always more than can be said and always more than what can be equated to linguistic expression. A central aspect of the *Critique of Judgment* is Kant’s concern with what is unaccounted for in the categorical operations of cognition and morality.\(^{124}\) In a metacognitive process concepts can be linked up with multiple representations, and by way of these, other concepts.\(^{125}\) Kant’s understanding of the *communicability* of art, in respect of thought, intuition and sensation, infers “perfect or complete communication that gives normative force, and normative authority, to what necessarily remains unarticulated or unspoken within abstract concepts.”\(^{126}\) Kant’s idea of ‘complete communication’, which involves concept, intuition and sensation, seems to suggest that there is more to be communicated than what gets communicated by concepts themselves: communication is perfect when it also conveys what is not mediated by concepts. Kant opens the way for the possibility of a communicative form other than which is perfectly rational with a conceptually determinate meaning. In other words, Kant implies that art is the ideal form of communication; we have art because our ordinary communication is not perfect or complete. As Jay Bernstein argues, Kant’s notion of complete communication is a motivation for art, and art is an acknowledgement of what remains ‘unspoken’, or incomplete, even if conceptual communication is perfectly explicit and ideal. Kant’s idea of complete communication suggests that the meanings we have are always less than the meanings we need, and the meanings we need cannot be made fully explicit; art is the repository of the unspoken. Finally, Kant’s account of *sensus communis* installs the notion of an epistemic community that breaks with claims of methodological subjectivity, permitting a re-inscription of sensibility – a reflective self-awareness, ‘seeing that we see’ – through inner-sense – an *as if* kind of inter-subjectivity. I argue that aesthetic experience is not radically subjective, but rather, like sense making, is shared (by


faculties that we have in common) and in Kant’s terms provides the basis for human community. A subjective judgment of a work of art may be, as if in common.

Public pedagogy in the art museum generally belongs to a paradigm of education exemplified by hubs of specialized knowledge transmitted to seemingly ‘passive’ presumed non-experts. This ‘educative’ situation for adult visitors is typically enacted in the museum through the transmission of information about works of art, a kind of telling which occurs between the knowledgeable and those presumed to be without knowledge. The politics of art museum discourses, interpretative, and communication strategies construct the relationship between visitors and works of art, which traditionally have been characterized as a relationship of authority mediated by an ‘explicative’ paradigm. In recent decades interpretation of art in the museum has become less ‘a modernist’ project of determining artistic intent and increasingly more an interaction between the work of art, the viewer and their many contexts in a construction of meaning. This thesis marks out theoretical ground for an emergent pedagogy as praxis that draws upon the philosophical insights of those thinkers that have been discussed above whose work, in different ways, provide insights with orienting ideals and principles for a more reflexive experiential and relational pedagogy. This is imagined as pedagogy that brings into play the visitors’ range of human experience coalescent with theoretical and historical elucidations of works of art, grounded on an expanded epistemology that recognizes, in the words of Francisco J. Varela quoted at the top of this chapter, “that the proper units of knowledge are primarily concrete, embodied, incorporated, and lived.”

**Conclusion**

A principal motivation for this thesis is the question that asks - *is there something we can know about art when we experience it aesthetically which reveals an intrinsic incompleteness in the traditional historical interpretation of art?* The thesis attempts to respond to this question through exploration of the historical formation of the art museum and the coextensive development of associated discourses. The thesis is weighted toward an analysis of the philosophical work of Gadamer, Dewey, Rancière and Kant to open new pathways that reorient pedagogy as a creative social practice that grapples with matters raised by works of art and the discourses that surround them in the museum setting. Obliging a disruption of traditional practice the thesis recommends a pedagogy that enables

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museum visitors’ personal perspectives to enter the discourse of museum culture through a range of practical and theoretical approaches. Critical to the endeavour of rethinking the orientation and potential of art museum pedagogy is the premise that aesthetic experience finds fulfilment in the possibilities of perception and understanding, both internal and external to the work of art; enfolding experientially constructed knowledge and theoretical knowledge.

Kant, Dewey, Gadamer, and Rancière claim that aesthetic experience has a political effect to the extent that the loss of destination it presupposes (i.e. facts, certainty, and official histories) unsettles our habituated functions. In rethinking the public educational responsibility of the art museum I imagine a pedagogy that acknowledges the direction of the viewer into the interiority of his or her emotional life; in the direction of the object it acknowledges the inner reaches of the work of art, the visible and the visual. Accordingly, implications for a revised pedagogical practice in the museum include consideration of the agency of works of art in relation to the agency of those experiencing them, and the work they do in the world.

The original contribution of this project is its investigation of philosophical thinking for the purpose of expanding the intellectual ground for public pedagogy and to advance further research that bears directly on problems I identify in extant practice methodologies. The cognate philosophical theories I investigate in my research provide insights into how we might articulate a critically engaged art museum pedagogy that encourages the exploration of how we make sense of things and also of what occurs when unfamiliarity is surmounted; where enlightenment, insight and appropriation succeed. The kind of pedagogy I am urging for the art museum is in itself a form of artistic practice, a dynamic, a creative process. This understanding implies more than just a reconstruction of knowing. It also suggests that pedagogy necessarily encompasses lived experience; consequently museum educators must be alert to pedagogical experience in ways that are deeper than simple cognition. They must be engaged in a practice that instigates experience, which is intuitive, felt and relational.

Pedagogy is an act of co-making, which has potential to result in shared processes and creative construction from which something new emerges. It is often assumed (wrongly) that art can be completely understood by mere exposure to it and the facts of its historical context. I try to suggest how we might develop a normative framework for art museum pedagogy which ultimately allows those participating to exercise their own agency through active inquiry of artistic phenomena, embracing both objective factual information about art and fostering experiences of art as unique creative acts of understanding.
Chapter one

Framing disciplines: art, the museum, and art history

Artworks participate in an immensely articulated network of material relationships complementary to and partly intersecting with the evidentiary elements in art historical practice – art history has existed in tandem with another institution whose subject matter would seem to be artworks: the museum. Donald Preziosi ¹

Meaning of the object lies not wholly in the piece itself, nor wholly in its realisation [by the viewer], but somewhere between the two. The object only takes on a life or significance when the viewer carries out [her] realisation, and this is dependent partly on [her] disposition and experience, and partly upon the content of the object which works upon [her]. Susan M. Pearce ²

In abolishing sensuous appearance, maturity and intellectualisation of art virtually abolish art itself. Theodor W. Adorno ³

This chapter investigates the museum’s inception and reception in the late eighteenth century, its development in the nineteenth, and the coextensive evolution of the discipline of art history and associated museological interpretive practices. The entire institution of the museum is categorised by a classificatory system; within the scope of this thesis the museum category, with which I am principally concerned, can be defined as a public museum of fine arts, or, art museum. Throughout the thesis I refer to this museum type as the art museum. Works of art within the art museum may be organised around groupings such as period, school, styles, or national themes and ideas. At the level of individual objects – auxiliary materials like labels, text panels, and catalogues present a ‘context’ in which the work of art can be interpreted, the museum participates in the construction of these categories and in the differentiations they are held to contain.⁴ Thus the classification of an object involves the choice of a particular kind of presentation that then establishes the museological context that provides the object with meaning; simultaneously, the museum constructs a self, the viewer, or in collective terms, a public.⁵ The processes of the reception of display strategies that art museums present also participate in the constitution of museum culture.

⁵ Sherman and Rogoff, eds. Museum Culture: Histories, Discourses and Spectacles, ii.
The first theme of the chapter explores the historical and epistemological foundation of the art museum, its primary postulations about art and their enactment within museum space. I address ideas and conceptions of art that inform different approaches to museum display and visitor experience. My understanding straddles two simultaneous pedagogical approaches in the art museum, one characterised by explicative intellectual instruction about art’s history in the nineteenth century, and the other, an approach that brings into view greater sensory aspects of works of art, through later nineteenth century display techniques that give the ‘subjective’ viewing position of the observer greater importance.6 This chapter will touch on how the museum has, at different historical periods, ascribed meaning to works of art by shaping and mediating messages constructed by the modern disciplinary paradigms of museology and art history on which the institution was predicated.

A second theme of this chapter moves to a brief exploration of the ways in which Enlightenment philosophy supported the emerging discourses of the art museum, in particular the relationship between things and the systems by which they might be understood, that is to say, the interpretation of objects. I then move to explore a third theme, the historical framing of art and the epistemological and hermeneutic ground of academic art historical methodology that the organisation of the art museum has helped to shape. I analyse the immensely important and influential ‘iconographism’ of Erwin Panofsky. The fourth and final section of the chapter describes the reception and critique of the art museum surrounding its inception and development in the writings of contemporary commentators.

There are many possibilities for understanding and organising human–object engagements in museums, but prevailing pedagogical practice falls short of exploiting these opportunities, as museologist Sandra Dudley claims.7 Rather than simply enable an intellectual comprehension of information presented by the museum, which an art object ‘illustrates’ (or punctuates), Dudley advocates an “intense interactive kind of viewing that gets visitors first to focus on the phenomena [...] to dwell in the process of collecting sensory data,” subsequently supplemented by inquiry of the work’s historical context.8 As Dudley observes, such an approach seeks a more imaginative, sustaining and empathetic engagement through an embodied experience of what is physically encountered, allowing recognition of the viewer’s own subjectivity in his or her reception of the work, in the address it makes.9 The museum’s historical preoccupation with the classification of objects, I suggest, potentially takes the viewer away from the

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6 Klonk, Spaces of Experience, 25.
8 Dudley, “Materiality Matters”, 3.
material, physical *thing* displayed before him or her. While the provision of pertinent knowledge about the historical and social context pertaining to a work of art significantly contributes to how it may be interpreted and understood, Dudley argues that the rationale and modus operandi of the museum inadvertently acts to limit the extent to which personal and attentive engagement with works on display is fostered. This suggests a discord between an explicative paradigm used to interpret a work of art and a sensory perceptual experience of the work *itself*, which potentially inhibits the transactional relationships between persons and works of art. More precisely, a discord arises when one interpretive approach is privileged at the cost of overruling, or misrecognising other aspects of the experience of art not embraced by the interpretive frame. As Dudley acknowledges, works of art affect how we respond, “they have agency and power in the process of engagement between them and us in that the sensory data we gather would not be what they are, were the works of art not as they are.” So, in the history of the art museum there are two strands for engaging visitors with works art, an explicative didactic pedagogy, and a sensory perceptual aesthetically oriented approach, which, at different historical moments merge or become more distinct.

Museums cannot predict nor guarantee a powerful response to works of art, but they can reconfigure the interpretative and pedagogic paradigm by actively working to maximise emotional, sensory and intellectual interactions wherever possible. This process necessitates, as Dudley asserts, the viewer’s personally constructed experiential knowledge of the work in addition to theoretical disciplinary knowledge that exists independently from the work of art, even though it refers to it. Both forms of knowing may contribute to, and foster, the viewer’s aesthetic understanding and appreciation of the work. A key implication of this involves rethinking what the response to a work of art might occasion for a viewer, the possibilities that reception of a work of art might effectuate. Seeking to address the apparent tension between subjective and objective art engagement strategies the thesis explores ways to integrate the correlative forms of both experiential and theoretical knowing by configuring pedagogy differently. With this intention, in subsequent chapters I investigate homologous philosophical ideas that not only clarify complex intellectual and experiential processes involved in an encounter with a work of art, but that also elucidate the value of cognitive, physical, and sensory interaction with it.

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The intersection of philosophy and the art museum

Productive relations between art and philosophy could be usefully embraced by the art museum to exploit the potentialities of art as a source of knowledge that exceeds the traditional framework of theoretical art historical knowledge. In the museum context this involves a relational responsive interaction between the audience and works of art, incorporating the object’s historical context, manifest phenomenon, and the sensory modalities through which works of art are experienced. It must be acknowledged that the power of a work of art, that is, coming to understand and appreciate it, is inextricably tied up with its history.

As an intellectual project, the disciplinary theorising of art in the museum captures some objects, physically, intellectually, and territorially, while it separates others, enabling some forms of knowledge relations while simultaneously disabling others. Importantly, I do not argue against the historical contextualising of art in the museum; rather, I address what I consider to be a necessary corrective; to evolve practices that integrate theoretical and experiential ways of understanding art. My concern is to orient pedagogy to attend to the immediate presence of works of art, to their apparently ostensive qualities and to the possibilities of people’s direct, embodied, emotional and experiential engagement with them. The presentation of art in the museum (with the provision of textual and verbal associated conceptual interpretive information) both privileges art’s contextual framing and pre-empts the possibility inherent in the materiality of works of art and their sensorially perceptible characteristics. The dichotomy of the rational and sensuous, together with the classificatory systems embedded from the eighteenth century in the operations of the art museum, position art in two frames – the art object as a part of a system of historical data, material and ideation, and the art object as an enmeshing of the physical material thing and human sensory perception of it. A dichotomy of the sensory and the intellectual is evident in the museum’s historical formation, traces of which remain. Integral to the endeavour of rethinking practices and processes that bring the museum’s public to an understanding of works of art is the recognition that art works can be responded to and understood in multiple ways. That is to say, the way words, concepts and interpretive systems are applied to works of art might be probed and challenged to embolden museum participants to encounter art in new and different ways.

Philosopher Beth Lord makes the observation that while art museums are concerned with objects, events and collections, more fundamental to the

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14 Dudley, Museum Materialities, 6.
museum is a philosophical problem that first arose in the seventeenth century concerning the relationship between things and concepts. The question of representation is the question of how things relate to the world and also how the world can be ordered into conceptual schemes. As such, this has ramifications for how we interpret and understand objects in the art museum. The desire for rational order, classification and the universal are systems that we associate with the Enlightenment, although they were by no means new or unique to that era. A rejection of religious and monarchical authority meant a rejection of the idea that the universe has an essential or divine order. Because divine systems were thrown into doubt, a thing’s place in a system could no longer be assumed to be part of the essence of what it was to be that thing. Rather, these systems were now believed to be the product of human understanding and consequently were suddenly at odds with the world of things that were not humanly produced.

Lord postulates that it is only when this space of representation opens, when the relationship between things and the concepts we apply to them becomes problematic, is it possible to create a physical space for positing and questioning the nature of this relationship. Positing and questioning the relationship between things and systems is interpretation. Museums are principally sites of interpretation that attempt to bridge the gap between things, or works of art, and systems. The evolution of the role of the museum in the eighteenth century can be attributed to intertwined social, economic, intellectual and political factors. However, Lord argues that integral to Enlightenment thinking is the challenge to consider the nature of representation; and this concern for presentation manifests itself in the inception of museums.

Michel Foucault, discussing the displaying of collections in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, writes:

It is often said that the establishment of botanical gardens and zoological collections expressed a new curiosity about exotic plants and animals. In fact these had already claimed men’s interest for a long while. What had changed was the space in which it was possible to see them and from which is was possible to describe them [...] What came surreptitiously into being [...] was not the desire for knowledge, but a new way of

16 Lord, “Representing Enlightenment,” 146.
17 Lord, “Representing Enlightenment,” 147.
18 Lord, “Representing Enlightenment,” 147.
20 Lord, “Representing Enlightenment,” 147.
connecting things both to the eye and to discourse. A new way of making history.\textsuperscript{21}

So what the museum provided was a space and a system for theorising, speaking about, and interpreting what is seen. Museologist Christopher Whitehead claims that a key concept in disciplinarity is ‘boundary work’, which he defines as the development of arguments and strategies to justify particular divisions of knowledge that arise in the course of struggles to limit the discourses involved in the production of formal knowledge.\textsuperscript{22} Whitehead argues that one theory of discipline is a theory of limitation. An analogous expression of this critical position is evident in museum historiography. The classification and display of art objects in the museum involved a particular kind of presentation to establish the museological context and the object’s subsequent meaning; art thus became a signifier in an artificial institutional frame.

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in Western Europe new aspects of visual experience coalesced with a developing discipline of aesthetic philosophy. Simultaneously, ‘Art’ became an autonomous domain that manifested in the disciplinary frame of the newly emergent public art museum. Art as a discrete visual form of representation developed its own historical paradigm; simultaneously the nascent discipline of art history brought concepts and words to account for the nature of art, its context, history, stylistic transference and progress. Into the nineteenth century the space of the museum was fashioned for the tasks it was intended to achieve, as a social space, a space of exemplarity and emulation, a space of representation, which coincided with emergent notions of the public, including public space of which the public art museum was a manifest example.\textsuperscript{23} At its inception, the museum needed to develop, as Tony Bennett has argued, “as a space of observation and regulation in order that the visitor’s body might be taken hold of and be moulded in accordance with the requirements of new norms of public conduct.”\textsuperscript{24} As a social space the art museum emerged in chorus with the formation of the bourgeois public sphere.

The museum typology with which this enquiry is concerned is the ‘universal survey museum’, a type that was crucial in shaping municipal and national art museums. Institutions were devoted to universal surveys of art through history, and this provided coherence for the display of works of art. The Louvre (1793),

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[24]{Bennett, \textit{The Birth of the Museum}, 25.}
\end{footnotes}
the National Gallery in London (1824), the Metropolitan Museum in New York (1870) and the National Gallery of Victoria (1861), all exemplify, more or less, the universal survey museum typology. Art historians Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach observe that universal survey museums became the indispensable institutions of great cities. Their emergence influenced cultural development in metropolitan centres and established a museum culture all over the world. Furthermore, by the middle of the nineteenth century, the emerging public modern museums were an important part of the colonial processes. For example, the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, had a twofold objective: “one in the acquisition of choice works of contemporary artists for the pleasure, improvement, variety and contrast which they afford; another in the illustration of the History of Art [i.e. copies of classical statues].”

**The history of the art museum**

The sixteenth and seventeenth century tradition of the *Wunderkammer*, or cabinet of curiosities, which included both works of art and objects used in the study of science and natural history, was predominate in northern Europe. In Italy, however, art and science collections tended to be exhibited separately, even in the Renaissance, though, eventually as art and science were recognised as distinct branches of knowledge, institutions came to be devoted to one or the other.

The prefiguration of the art museum’s exhibitionary presentation that emerges in late sixteenth century Italy represents a new explorative approach to knowledge. Simultaneously, as art historian Dorothea von Hantelmann suggests, a new cultural format evolves from a fixed closed cosmology of religion to the cosmology of a structurally more open secular society. Integral to the development of museums is a highly refined form of consumerism, what von Hantelmann defines as a *knowledge transfer* from the field of commerce to the new field of art, nourished by modern secular principles.

Although Renaissance Italy had an historical perspective on culture, and a sophisticated tradition of art writing, there were no public art museums. While

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many precursors emerged in the Renaissance, it was not until the eighteenth century did institutions like the public art museum develop. There were artists, collectors, and connoisseurs, and texts such as Giorgio Vasari’s *Lives of the Artists* (1550) that provided an historical framework for the organisation of private princely collections. Vasari’s perception of the enterprise of the art historian is to distinguish good work from bad; to relate a work of art both to the artist’s intentions and the central artistic tradition of the age, an approach that shaped art history as it emerged toward the end of the eighteenth century. To some degree, aspects of this approach to art history and museum presentation remain intellectually valid and instructive to the present. Museologist Susan Pearce explains the emergence of the art museum in the late eighteenth century in the following way:

The new public art museum required a new philosophy and a new iconography which would draw upon the idea of classification inherited from the previous century and link this with the applied intellectual rationale characteristic of the developing European middle class who wanted to see a clear increase in knowledge and understanding for their own efforts, and who preferred this knowledge to underpin their own position.

Pearce suggests the intertwining of pedagogic, judgemental, and spiritually affirming ideas implicit in the museum’s ordering of relations between its architectural spaces, works of art and persons, as it developed through the nineteenth century, inculcates notions of civic pride and nationalism. “The feeling of the sacred, transplanted into the secular and rational or civic terms and linked with the conviction of progress toward superior understanding,” Pearce argues, “both created museums and was created by them.” So, it can be argued art in the museum gives secular culture a pseudo-spiritual dimension.

As has been noted above, a corollary to the emergence of the art museum was the history of art, in which works of art could be exhibited in chronological arrangement to show ‘high’ and ‘lower’ points in art’s progress, and enable comparative study. Pearce argues that the development of a historical framework for classifying art had the effect of creating historical depth for a society whose ways of thinking were only just adapting to the idea of the present as the product of the past. Historically arranged works of art in museum

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34 Pearce, *On Collecting*, 127.
collections was understood as an essential instrument in educating the general public. Comparing paintings was considered a way to acquire true understanding of art. For example, Gustav Friedrich Waagen (1794-1868), the first director of Berlin’s Altes Museum, in 1832 arranged paintings in the collection according to chronology and schools as a way of illustrating incipient art historical knowledge about schools, styles, and developments.\textsuperscript{35} Waagen argued that instruction in the history of art, “by following the spirit of the times and the genius of the artists, would produce an harmonious influence upon the mind of the spectator.”\textsuperscript{36} Correspondingly, the purpose underpinning Christian von Mechem’s (1737-1817) arrangement of the art collection of the Belvedere Palace in Vienna in 1779 was to teach visitors about the history of art through comparative viewing, which a century later art historian Heinrich Wöfflin was to promote as the standard technique to develop visual literacy.\textsuperscript{37} Max Jordan, Director of the National Gallery of Berlin from 1879-1895, considered that by their organisation “museums could teach their visitors how to compare works of art, see how artists expressed the views of different times, and understand their distinctive craftsmanship.”\textsuperscript{38} These accounts speak to the conception of the museum as a cultural resource and an instrument of public instruction, which meant that the objects it displayed were attributed a didactic exemplarity.\textsuperscript{39} Although, by the end of the nineteenth century Waagen and other museum directors initiated reforms in the display of art works in order to integrate an aesthetic or affective understanding of art with the this systematic didactic presentation.

The emergence of the public art museum was intrinsically bound up with the rise of academic art history, new aesthetic theories, and the development of democracy. The starting point for art history, Elizabeth Mansfield writes, “was marked by Enlightenment formulations of an ideal museum,” while the nineteenth century art museum functioned as an institution for organising art history “to amass, distil, unify, and circulate its beliefs and conventions.”\textsuperscript{40} In this respect, the history of art history is bound to modernism and its institutions; the institutions most associated with art history’s professionalism are the museum

and the academy.\textsuperscript{41} Art historian Julia Noordegraaf notes that, while for much of the nineteenth century the art museum had functioned for art historians as an extension of the archive, the practice of art history from the mid-nineteenth century was taught as a separate academic subject.\textsuperscript{42} Into the nineteenth century the academic development of the discipline of art history is evident in Waagen’s 1844 appointment to the inaugural chair of art history at the University of Berlin, the first time art history was acknowledged as a university discipline,\textsuperscript{43} though, at this point of the nineteenth century the vocational development of art history was not widespread.

The formation and organisation of art museums suggest many ways for thinking about and experiencing the works that they collect and exhibit. The architectural environment and the display of museum collections project implicit interpretations. Like art historians, museum curators create the context in which art is exhibited and mediated; initially art historical writing and art museums offered complimentary ways of theorising art. How the museum is to be used by visitors, what Noordegraaf refers to as the \textit{script} of museum presentation and display, is embedded in the architecture and physical layout of the building, its contents, the display techniques, mediation practices, and modes of communication, all of which contain cues for the use of the museum by its visitors.\textsuperscript{44} An analysis of the museum’s script at different historical moments can provide insights into the ordering of relations between works of art and persons. In the early nineteenth century art museum, reflection and critical judgement was the modality of usage for museum a visitor. The museum script immerses visitors in new categories and values of Western modern society, like the category of individualism and flexible forms of usage, in contrast to collective control of their attention.\textsuperscript{45} Principles of display and patterns of movement through the architectural spaces of the museum structure the relationship between works of art and the persons encountering them. In the nineteenth century new conceptions of the individual, the material object, narratives of progress and development, and the product, or refined object, merge together, von Hantelmann postulates, in the museum’s exhibitionary format.\textsuperscript{46} Cultural theorist, Tony Bennett argues that the space of the nineteenth century museum was an emulative space, envisaged as a place to induct the visitor into an improving relationship to the self, operating as an ‘exhibitionary complex’ it was

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{41} Mansfield, \textit{Art and Its Institutions}, 24.
\item \textsuperscript{43} \url{https://dictionaryofarthistorians.org/waageng.htm} Accessed 20 September 2017.
\item \textsuperscript{44} Noordegraaf, \textit{Strategies of Display}, 43.
\item \textsuperscript{45} Dorothea von Hantelmann, “Transforming Exhibition Formats in Transforming Societies,” \url{https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TLvKBkDd9kQ} Accessed 20 September 2017.
\item \textsuperscript{46} Dorothea von Hantelmann, “Transforming Exhibition Formats in Transforming Societies,” \url{https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TLvKBkDd9kQ} Accessed 20 September 2017.
\end{itemize}
a place where people see, and could be seen, rendering the crowd visible to itself. Congruently, writing on the ‘publicness’ and social impact of museums, Helen Graham writes:

Moving into the exhibitionary spaces of the museum was (initially) understood as requiring an explicit moving into a different space which might enable museum visitors to more easily comport themselves in a way which would, in turn allow them to acquire the necessarily temporalised knowledge to sustain such conduct beyond the walls of the museum.

Where the nineteenth century ‘exhibitionary complex’ imagined its effects as deriving from coming into a place demarcated from other public spaces, more recent museum practice has increasingly problematized the effects of museums being intensely demarcated from everyday life. As Graham notes, an iteration of this concern over demarcation is expressed through the changing importance of ideas of ‘access’ versus ‘social impact’ in current museum practice. These ideas will be explored further in Chapter Two.

**German aesthetic reform 1900**

In the later quarter of the nineteenth century reformers of the art museum aspired to make works of art more experientially accessible to the public: Alfred Lichtwark, director of the Kunsthalle in Hamburg (1886-1914), and one of the founders of the field of museum education, considered knowledge of the history of art to be unessential, art history was considered the preserve of academic scholarship. Concurrently, in the 1880s, Wilhelm von Bode, director of the Renaissance collection housed in the Berlin Altes Museum (today’s Bode Museum), rejected the dense wall-deep display of art most usual in the early nineteenth century museum. Bode was now critical of the academic arrangement of works of art, arguing that original works of art could not enlighten and instruct the public if they were presented simply as an example of one school or another. For Bode, a collection of art could only be useful in instructing the viewer when displayed in a setting that evokes the original environment of the

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51 Alfred Lichtwark (1852-1914), art historian and pedagogical reformer, founded the ‘*Experiential Art Appreciation*’ method of museum education. Lichtwark’s ideas, known as *Kunsterziehungsbewegung*, were implemented in art schools and art museums and resulted in exhibitions appealing to children and non-art specialists. [https://dictionaryofarthistorians.org/lichtwarka.htm](https://dictionaryofarthistorians.org/lichtwarka.htm) Accessed 3 October 2017.
53 Noordegraaf, *Strategies of Display*, 64.
objects: “[…] the chief aim should be the greatest possible isolation of each work and its exhibition in a room which in all material aspects, such as lighting, architecture, should resemble, as near as may be, the [setting] for which it was originally intended.”

Contrary to simulating a historical setting for works of art, Bode emphasised colours and textures, based on purely formal considerations, to produce a pleasing effect on the eye, challenging the mission to educate the viewer in the progression of art. Widely influential in Europe, Bode’s innovations in museum presentation can be seen as placing a greater accent on public accessibility to the sensory perceptual aspect of viewing works of art rather than to art historical scholarship. As art historian Charlotte Klonk has argued, this implies a less externally derived sense of subjectivity, “works of art are displayed near to the spectator’s eye level, either individually, or if they are small cabinet pictures, one above the other; that it was intended to evoke in the viewer an intimate, domestic sense of experience […] an interiorised reception.”

In one way or another, the art museum has always given broad focus to the experience of the visitor, however, Bode’s approach to display and Lichtwark’s research on ‘experiential art appreciation’, demonstrate a shift towards an aesthetic experiential approach to the mediation of art. There are manifest in the history of the art museum two strands for how relations between persons and works of art are ordered, an instructive didactic approach and an affective experiential pedagogy, which at times coalesce in the art museum, while at other times, the early twentieth century for example, they loosen. The argument this thesis puts forward leans in the direction of the experiential and in the chapters that follow I draw out a theoretical framework that supports the amplifying of experience in an encounter with art, that acknowledges the interdependence and necessary integration of the subjective and objective, the intuitive and cognitive, in facilitating an experiential understanding of art.

In France, the Louvre became a public art museum after the Revolution. However, as early as 1749, the art critic Étienne Lafont de Saint-Yenne had proposed that the Louvre be restored and made into a royal art museum. This was the first appeal for a public art museum in France. Lafont was advocating for something akin to a royal art museum open to foreign visitors and the French public, although, initially public access was limited and monitored. With the Revolution in 1789 the transformation of the Louvre became urgent and through a series of decrees of confiscation, what had been the property of the King

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54 Emma Barker, ed. *Contemporary Cultures of Display*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press/The Open University, 1999), 143.
55 Klonk, *Spaces of Experience*, 58.
became the property of the new Republican state. In 1792, in a letter to the artist Jacques-Louis David, the Minister of the Interior, Jean-Marie Roland, described the meaning of the new museum:

As I conceive it, it should attract and impress foreigners. It should nourish a taste for the fine arts, please art lovers and serve as a school to artists. It should be open to everyone. This will be a national monument. There will not be a single individual who does not have the right to enjoy it. It will have such an influence on the mind, it will so elevate the soul, it will so excite the heart that it will be one of the most powerful ways of proclaiming the illustriousness of the French Republic.58

In some European countries royal collections became public museums at the initiative of the royal families themselves. Examples include the Viennese Royal Collection, opened to the public in the 1770s; the Dresden Gallery (so admired by Goethe); and the Uffizi collection in Florence, donated by the Medici to the state in 1743.59 While the new institutions inherited some of the ceremonial functions of the princely collections from which they evolved, they were reshaped and redefined and ultimately these public art museums developed their own distinctive forms of practice.60 Coterminal with the establishment of the art museum were new display technologies for presenting the collections organised according to Enlightenment ideas. This meant that the display adhered to a secular universe of belief that stressed order and the application of rational principles of classification to previously unsystematic displays. Paintings were presented in national schools and art historical periods, classified according to linear chronology, sometimes put into simple uniform gallery frames and clearly labelled; royal collections were thus organised into new iconographic programs.61 The new art museum developed an art historical coherence and this had the effect of changing the viewer’s experience of art. By the nineteenth century ‘Art’ became a subject of historical expertise. Cultural historian Didier Maleuvre argues that the historicising of art in the museum reduced it to being a mere inhabitant, as opposed to being a shaper of its historical circumstances.62 The work of art then became a marker to represent a moment in history, exemplifying a particular category within the new system of art historical classification.63 Duncan and Wallach propose that without the museum the discipline of art history, which has evolved over the last 200 years, would be quite inconceivable. Viewed historically, the discipline of art history appears as a

necessary and inevitable technology of the art museum. However, while the viewer of art in the museum apparently has free choice, the spatial structure and museological practices of this new institution of art function along the lines of Michel Foucault’s *dispositif* that is, the command of museological and art-historical bordering of art jointly predetermine a range of meanings that are produced by the museum’s disciplinarity.

Art museums have histories of their own, separate from the manifest narrative that their collections are curated to impart. As it emerged the art museum was predicated on what historian James Sheehan contends as three foundational assumptions that took shape within the eighteenth century. First, the museum can now assume that there is such a thing as ‘Art’, its Greek vases, medieval altarpieces, and dynastic portraits would otherwise have nothing in common; they were, after all, made in different ways and designed to serve different purposes. It is only because these objects can be regarded as art that the museum’s eclectic contents occupy the same physical space and share the same matrix of meaning. Because they are art, they can all be experienced ‘aesthetically’, that is to say, as things valuable for their own sake, without practical purpose. A second foundational assumption art museums make is their claim to edification and education, to public resources and private support contingent on the belief that experience of art is somehow beneficial to individuals and to society. Sheehan argues that separating art from the everyday world creates a setting in which visitors can comprehend a connection between art, truth and morality – museums were presumed to promote, beauty, virtue and enlightenment. Explicitly, art museums are conceived as sites of education. In theory and practice the art museum was connected to the educational concept of *Bildung*, a self-formative type of cultural learning that incorporates aesthetic cultivation and character formation through instruction. A third assumption Sheehan points to is that art museums were founded on a concept of historical movement, which celebrates the value of past art and the need to protect and preserve it. In the nineteenth-century European context, Sheehan seems to suggest that the pedagogy of the museum was informed by ideas about aesthetics, ethics and the value of history conjoined with the conviction that the museum’s content should be accessible to the public. Along with other institutions, (like public libraries and art academies) that emerged in the

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65 Foucault uses the term *dispositif* to refer to a heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions – in short, the said as much as the unsaid.
eighteenth century the art museum spawned ruptures in the way culture was created and experienced and occasioned shifts in what it meant to be an artist and how art was experienced.\textsuperscript{71}

From the point of its official reception, the art museum was more than a mere historical project; it constructed a visual image of history.\textsuperscript{72} Under those circumstances a proliferation of national art museums came into being toward the turn of the nineteenth century in Europe: as previously mentioned, in France the Louvre opened in 1793; Spain followed in 1820 with the Prado Museum; Britain established the National Gallery in 1824 and the British Museum in 1852; and in Berlin, the Altes Museum was founded in 1830. The bracketing of art into the autonomous sphere of the museum complemented the movement that gave art over to the expertise of historical science, to the investigations of historiographical study and the precise details of scholarship.\textsuperscript{73} With the cultural secularisation of history the nation became, through the narratives of the museum, “the legitimate vestal of memory and of the past’s ruins – the museification of art in the nineteenth century makes art the object of historical expertise.”\textsuperscript{74}

Presented according to chronological and national (rather than thematic or formal) categories, art works in the museum are primarily historical objects. That is to say, the museum presents an idealist conception of history that interprets art principally as an illustrative visual historical document. The museum privileges art’s historical framing, however, it will be argued in following chapters that art invites us to encounter it in ways that include but also exceed this framing. Within museum typology the art museum is distinctive and warrants different historical thinking than, for instance, a museum of farming instruments, because, as Maleuvre notes, “the work of art makes history in an essentially different way than other artefacts might.”\textsuperscript{75} Maleuvre goes on to explain that art constitutes a \textit{caesura} of history, hence of experience and of the subject: it cuts into the concept of the substance of culture in a way that calls into question ideas of immanence, naturalism, and authenticity.\textsuperscript{76}

There are convergences between theoretical knowledge of art and cognate fields within philosophy, such as theories of knowledge, hermeneutics, and experiential inquiry, which suggest a positive degree of porosity between these disciplines which potentially allows for a more epistemologically fluid and expanded approach for bringing museum visitors to an understanding of art.

\textsuperscript{71}Sheehan, \textit{Museums in the German World}, 1.
\textsuperscript{72}Maleuvre, \textit{Museum Memories}, 1.
\textsuperscript{73}Maleuvre, \textit{Museum Memories}, 9.
\textsuperscript{74}Maleuvre, \textit{Museum Memories}, 9.
\textsuperscript{75}Maleuvre, \textit{Museum Memories}, 3.
\textsuperscript{76}Maleuvre, \textit{Museum Memories}, 9.
Thus, enabling visitors to experience and understand art in ways by which they can incorporate the knowledge it brings into their own life worlds. This calls into question the prioritising of knowledge mediated through historical analysis of artistic representation. It highlights a concern that has, until recently, been underexplored in the museum; the implication of museum discourses, and accordingly, pedagogy, that ascribe viewing subject ‘positions’ in relation to the work of art. Recognition of the agency of both the viewer and that of the work of art in an interactive encounter is critical to performing emancipatory museum pedagogy.

Defining art historically

Klonk posits that until the end of the eighteenth century art history was not historical at all in the modern sense; art’s value lay in aspiring to timeless aesthetic norms systematically elaborated by late seventeenth century and early eighteenth century French theorists (Charles Le Brun and Denis Diderot, for example). Klonk writes:

Two new notions became widespread at the end of the eighteenth century which allowed art to be seen as intrinsically historical. Firstly, art came to be seen as an intrinsic expression of individual societies and civilizations [...] Secondly, a systematic understanding of the connection between these individual expressions had to be elaborated [...] which explained the differences and similarities between different cultures’ art works.

Art’s historical systematicity meant that works of art were understood as part of a developmental process, which came to constitute an emergent history of art. Hegel’s recognition that every work of art belongs to its own time and as a product of a historically specific cluster of ideas and values became a prerequisite for the historical study of art. Subsequently, Hegel was immensely influential on a later generation of art historians such as Alois Reigl, Heinrich Wölfflin and Aby Warburg, who effectively founded art history as an academic discipline in the late decades of the nineteenth century.

While paradigms of art historical explanation and interpretation of art objects have varied widely since the nascent institutional beginning of art history in the late eighteenth century, art historical practice has traditionally been based on

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77 Dudley, Museum Materialities, 4.
the assumption that works of art contain legible vestiges of a work's historical genealogy, either of a formal or thematic nature. Correlatively, from its reception as a public institution in the early nineteenth century, the art museum functioned as a centre for information about art in the context of its broader social, political and intellectual development. Needless to say, in critical relation to theoretical and practical changes in how we understand cultural processes, what art is, and what art does, art history and the art museum have, in the past two centuries, undergone dramatic changes. Art history over the last two centuries has moved from a causal account of history to multi-causal accounts, it is underpinned by developments in other disciplines and has been responsive to theoretical reflections upon art's determinates and changing presentations. In the case of the art museum the rapidity of contemporary societal change had broad implications for how it defines and practices its public responsibility and alongside social developments there have been direct challenges to the museum's traditional roles. The future of the art museum, argues museologist Graham Black, must pivot around two forms of sustained engagement: Firstly, the externalisation of purpose of the museum driven by engagement with its publics and the communities it serves, and secondly, the self-directed, self-sustaining, collaborative engagement between the museum and its users. Art museums need to enable visitors to make connections with works of art that involves them in value-creating processes such as community, active participative engagement, and co-creation. This implies active and participating communities of museum users. A redefinition of the role and purpose of the art museum in communities, and efforts to make deeper connections for visitors in their experience of art has re-oriented museum practices away from a nineteenth-century notion of 'object-epistemology' toward audience agency. This redefinition has provided opportunities to rethink the role and performativity of works of art in determining the experience of visitors. This process represents a shift away from a factual based explanation of a work of art to what educationalists Elizabeth Wood and Kiersten Latham describe as, an

'object-based-dialogue' that places emphasis on collaborative processes: that is, the object, the presentation, and the visitor, conjointly participating in the act of meaning-making. 

Caught between scientific and philosophic aims, Elizabeth Mansfield claims the modernist discipline of art history was confidently secular and epistemologically conflicted. The history of modernism circumscribes the history of art history. Modernism and art history, equally responsive to post-Enlightenment aesthetics and cultural debates and to the economic and social revolutions of the nineteenth century, have followed analogous courses. Philosophically, modernism grows out of the positivist as well as the idealist tradition articulated in the eighteenth century and codified in the nineteenth. The new discipline of art history was made possible by a new conception of art as a universal human phenomenon, the emblem of which was the museum, the role of which was to collect, categorise, and systematically exhibit a universal history of art.

Museum historians and critics, inspired by the institutional critique of Foucault, have argued that museums in the nineteenth century, besides offering edifying cultural diversion for the masses, contributed to what Foucault terms the ‘disciplinary technology’ of the modern state, the purpose of which was to produce ‘docile’, ordered and patriotic citizens. The ideological and disciplinary apparatus that shaped and informed the museum augmented emergent narratives of the nation state and a universalising history through institutional and disciplinary technologies. For the past two centuries the historical framing of art in the museum has, not insignificantly, shaped and informed the public reception and apperception of art.

**Philosophy and art history**

Philosophers have been an important influence on art history, their writing playing a key role in art history’s evolution and the museum. While the history of art started with the work of Florentine artist Giorgio Vasari in his *Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, the modern discipline of art history emerges in part from Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel’s account of art and its history in his *Aesthetic Lectures* presented at the University of Berlin between

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86 Michael Ann Holy, *Panofsky and the Foundations of Art History*, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2002), 35-36. Holly notes – “Rooted in the Hegelian tradition, metaphysical idealism (eg. Croce and Collingwood) contended that through a study of the particulars in history, the philosopher-historian can uncover generalized principles at work.... Positivist historians (eg. Ranke and Comte) swore fidelity to the historical fact per se and confidently claimed that historical studies should be based on the verification procedures established by the scientific method.”
1820 and 1829. Art historian, Hans Belting, argues that Hegel’s revision of the function of art in human society had a lasting effect on subsequent writing on art; Hegel provided a philosophical model for the discipline, “in which art shifted from a living practice to a topic of memory in the guise of history.” Belting argues that Hegel offered a kind of ontology of art, even when applying it in retrospect, and hence, in principle “delivered arguments for the creation of the [...] art museum, in which the horizon of art found its institutional counterpart.” For Hegel, the very essence of art had already exhausted itself in history, which, as Belting notes, made the writing of art’s history *a posteriori*. The belief in the meaningful progress of style evoked an autonomous history; the axiom of art history as an explanatory paradigm spawned “the exercise to contemplate art as a privileged manifestation of history and to understand changes in art as an index of the temporality of history.” As Belting asserts, our concept of art is rooted in the Enlightenment age, which gave to art a “timeless and universal significance transcending the specificity of individual works or genres.”

In the important work, *Confronting Images: Questioning the Ends of a Certain Art History*, (2005) French art historian, Georges Didi-Huberman observes that the history of art did not remain impervious to the “great theoretical movement of Immanuel Kant, which shaped entire generations of intellectuals and scholars, particularly in Germany, which was to become contemporaneously the centre of ‘scientific’ art history.” In his *Critique of Judgement* (1790), Kant’s philosophy did not leave the question of art outside the frame of its fundamental inquiry, making art, as Didi-Huberman writes, an “essential exhibit of its analysis of the human faculties as a whole.” Yet, as Didi-Huberman postulates, post-Vasarian art history (still practiced today) is (only) partly of Kantian inspiration, or more correctly, neo-Kantian, for Kant would not recognise himself in the ‘Kantian syndrome’ in art history, which “refers to the historians choices and shapes the discourse of knowledge produced about art.”

Didi-Huberman writes:

> It is understandable that an academic discipline anxious to constitute itself as *knowledge*, and not as normative judgment, should have turned to Kantianism of pure reason rather than that of the faculty of taste. When art historians were conscious that their work pertained exclusively to the faculty of knowledge, and not to the faculty of judgment, when they decided to produce a discourse of objective universality, and no longer a

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89 Hans Belting, *Art History*, 137.
discourse of subjective norms, then Kantian reason became a necessary
way station for all those who sought to reground the discipline, and to
redefine ‘art’ as an ‘object’ of knowledge.95 [my emphasis]

What we might acknowledge as ‘history’, Iversen and Melville suggest is
indicated in this work of Kant’s only indirectly as “a pressure that only inflects
the discussions of originality and genius”.96 On the other hand, Hegel’s Aesthetic
Lectures take ‘fine art’ as the central focus and the foremost concern of aesthetics
that can only be fully understood by historical account and categorisation into
discrete domains of practice: architecture, sculpture, painting, music and
poetry.97

Philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty resolutely writes, “Hegel is the museum.”98
While much may be rejected in Hegel’s account of art’s historical development,
the very familiar mode of argument underpins the disciplinary structures and
processes of traditional art history.99 Hegel was an active participant in
discussions that led to the foundation of the Altes Museum in Berlin (1830), an
institution that presented an art historical system redolent of his ideas.100 For
Hegel, art was a form of thought, and addressing art as such called for no
particular method beyond thought itself, in all its continuous movement and
transformation. A feature of Hegel’s aesthetics is that he understood art to be
something of the past; “each work of art represented in fossilised form the
conscious thought left behind by humanity.”101 Hegel’s historical process is
museum-like in that it was a process of ‘remembering back’, reconstructed as an
imaginary museum. The present is separated from the past and the visitor to this
museum becomes aware of the gradual changes of form in art.102

Allowing only for Kant’s ‘disinterested pleasure’ Hegel rejected sensual response
to art. He stressed that the importance of art was to “immerse one’s self in the
topic of the work of art.” For Hegel the “poorest mode of apprehending art is the
purely sensuous.”103 Hegel perceived art in a way that stripped away the
viewer’s spontaneous sensual reaction, particularly if the contemplation of art
was to be perceived as a form of knowledge.104 As art historian Beat Wyss notes,
Hegel’s abandonment of the aesthetic or sensual response to art represents a

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95 Didi-Huberman, Confronting Images, 93.
96 Iversen and Melville, Writing Art History, 151.
97 Iversen and Melville, Writing Art History, 151.
98 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Indirect Language and Voices of Silence” in Signs, ed. Richard C. Mc Cleary,
(Evanston Illinois: North Western University Press, 1960), 82.
99 Merleau-Ponty, “Indirect Language,” 152.
100 Charlotte Klonk and Michael Hatt, Art History: A Critical Introduction to Its Methods, (Manchester and
101 Beat Wyss, Hegel’s Art History and the Critique of Modernity, trans. Caroline Dobson Saltzwedel,
(Cambridge University Press, 1999), 2.
102 Wyss, Hegel’s Art History, 2.
104 Hegel, Aesthetic Lectures, 140.
shift in art’s function, a turning away from sensualism marks art out as no longer of use in its traditional religious context of influence; sensualism and the museum-oriented historical aesthetic are directly, albeit inversely, related. Wyss writes, “the abolition of spontaneous sensualism is what makes the study of art history at all possible.” Wyss goes on to note an inherent weakness of Hegel’s historical thought model in its elision of the present: “now is obscured by methodological sediment. […] the demand for history to halt […] is based on the standpoint of historical rationality.” [my emphasis] So, history took on a new authority within the walls of the museum while simultaneously it appeared to cease: “works of art became venerated in the name of history as embodied in art.”

Many of the ideas I have discussed here remain integral to the methods of art history as it impacted museum interpretive discourse and pedagogy through the nineteenth century. Hegel’s ideas were immensely influential on the late nineteenth century development of Kunstwissenschaft – the science of art – particularly Hegel’s claim that historical change in art was not coincidental but a holistic development of culture and ‘spirit’. Eminent art historian Erwin Panofsky has been called the last Hegelian.

**Panofskian ‘iconographism’ and formalist concerns**

Coterminous with the emergence of the museum, the discipline of art history created the field of art objects. Once the archive was established, the art historian could then set about applying to this field a disciplinary methodology. Arguably the most influential historian of art in the twentieth century, Irwin Panofsky’s art historical process, which influenced museum interpretive strategies, strongly adhered to method. The primary intellectual activity of the art historian is ‘interpretation’ and the primary purpose of art historical inquiry is ‘meaning’, so the primary reference of ‘theory’ in such a model will be to method – that is, attention to the methodological instruments and “controlling principles that prevent the art historian from falling into mere intuition or speculation.”

Iconology, the study of visual imagery, its symbolism, and interpretation became an important tool in art history to recover cultural knowledge stored in the production of historical art. Although as a method applied to analysis of works

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105 Wyss, *Hegel's Art History*, 140.
106 Wyss, *Hegel's Art History*, 140.
107 Wyss, *Hegel's Art History*, 173.
of art it was not coherently systematised by Panofsky until 1939 in his *Studies of Iconology*, he posited it as a direction for art historical inquiry much earlier.\(^{111}\) Panofsky used iconology to retrieve the underlying principles that form the basic attitude of a nation, a period, a class, a religious or philosophical perspective, condensed into a work of art. He used iconology as a tool to *recover* meaning from works of art by referring to documents and texts drawn from the same tradition in which artists had lived: iconology became a discourse directed to the ‘history of types’. This methodology implied the suppression of subjectivity in favour of positivistic objectivity, which required artistic ‘intentions’ to be validated by ‘archaeological investigation’ and proved deeply influential. As Keith Moxey suggests, this represents bias “against the insertion of concerns of the present into narratives about the past,” in an attempt to “claim rigor, objectivity, cognitive substantiality, and progress associated with science and the empirical disciplines.” The price of this interpretive objectivity “is the abdication of responsibility for finding in history a means of articulating the cultural dilemmas of the present.”\(^{112}\)

The influence of Hegel and the ideas of cultural historian Jacob Burckhardt (1818–97) and hermeneutic philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911) represent the range of thinking that maps the epistemological terrain on which Panofsky's art historical ideas developed.\(^{113}\) However, the philosopher to whom Panofsky most often acknowledged his indebtedness was Ernst Cassirer (1874–1945). The theoretical connections between Cassirer and Panofsky are clearest in Panofsky's 1925–26 essay, *Perspective as Symbolic Form* and the German scholarly tradition of *Kunstwissenschaft* informs Panofsky's art historical methodology. Constitutive of much twentieth-century art historical practice, it is an essentially ‘scientific’ procedure, founded on ‘natural’ or ‘factual’ description, which acts as supporting ground for the attribution of meanings, that in turn offer support for the account of the object in terms of its intrinsic human meaning.\(^{114}\) *Kunstwissenschaft* was predicated on the possibility that the study of art can be systematic, scientific and objective. In essence, it implied a rejection of philosophical aesthetics in its concern with the issue of validating art historical judgements.\(^{115}\) The German, *Wissenschaft*, suggests thorough, comprehensive, and systematic knowledge of something on a self-consciously rational basis.\(^{116}\) Importantly, the role of method in Panofskian art history is to guarantee and

\(^{111}\) Holly, *Panofsky and the Foundations of Art History*, 158, 159.


define ‘objectivity’. Panofsky moves art history’s general object away from the present, most significantly he invents a need for method by means of which ‘historical distance’ can be appropriately bridged.

A cultural historian, Panofsky took works of art as his point of departure – he saw a work of art as an intact physical ‘piece of history’, one of the “frozen stationary records [...] [which have emerged] from the stream of time,” signing a variety of things. For Panofsky art is the physical piece of evidence, the locus classicus from which we can elicit symbolic beliefs, habits, assumptions influenced by philosophy, literature, theology, and psychological dispositions.

He used the initial study of a work of art as a means to understanding something else. While it might be argued that this approach may ultimately expand the study of the singular presentation of a work of art, it gives little status to an initial pre-reflective engagement with a work of art. Yet, it must be acknowledged Panofsky himself recognised this. Even so, a Panofskian iconographic methodology overrides an embodied sensory encounter with the work, as art historian David Rosand observes:

Historicism, unfortunately, tends to avoid confronting some fundamental issues of hermeneutics. Our methods of style description, iconographic interpretation, and contextual commentary depend upon external comparisons – with other works of art, cultural conventions, and social situations. Hardly ever do we attempt to deal with the communicative function, the visual mechanics, so to speak, inherent in the work itself.

Panofsky looked only to signifying values, validated by external documents and with seemingly uncontested authority he tried to ground reason into historical knowledge as applied to art.

When Panofsky began writing on art in the second decade of the twentieth century, the discipline of art history was dominated by an interest in form: the formal aesthetic properties of the work, which decontextualised the object from its historical situation and broader human surroundings. A formalist art historical approach is dedicated to explicating the work of art by close attention to its formal properties, with focus on stylistic aspects, quite apart from human

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121 Holly, Panofsky and the Foundations of Art History, 171.
123 Didi-Huberman, Confronting Images, 4.
124 Holly, Panofsky and the Foundations of Art History, 24. Note: Clive Bell (1881-1964) was a prominent proponent of formalism in aesthetics.
content or the subject matter of the work. To a large degree, a formalist approach relegates to ancillary status all information external to the experience of a work of art on its own terms, be it historical, biographical, or sociological. As an academic method in art history formalism privileges visual analysis of the work of art irrespective of cultural context or artistic motivation; works of art are seen as objects in themselves rather than products of their age. Consideration of subject matter as such, or ascertaining the viewer’s awareness of a work’s identifiable cultural milieu, was considered by art historians of formalist theoretical leaning, such as Roger Fry (1866-34), to inhibit an appreciation of formalist aesthetic complexities. From a formalist theoretical perspective, the context of a work, the reason for its creation, its historical background, biography of the artist, is considered to be of secondary importance. Accordingly, it was common for art museums at the turn of the twentieth century to identify their holdings only by the names of artists and pertinent dates, avoiding any interpretative or didactic information extrinsic to the experience of art. However, as art historian Michael Ann Holly argues, “theoretical interest in works of art as ‘embodied’ ideas (ideas made manifest), with an attendant desire to situate works of art firmly within their cultural milieu, never became wholly dormant.”

Contrary to formalist art history, a contextualist art history as exemplified by Panofsky moves beyond the work of art in order to explain its presentation as a product of something else: biography, related literary sources, the intellectual milieu of the period. The ‘scientific revolution’, or Kunstwissenschaft, in German art history aimed to move beyond the consideration of art as merely an aesthetic phenomenon. According to Iversen and Melville, Panofsky’s contextualist approach positions the art historian in a certain way:

[At the top of] [...] a perspectival apparatus from which detached vantage point he surveys a field of already-constituted objects [which] creates a particular kind of objectivity dependent on something called “historical distance” [...] a way of describing and locating an otherness fundamental to art historical inquiry.

Panofsky warned against the “subjectivist sufficiency of nondocumented interpretations,” as Didi-Huberman notes, when “Panofsky explained an image it is a signification given beyond all expressive values.” If the sensuous experience of aesthetic phenomenon offered merely an aggregate of individual

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experiences of specific objects it was thought that, as art historian Karen Lang writes, "a systematic art history could offer reasoned judgement of historical works of art along with a clear understanding of the system of knowledge to which these objects belonged." 131 Panofsky himself was aware of tensions between a contextualist historical approach to the study of art and the viewer’s aesthetic experience of a work and he subsequently apologised in an essay for his emphasis on matters of historical content. 132 Panofsky stresses the need for understanding a work of art as a thing in itself, to recognise the autonomy of its existence. Yet, he argues that reliance on both extrinsic documents and intrinsic histories is not sufficient; scholars must demand some basic epistemological principles before approaching the work, some ‘valid theory of knowledge’. 133 Panofsky turned to Kantian philosophy to give art history its status as knowledge. Didi-Huberman writes:

 [...] when rearranging the cards of art history so as to give it methodological configuration that, by and large, has not lost its currency today [...] Panofsky turned to Immanuel Kant because the author of the Critique of Pure Reason had managed to open and reopen the question of knowledge, by defining the play of its limits and its subjective conditions." 134

Panofsky found the real subject of aesthetics far removed from the study of art history, believing that aesthetics is not concerned with the historical work of art, or with the artist who created it, but rather with the impressions it makes, in the present, in the mind of the contemporary observer. 135 It is Panofsky’s view that creating a unified history from an aggregate of aesthetic objects requires a vantage point (an Archimedean point) from which an observer can objectively perceive the subject of inquiry. Without this, Lang suggests, Panofsky believed we remain in a vicious circle of knowing style via the work of art and the work of art via its style. 136 The vantage point outside the circle, Lang purports, might be provided as a principle that would not only suggest the relation of art objects to each other but also tell us about the nature of art itself. Correlating aesthetic phenomena with the notion of causality and a system of historical sequence is one thing; adequately describing the nature of art is another. The aesthetic, Lang deduces, offers special challenges to art history, something Panofsky discovered as he sought to provide the “inherent laws” and to preserve “the unique value

132 Lang, Chaos and Cosmos, 26-27.
133 Holly, Panofsky and the Foundations of Art History, 81.
134 Didi-Huberman, Confronting Images, 4-5.
135 Holly, Panofsky and the Foundations of Art History, 87.
[of] the academic study of art.” 137 As Lang suggests, before an historical investigation is launched we need some understanding of the work of art as a single intelligible phenomenon in itself, not as part of a series or an example of something else.138 Works of art have a reality apart from their place as links in a chain, as Panofsky writes, “the work of art is a work of art and not just any arbitrary historical object.” 139

In her essay *Chaos and Cosmos: Points of View in Art History and Aesthetics*, Lang examines what the theoretical point/s of view are by which an aggregate of aesthetic objects is transformed into a scholarly discipline.140 She argues that art history, which consists of a domain of aesthetic objects, is a curious discipline that requires “the close observation and study of images which by their very nature can never be ‘known’ in the objective sense to which science strives, as well as the classification of these objects into categories and contexts which – structurally speaking – resemble those of the natural sciences.” 141 In her analysis of Panofsky’s early work Lang determines that the methods employed by the art historian guide research towards reasonable ends to build up art history “as a respectable scholarly discipline [though] its very objects come into being by an irrational, subjective process.” 142 Panofsky’s search for meaning in artistic phenomena, and the negotiation of empirical, objective and transcendental points of view animate his early work.143 In summary, Panofsky recognises and acknowledges three problems that arise in the defence of art history as a rigorous discipline. They all concern the problem of where to start, that is, the need to know something else before you can begin art historical inquiry. First, is the understanding of one document that requires an understanding of other documents, each of which presents some difficulty; second, aesthetically recreating the work of art and rationally investigating it are seemingly contradictory activities, given the instinctive and subjective judgements on which the re-creation must be based; and the third problem concerns rational investigation and the formation of a theory of art, where the theory is essential to the rational investigation and vice versa.144

Panofsky’s art historical methodology has been much criticised, appraised as over intellectualised, and although contemporary art history has moved in very different directions, an analysis of Panofsky’s method is a useful instrument to

143 Panofsky, “The History of Art as a Humanistic Discipline,” 64.
elucidate tension in the discipline generally. Panofsky's recognition and explanation of an inherent epistemological tension in art historical method, between a subjective aesthetic response to art and its objective analysis, brings to the fore insights pertinent to mapping new potentialities for museum pedagogy.

A work of art in itself already invites us to examine concepts of culture and history, and it invites a relation of reciprocity that involves aesthetic experiential attention and the interaction of types of knowledge: including mediating knowledge and objectified knowledge. I will argue in following chapters that art requires close and sustained attention in order for interpretation to be more than an initial proclamation about the meaning of work of art (a statement of fact about it), and to allow for the demands the work makes of us as viewer – responsive rather than pre-emptive. I concur with Amanda Boetzke's understanding that the “ethics of interpretation [...] hinges on acknowledgement that a work of art cannot be reduced to preconceptions of its place in a seamless art-historical narrative.” While acknowledging tension in his iconographic methodology, Panofsky nonetheless warns “against the aesthetic vagueness of non historicised approaches to art.” “In order to constitute iconology as an ‘objective science’ it was necessary for Panofsky,” Didi-Huberman argues, “to literally exorcise something inherent in the very powers of the object he tried to circumvent through a science.”

Antithetical to Panofsky's approach to interpretation, hermeneutic philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer takes the view that interpretation does not conform to a method of certainty and claims that the objectivist methodologies of the natural sciences inappropriate for the concerns of the human sciences. Hermeneutics and other humanist disciplines require the direct phenomenological involvement of interpreters with their subject matters. Gadamer's phenomenological hermeneutics is helpful for understanding how interpretation might bridge the past and present in the viewer's encounter with an art object. I explore the implications of Gadamer's hermeneutical perspective for re-envisioning museum interpretive practices in Chapter Three.

The discussion to this point of the chapter has sought to determine historical and philosophical ideas informing the inception of the art museum, to examine art historical methods and philosophical discourses that impact the museum's

development. In this final section of the chapter I focus on the historical reception and critique of the art museum.

**Reception and critique of the art museum**

In the nineteenth century art becomes an object of historical expertise, it is bracketed off by the museum as an autonomous domain. Significantly, the museum was not initially perceived as a protector of art and history. When the first great art museums emerged in the nineteenth century, objectors declared that they effectively destroyed history and culture rather than preserving them; the museum’s reinvention of history was thought to threaten historical meanings.\(^{149}\) Criticism of the museum centred on the question of authenticity. Maleuvre notes that the museum was seen to endanger cultural and artistic authority by removing works of art from their original locations and placing them in museums where they can only be looked at, and not, so to speak, lived with.\(^{150}\) Loss of context, loss of cultural meaning, destruction of a direct connection with life, promotion of an aesthetically alienated mode of observation, instigation of a passive attitude toward the past and a debilitating mood of nostalgia; were all criticisms of the museum.\(^{151}\) Critique has not been limited to the museum’s inception, rather, it has been critiqued one way or another throughout its historical trajectory; from the late-twentieth century there has been an increasing body of critical scholarship, which I briefly explore in Chapter Two.

Claims of the museum’s inauthenticity have haunted museographic discourse to the present. In a line that runs from Antoine-Chrysostome Quatremère de Quincey (the French cultural leader, who first theorised an anti-museum critique) through Hegel, Friedrich Nietzsche, the first historical avant-garde, John Dewey, Martin Heidegger, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, aesthetic discourse has bemoaned the separation of art from existence, a separation for which the museum is held largely responsible.\(^{152}\) As Maleuvre points out, the idea that art in the museum is no longer authentic implies that art outside the museum enjoyed a truer, more immanent connection with history and culture.\(^{153}\) Quatremère de Quincey’s *Moral Considerations on the Destination of Works of Art*, published in 1815, was the first social critique that responded to the phenomenon of the museum. What underlines his critique is the principle of cultural authenticity.\(^{154}\) Quatremère did not see the museum as preserving art or culture, he saw it as bracketing culture from its true context in living history. By

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wrenching works of art out of original contexts, the museum is guilty of depriving works of art of their life force. For Quatremère, the value or beauty of the work of art is contextual and dependent on affiliations with use and cultural provenance, whereas in the museum, history is regarded as inauthentic. Notwithstanding this criticism, the notion of authenticity was particularly important in the museum, the collections of which had to have the sacred aura of ‘genuine’ art. As such, the museum was to become the guarantor of historical authenticity. As repositories of works of art that survived history and sites of scholarly research, art museums were the manifestation of the nineteenth century belief in the significance of the past for the present.

For Quatremère, however, art must remain connected to life, embedded in life; an idea that stems from aesthetics itself. Maleuvre observes that in Baumgarten’s aesthetic discourse (and later Friederich Schiller) aisthesis designates the sensuous experience whereby “the intellect fused with things perceptible, with matter. Art ought to reunite consciousness with being, with unmediated existence, with the sensate.” Quatremère’s theory is embedded in an understanding that art has “a special almost direct, connection with concrete, material existence, a connection that is generally described as ‘feeling’.” Traces of the legacy of Quatremère’s critique are discernable in Heidegger’s call to rescue Being from inauthenticity by wresting the work of art from the metaphysical discourse of art history and from museums. Heidegger deems the damage done by the museification of art as irretrievable, he writes:

The Aegina sculptures in the Munich collection [...] are, as works, torn out of their native sphere [...] Placing them in a collection has withdrawn them from their own world [...] Their standing before us is still indeed a consequence of, but no longer the same as, their former self-subsistence [...] this self-subsistence has fled from them [...] The works themselves stand and hang in collections and exhibitions. But are they there in themselves as the works they themselves are, or are they not rather here as objects of an art industry? [...] Even when I make an effort to cancel or avoid such displacement of works — when, for instance, I visit the temple in Paestum at its own site or the Bamberg cathedral on its own square – the world of the work that stands there has perished. World-withdrawal and world-decay can never be undone.

Similarly, Dewey makes an appeal for a similar authentic experience of art:

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155 Maleuvre, Museum Memories, 15.
156 Maleuvre, Museum Memories, 35-36.
157 Maleuvre, Museum Memories, 36.
158 Maleuvre, Museum Memories, 17.
When artistic objects are separated from both conditions of origin and operation in experience, a wall is built around them that renders almost opaque their general significance, with which aesthetic theory deals. Art is remitted to a separate realm, where it is cut off from that association with the materials and aims of every other form of human effect, undergoing and achievement. ¹⁶⁰

Nietzsche, in his Untimely Meditations, warns that a hypertrophied sense of historiography so impoverishes culture that it “is not a real culture at all but a kind of knowledge of culture.”¹⁶¹ More recently, Merleau-Ponty registers philosophy’s complaint against the museum’s dressing of living history into pompous history:

The museum adds a false prestige to the true value of the works by detaching them from the chance circumstances they arose from and making us believe that the artist’s hand was guided from the start by fate [...] The museum kills the vehemence of the painting as the library, Sartre said, changes writings which were originally a man’s gestures into “messages”. It is the historicity of death. And there is a historicity of life of which the museum provides no more than a fallen image. ¹⁶²

Theodor Adorno also judges the museum, charging it with the stultification of culture in the very name of culture in its presentation of objects “to which the observer no longer has a vital relationship and which are in the process of dying [...] Museums [...] testify to the neutralisation of culture.”¹⁶³ Art is inextricably entangled in its changing environment as Belting writes, in the eighteenth century:

The dissonance between art history and aesthetics

The newly conceived designation of ‘art’ made the discipline of art history possible. Art history took as its principal focus the restoration of the contexts surrounding the production of the work of art.¹⁶⁵ Both the art museum and art

¹⁶⁴ Hans Belting, Art History, 14.
history functioned as systems for codifying knowledge, developing narratives of causality that inform the presentation of art in an evidentiary pedagogy.

Philosopher Jay M. Bernstein in *The Fate of Art: Aesthetic Alienation from Kant to Derrida and Adorno*, argues that theories of art, “attempting to interrogate artworks historically” necessarily understand them in “non-aesthetic terms.”

Problematically, traditional nineteenth and much twentieth century art history is seen as requiring a certain mistrust of aesthetics. This tension emerges from dichotomous modes of art interpretive methods concerned with ensuring objectivity in historical analysis deriving from the rigor of *Kunstwissenschaft*. It is Bernstein’s claim that our experience of art today is conditioned by the loss of the *truth-function* of art. He argues that with the growth of modern science and technological reason art became alienated to a separate and autonomous domain of aesthetics. Curator Robert Gero notes that other scholars, including philosopher Kendall Walton, argue that aesthetic evaluation is impossible without first determining the historical context of the work of art; its particular positioning in history. Erwin Panofsky is perhaps the preeminent example, and he writes:

> But that we grasp [aesthetic] qualities in the fraction of a second and almost automatically must not induce us to believe that we could ever give a correct pre-iconographical description of a work of art without having divined, as it were, its historical 'locus'. While we believe we are identifying the motifs on the basis of our practical experience pure and simple, we really are reading 'what we see' according to the manner in which objects and events are expressed by forms under varying historical conditions [...] we subject our practical experience to a corrective principle which may be called the history of style.

I make the point here that within the field of art history there are varying accounts as to whether art history contains or is constrained by aesthetic judgement. Some art historians claim that identifying stylistic elements in a work of art can detect aesthetic significance in those elements. While others, like Jenefer Robinson make a stronger claim that stylistic elements can be detected *only* if elements of aesthetic significance within the work have first been detected. In making the case for an experiential museum pedagogy I argue that explicit prioritising (at the cost of other modes of experiencing and

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167 Bernstein, *The Fate of Art*, 12.
knowledge formation) art’s mediation through discourses of its history limits the reception of art for the museum’s audience. At issue in the museum setting, as Gero argues, is that if contextual conditions pertaining to the production of a particular work of art are ‘read’ or interpreted in the broadest sense the work becomes a compressed representation of a particular socio-historical context and discourse: “Its dominant function is to be read as a moment of a cultural time-space. Here the specificities of art history and aesthetics are lost in the generalities of institutional display.”

The mistrust ascribed to aesthetics is, in part, consequential of reason becoming the ground for validated art historical knowledge. The redefinition of ‘art’ as an ‘object’ of knowledge disavows the ‘messiness’ of aesthetic experience in an encounter with a work of art, deeming it as invalidated knowledge thereby privileging the museum’s rational explicative order, and holding conceptual and intuitive knowledge as separate in its dominant interpretive and pedagogical paradigms. As Adorno acknowledges, it is the work of art’s incomprehensibility that needs to be comprehended, “art is no more concept than it is pure intuition and it is precisely thereby that art protests against their separation.” Art asks for our collaboration in forming aesthetic conceptions.

As the art museum evolved, and the simultaneous development of a Hegelian inflected art history and the later method set forth by Panofsky, it would seem that the museum has maintained Plato’s animus by denying art’s semblance. The rationalisation of art relied on distance from aesthetic reflection to ensure its disciplinary status, its autonomy and credibility as a distinct discipline. Art history, it seems, did not need aesthetics to achieve its aims in the art museum.

The ontological conception of art has consequences for the methods and nature of knowledge that can be acquired from it. For the museum to move toward an emancipatory pedagogy the ontology of art needs to be reconsidered. Coming to understand a work of art in the museum is not simply the transmission of conceptual contextual knowledge from an authority to the viewer. It is an experiential hermeneutic process that entails the agency of the viewer interactively engaged with the phenomenon being encountered. It involves the interdependent processes of perception, affectivity, communication and cognitive, and experiential modalities.

As art came to be envisaged as a cultural resource, which might be pedagogically utilised by government, the modern art museum became dominated by the

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“technology of the series”\textsuperscript{173} This meant the principles of its display were modified to this end, determining the museum space as a pedagogical space. Cultural historian Philip Fisher interprets modern art’s progress as it reflects the dictates of the museum, casting the art museum as the major interpreter of industrialised culture, countering the pull of mass production by designating what is unique and ‘irreplaceable’ to be what counts as art. In this way, the museum changed the way objects were seen, crucifix and Greek vase alike, Fisher argues, by extricating them from their cultural context, “effacing them from their intended meaning, and rearranging them in a time-line of art history.”\textsuperscript{174} The public art museum developed new forms of exhibition that “involved an instruction in history and cultures, periods and schools, that in both order and combination was fundamentally pedagogic.”\textsuperscript{175} Historically, the museum’s pedagogic foundation mediated art’s historical development; motivated not by the individual work of art but relations between works of art, both what they have in common (styles, schools, periods) and what they do not. Fisher writes,

that we walk through a museum, walk past the art, recapitulates in our act the motion of art history itself, its restlessness, its forward motion, its power to link […] the rapid stroll through a museum is an act in deep harmony with the nature of art, that is, art history and the museum itself, not with the individual object, which the museum itself has profoundly hidden in history.\textsuperscript{176}

Up to the present time, and over the course of the twentieth century, the relations and conditions for the presentation, interpretation, and reception of visual art in the museum have increasingly become a focus of scholarly and artistic reflection.\textsuperscript{177} Many art historians like Joanna Woodall, Georges Didi-Huberman, Leo Steinberg, and Timothy James Clark, make an appeal for greater attention to what is actually seen, what is unseen, touched, and experienced when confronted with a work of art.\textsuperscript{178} The traditional disciplinary aim of art history has been to do justice to the complexity of works of art by taking the relationship between particular works and their visuality as the field’s primary object of investigation. Yet, critical art historians raise the issue that traditional

\textsuperscript{174}Fisher, Making and Effacing Art, 7.
\textsuperscript{175}Fisher, Making and Effacing Art, 7.
art history neglects or dismisses as ahistorical or anachronistic, a *philosophical* approach to a work of art. Didi-Huberman offers an alternative to modern art historical discourse, not with the intention to replace, but rather to “supplement it, to see it in dialectical relation to what it represses: the image’s opacity, its resistance to clarity.” For Didi-Huberman the conception of art history as articulated in his *Confronting Images: Questioning the Ends of a Certain History of Art* (2005), the work of art is not the site of “adequation, mastery or intelligibility, but of a rupture in the visual field, a breach of the coded operations of the sign, a vulnerability (in all senses of the word) by which it is opened onto [...] associations well beyond the logic of ‘simple reason.’” Critical of a Panofskian inflected art history, specifically “the keeping at a distance in order to keep in tact the very conditions of knowledge,” to protect the discipline against “all immoderation in the exercise of reason,” Didi-Huberman interrogates the rhetoric of certainty of modern art history that gives the impression of a work of art “truly grasped and reconnoitered in every aspect.” The paradox of creating “specific knowledge of art,” Didi-Huberman argues, risks creating artificial boundaries for works of art that dispossess them of their own “specific unfolding.” This is a paradox that resonates with the museum’s favouring of academic histories and knowledge, bracketing art’s capacity to present viewers with sights and insights that are not reducible to their conceptual equivalents, it’s capacity to serve as a form of sensuous cognition. I return to this central thematic thread of the thesis in the following chapter.

A rub between the historical and the aesthetic is evident in Johann Wincklemann’s 1764 *The History of Ancient Art* where he writes of the dilemma of reconciling the historical study of art with its visual impact in the present: “while I can know a great deal about the past history of a work, I can see it in the present only, and only in so far as it is I who see it.” [my emphasis] Writing on beauty and art Elizabeth Prettejohn astutely makes the point that while Winckelmann may have concealed gaps in the historical narrative behind his evocations of beauty; we, on the other hand, may conceal the beauty of works of art behind the richness of the history we are able to write, read, and listen to. Similarly, the words of museologist Susan Pearce at the top of this chapter positively anticipate a critical museum pedagogy: “The object only takes on a life

180 Nagel, “Fra Angelico”, 563.
or significance when the viewer carries out [her] realisation, and this is dependent partly on [her] disposition and experience, and partly upon the content of the object which works upon [her].

In summary, this chapter has reflected on the key ideas that set the parameters of my inquiry. I have probed the dominant disciplines of art museum interpretive practice to open investigation of how we might rework visitor access to art by means of re-scoping museum pedagogy. In particular, I have explored the way a relationship between art and audience is understood and brokered through the institution’s traditional epistemological paradigm and hermeneutic practices, how *encounters* with works of art have been historically determined and produced. I claim that discord in the museum’s disciplinary discourses, explicit and tacit, diminish the experiential yield of transactional ‘dialogicality’ between a work of art and a viewer. An understanding of art necessarily involves insights provided by experientially constructed knowledge and theoretical knowledge.

To paraphrase Dudley, the work of art consists of the interaction between itself as it is observed, and the human subject doing the observing, it is only through this engagement that the work becomes properly manifest to us, both what is visible and the visual event. Given these claims, new possibilities for audience engagement with art require a better fit between the cultural resources of the museum and the cultural practices of production and exchange of meaning, the subjective agency of visitors, theoretical and historical information, and the pedagogy the museum performs.

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Chapter two

The work of art in the museum

I dream of a new age of curiosity. We have the technical means for it; the desire is there; the things to be known are infinite, the people who can employ themselves at this task exist. Why do we suffer? From too little: from channels that are two narrow, skimpy, quasi-monopolistic, insufficient. There is no point in adopting a protectionist attitude, to prevent “bad” information from invading and suffocating “the good”. Rather we must multiply the paths and the possibility of comings and goings.

Michel Foucault 1

Now more than ever: the efficiency, quantity and immediacy of information and information-systems has placed art and the artistic gesture at risk of being identified, categorized, digested, cannibalized and made into information before it has a chance to begin being art. Curiosity is being castrated by information.

Anthony Huberman 2

Art is pedagogical for the simple reason that it produces truths and because “education” (save in its oppressive or perverted expressions) has never meant anything but this: to arrange the forms of knowledge in such a way that some truth may come to pierce a hole in them.

Alain Badiou 3

Introduction

The public art museum emerges in the eighteenth century in the context of a newly endowed importance given to ‘Art’. The historical emergence of ‘Art’ as an autonomous category in conjunction with the development of aesthetic philosophy helped shape new aesthetic relationships in the art museum. Objects became significant for their properties as works of art under the gaze of the attentive viewer. The emergent and coextensive fields of art history and philosophical aesthetics intersect in the public space of the art museum. Writing about art flourished in the eighteenth century giving rise to modern art criticism and the demarcation of aesthetics as a modern philosophical discipline. The new social institutions — the art academy and the art museum — were created

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around art’s emergent autonomy from earlier religious and political functions. Aesthetics marked the philosophical attempts to theorise certain subjective processes specific to the perceiving mind’s direct relations to ‘sensuous’ materiality. A dimension of human experience that was, as historian William Pietz has argued, inadequately accounted for by the established rational psychologies of René Descartes (1596-1659) and John Locke (1632-1704). Aesthetics marked the successful effort to identify works of art and aesthetic feeling as a discrete domain of enlightened experience; aesthetics, art criticism, and art history came into existence interdependently with art’s singularity.

Aesthetics became incorporated into a major philosophical system through the influential work of Immanuel Kant’s Critique of Judgment, which drew on British and other German sources. Hegel’s Aesthetic Lectures (1820–29) in the early nineteenth century became specifically associated with fine art and its history. However, as has been argued, as a discipline, art history is largely, and problematically, disconnected from aesthetics: traditional art history is seen as actually requiring a certain rejection of aesthetic judgments.

Although philosophers have given a great deal of attention to aesthetics and the philosophy of art, few philosophers have attended seriously to art museums and, not until recent decades, have museum scholars given attention to philosophical influences in writing on the art museum. This is surprising, given that museums play a significant role in what counts for art within culture, and the staging of art’s presentation for our (aesthetic) experience. This thesis is weighted toward the analysis of several philosophers the work of who offers significant insights for how art might be experienced in the museum.

The first section of the chapter investigates the development of aesthetic philosophy and its uneasy relationship with art history in the nineteenth century art museum. Traditional art historical discourse interprets works of art not as aesthetic objects for personal contemplation, but rather, what the work of art points to, just how it represents its subject matter and what the work can be

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taken to be indicative of, or serve as evidence for. On the other hand, the framework of post-Kantian aesthetic theory is interested in the work of art in and for its own sake, independent of all historical narrative. However, as distinct discourses, art history and aesthetic philosophy intersect in the nineteenth century museum to construct new viewing subject positions relational to the presentation of art. Simultaneously, the public space of the art museum makes visible the public it addresses: it provides a frame that constructs the public as a visible entity. Constituted as an instrument of public education, the art museum was inherently pedagogic from its inception. Educational theory can in general terms be regarded as a project of modernity and as deeply rooted in philosophical ideas of the Enlightenment. The belief that education had the power to effect social change formed a solid foundation for the museum’s establishment.

Eileen Hooper-Greenhill has argued that the approach to museum pedagogy in the later nineteenth century was grounded on “how objects might be known and used in the production of knowledge.” The structure of this pedagogical mode positioned works of art as “sources of knowledge [...] that had fixed and finite meanings that could be discovered [...] and then taught.” A transmission-based educational paradigm privileging objective, reproduced knowledge, bracketed off from the experiential, biological, and temporal context of knowing was deployed. While residual elements of this approach endure much contemporary education practice acknowledges that the epistemological foundation of the transmission model is educationally inadequate in this setting.

A second section of this chapter explores the implications for museum pedagogy of the contested boundary zone of theories working within the disciplines of philosophy, art history, museology, and contemporary critical theory. It seeks to elucidate what I perceive to be an implicit epistemic and hermeneutic discord in the pedagogical apparatus of the museum. Public art museums developed, as Kenneth Clark explains, “together with the modern conception of education, and it was as part of education that their support was underwritten by the public authority.” Educational discourses during modernity were based on apparently

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14 Hooper-Greenhill, Museums and the Interpretation, 5
15 Aaron Stoller, Knowing and Learning as Creative Action: Reexamination of the Epistemological Foundation of Knowledge, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 3.
coherent and objective structures of generalisable knowledge. Hooper-Greenhill explains further that as “[...] knowledge was shaped, so was the self,” for disciplinary knowledge was expected to create a “centred stable and sovereign self, governed by reason and will.”¹⁸ This meant that collections were curated from a public educational viewpoint and, ideally, to teach the history of art. Nineteenth-century museums acquired works of art to complete historical sequences in collections or to illustrate some school or period. Art history provided a systematic technology of instruction to enable non-elite social classes a ‘point of entry’ in the encounter with art, to overcome their unfamiliarity, although, ‘systematic’ understandings and presentations of art were coextensive with affective ones. Art was studied evidentially; as categories and ‘influences’, artists were brought to light not because they were (necessarily) good artists, but because their work illustrated a tendency. As Kenneth Clark has observed, this was a “half realized educational aim transmitted as information about art and its classification.”¹⁹

The third section of the chapter addresses the development of new approaches to art theory and art history that contribute to an expanded understanding of the experience of art and the complexities involved in viewing it. Here I give particular attention to the work of contemporary art historians T. J. Clark and Georges Didi-Huberman who, from different perspectives, demonstrate what it means to engage with art’s semblance and capacity to serve as a form of sensuous cognition, what it means to look attentively at works of art, and what is at stake if we don’t take enough time to engage with them.

The approach taken by Clark in his extended inquiry of two paintings by Nicolas Poussin has an orientation towards the ideals and principles of Dewey’s ‘experimental way of knowing’. Dewey’s pragmatic stance translates knowledge (including ‘received’ knowledge of the academy) from a stable object into an act of knowing, in an ongoing attempt to improve a hypothesis by an intentional effort to reveal new connections and relations.²⁰ Dewey explains the prototype of experimental doing for the sake of knowing this way:

> When we are trying to make out the nature of an unfamiliar object, we perform various acts with a view to establishing a new relationship to it [...] to bring to light new qualities [...] we turn it over, bring it into better light [...] the object as it is experienced prior to the introduction of these changes baffles us; the intent is to elicit some previously unperceived

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qualities, and by varying conditions of perception shake loose some property which as its stands blinds or misleads us.\textsuperscript{21}

From a different stance the work of Didi-Huberman pursues a critical reading of the tradition of art history that takes a hermeneutic and phenomenological perspective that significantly contributes to broadening methodologies in art history.

A seminal body of critical discourse of the museum has merged with and been informed by the elaboration of other cultural discourses of cultural value, social justice, epistemic structures and modes of representation. In the 1990s various writers, including Tony Bennett, Carol Duncan, Douglas Crimp and Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, introduced critical discourse to the nascent academic discipline of museology, in response to the work of Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu, among others.\textsuperscript{22} This body of scholarship introduced new complexity and theoretical language to the discussion of the art museum, challenging, among other things, the complacency of an art history rooted in objective knowledge and connoisseurship.

The final section of the chapter aims to contextualize elaborations of museum discourse and practice that have from the late decades of the twentieth century and up to the present, stimulated debate and scholarly reflection effecting significant change in the conditions and the relations for the presentation and reception of art. It explores Foucault’s notion of ‘effective history’ that challenges notions of historical continuity and coherence, a move away from ‘totalising history’ to reveal the contingency of political orders and historical events.\textsuperscript{23} Foucault’s philosophy of effective or general history explicated in \textit{The Archaeology of Knowledge} (1972) provides a critical base from which to reconfigure audience agency in relation to works of art in the museum. Applying ‘effective’ history to the art museum works of art are understood as particulars, as fundamentally puzzling things to be inquired into, not framed as evidence for a ‘totalising’ single historical trajectory.

The art museum has become a site of critical and post-critical analysis, which has spawned new perspectives and cultural practices that reconstruct relations between the viewing subjects and works of art.\textsuperscript{24} However, cultural theorist Michelle Henning argues that critical studies of the museum in the late decades of the twentieth century did not manage to account for the “material specificity of museums and exhibitions,” for their experiential or affective appeal.\textsuperscript{25} Rather,

\begin{tabular}{l}
\textsuperscript{22}Michelle Henning, \textit{Museums, Media and Cultural Theory}, (Berkshire, UK: Open University Press, 2004), 1. \\
\textsuperscript{23}Lord, “Foucault’s Museum: Difference, Representation and Genealogy,”11. \\
\textsuperscript{24}Bismarck, Schaffaf and Weski, (eds) \textit{Cultures of the Curatorial}, (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012),12. \\
\textsuperscript{25}Henning, \textit{Museums, Media, and Cultural Theory}, 2.
\end{tabular}
this important body of literature focussed on the history, theory and practice of the museum, drawing attention to questions of disciplinary power, the formation of modern museum policies, display practices and the patterns of their social usage.26

‘Art’, history and the museum

The newly conceived designation of ‘Art’ made the discipline of art history possible. Art history took as its principal focus the restoration of the contexts surrounding the production of the work of art.27 Both the art museum and art history functioned as systems for codifying knowledge, developing narratives of causality that inform the presentation of art in an evidentiary pedagogy.28 ‘Art’, conceived as designating a form of specific experience, has only existed in the West since the eighteenth century. Philosopher Jacques Rancière claims, that ‘history’ and ‘art’ born together play a significant role in the development of the concept of ‘art’:

It constitutes this reality itself. In order for there to be a history of art, art must exist as a reality in itself, distinct from the lives of artists and the histories of monuments, freed from the old division between mechanical and liberal art. Yet reciprocally, for art to exist as the sensible environment of works, history must exist as the form of intelligence of collective life. [...] The story [of art] must therefore involve a temporal and causal scheme, inscribing the description of works into a process of progress, perfection and decline [...] they only bear witness by establishing an exactly opposed sensible configuration: by becoming works of art, lent to a ‘disinterested’ gaze, enclosed in the separate universe of museums. 29

Rancière observes that while history and art emerge coextensively it is in a contradictory relationship: the museum makes art and its history tell a story:

History makes Art exist as a singular reality; but it makes it exist within a temporal disjunction: museum works are art, they are the basis of the unprecedented reality called Art because they are nothing like that for those who made them. And reciprocally these works come to us as the product of a collective life, but on the condition of keeping us away from it.30

Art becomes an autonomous realm of production and experience since history exists as a concept of collective life that can be envisioned as a people, a society, a

30 Rancière, Aisthesis, 19.
period, constructed as demonstrating characteristic traits at a certain point in the progress of its collective life.\textsuperscript{31} The rise of the public art museum can be seen as a corollary to the designation of ‘art’ as a distinct category alongside the philosophical interest in the aesthetic and the transformative powers of art objects. The museum could only come into existence with the constitution of a category of art; we could only understand the sense of art and artistic achievement if we ourselves had a conception of art. Centuries after Plato the existence of ‘art’, that is, European art, became designated as a particular class of objects, a name for things that are appreciated as more than ‘mere things,’ as a set of practices the end of which lies in something other than their usefulness. Art became an honorific designation granted to artefacts that have achieved a significant degree of cultural distinction.

In an effort to determine what is distinctive about art, theorists since the eighteenth century have sometimes called art’s non-cognitive (aesthetic) element ‘beauty’ and have associated special qualities and emotions with it; beauty is a familiar name given to whatever it is that seems to elude the grasp of concepts pertaining to works of art.\textsuperscript{32} In the last few decades attention has been given to a recovered interest in ‘beauty’ or what we can term art’s aesthetic capacity. This has been motivated by a desire to recover art’s sensuous appeal from the theories designed to explain it.\textsuperscript{33} The revival of an appeal to ‘beauty’\textsuperscript{34} suggests that there is more at stake in questions of aesthetics than fashion and standards of taste. Sensuous and particular, material and meaningful, works of art are not less ‘true’ as a ground for knowledge.

Anthony Cascardi observes, what is really at issue here is art’s desire and capacity to serve as a form of sensuous cognition.\textsuperscript{35} The museum positioned works of art as sources of knowledge and simultaneously as aesthetic, auratic things. This conflict manifests in the museum’s pedagogy in consequence of art history’s discount of art’s material specificity, its experiential aesthetic and affective appeal. Henning makes the observation that while cultural studies has been predicated on demonstrating how the world we experience is socially constructed, “produced from texts, discourses and ideology”, it is, however, also sensuous, “the world of things is not passive but acts upon us.”\textsuperscript{36} Works of art have agency, they can only be known in a confrontation with a beholder. Rather

\textsuperscript{31}Rancière, \textit{Aisthesis}, 14.
\textsuperscript{32}Cascardi, “Prolegomena to Any Future Aesthetics,” in \textit{Art and Aesthetics After Adorno}, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 15.
\textsuperscript{33}Cascardi, “Prolegomena to Any Future Aesthetics,”16.
\textsuperscript{35}Cascardi, “Prolegomena to Any Future Aesthetics,”16.
\textsuperscript{36}Henning, \textit{Museums, Media and Cultural Theory}, 154.
than discounting the materiality of works of art we need to take our experience of them, their affect on us, explicitly into our account of them. The interpretation of works of art exceeds their reconstructed history; a personal response is a constitutive element of interpretation, it is both object and subject of an interpretation, it communicates something about the interpreter and the work of art.

The recent revival of interest in beauty and affectivity correlates to greater emphasis being given to the experience of the visitor in museum theory and practice. It reflects a turn to the plurality of interpretive perspectives, participative ways of attending to objects and producing narratives. It acknowledges that we are involved both bodily and intellectually when we interact with a work of art. This shift of attention now given to the experience of the visitor can be seen as a desire and need to engage visitors directly and sensually with works of art. Motivated by a desire for contact, a turn to affect seeks to overcome distance between self and things, subject and objects, and each other, which the modern museum exemplified.37

Art and the evolution of aesthetic thinking

By the middle of the eighteenth century the argument was beginning to be made that sensory knowledge was not inferior to rational thinking; sensuous knowledge had a perfection of its own. There were two distinct kinds of knowing.38 Late in the century Kant developed a theory of aesthetic thinking that went beyond all rational concepts by asserting that intuitions about art (and nature) transcend what is immediately perceptible or ostensive. We could read Kant’s Critique of Judgment as a critique of the exclusion of art in Plato’s Republic. In the Critique of Judgment the particular status Kant accords to the imagination and epistemological reciprocity between subject and object offers insights into the kind of unity of experience and the form of knowing that art occasions, requiring significantly more than conceptualisation or acts of recognition.39 Plato’s action against art in Book X of the Republic, and art’s subsequent aesthetic confinement in museums from the late eighteenth century implies that art may exist in another form and, as Plato feared, merges with life in the production of social and political reality.40 While Plato’s banishment of art as second-hand existence does art a great injury, it does nonetheless, as Maleuvre argues, “mark the first formal reflection on art, [...] so that art’s incorporation into philosophy

is marked as a negation of its claim to being.” Plato stands at the juncture where Greek art gives way to the beginning of metaphysics: “It grants the philosopher-king a monopoly over truth while stripping art of its relevance to life: art is what is illusionary, deceitful and second-hand.” Plato’s account of the polemical origin of the ‘aesthetic’ work of art shows art’s severance from life to be a historical product. Similarly, Heidegger, in pinpointing the development of aesthetics pushes it as far as philosophy’s first meditation on art, thus implying aesthetics already existed as unnamed reflection. Heidegger writes:

The name ‘aesthetics’ meaning meditation on art and the beautiful is recent. It arises in the eighteenth century. But the matter which the word so aptly names, the manner of inquiry of art and the beautiful on the basis of the state of feeling in enjoyers and producers, is old, as old as meditation on art and the beautiful in Western thought. Philosophical meditation on art and the beautiful even begins as aesthetics [...] with the Greeks at the moment when their great art and also the great philosophy that flourished along with it comes to an end. At that time, during the age of Plato and Aristotle, in connection with the organization of philosophy as a whole, these basic concepts are formed which mark off the boundaries for all future inquiry into art.

Aspects of modern aesthetics were in development by the third decade of the eighteenth century, primarily in England and Germany. From this point aesthetics acquired distinctness, a new self-consciousness as a domain of critical philosophical discourse, coalescing around configurations of fine art, beauty, and ‘taste’. Coextensively, the classification of what we now refer to as ‘the arts’ or ‘fine arts’, constituted art as a system and thereby provided the necessary subject for aesthetics as the philosophy of art. Moreover, eighteenth-century writings on aesthetics spawned modern ideas of subjectivity and individuality. Freedom of the imagination was a central idea that gave impetus and thrust to the flourishing of eighteenth-century aesthetic theory. The term ‘aesthetics’, purportedly first used by Alexander Baumgarten in his 1735 Reflections on Certain Matters Relating to Poetry, and later in 1750 as the title of an unfinished work, Aesthetica, signified aesthetics as a ‘science of perception’, the sphere of

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41 Didier Maleuvre, Museums, Memories, 43.
42 Didier Maleuvre, Museums, Memories, 42.
immediate and particular sensory cognition, as opposed to general abstract forms of conceptual knowledge or intellectual cognition.

In the same century Kant developed another perspective on aesthetics. Often referred to as the first philosopher of modernity, Kant changes the most fundamental philosophical question from ‘what is there’ to ‘what can I know’ and hence replaces metaphysics with epistemology. Kant’s philosophical task is to set limits on what finite human reason can do. Kant’s response to Baumgarten and a central ingress of his *Critique of Judgment* (1790) was to assert that aesthetics does not in fact give us knowledge in the form of knowledge of objects. Kant’s significant move is from the universal to the human perspective. Aesthetic judgments (judgments of beauty) do not essentially concern objects; what is experienced is the feeling of pleasure or displeasure within the perceiving subject. For Kant, aesthetic judgments are subjective but also universal; as all humans have the same faculties they are also capable of this feeling.

Kant thus introduces into philosophy the concept of inter-subjectivity through his conception of *sensus communis*, our capacity of mind to check our own judgments against those of others so that they are not just subjective. So Kant plots a middle path through two different ways of knowing, sensuous and cognitive, in his notion of ‘universal subjectivity’, the kind of universality that follows from an aesthetic judgment that cannot be proven by rule (concept). That is to say, in claiming such a judgment as aesthetically pleasing, I am claiming everyone should agree with me. An aesthetic judgment involves a ‘free play’ of the faculties of the imagination and understanding, and this free play arouses in us a communicable state, which I can assume, will be the same for everybody.

Distinguishing the objective universality of pure reason from the subjective universality of works of genius Kant echoes this rub in *The Third Critique* in his account of an excess of sensation, “that no concept can be wholly adequate to them as internal intuitions”, explicated by his notion of *aesthetic ideas* (§ 49: 314). 47 A kind of excess of sensation of what things are able to do, what is presented to the senses spills over what can be identified cognitively, "inducing solely on its own account such a wealth of thought as would never admit of comprehension in a definite concept, and as a consequence, giving aesthetically an unbounded expansion to the concept itself." 48 (§ 49: 315) The excess of sensory experience cannot be matched in terms of conceptual knowledge. Kant regarded the idea as a ‘necessary condition’ of aesthetic judgment;

correspondingly, he saw beauty as “the expression of aesthetic ideas.”

In opposition to Kant’s aesthetic ideas and attributes the traditional art museum as a modernist paradigm adopts a particular stance for its visitors, one that aims to present objective, conceptually grounded knowledge for the visitor to absorb. The information mediated is that of the academy, shaped by the discipline of art history it groups works of art in order to materialise that history. As noted in Chapter One, by making itself a legitimate academic discourse the history of art had by the late nineteenth century complied to what Didi-Huberman has described as “the status of a really ‘disinterested’ and “objective knowledge: [...] ‘objective’ [...] in the theoretical sense of a veritable epistemology [...] a critical philosophy of knowledge [...] the Kantianism of pure reason rather than that of the faculty of aesthetic taste.” In Kant’s Critique of Judgment, art paradoxically escapes the constraint of epistemology. Kant’s theories of art and knowledge challenge the opposition between the conceptual and the aesthetic. Reflective judgment, or aesthetic judgment does not categorize its object but produces a concept that reflects the mind’s capacity to form a concept in order to gain purchase on the phenomenon before it. What Kant’s theory of aesthetic judgment achieves by the absence of determination or objectivity is the awareness that concepts or metaphors (aesthetic ideas) are used, which do not stand as evidence empirically supported by the object being encountered.

Preziosi makes the claim that aesthetics remains the deeply unresolvable foundational dilemma of the modern enterprises of art historicism and museology. In this claim he sees that these disciplinary practices, as they intersect in the art museum, are historically inextricable as well as co-implicative as modes of modern knowledge production. Aesthetics, art history and museology form a complex history of related but distinct sites of disciplinary protocols and professional practice.

Philosophers have long debated the place of affect in human experience. Art has long been held to afford benefits, or dangers, to those who attend to it. Plato’s discussion of the role of art is an early instance of its dangers: for Plato art was dangerous because it gave an outlet for the expression of uncontrolled emotions and feelings. Human geographer Nigel Thrift understands affect as a form of thinking, often indirect and non-reflective, but thinking all the same; affect is a different kind of intelligence about the world. It cannot simply be relegated to

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the irrational.\textsuperscript{52} Affect is central to Plato’s critique of art and aesthetic theory. Its power is implicit in the question: how can something that is made also be ‘true’?

In his animus towards artists Plato is alert to the power of art’s affective capacity; as Maleuvre suggests, we can find in it the kernel of the future preservation of art in the museum.\textsuperscript{53} In Plato’s rejection there is a discernment of art that poses an element of threat, a realisation of art’s capacity for knowledge, for truth telling.\textsuperscript{54} The peddling of second-hand truth in the community; that is, copies of copies as remote from truth, for which the artists were banished from the republic is, for Plato, as Maleuvre posits, a prevarication:

Blurring the distinction between the truth and its facsimile, the work of art tends to be indistinguishable from what it mimics. The political stakes implicit in this blurring of the model and the copy are what condemn art and artist to isolation.\textsuperscript{55}

This repudiation of art (which entails a certain notion of aesthetics) brings definition and dignity to philosophy by defining art as irrational.\textsuperscript{56} For the philosopher-kings of Plato’s Republic, not moved or motivated by modes of interaction with the world that are not rational or scientific, art has nothing to teach about the world, and furthermore, its affectability stirs up undesirable irrational emotions. In the Republic it seems that works of art are dismissed because of their illusionary nature, but in fact art is banished for its ability to take the place of real things.\textsuperscript{57} The Platonic edict against art proved influential in two respects. First, the act of banishment commenced arts museification long before its full manifestation in the modern era, and second, art’s aesthetic affect was consequently feared, denied and silenced in the modern ‘aestheticised’ art museum.\textsuperscript{58} Maleuvre observes that fear of art’s aesthetic affect is more explicit in Plato’s Laws. Here, art’s claim for truth not only impinges on politics’ claim for truth, but also forces the legislator to recognise in politics a production of truth inherently akin to that effected by the artists. Art is consequently ostracised for being a comparable form of truth-production.\textsuperscript{59} When inquiring whether they might enter the city, the artists receive the following response from the lawmaker:

\textsuperscript{52} Nigel Thrift, \textit{Nonrepresentational Theory: Space, Politics, Affect}, (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 175.
\textsuperscript{53} Maleuvre, \textit{Museums}, 40.
\textsuperscript{54} Maleuvre, \textit{Museums}, 40.
\textsuperscript{55} Maleuvre, \textit{Museums}, 40-41.
\textsuperscript{56} Halliwell, \textit{The Aesthetics of Mimesis}, 9. Note: Halliwell argues for a more subtle understanding of the ways in which elements in the tradition of mimetic thought were transferred (not abandoned) during the eighteenth century, allowing considerable historical and conceptual continuity, not a separation of ancient and modern views of art.
\textsuperscript{57} Maleuvre, \textit{Museums}, 41.
\textsuperscript{58} Maleuvre, \textit{Museums}, 41.
\textsuperscript{59} Maleuvre, \textit{Museums}, 41.
Respected visitors, we are ourselves authors of tragedy, and that the finest and best we know how to make. In fact, our whole polity has been constructed as a dramatization of a noble and perfect life; that is what we hold to be in truth the most real of tragedies. Thus you are poets, and we also are poets in the same style, rival artists and rival actors, and that in the finest of all dramas, one which indeed can be produced only by a code of true law – or at least that is our faith. So you must not expect that we shall lightheartedly permit you to pitch your booths in our market square with a troupe of actors whose melodious voices will drown our own.

Here the capacity of the artist to make real tragedy is in competition with the tragedy of real-life politics. Plato acknowledges that art’s capacity to create reality differs only in degree from the reality of politics; consequently art must be cast outside where it cannot be confused with the life of the forum.

Maleuvre writes: “Plato puts the work of art away so that its semblance”, its lack of incorporation in the processes of rationalization, “may be recognized as just that.”

Similarly, art’s existence in the eighteenth-century museum also legislates against the direct participation of art in life. In the definition of its display spaces and the mode of integrating and rationalising its collections within a historicist paradigm, the foundation of the art museum is one of aesthetic detachment. In no way compatible to the aesthetic domain, the process of rationalisation was woven into the very material of Western modernity; the art museum itself, along with practices developed to support it, formed part of the rational project of modernity. But, as Cascardti claims, art is semblance, it is not completely reducible to the processes of rationalisation; reason in its rationalised form could not wholly silence the validity of the claims art makes.

Art has, Cascardti writes, “embodied meaning”, which is to register “art’s way of demonstrating the inadequacy of purely conceptual ways of knowing the world,” and of “staking claims for the kind of values that it makes in the world.” Cascardti goes on to write:

Art is an engagement of the world that is itself a form of valuing, which is to say that it is a form of realizing and tracking value by means of material making and embodied conceiving. In it, values are not simply invoked or applied but enacted: as colour, depth, line, volume, and so on. Painting thus becomes a mode of embodied meaning that returns us to those very things that have been alienated from the concept as a ‘simple distraction’: body, gesture, style, manner, tone, mood and the like.

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61 Maleuvre, Museums, 41.
62 Maleuvre, Museums, 41.
63 Cascardti, “Prolegomena to Any Future Aesthetics,” 25.
64 Cascardti, “Prolegomena to Any Future Aesthetics,” 25.
the work of ‘thinking’ in a manner that conceptual thought cannot accomplish.66

Post-Kantian influences on the museum

The project of the art museum by the late nineteenth century, Henning argues, is roughly cast within a post-Kantian terminological framework.67 Certain practices of attention were validated while others were devalued; it was assumed that works of art needed to be viewed in the right circumstances, with little distraction and little contextualization.68 The luxurious setting of the art museum environment was conceived as providing the right setting for contemplation of works of art and ‘aesthetic’ experience. Through appropriate acts of attention the quality of the work of art, it was assumed, would reveal itself without being explained or mediated.69 Paradoxically, the emphasis on this conception of aesthetic experience subordinates the specificity of the work of art and the viewer experience of it to the aestheticised codes of museum space and technologies of display. Additionally, as I have previously argued, art’s historical framing ‘read’ or interpreted in the broadest sense meant the individual work was condensed as the representation of a particular socio-historical context and discourse; specificities of art history and aesthetics are lost in the generalities of institutional display.70

As Henning observes the aesthetic originates as a discourse of the concrete and particular, giving attention to the sensuousness of the world, yet, the nineteenth century art museum exhibits works of art as little more than evidence of the narrative of art’s history; the antithesis of Kantian aesthetics.71 Moreover, Maleuvre points out that the human subject addressed by such displays is an inward-looking subject; the experience offered is solipsistic. The emergence of this solipsistic aesthetic in the nineteenth century art museum Maleuvre argues is the product of the disciplinary society, as defined by Foucault.72 The aesthetic theory that developed alongside the designation of art as ‘art’ is tied to the existence of ‘art’ (but not only art) as a specific class of objects that is meaningful, sensuous and particular, set apart from the rest of experience.73

Art historians and curators have broadly shared the idea of the art museum as a primary site of modernist aesthetics, arrogated as a post-Kantian staging of art in, to use the words of Carol Duncan, “a marked off ‘liminal’ zone of time and

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66 Cascardi, “Prolegomena to Any Future Aesthetics,” 33.
68 Henning, Museums, Media and Cultural Theory, 109.
69 Henning, Museums, Media and Cultural Theory, 111.
71 Henning, Museums, Media and Cultural Theory, 113.
space in which visitors, removed from the concerns of their daily, practical lives, open themselves to a different quality of experience.” Duncan’s seminal work *Civilising Rituals* (1995), makes the claim that a museum’s central meanings, its meaning as a museum, is structured through ritual. Like the temples and palaces they so often emulate, art museums are complex entities in which both art and architecture are parts of a larger whole, the totality of which sets the stage that prompts visitors to enact a performance of some kind. Duncan argues that museum going is akin to older ritual situations. Her concern is not a definitional or comparative anthropological account of ritual; rather her interest is in the way that art museums offer up values and beliefs about social, sexual and political identity in the form of rich and direct experience. The civic rituals of the nineteenth century museum embraced both aesthetic and art historical educational missions, which were understood, she suggests, as socially valuable by museum professionals. The aesthetic museum space places emphasis on the unique transcendental qualities of art in a setting that is conceived as a refuge for contemplation, while the museum as an educational site frames works of art as art historical objects. While these museum missions are not necessarily adversative, they can, and have been, in tension. Duncan’s account of the dual mission of the art museum maps the lineage of *art as experience* and the centrality of an instructive art historical pedagogy in its history. A core aim of this thesis is to pick up the experiential and overtly instructional educative thread traceable in the museums historical trajectory and rethink it in terms of museum praxis that is able to make connective elements between persons and works of art but attuned to an individualised collective sensitivity. Or, as von Hantelmann argues, we are in need of praxis that aspires to bring back together in museum practice modalities of connection and relationality, of nature and culture, products and process, and rationality integrated with other processes of knowledge. The task of the thesis is to articulate the potentiality of selected philosophical reflections to shape a new praxis performed in a space of public interaction and communication that involves all of the senses, that integrates aesthetic and analytic scientific impulses. The history of the art museum is important to this project for the reason that it brings into focus particular kinds of museum presentation that

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74 Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals*, 20.
both drive the museological context that structures relations between works of art and persons, and maps ideas that shape different educational approaches to how works of art are encountered in the museum.

Duncan draws associative links between what she describes as the ritualised space of the museum and visitor behaviours that enact the museum’s script and ‘Kantian’ aesthetic attitudes. She suggests that the eighteenth-century designation of art and aesthetic experience as topics for critical and philosophical inquiry might be seen more broadly as a propensity to furnish the secular with new value. Duncan’s argument is that aestheticians gave philosophical formulation to the condition of liminality as a state of suspension from the day-to-day world. The inference here is that notions of liminality became incorporated with ideas of aesthetic experience.

In his work The Invisible Masterpiece, art historian Hans Belting also argues for a synthesis of aesthetic and religious contemplative attitudes. Belting cites the example of the Sistine Madonna altarpiece, painted by Raphael in 1512, which was subsequently relocated from Piacenza, Italy, to Dresden, Germany, in 1754. He refers to the painting as an example of the blurring of religion, aesthetics, and art; the painting’s interpretive potential as classical perfection and religious subject matter informed a new mode of art viewing. The painting’s subject is the Virgin Mary appearing as a miraculous vision to Saint Sixtus. When it was taken into the collections of the Dresden art museum it was deprived of its religious function, becoming for its mostly Protestant eighteenth-century audience, a ‘miracle of art’.

Contemplation of this individual work in isolation almost became a religious experience in itself, even in a secular setting. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries a miracle story circulated in which the subject of the painting appeared in a dream to Raphael. Belting explains how this myth reinterpreted the Sistine Madonna as if it were itself a vision that was (actually) experienced by Raphael, so that a miracle becomes the origin of the painting as well as its content. As a miraculous object the painting becomes imbued with religious significance, and the artist becomes a cult figure, the subject of myth and mystery.

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81 Duncan, Civilizing Rituals, 14.
82 Duncan, Civilizing Rituals, 14.
83 Note: Pope Julius 11 commissioned Raphael to paint the Sistine Madonna as an altarpiece for the church in San Sisto, Piacenza, Italy in 1512.
85 Henning, Museums, Media and Cultural Theory, 16.
86 Belting, The Invisible Masterpiece, 52-54.
87 Belting, The Invisible Masterpiece, 58.
Belting suggests that, encouraged by aesthetic contemplation and the display and exhibition arrangement of collections, some works of art gain a new kind of singularity in the museum, often at the expense of older meanings. Aesthetic absorption was understood in terms of absorbing the aura of the object (in a way redolent of animism), immersing oneself in it, becoming transported by it. He therefore argues that the museum animates objects as sources of knowledge and simultaneously as aesthetic, auratic things. The transfer of ritual objects within the development of aesthetic practices in the art museum contributed to a change in aesthetic value, which became a mysterious quality, or aura, possessed by the singular masterpiece. These ideas were seeded by a derivative conception of post-Kantian aesthetics, whereby aesthetic judgment could be universally valued and is pleasingly uplifting. As noted above, Kant’s account of aesthetic judgment is both subjective and (objective) universal; it also claims that (only) pleasure in the beautiful (that is art) is ‘disinterested’, which is related to Kant’s claim to universal validity of aesthetic judgment. In this context Kant’s claim of ‘disinterestedness’ means a kind of pleasure in art cut off from desire (or concept); pleasure is neither grounded in desire nor does it produce desire. Maleuvre observes that as Kant saw it, “art is active attention to the process of venturing, not of arriving, of exploring, not leering at the spoils.”

Architectural and display technologies, particularly in the late nineteenth-century museum, would likely have been effective as viewing cues and codes conducive to the enactment of a Kantian inflected ‘disinterestedness’, where pleasure in works of art is elicited in an environment with minimal distraction. For Kant, the notion of ‘disinterestedness’ meant that the perceiving person has no real interest in the continued existence of the object, detachment from the object opens up a space in the Kantian aesthetic experience for the reflective imagination, imagination being that which provisions the mental figuration necessary for aesthetic experience. Kant liberated art from content, subject matter, the viewer’s vested interest and the needs of religion, while the art museum provided the spaces and practices for performing the idea of art and a notion of the aesthetic pleasure of it.

**Art’s display and reception**

Late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century art museum exhibition practice did not display works of art isolated from each other; the works are not displayed as

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discrete entities that emphasise the unique character of individual works of art or artists. As Klonk claims, such displays did not give attention to the individual perceptual responses of the viewer.\(^93\) However, by the late nineteenth century fewer works were displayed in a dense wall-climbing salon-style hang. They were brought down to the viewer’s eye level, effectively repositioning the viewing subject by giving greater value to the experience of the viewer.\(^94\) This signified a new conception of the nature of subjective experience expressed in the display of the late nineteenth century museum, which privileged interiority.\(^95\) Late nineteenth-century German art museum directors and curators like Hugo von Tschudi (1851–1911) and Wilhelm von Bode (1845–1929) exemplify the fusing of the art museum’s mission to educate viewers by presenting art in a historical progression with affective approaches which sought to bring into view the ‘unscientific’ sensible aspects of art. Their display strategies were informed by a deep concern for aesthetic responses and an interest in promoting the immediate emotional impact of works of art by privileging the abstract formal elements. The emotional impact of line and colour espoused around 1900 by Theodor Lipps (1851–1914), a leading advocate of ‘empathy theory’, greatly influenced popular aesthetics in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.\(^96\) Lipps argued that empathy plays a role in our aesthetic appreciation of an object; in fact he considered empathy essential for the philosophical and psychological analysis of aesthetic experience.\(^97\) Empathy theory discussed aesthetic experience primarily in terms of the projection of people’s inner states on to objects. Strategies for the presentation of art that accentuate empathetic engagement with singular works of art merged with conventional art historical interpretation that sought to educate.\(^98\) Significantly, Henning suggests that writing on the art museum which positions it as the “rational instrument of government” has tended to draw attention away from the impact on museum display of Romanticism, explicitly its resistance to over determined and “extravagant classification.”\(^99\) By the mid-nineteenth century a Romantic notion of aesthetic experience had displaced older understandings of the contemplation of art. The aesthetics of Romanticism characteristically exalted emotion over reason: the senses over intellect. For the Romantic, paintings ‘speak’ to the soul; the aesthetic qualities are not a matter of perfect form, but a mysterious communion between the viewer and the art object, analogous to what the Romantics were to find in nature and in the experience of the sublime and the

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\(^94\) Klonk, *Spaces of Experience*, 23.

\(^95\) Klonk, *Spaces of Experience*, 25.

\(^96\) Cited in Klonk, *Spaces of Experience*, 58.


\(^98\) Klonk, *Spaces of Experience*, 61.

picturesque landscape.\textsuperscript{100} As a reaction against Romanticism in the later decades of the nineteenth century the 'scientific revolution' or \textit{Kunstwissenschaft}\textsuperscript{101} in German art history sought to move beyond the consideration of art as \textit{merely} an aesthetic phenomenon. Philosopher Francis Halsall claims the “messy relationship with aesthetics and art history is framed by its relationship to modernism,” which in the late nineteenth century “threw art history between scientific, philosophical, and aesthetic aspirations.”\textsuperscript{102} As has been discussed in Chapter One art history had little academic or intellectual precedent, and was by the late nineteenth century acceding to be grounded on attempts to systematise and reconcile discursive accounts with aesthetic accounts of art objects. Predicated on the possibility that there can be a study of art that is systematic, scientific and objective, \textit{Kunstwissenschaft} gave status to art history.\textsuperscript{103} This development, Richard Woodfield argues, was “based on a rejection of academic philosophical aesthetics and the creation of a new aesthetics out of the materials of art history.”\textsuperscript{104} In the late nineteenth century the work of art becomes a historical object that can be analysed through scientific methodologies of art history.

This scientific or systematic study of art greatly influenced what was to become orthodox academic art history. It is evident in the work of some of the founding writers of the modern discipline of art history: Heinrich Wölfflin and Alois Reigl and the later work of Panofsky and Ernst Gombrich. In part, the manifesto for this approach relates to the work of Hans Sedlmayr and the Vienna school of art history.\textsuperscript{105} Many of the important representatives of the Vienna School combined careers in universities with curatorial activities in art museums. Alois Reigl, for example, joined the curatorial staff at the Austrian Museum of Decorative Arts, while under the directorship of Moritz Thausing, the Albertina (Vienna) became the premier works-on-paper museum in the world.\textsuperscript{106}

Halsall holds the view that aesthetics is the source of an internal and potentially destructive tension that emerges from the dichotomy between a mode of art historical practice concerned with ensuring objectivity in historical analysis, derived from the rigorous, or scientific study of art, and a mode of connoisseurship concerned with making and responding to value judgments.

\textsuperscript{100} Henning, \textit{Museums, Media and Cultural Theory}, 17.
\textsuperscript{101} Lang, \textit{Chaos and Cosmos}, 34.
\textsuperscript{103} Halsall, \textit{Aesthetic Judgment}, 3.
\textsuperscript{105} Woodfield, “Kunstwissenschaft versus Ästhetik” 24.
\textsuperscript{106} \url{https://dictionaryofarthistorians.org/thausingm.htm} Accessed 8 August 2016.
about art. At the heart of this tension is a belief that by applying aesthetic judgments or personal subjective partiality (taste), the art object’s historical reconstruction is obscured. The implication is that – in general – historical analysis precludes aesthetic reflection, in order to avoid compromising such analysis. In the tradition of Kunstkissenschaft aesthetic judgment is not seen as pertaining to or recognising the social or historical particulars of art.

Further expression of this noted tension between aesthetics and art historical methodology is evident in the polarity of conceptions of the ideal art museum: defined either as the educational museum or the aesthetic museum. In the educational museum model works of art are framed as art historical objects explicated by historical knowledge. Whereas in the aesthetic museum model, particularly in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, minimum interpretive devices are deployed so that art’s unique and transcendent qualities are given priority, while the spatiality of the museum is designed to provide sanctity for the aesthetic contemplation of art. A disparity between the educational and the aesthetic endures in the art museum. In part this relates to a suppression of the reciprocal dependence of art-historical and aesthetic significance in interpreting a work of art, an aporia acknowledged by Panofsky. Therein, Paul Crowther argues “reducing artistic meaning to factors bound up with the image’s documentary and persuasive effects, the social and other contextual elements that enable these.” The problem being, as Crowther suggests:

that when all the social functions of art and the standard questions of iconography and iconology have been mapped out and analysed the fundamental question remains unanswered, namely what is it about the visual image which enables it to sustain such breath of meaning? What is the basis of its formative power? We are left, in other words, with the problem of the intrinsic significance of the image.

Aesthetics connotes a regime of perception, and sensation, a mode of experience considered appropriate for encounters with works of art, which was implicit in nineteenth and early twentieth-century attitudes to art. The art museum sought to facilitate an aesthetic experiential modality for its viewers through display technologies, architectural space and art’s autonomy. While aesthetics is

110 Duncan, Civilizing Rituals, 4.
112 Crowther, “Aesthetics in Art History,” 126.
attendant in the pedagogic regime of the art museum it is tacit, to the degree that it is outweighed by the status given to a rehearsed objective knowledge about art and its historical context. In the intellectual project of the art museum the codification of art, art’s history and aesthetic theory uneasily co-exist within a rationalised explicative pedagogy. Art history sits uneasily alongside a tacit aesthetic discourse of awe, delight, wonder and sublimity.

Art historian Donald Preziosi asserts that as a paradigmatic institution of modernity the public art museum defined new relationships between people and things, between subjects and objects. The early public art museum was imbued with a belief in the ‘object lesson’: using a physical object to assist the recognition of concepts. One metanarrative of the Enlightenment is a belief in an objective reality. Preziosi argues that the galleries of the art museum were spaces of consumption, of viewing and learning, of controlled and disciplined behaviour: where art historical theory lays emphasis on the art object;

as a vehicle by means of which the intentions, values, attitudes, messages, emotions [...] of a maker (or by extension his/her time and place) are conveyed (by design or chance) to (targeted or circumstantial) beholders or observers.113

Accordingly, art historical methodology invariably construed the work of art as reflective of its origins in some determinate or determinable way. Art history’s disciplinary structure is therefore responsive to the question of what it is that works of art might be evidence of.114 Founded on the need to give a historical account of contextual factors of the production of an art object, art history sought to render visual objects more cogently legible to a wider museum audience. Hence, from its inception, the art museum was a means of access to expert knowledge, principally through a modernist one-way transmission model of communication. The emergence of ‘art’ as an autonomous domain of sensuous, meaningful objects displayed and curated as art objects in the public spaces of the art museum spawned new habits and forms of attention. The desire to communicate with visitors was counterpointed by the principal role of the museum to give ‘historical and objective validity’ to works of art. The formative pedagogy of the art museum comprised a technology. As Bennett describes:

[I]t was not just a representational one that works via its influence on the visitor’s consciousness. It is a technology which also saturates the routine of the visitor as the lesson’s of art’s progress takes the form of an itinerary that the visitor is obliged to perform. The museum

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converts rooms into paths, into spaces leading from and to somewhere.\textsuperscript{115}

In the institutional presentation of art the aesthetic connotes our perceptual and cognitive engagement. Intuition and feeling is ultimately related to objective rational explanation, what we experience when we encounter a work of art, the experiential knowledge we construct in our interaction, has interconnection with what we might want to explain or understand about its historical or theoretical context.\textsuperscript{116}

However, the European museum of modernity was assigned to the production and dissemination of objective knowledge; rationality was evoked to supplement superstitions and subjective knowledges of earlier times.\textsuperscript{117} Knowledge was constructed; deduced from reason it was objective and reliable. Grand metanarratives categorized those things that could be observed, measured, classified, and named, which were then displayed in museums to give a universally valid and reliable view of the world.\textsuperscript{118} Yet, works of art are not amenable to being reduced to documents or representations, while works of art are constituted by the art museum, at the same time they are material things.\textsuperscript{119} As art historian Clare Farago has claimed, the act of representation creates its own conditions of reception that deserve to be acknowledged and respected in the interpretive act.\textsuperscript{120} So, the other side of the epistemic framing of the modernist art museum would seem to be the way that ‘things’, precisely here, works of art in the museum, appear to exceed their designated roles, where the assimilation of works of art, for example, resists any attempt to make them fit coherent objective, historicist narratives.\textsuperscript{121}

Aesthetics’ apparent lack of substance (understood as little more than connoisseurship), in conjunction with stereotypical ideas about the preoccupation of aesthetics with subjective taste and ineffable emotions, meant, as Richard Woodfield argues, that these formative art historians marginalised aesthetics on the grounds that it was based on non-rigorous reflection and uncritical value judgments.\textsuperscript{122} Correspondingly, Christine McCorkel suggests their historical explanation of art sought to eschew value statements while

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{115}Tony Bennett, \textit{The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics}, (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 44.
\item \textsuperscript{116}Gill Perry and Colin Cunningham, (eds) \textit{Academies, Museums and Canons of Art}, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), 9-10.
\item \textsuperscript{117}Henning, \textit{Museums, Media and Critical Theory}, 14.
\item \textsuperscript{119}Henning, \textit{Museums, Media and Critical Theory}, 2.
\item \textsuperscript{120}Clare Farago and Robert Zwirnjenberg, \textit{Compelling Visuality: The Work of Art in and Out of History}, (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), xii.
\item \textsuperscript{121}Henning, \textit{Museums, Media and Critical Theory}, 2.
\item \textsuperscript{122}Woodfield, “Kunstwissenschaft versus Ästhetik,” 22.
\end{itemize}
pressing the “notion of ‘style’ into service to reduce art to the objectively observable.” What could be known and demonstrated by reduction to formal logical statements rather than what is significant in human sensory experience became the central concern in the analysis of art: a “concern with ‘knowability’, a logical and empirical demonstrability.” Here the concept of knowledge was a matter of factual, repeatable observations that could be made accessible and relevant in the museum and communicated to an undifferentiated mass audience. It is important to note, that while rebutting aesthetics, art historians of the Kunstwissenschaft tradition did not deny aesthetic responses to works of art; they merely considered such responses to be overly bound by subjectivity. The formalisation of methods resulting from the Kunstwissenschaft approach influenced art museum interpretative practice into the mid-twentieth century. It ensured epistemological certainties for the study of art.

However, theories of art change and through the twentieth century the discipline developed, with gains and losses. Yet, it should not be assumed that the emergence of new art theories and methodologies makes previous approaches redundant. On the contrary, new approaches often depend on aspects of earlier ones; most contemporary art historians would not want to align themselves with just one historical method. Yet, as I suggest above different methods are not necessarily compatible. For example, the theoretical basis of feminism and formalism, or of iconography and connoisseurship are in many ways antithetical.

Art museum Governmentality

Museums have always undergone transformations and as the contexts in which visitors to the art museum operate they are not rigid, pre-existing configurations rather, they are constantly changing and are actively constructed and transformed by those participating in them. Bennett contends that art museums connect specific forms of expertise to programs of social management, which operate in registers that are simultaneously epistemological and civic. Bennett ‘s conception of the art museum is a place in which new forces and realities are constructed and then mobilised into social programs. In this way, art

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124 McCorkel, “Sense and Sensibility,” 39
125 Woodfield, “Kunstwissenschaft versus Ästhetik” 30.
museums are, Bennett argues, important sites for the historical production of a range of new realities, such as: art, community, prehistory, national pasts, and international heritage. Bennett sees relations between specific forms of cultural expertise and the social: Kant’s account of the aesthetic as an independent form of cognition indirectly allowed a reconceptualisation of the space of the art museum as one of self-formation, through which acts of judgment, by means of the works of art, enabled self-judgment and self-formation, on the part of a new free citizenry. Relatedly, in light of its provision of both the setting and an occasion for a new set of practices of ‘inwardness’, which in turn shape new forms of civic virtue, Preziosi characterises the nineteenth century art museum as a “laboratory for the education and refinement of bourgeois sentiment.” Whereas, art historian Philip Fisher argues that art museums create the context in which what he describes as ‘portable objects’ are “open to resocialisation and resettlement within this or that cluster of what are now taken to be similar things,” that is to say, ‘art’. The portability of objects that Fisher refers to, easel painting for example, allows for experimental arrangements of objects that make possible generalisable theories and abstractions that frame or reframe art within an object-based epistemology. Preziosi and Fisher, like Bennett, draw an analogy between art museums and laboratories, where laboratories are conceived as places in which “forces and realities are constructed and then mobilised in social programs by those who are empowered to act as their credible interpreters.”

Changes in the display of works of art impact on perception and codes of viewing which have consequences for how works are understood. The nineteenth century museum visitor was confronted with a canon of historical instruction set in a space for aesthetic contemplation. In the twentieth century, and to the present, works are presented to the visitor in spaciousiy separated arrangements that correspond to an individualised viewer and an individualised object that privilege the seminal role of the creative individual. As von Hantelmann has argued, in the twenty first century the subject is no longer the ‘recipient’ of the museum in its canonical nineteenth century formation. In the last decades the word ‘performative’ has become a key rubric within the discourse of contemporary art and museum practice, and aesthetics.

131 Bennett, “Civic Laboratories,” 522.
132 Bennett, “Civic Laboratories,” 532.
135 Bennett, “Civic Laboratories,” 522.
performative brings into perspective is the contingent and elusive realm of impact and affect that art brings about both situationally and relationally, in a given space and discursive context in relation to a viewer or a public. Chapter Five will explore the reality producing dimension of art’s ‘performative field’ accounted for in the work of Jacques Ranciére, Mieke Bal, and Olafur Eliasson, to bring forth new forms of visitor engagement with art that fosters experience that has a connective element to what is being encountered, but remains tied to individual sensitivity.

The art museum in the twenty-first century

Historians, Irit Rogoff and Daniel Sherman point out how the structuring components of museums and museum discourse have, until the later part of the twentieth century, involved supposedly objective and verifiable elements. With the public, however, they argue, “questions of subjectivity, and ways in which audiences’ varying receptions of museum display gratify particular subjective desires, enter into the discussion.”137 Congruently, Bennett makes the case that challenges (like postcolonial theory, indigenous critiques, and counter-knowledges) to the classificatory procedures of the cultural and historical sciences that are the foundation of Western curatorial practices, and the ruptures they have occasioned in systems of thought closely associated with museums, has meant that there are competing knowledges regarding the ordering and arrangement of relations between objects and persons.138 Accordingly, much contemporary literature on the museum is in agreement that such relations should be reordered with a view to configuring the social in more culturally plural ways.139 Naomi Jackson, researcher on dance and ethics draws on Foucault to remind us that, in order “to find greater agency, we need to demystify socially constructed discursive networks, which function in various historical moments to limit our ways of behaving and thinking.”140

The white cube

The presentation of a nineteenth century dense salon hang with no focus on individual objects gives way in the mid-twentieth century to the view that works of art can speak independently, and are independent of their surroundings, thus making a claim for art’s autonomy and decontextualisation. The surrounding

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137 Sherman and Rogoff, eds. Museum Culture: Histories, Discourses and Spectacles, ii.
139 Bennett, “Civic Laboratories: Museums Cultural Objecthood and the Governance of the Social, 538.
environment of displayed works of art came to be treated as mute and nondescript, abolishing all decorative detail and gallery ornamentation. A white walled space separated from other fields of life was deployed to isolate an individualised viewer. The rise of what Brian O’Doherty termed, the ‘white cube’, sought to encounter the subjectivity of artists in an individualised, sparsely hung display of painting, and to co-produce the viewer’s subjectivity. O’Doherty’s analysis of the function of the ‘white cube’ explores the transformation of easel painting in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and its exhibition in art museum space. The ‘white cube’, O’Doherty argues, renders the eye disembodied or autonomous, marks a separation of perception from the rest of our being; a fragmenting of self. Presence before a work of art, he writes “means we absent ourselves in favour of the Eye and The Spectator [...] the Spectator and the Eye are conventions which stabilise our missing sense of ourselves.” Curator Christoph Grunenberg writes: “On the one hand [the white cube][...] emphasises the essential formal qualities of abstract painting and sculpture. On the other hand, its inconspicuousness suggests that it is nothing more than a neutral context for the works of art.” Museum space in this example becomes ‘sacred’ space, to some degree consonant with the nineteenth century art museum that isolates the work of art from the outside world, which is demarcated off; windows are absent and the ceiling is the source of light. In the 1960s the growing need to charge works of art with subjectivity can be seen in an increase of wall space between works of art, where sculptures are displayed centrally in spacious white galleries and large scale frameless canvases, establish the white cube as the dominant exhibition modality of the twentieth century. The Museum of Modern Art (MOMA), founded in New York in 1929 displayed works of art predominately against a white background absent of any social or political context, although this was as much to provide an adaptable and flexible arrangement of spaces as the enclosure and isolation characteristic of O’Doherty’s white cube.

Theoretical approaches to art, its history and semblance

By the latter half of the twentieth century what had been a ‘scientistic’ epistemology of art’s historical development merged with several different art histories that exist side by side. In the contemporary academy there are many

143 O’Doherty, Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space, 55.
144 O’Doherty, Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space, 55.
147 Klonk, Spaces of Experience: Art Gallery Interiors from 1800 to 2000, 156.
threads within what is termed ‘new’ or ‘radical’ art history, which in recent decades have emerged as theoretical positions relational to works of art. Many of these theories reflect a broader spectrum of social processes and communication and a plurality of knowledges that art produces. Contemporary directions in art history have opened new perspectives that focus on the materiality of art objects as mediating the encoding of conventions.

Many art historians have contributed to an expanded understanding of the actual experience of art, the complexities of looking and knowing and art’s speculative layering. Correspondingly, these art histories have set new museological benchmarks for the interpretation of works of art in the museum. Furthermore, the work of contemporary artists reflects an interest in greater social interaction generated by works of art, in ways articulated by Nicholas Bourriaud's conception of relational aesthetics. Drawing on theoretical and practical aesthetic practices Bourriaud's relational aesthetics seeks to galvanise human relations in the experience of art into a social context, rather than as independent, private space. Artists who work in this paradigm include Gillian Wearing, Philippe Parreno and Liam Gillick. Collaboration is an important aspect of the work of these artists, exploring individual and collective experience and forms of social organization. Attracting much critical debate, notably in the work of Claire Bishop and Jacques Rancière, these ideas reflect a contemporary interest in the opportunity art provides for social interaction, for conversation, and a way of understanding ourselves, our identity, and that of others. In Chapter Five I elaborate on the conception of art and aesthetic practices in Rancière’s notion of the ‘distribution of the sensible’ and Mieke Bal’s understanding of dialogic practice that seek to reorder relations between works of art and visitors.

While the body of knowledge that the new theories of art have produced have informed new standards in the academy, there remain unresolved problems in the interpretative practices and public pedagogy (learning) in the art museum that coalesce around aesthetic modernism. Dewdney and co-authors David Dibosa and Victoria Walsh, understand this problem as an aesthetic modernist

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curatorial and educational approach that positions the individual, being the irreducible core of the construction of the modernist authentic self, in front of a work of art, who; “stands before it unencumbered in order that the work of art [...] can communicate, or ‘speak’ directly to the perceiving subject.” Here Dewdney and co-authors claim that in this situation museum visitors without knowledge and training in art are not considered to be in possession of the resources to engage meaningfully with works of art. Consequently, they require the intercession of the museum.156

The art museum has changed frequently in its short history, it is changing now, and it is capable of playing roles other than those it has played up to now. Significant and current shifts and turns in museum theory and practice now recognise interpretation as a ‘productive’ rather than a ‘reproductive’ process.157 Such an approach assumes the active participation of the viewer in the production of new meaning; where the viewer is positioned historically, socially and culturally in relation to the work of art. Implicit in this approach is an understanding of knowledge as a process of production (not reproduction) within socio-cultural contexts. Importantly, the active agency of the viewer holds to the idea that interpretation of past events and works of art of the past can only be constructed in the present. The activity of looking at art in the museum is not a neutral or ahistorical process but one in which the viewer is socially and culturally located.158

Congruently, decisive shifts in art history are important catalysts for effecting change in ways the museum can support their audiences to engage with works of art. T. J. Clark, takes an approach that reflects a deep concern for what it means to look attentively. Clark’s understanding of the process of looking opens windows onto art’s speculative layering, its opacity, what he calls the “specificity of picturing.”159 Writing of his experience of repeated viewings of Nicolas Poussin’s Landscape with a Man Killed by a Snake (1645), and Landscape with a Calm (1650-51) Clark writes:

When I am in front of a picture the thing I most want is to enter the picture’s world: it is the possibility of doing so that makes pictures worth looking at for me [...] the moment that the looking [...] is always waiting for is that of being in the picture’s place – within the structure of experience the picture opens up for others to inhabit. My deepest wish, therefore, confronted with Snake, is to be where the woman is for herself,

155 Dewdney et al, Post-Critical Museology, 173.
156 Dewdney et al, Post-Critical Museology, 173.
158 Atkinson, Art in Education, 36.
in no other space (or pattern of reactions) but that provided by the surface of events.\textsuperscript{160}

In diaristic form Clark traces the process of looking at Poussin’s paintings. Recording the development of his experience as he views the paintings at different times of day, in different moods, and following the opportunity to share his insights and intuitions against the thoughts of others. With a particular focus on \textit{Landscape with a Man Killed by a Snake} Clark’s writing includes both immediate observations and considered reflections; it captures the sense of surprise upon noticing certain details in the painting, a growing sense of familiarity with the work as repeated viewings lead to deeper thoughts about the subject matter. There is excitement in discovering new things, in finding new meanings in familiar things, integral to the activity of looking at paintings. Clark’s focus is his reaction to the paintings — not a theory about them — in order to show how a theory of a painting comes into being, how a painting (as as opposed to a proposition or a narrative) instigates and directs an inquiry into “what it is saying.”\textsuperscript{161} Remarking on Clark’s process, Mark Hannam writes that looking is,

\begin{quote}
to enter the picture’s world […] at the same time, to enter the artist’s world. This is a public act: it is an act of engagement with the worlds of description and of criticism, of the representation of events and of their interpretation. This is [...] a shared world, albeit a world on canvas.\textsuperscript{162}
\end{quote}

Clark suggests that if pursued long enough “one kind of corrective to dogma is looking itself.”\textsuperscript{163} Here he points to that moment of \textit{not} grasping the painting, of letting oneself be grasped by it instead: thus \textit{letting go of one’s knowledge of it}.\textsuperscript{164} Only after sustained looking at \textit{Landscape of a Man Killed by a Snake} does the painting provoke for Clark pertinent questions to look for in the historical literature and other contextual source material relevant to Poussin’s oeuvre. Because he has submitted to the picture he has gained, he writes, “a sense of the sort of ethics and epistemology he ought to be looking for in the verbal record.”\textsuperscript{165} In this way Clark is allowing the factual contents of the painting to emerge as he looks, his focus then is on the specificity of the painting which is closely bound up with materiality of a given practice and “on that materiality’s being so often the generator of semantic depth — of true thought.”\textsuperscript{166}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[160] Clark, \textit{The Sight of Death}, 222.
\item[161] Clark, \textit{The Sight of Death}, 82-83.
\item[163] Clark, \textit{The Sight of Death}, 12.
\item[165] Clark, \textit{The Sight of Death}, 164.
\item[166] Clark, \textit{The Sight of Death}, 164.
\end{footnotes}
Clark records what is there on the canvas of *Landscape with a Man Killed by a Snake* – the people, the animals, the buildings, the vegetation, the landscape, and the sky. He describes the colours used and the contrast achieved; he puzzles over the structure of some of the buildings and the lack of shadows of some objects; he speculates about the time of day, and the activities of the people represented. Clark writes: “painting is making a world materialise [...] Great paintings attract serious attention: they allow the viewer space and time, not just for the viewer to enter the picture’s world but for elements of the painting to enter the viewer’s world.”

The initial descriptions and observations of the painting are, Clark acknowledges, provisional, likely to be modified by further contextual and historical research. However, his central point here is that art history suffers from going to the texts, the wider contexts of works of art being studied with far too crude approximate questions in mind. Clark is arguing that through observation of relevant phenomena confusion and disruption initiate a given line of inquiry of a work of art. First intuitions need to be constructed and reconstructed through reflection; hypotheses formulated which may resolve the given perplexity, that may through further contextual or historical research be endorsed or open up further inquiry. I will return to discuss the implications of this approach for experiencing and coming to know and understand works of art in the museum in an analysis of John Dewey’s ‘theory of inquiry’ in Chapter Four.

Nicolas Poussin: *Landscape with a Man Killed by a Snake*, 1648,
Oil on canvas, 118.2 x 197.8 cm,
National Gallery of London.

Works of art and artefacts have a specific history in their making and in their reception. The discipline of art history seeks to elucidate the work of art’s socio-cultural context. Art historical analysis of works of art provides insight into how

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they ‘work’: the circumstances and preconditions of their making and consumption, frameworks of classification that may have conditioned an artist’s strategies. Attentive viewing allows specificities of a work of art to emerge in the process of focussed looking, potentially directing further research of pertinent scholarship to gain a more wide-ranging view of a work’s socio-historical context. The process of coming to know and understand a work of art requires an attentive encounter and sustained engagement to enable a response to the work’s presentation.

Analogously, Didi-Huberman in his meditation on the ends of art history, *Confronting Images*, writes that in looking we must agree to surrender ourselves to:

[T]he contingencies of a phenomenology of the gaze,[…] agree to imagine, the sole safety-rail being our poor historical knowledge […] we must momentarily leave behind everything we thought we saw because we knew what to call it, and return henceforth to what our knowledge had not been able to clarify.168

Like Clark, what Didi-Huberman draws attention to is that we cannot content ourselves with relying on the authority of texts or the ‘expert’ if we want to grasp something of the efficacy of art images. To do so disarms us Didi-Huberman writes: “It constrains us either to remain silent about an essential aspect of art images, for fear of saying something unverifiable […] or to use our imaginations and risk, in the last resort, unverifiability.”169

In structuring visitor-education programs museum pedagogy must afford agency to the viewer, he or she must work with the work of art, take time to explore it to gain knowledge from it, and of it. Linking it with the self is to open up questions about it, who or what we are, its conditions as possibility of the present, shifting the authority of the museum to the viewer’s capacity to engage the work of art’s power to unfold meaning.

**Twentieth century critical discourse and the museum**

As has been discussed in Chapter One, the museum has been accompanied by critical discourse since its inception.170 More recently, a seminal body of critical theory has been generated from within the art museum and the academy. It can be argued that the ‘institutional critique’171 of the 1960s impelled some reflexive

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171 Note: “In the 1960s and 70s ‘institutional critique’ revisited the radical promise of the European Enlightenment by confronting the art museum claiming it was not sufficiently committed to or realizing the
practices across the curatorial and education spaces of the art museum. However, Victoria Walsh claims the tenets of the so-called ‘new museology’ in the 1990s were fundamentally rejected by the art museum on the basis that as a theoretical project it failed to adequately differentiate between the typologies of museum collections or to engage with the ontological specificity of the art object.¹⁷² Critical discourse of the art museum has joined and been informed by the elaboration of other critical discourses of cultural value, social justice, epistemic structures, and modes of representation.¹⁷³ Michel Foucault’s critique of the contingency of intellectual systems, hierarchies, and power relations in institutions in his excavation of the human sciences in The Order of Things (1966), was an important revelatory source for analysis of the art museum.¹⁷⁴ Foucault’s early work (The Discourse on Language, 1972)¹⁷⁵ in which he used a linguistic model to thematise the relations between epistemic structures, disciplinary boundaries, the construction of internally coherent discourses, and power relations, has had significant bearing on the critical literature on art museums.¹⁷⁶ Sherman and Rogoff acknowledge that Foucault’s model elucidates the ways museums both sustain and construct cultural master narratives that achieve an internal unity by imposing one cultural tendency as the most prominent manifestation of any cultural period.¹⁷⁷ Foucault submits that, like ideology that mystifies social and economic relationships, discourse

\[\ldots\] is incapable of recognizing the will to truth which pervades it; and the will to truth, having imposed itself upon us for so long, is such that the truth it seeks to reveal cannot fail to mask it.¹⁷⁸

Here Foucault’s claim is that all discourses exist to express certain truths (their ‘will to truth’). But after we have learned how to think and speak in the terms and truths of any discourse, we lose sight of the fact that those truths are

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¹⁷⁷ Sherman and Rogoff, Museum Cultures, xi.

¹⁷⁸ Michel Foucault, Discourse on Language his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France, 1970 serves as a kind of prolegomenon for the work he proposed to do, which appears later as The Archaeology of Knowledge. Page numbers in the following notes refer to the version of this essay in Michel Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon, 1972), 219.
constructed through a discourse, as they seem to exist independent of the insights and limits of the discourse that created them. Foucault calls into question the rationality that grounds the establishment of a regime of acceptability;\(^{179}\) in other words, the common-sense world in which we all live is not taken as given. Foucault understands reason and truth to be relative, rather than absolute concepts, and he proposes that both reason and truth have historical, social, and cultural contexts. He examines how forms of rationality and regimes of truth inscribe themselves in practices and he asks what role they play within these practices.\(^{180}\) Foucault’s work is helpful in that it provides tools for examining art museum practices in order to open up, understand, and evaluate these practices so they can be rethought and/or potentially offer new ways of seeing and doing.\(^{181}\) One of Foucault’s most useful tools is his approach to history, which involves a rejection of the notion of a continuous, smooth, progressive, totalising, developmental history.

Foucault’s philosophy of history advocates a shift from ‘total history’ to ‘general history’, from ‘traditional history’ to ‘effective’ history.\(^{182}\) In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1989) Foucault challenges the notion of a ‘total history’ that assumes that the past can be understood in its totality according to a single principle, as it assumes single coherent principles under which phenomena and their material traces can be united. Total history, according to Foucault:

[S]eeks to reconstitute the overall form of a civilization, the principle – material or spiritual [...] which is called metaphorically the ‘face’ of a period [...] A total description [of history] draws all phenomena around a single centre – a principle, a meaning, a spirit, a world-view, an overall shape; a general history, on the contrary, would deploy the space of dispersion.\(^{183}\)

Primary in general history are the specificities and inconsistencies of material documents and objects. Applying Foucault’s notion of general or ‘effective’ history to the art museum, art objects are not framed as exhibited evidence for a single historical trajectory, nor do they illustrate universal concepts. Rather, they are to be understood as particulars, as fundamentally puzzling things to be opened, inviting inquiry. For Foucault, understanding must be separated from recognition, recollection, and memory; to become a tool of knowledge that cuts

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\(^{182}\) Michel Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, 10.

\(^{183}\) Michel Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, 11.
through received, or assumed identities. Significantly, philosopher Beth Lord notes that Foucault’s model of general history does not make the primary experience of the art object aesthetic or evocative. It is mysterious, yet not simply to be appreciated for itself or related to the viewer’s subjectivity. As Lord postulates, Foucault’s model properly affords more agency to the viewer. The viewer must become the historian; she or he must work with the object. This work with the art object will then develop into different causal series and multiple micro-histories. We will recognise the object as an integral part of what we are, and understand how these causal series have been the condition of possibility of present circumstances. Hence, there is a link with the self, yet not self-identity and the fixed truth of the object. Here the self is an open question, the determinations of which change how history is performed; the art object is a way of developing and opening up what makes us what we are. I will return to these points in Chapter Four where I examine John Dewey’s critique of what he terms ‘spectator theory of knowledge’ and his ‘theory of inquiry’ which I will argue present important insights for re-envisioning museum public pedagogy.

For Foucault, genealogy is a methodology that resists the search for origins and universal structures of knowledge typical of total history. Through genealogy we reveal the contingent series and accidental events that are conditions of possibility for our present. For Foucault, genealogy has a progressive purpose; not a teleological process toward a goal, but to the development of our capacities to get out of fixed ways of thinking. To, “multiply the paths and the possibility of comings and goings” to refer to Foucault’s quote at the top of the chapter. It aims simultaneously to identify the contingent historical conditions of the self and to liberate the self from those contingencies.

If we apply Foucault’s model of ‘effective’ or ‘general’ history, his rejection of a totalizing, continuous, smooth history, to the art museum, works of art will open multiple paths, not be used as evidence for a single historical trajectory, nor as illustrations of universal concepts, but as particulars to be opened and explored. Works of art are objects of productive knowledge, as Lord notes, they “cannot be anchored in fixed concepts, the concepts themselves are to be broken open.” This implies a shift away from the authority of the museum to tell the visitor the story, in the direction of the work of art’s power to unfold multiple stories through the work and agency of the viewer. However, importantly, Foucault’s model of general history does not make the experience of a work of art.

principally aesthetic, nor is it to be merely appreciated for itself or related to the viewers subjectivity, yet the experience offered is deeply relevant to the self.

This totalising approach to history is exemplified in the foundational paradigms of museology and art history employed in European public art museums from the late eighteenth, and, to a certain extent, into the twenty first century. Implicit in these paradigms is the elision of the active agency of the visitor, which disavows the historicity of the viewing subject. Hooper-Greenhill argues that from the outset of the museum a division was drawn between the private space where the curator, as expert, produced knowledge (exhibitions, catalogues, lectures) and the public space where the visitor consumed those appropriately presented products. The lack of knowledge of the work of the curator constituted the visitor as ignorant and the curator as expert in respect of the collections. Conversely, the lack of knowledge of the visitor’s reactions and responses constituted the curator as ignorant in respect to the audience for whom the museum’s intellectual products were intended. As Hooper-Greenhill maintains, the museum constructed subject positions that place the ‘viewer’ as the beneficiary (enabled to know) and the ‘curator’ as a knowing subject with the specialist expertise who enables the knowing of others.

As Hooper-Greenhill suggests this marked a boundary between knowing subjects, between the producers and the consumers of knowledge, between expert and a nescient public. Simultaneously, it inscribed cultural and social inequality, which, to some measure, remains inherent in the public pedagogy of the art museum. It must be said, however, that the closed and private space of the early public art museum has most certainly begun to open. As Zygmunt Bauman attests, there has been a paradigm shift in the identity of the museum profession and its practices, from ‘legislator’ to ‘interpreter’ of cultural meaning. While Beth Lord ventures that the shift from Friedrich Schleiermacher’s ‘scientific’ hermeneutics to Hans-Georg Gadamer’s ‘philosophical hermeneutics’ is mirrored in the museum by a shift in pedagogy.

Contemporary learning theory recognizes museum visitors construct meaning in and through culture, using the cultural constructs of memory, perception and

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189 Hooper-Greenhill, Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge, 200.
190 Hooper-Greenhill, Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge, 168.
191 Hooper-Greenhill, Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge, 190.
192 Hooper-Greenhill, Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge, 200.
interpretive processes, shaped partly by prior knowledge and experience, the relation between the past and the historical present. While many art museums do bring into play the active agency of visitors through their own experiential inquiry of works of art, I argue we need to calibrate theoretical frameworks for a pedagogy that enacts embodied and conceptual experiences of art that set in flow simultaneously a person’s reason, senses, and emotions. Experiences, which in John Dewey’s words, “contribute value and meaning to future experience […] modify our ways of perceiving the world, thus leaving us and the world itself irrevocably changed.” Knowing and understanding art is not only the absorption of information, not simply analysis and interpretation but rather something we actively co-produce through various processes, and practices.

**Contemporary shifts in the context and practice of the art museum**

Andrew Dewdney and collaborating authors of the Tate Encounters research project, *Post-Museology: Theory and Practice in the Art Museum* (2013) claim that the art museum continues to struggle with exactly how the ‘mute’ work of art communicates and how the cultural position and knowledge of the viewing subject engage the work of art. We can, and need to, come to a better understanding of these processes and how audiences experience the art museum. The power wielded by museum professionals, particularly curators and educators, is very real. They are involved in shaping consciousness: as professional practitioners their work is freighted with ethical, cultural, and political import. For museum educators and curators to operate critically, to remain productively creative, we need to find new ways of working which allows emancipation from the seemingly naturalised protocols of institutional forms of thought, to maintain the vitality of critical reflection. This means we need to rethink how works of art are related to history, or more precisely, histories, to find new ways to think about the power of the work of art to engage the viewer, recognizing the content the viewer brings to that engagement. It implies a move away for the authority of the museum to tell the visitor the story, in the direction of the work of art’s power to unfold multiple stories. We need to think of the work of art as the interaction between it, the thing observed, and the human subject, to allow the work to perform or enact its power, to know the work.

affectively, through intuitive and cognitive processes of reflection, construction and reconstitution to gain understanding.\footnote{199 Andrea Witcomb, "Remembering the Dead by Affecting the Living: The case of a miniature model of Treblinka" in Sandra Dudley, ed. 
*Museum Materialities: Objects, Engagements, Interpretations*, (London: Routledge, 2010), 51.}

If we look to the example given above of T.J. Clark writing of his experience of viewing Poussin’s painting *Landscape with a Man Killed by a Snake*, we can see that the knowledge produced within, and in art, is most importantly knowledge that emerges as a result of what happens when people become aware of what they have experienced within themselves and with other people, as they spend time in the presence of a work of art.\footnote{200 Sandra Dudley, *Materiality Matters*, 5.} In a sense, Clark’s meditation shows that it is only within a transaction with the work of art that the work comes to exist at all. The work will be perceived and responded to differently by different persons, we could say the work of art is realised not in itself, nor in the mind, but somewhere in the space of the transactional relationship between the *person* and the work of art. As Dudley suggests, the *active* relationship connect each to the other.\footnote{201 Sandra Dudley, *Materiality Matters*, 5.}

Works of art are encountered as much by the body as the mind; the relationship between the senses and the cognitive processes is integrated. As active agents, encountering a work of art we involve the senses and the body (in apprehending new information from the situation), and the mind (in processing this information) through relating it to existing knowledge.\footnote{202 Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums*, 168.} Interactive and dialogic processes enact embodied interpretation, thus making that which is interpreted meaningful.\footnote{203 Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums*, 168.} What is important here is the perception of audience as active, creative, intelligent and surprising. This will require that we develop strategies for understanding theoretically and in *practice*, what is actually going on for audiences, and what could be experienced.

Shifting attention to the interaction of audience with works of art is a central tenet of Hooper-Greenhill’s conception of the ‘post- museum’ or ‘critical museum’. Contra the modern museum, which she writes, constructs knowledge as disciplinary and subject-based, the post-critical museum still considers specialist knowledge important but also knowledge that is based on the lived experience of visitors. A descendant of the nineteenth century modernist museum discussed in the these first chapters, the ‘post-museum’, defined more than a decade ago (2000), retains some of the characteristics of its antecedent model but reconfigures them to meet its own end.\footnote{204 Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums*, 152.} The post-museum is equally
interested in tangible and intangible cultural material, exhibitions and conjoint events as dynamic processes enabling the many voices and many perspectives. Knowledge, Hooper-Greenhill proposes, is no longer monolithic, but fragmented and multi-vocal, presenting a range of views, experiences and values, where the voice of the museum is among many. In contrast to the modernist museum, the post-museum can “negotiate responsiveness, encourage mutually nurturing partnerships, and celebrate diversity.” Nor is it necessarily imagined as a single site, a building, but potentially moves as a set of processes, as a distributed museum. Many of these ideas have informed recent research and are explored in practice by many art museums, and other museum typologies; however, there is more that needs to be done.

Writing of the current disruption of settled notions in the art museum’s relationship to culture and society Dewdney and co-authors summarise the situation by the following three understandings: first, communication in the many-to-many environment of online media leads to the demise of singular forms of cultural authority previously mediated by cultural institutions. Second, new subjectivities engendered by transcultural and transvisual conditions make “the established and normative notion of spectatorship entailed in aesthetic modernism, based upon the idea of a singular exceptional transaction between two foundational subjects in the encounter with a work, is unsustainable”. Thirdly, the confluence of the transmedial and the transcultural and the global economic and technological conditions in which they are entailed, troubles the system of representation that once secured the relationship between subject and object. As Dewdney and collaborating authors insightfully claim the confluence of these factors impels rethinking audience as a matter of urgency. The spectator has been repositioned in a new relationship to traditional objects and cultural value. Understanding what audience is doing in the art museum is, Dewdney and co-researchers argue, an urgent and primary challenge for thinking about the museum of the future. It is imperative that museums come to better understand the character and composition of visitors, their motives, interests, and experiences of the museum as it is deeply connected to how the museum will continue to produce cultural value. Nor should museum professionals allow the “buoyancy of numbers and the continued popularity of [...] major museums” deflect us from this task. The relationship between the art museum and audiences that the Tate Encounters research points toward, and

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205 Hooper-Greenhill, Museums, 152.
206 Hooper-Greenhill, Museums, 153.
207 Hooper-Greenhill, Museums, 153.
208 Dewdney et al., Post-Critical Museology, 205.
209 Dewdney et al., Post-Critical Museology, 205.
210 Dewdney et al., Post-Critical Museology, 205.
211 Dewdney et al., Post-Critical Museology, 205.
212 Dewdney et al., Post-Critical Museology, 207.
which will inexorably reorient through cultural, technological and social changes, needs to be re-imagined and theorised for the twenty first century museum.213

Challenging traditional and standing practices that privilege authoritative knowledge transmission about works of art, will require us to build on the field of extant post-critical work to look to germane domains of knowledge to expand and re-imagine the parameters of what constitutes engagement with art, for broad and diverse audiences. Importantly, the experience of art in the museum must involve perceiving the work’s materiality through the senses and not simply intellectually: interplay of experiential and theoretical knowledge leads to additional development of the adult viewer’s knowledge of art, and acuity to engage with it.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have brought to attention the historical emergence of ‘art’ as an autonomous category coextensive with the development of art history and aesthetic philosophy in the late eighteenth art museum century. My purpose has been to elucidate how these domains construct new categories of value and knowledge pertaining to art and its mediation by the museum. A second theme of the chapter interrogated the pedagogical paradigms that in different measure, and at different times, mediate the museum’s elaborations of art’s historical contexts and its sensible affective dimension. I have argued that these seemingly contradictory perceptual frames bring into view the need for museum pedagogy to redefine approaches to visitor encounters with a work of art that theoretically and practically integrate art’s sensible and intellectual aspects. In the third section of the chapter I discussed contemporary shifts in the interpretive strategies of the art museum influenced by the insights of Foucault’s notion of ‘general history’ that radically reorients the relationship of the viewer to the work of art, and new perspectives on viewing art exemplified in the art theoretical writings of T. J. Clark and Didier-Huberman.

Contextualising the art museum within contemporary research and post-critical museological scholarship aims to bring to light the exigency and aspiration for further theoretical exploration to realise the potentialities of museum pedagogy. While recognising that significant change is already underway I have argued that the cognate field of philosophy opens up pertinent theoretical grounds for re-envisioning visitor engagement with art in the museum. The discussion in this chapter identified opportunities and the exigency for re-scoping pedagogy for personal and cultural experiences relevant to visitors. The following four

chapters move to explore a range of philosophical reflections as germane theoretic ground to inform and enact pedagogy as praxis that re-imagines how the parameters of an encounter with art might be constituted for and by museum visitors.

In Chapter Three, I investigate Gadamer’s aesthetic hermeneutic philosophy for new pedagogical strategies based on participative engagement. The efficaciousness of Gadamer’s phenomenological hermeneutic approach to an encounter with art lies in its recognition that knowledge emerges from embodied, social action, and active inquiry out of the contexts, situations, and communities in which museum visitors are embedded, through *dialogue* with the object. Gadamer’s hermeneutic philosophy has important consequences for our understanding of the experience of art and the aims of education; it is an explicitly dialogical philosophy that has rich implications for the theory and practice of education.214 Gadamer develops philosophical hermeneutics as a theory which illuminates the conditions of possibility for interpretation, and understanding, as such it has consequences for deepening educational processes, in particular transformation in educational experience.

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Chapter Three

Gadamer: The experience of art as a participatory act

Art cannot be reduced to some external meaning or truth we know in advance. Art is thinking but is not theory. The world’s reality resides in art, and it is inseparable from art’s investigative procedure, which seeks to expose how the forces, the different compounds of elements - material and conceptual - interact to produce a certain effect.

Chus Martinez. 1

Interpretation, in the sense relevant to hermeneutics, is an attempt to make clear, to make sense of an object of study. This object must, therefore, be a text, or a text-analogue, which in some way is confused, incomplete, cloudy, seemingly contradictory - in one way or another, unclear. The interpretation aims to bring to light an underlying coherence or sense.

Charles Taylor. 2

The fact that through a work of art a truth is experienced that we cannot attain in any other way constitutes the philosophic importance of art.

Hans-Georg Gadamer. 3

This chapter explores ways of thinking about meaning and understanding through an experience of art that reconfigures the public educational role of the museum. My purpose here is to find a way to bring to fruition what encounters with works of art have to offer in terms of emotional, cognitive and intellectual experience — and in terms of enrichment for viewers. It is my observation from my own professional practice in museums that a gap exists between what works of art have to offer and what people actually gain from the experience of art. This pertains to how people are brought to an engagement with a work of art, what the nature and value of the experience of a work of art is understood to be and what it might elicit. It is always possible to bring museum visitors to a greater understanding of works of art and such experiences may be transformative.

A central claim of this thesis argues that art museum education can no longer be thought of on the model of a direct transfer of information from one who knows to the many who do not, but must be conceived in a more dialogical and

1 Chus Martinez, Unexpress the Expressible, Documenta (13), (Erschienen Im Hatje Cantz Verl: Kassel, 2013).
transformative way.⁴ This chapter explores the implications of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics for this hypothesis, in ways that educators working with art in museums may find relevant. Gadamer wrote about human subjectivity and developed a critical and dialogical approach to philosophical hermeneutics in his major work *Truth and Method*, first published in 1960. He related hermeneutics to the philosophy of historical understanding, and asserted the linguistic character of human reality.⁵ It is Gadamer's claim that works of art address us, which entails the supposition that works of art have a meaningful cognitive content. Key aspects of Gadamer's hermeneutical philosophy resonate with educational theories that put at issue questions of cultural reproduction and critical thinking, authorial intention of meaning, transmission of objective facts, intellectual emancipation and human agency.⁶

**What Gadamer offers the project of theoretically calibrating museum pedagogy**

Gadamer employs experience in his discussion of the phenomena of art as an analogy of how hermeneutics is not simply a method of interpretation but is rather a model of human understanding involving dialogue between a work of art and a viewer. In this articulation of experience the historicity of the work of art and the interpreter are taken into account, in a dialogical encounter that results in transformation and self-understanding for the interpreter.

Critical of the Kantian notion of aesthetic consciousness, Gadamer's hermeneutic philosophy emphasises the cognitive relevance of art; how the objects of which we become conscious are constituted in our experience of them. Experience of art for Gadamer is detached from purely aesthetic elements; it is imbued with political, ethical, religious, and other kinds of cultural values and other factors that orient our being in the world.⁷ Gadamer is interested in what comes into being within our experience of art, how historical and cultural tradition 'shows' itself in a work of art, and how our engagement with what is shown changes the latter's historical nature.⁸ The essence of Gadamer's hermeneutic conception of experience is essentially historical. For Gadamer, the interpretation of art is akin to translation, the aim of which is a ‘fusion of horizons’ of the world of the work of art and the world we inhabit. The issue of understanding is, for Gadamer, dialectical: understanding is grasped as the mutually transforming fusion of different cultural horizons. Meaning is formed through the viewer's reflective

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interaction with particular works of art. Confronted with otherness, or the unfamiliar that the work may present, we enter into the perspective of another, we ‘feel’, or empathise, in the attempt to discover something familiar. In this aspect, Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics show similarities with Dewey’s theory of inquiry and the role of disequilibrium in the process of experiential inquiry and understanding. Dewey writes that the product of art, a particular painting, sculpture, or building – is not the work of art — the work takes place when a human being co-operates with. For both Gadamer and Dewey a work of art is something that transpires as a person and a work of art interact with each other.

The phenomenological character of Gadamer’s aesthetics invites our openness to the work of art’s unfolding. The world of the work of art discloses itself differently to different people and this influences people’s self-understanding differently. The act of interpreting a work of art is for Gadamer transformative, it changes both the interpreter and the work being interpreted. In this understanding Gadamer argues that art cannot give us objective knowledge about the world in the way of the natural sciences. For, Gadamer, a work of art is ascribed an inexhaustible excess of meaning that is brought forth by an interpreter's participatory engagement, but which cannot be wholly disclosed. In effectively drawing out the implications of this claim, art historian Richard Wollheim writes:

However far we go with setting down, what as we see it, the work means or is, this can never be complete, just because experience, hence our experience of the work, can never be exhausted. And if the work is such as to repay the effort, we shall anyway want to go back to it over and over again in order to renew, and probably revise, what we learnt about it through experience.

Gadamer’s concern is not to theorise art or to give focus to what a work of art signifies or represents (merely) as social or historical phenomena, but is with the work per se. The work of art for Gadamer is in a dialogical partnership with us, it makes an address to us and demands our attention. As philosopher Nicholas Davey has suggested, the enigmatic quality of a work of art is precisely what is of value about art. Davey makes the observation that art’s “resistance to theoretical capture is precisely what is of value about art [...] it reminds us of the limits of our understanding and thereby opens us to the possibility of understanding yet

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more about it and ourselves.”

Experiences of works of art are often at the same time conceptual and embodied: they can set in flow simultaneously a person’s reason, senses, emotions, and motor channels of response. As Dewey acknowledges, the artist’s motor responses channel emotion into art during the process of art making, and the viewer likewise relies on physical experiences to respond to the artist’s work.

We can understand the address of art as characterised by the encounter between the viewer, ‘I’ and the object, ‘it’. That ‘it’, essayist Siri Hustvedt writes, “is the material trace of another human consciousness: the artist, who is missing from the scene, has left us a work, [...] which has no practical purpose [...] the [work] carries within it the residue of an ‘I’ or a ‘you’. The meeting between the viewer and thing implies inter-subjectivity.” Hustvedt here explains that the experience of art addressing us makes us alert to the human presence that is part of the work of art. The inter-subjectivity inherent in viewing works of art is a personal act, because in it, Hustvedt writes, “we feel and see not only the rigors of thought, but [in the case of painting] the marks left by a person’s physical gestures — strokes, jabs, smudges.” The experience of art’s address to us is potentially a transformative one, which entails the cognitive relations within a viewers’ outlook being transformed by those which constitute the work.

In *Truth and Method* Gadamer writes:

In the experience of art we see a genuine experience (Erfahrung) induced by the work, which does not leave him who has it unchanged, and we inquire into the mode of being of what is experienced in this way. So we hope to better understand what kind of truth it is that encounters us there [...] the experience of the work of art includes understanding — but not in the sense of scientific method. Rather, understanding belongs to the encounter with the work of art itself, and so this belonging can be illuminated only on the basis of the mode of being of the work of art itself.

The value of Gadamer’s hermeneutic aesthetics for museum art engagement practices lies in its emphasis on the direct experience of works of art, underscoring the centrality of the work itself in determining a viewer’s understanding. The significance of Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics, particularly in this context, lies in the suggestion that the power of a work of art

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resides not in itself, as an autonomous aesthetic object but in its dialogical capacity to ‘affect’ change in a viewer’s field of understanding.\(^\text{19}\) In Gadamer’s thinking aesthetic contemplation is an active participation (of a viewer) in bringing forth what a work can disclose. Gadamer’s central concern is the place of art in our experience of the world; his hermeneutic approach constitutes a rethinking of aesthetics through the integration of aesthetics into hermeneutics. As an interpretive rather than descriptive approach to themes like dialogue and tradition in the project of human understanding, Gadamarian aesthetic hermeneutics has a phenomenological underpinning. Seeking to overcome the epistemological framework of subject/object dualism that sets the theme of the classical modern project (so influential on the public art museum’s formative practices) Gadamer shifts the ground of inquiry into the concrete existential phenomena of understanding, from epistemology to ontology.\(^\text{20}\) In *Truth and Method* Gadamer analyses ‘play’ as the pointer to ontological explanation and his development of a philosophy of the *experience* of art. For Gadamer, it is not aesthetic consciousness but the experience of art that must be the object of our examinations, he affirms “the primacy of the play over the consciousness of the player.”\(^\text{21}\) (original italics)

[The] work of art is not an object that stands against the subject for itself. Instead the work of art has its true being in the fact that it becomes an experience that changes the person who experiences it. The ‘subject’ of the experience of art […] is not the subjectivity of the person who experiences it but the work itself.\(^\text{22}\)

In this first section of the chapter I move the discussion to focus on ‘experience,’ a term cultural historian Martin Jay describes as “rife with sedimented meanings that can be actualised for a variety of different purposes.”\(^\text{23}\) My focus on *experience* here is to determine ways that Gadamer’s hermeneutic aesthetics can be appropriated to provide a framework for rethinking approaches to peoples’ engagement with works of art in the museum from an experimental standpoint. A central aspect of Gadamer’s philosophy pertinent to museum practice is its account of participatory experience. Gadamer’s elaboration of the processes that actualise meaning of a work of art in the activity of experience and understanding open up opportunities for how the museum might structure adjunct visitor-engagement programs.

A second section of the chapter expounds upon ideas embodied in Gadamer’s hermeneutic philosophy concerning the processes of coming to know and

\(^{19}\) Davey, *Unfinished Worlds*, 12.
\(^{22}\) Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 102.
understand a work of art. As I noted in Chapter Two Didi-Huberman’s interpretive approach to art takes a hermeneutic and phenomenological perspective, in regard to the work’s reception and production. I draw on Didi-Huberman’s account of his experience of viewing Fra Angelico’s *Annunciation*, a fifteenth-century fresco in Cell 3, of the San Marco monastery in Florence. Fra Angelico’s fresco infers the devotional function it has in daily life of the monk inhabiting the cell, for whom it carries a significant meaning: interpretation of the fresco involves intellectual as well as an empathetic acknowledgement of particular motivations. There is an elective affinity in Didi-Huberman’s account of his experience of this work of art with Gadamer’s conception of the generative tension between *sight* and *in-sight* that viewing a work of art can obtain. In his account of interpreting the work Didi-Huberman illustrates the processes at *play* and the potentialities occasioned by appropriate attentiveness given to an artistic object we encounter.

Investigating works of art means encountering them first-hand and giving them conscious attentive observation for only when a work of art is permitted ‘to speak’ does it become possible to respond. Attentive looking allows a work of art to declare its own phenomenal nature and it initiates and guides further inquiry into the work’s varied circumstances of production and reception. However, this presupposes informed participants, including basic knowledge of the relevant field and its history. Gadamer’s hermeneutic philosophy brings to attention the inexorable historicity of knowledge; our knowledge is almost always informed by prior traditions that are incorporated into our ways of thinking.24 Such traditions inform ways we look at works of art and instigate questions that are seen as significant and structure possible answers. Art historian Marcia Pointon makes the point that we unknowingly engage all the time in forms of visual analysis that are not dissimilar to certain kinds of art interpretive activity.25 I return to this point later in the chapter when discussing Gadamer’s conception of *tradition* and *effective history*. The value of Gadamer’s hermeneutic philosophy for museum practices is that it entails resituating the viewer in relation to the work of art and acknowledging their own historicity in the interpretative process. Gadamer refigures the role of ‘spectator,’ a role to which many museum users may be inured, to a participator, an active agent in his or her own engagement with works of art.

The concept of interpretation, which guides a hermeneutical analysis of educational experience, is opposed to the narrowly defined epistemological notion of cognition. In epistemology the word *understanding* usually signifies mental processes which take place in the mind. It is an intellectual process where a knower gains knowledge about something, in a straightforward linear, dualistic

relationship between the subject (knower) and object (known). An epistemological approach to the process of human understanding is different from one that is hermeneutical. Regarding this distinction Shaun Gallagher writes, “[E]pistemology has been oriented by the question of how we come to know things as objects, hermeneutics [is] oriented by the question of how we come to know others as persons, and their expressions.” Gadamer challenges the assumption that subject and object are separate entities while resisting the idea that they are dependent, for both subject and object have an effect on whatever each one becomes through interaction. Hence, the relationship between subject and object is dynamic. Gadamer’s rejection of epistemology as the basis for knowledge changes the nature of understanding from being an activity based on the distancing of subject and object, with an end, that seeks to achieve neutrality or ‘objectivity.’ In contrast, the ontological foundation of understanding in Gadamer’s philosophy entails the idea that what we seek to know exists because it possesses meaning that can be grasped by our mind; complete objectivity is not possible.

In Being and Time Martin Heidegger radicalised the concept of hermeneutics and understood it to be to be the existential, phenomenological analysis of human experience in so far as understanding is an existential-ontological characteristic of human beings. While intellectual comprehension is one kind of understanding, understanding itself is an existential characteristic of human existence: understanding is the disclosure of meaning or the opening up of the ‘world’ which belongs to human beings. In agreement with Heidegger, Gadamer writes that understanding “is not an isolated activity of human beings but a structure of our experience of life. We are always taking something as something. That is the primordial givenness of our world orientation, and we cannot reduce it to anything simpler or more immediate.” The hermeneutical ‘as’ means that understanding is always interpretational; we do not intuit the thing in itself, we interpret it as something.

There is an educational orientation in Gadamer’s hermeneutical concepts of application, experience, prejudice, fusion of horizons, effective history, and language. These interpretive concepts point to Gadamer’s assertion that (active) participation of the viewer is a condition of a work of art coming to fruition, what the subject-matter reveals and conceals. Gadamer emphasises that the experience

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26 Gallagher, Hermeneutics and Education, 40.
27 Gallagher, Hermeneutics and Education, 40.
29 Gallagher, Hermeneutics and Education, 42.
31 Gallagher, Hermeneutics and Education, 42.
of art is when a work of art 'speaks to us', and this, he insists, is the event of art, the occasion when it makes a claim on us.\textsuperscript{32}

In the third section of the chapter I move to investigate how aspects of Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutic approach to interpretation, understanding and knowledge creation can beneficially inform museum-learning events by situating the viewer in hermeneutic practice. I draw on Gadamer’s ideas of application, experience, prejudice, conversation, traditions, community, and dialogue, to address questions of agency, cultural reproduction, cultural authority, and the primacy of conversation, issues raised by educational theory and contemporary museological research. Underscoring this approach is the importance of the hermeneutic situatedness of the viewer as the interpreter of his or her experience of a work of art. Gadamer’s philosophical thinking can be applied to an encounter with works of art in ways that bring viewing subjects into conversation with museum ‘specialists’ as interpreters of the address art makes to them. Where understanding is shared through language and dialogue, different interpretations of the artistic phenomenon encountered are brought together in conversation to construct and reconstruct shared understanding, reorienting or modifying the gap between the familiar and the unfamiliar. Thereby, bringing participants to a deep understanding of other perspectives and their own experience of a work of art, an interpretive approach that is potentially transformative rather than strictly reproductive.

**Experience**

Central to Gadamer’s hermeneutic philosophy is the conviction that experience of a work of art is participation in its presentation; participation in the movement of our experience and reflection, for only through such participation can we become reflectively aware of what is performatively at play within our experience of art.\textsuperscript{33} The task, concerning the experience of art, Gadamer suggests, is to grasp what has taken hold of us. Gadamer offers an account of how the phenomenological conception of the movement of thought and sensibility in response to experiences can be understood. For Gadamer, pondering and thinking involve a becoming open to the movement in things; such movement is not a matter of detached observation but of informed participation.\textsuperscript{34} Gadamer writes:

> In the puzzling miracle of mental wakefulness lies the fact that seeing something and thinking something are a kind of motion, but not the kind that leads from something to its end. Rather, when someone is looking at something, this is when he or she truly sees it, and when one is directing

\textsuperscript{32} Davey, *Unfinished Worlds*, 11.


\textsuperscript{34} Davey, “The Hermeneutics of Seeing,” 49.
one's thinking at something, this is when one is truly pondering it. So motion is always a holding oneself in being, and through this motion of human wakefulness there blows the whole breath of the life-process (Lebendigkeit, liveliness), a process that ever and again allows a new perception of something to open up.”35

Here Gadamer conceives of seeing and thinking aesthetically, not as the instrumental pursuit of an end, or objective analysis. But rather, a contemplative disposition to the movement within things comes about through our participation; the cognitive movement takes us beyond the immediate, allowing reflective distance between the object and ourselves. There are at least three types of hermeneutic movement at play in Gadamer's conception of understanding: social, cultural and intellectual history show that traditions are constantly shifting in content and nuance; meanings of language alter reflecting changed social circumstances, and individuals and social groupings generate shifts in meaning and practice, all of which run into and moderate each other.36 These movements allow us, Davey writes, “to the see [an art object’s] hermeneutical provenance as well as its possible future determinations [...] movement is therefore capable of transforming our understanding of the question at issue.”37

Experience is a volatile concept, as historian Martin Jay writes, "sometimes gravitating towards its subjective pole and sometimes to its objective pole."38 Its volatility can be understood if we can see its ability to be employed in either a subjective genitive or an objective genitive case.39 It can be understood, "as epistemological experience, or the experience of real objects in the world, as aesthetic experience or the experience of art, as religious experience or the experience of God, and so on."40 Jay probes what the implications are of experience being entirely construed as a subjective genitive — something undergone, possessed, or even generated by the subject, or as an objective genitive — entirely the function of the object whose reality is prior to the experience of it.41 Experience has a mixed nature; this is clear, Jay posits, in Kant’s solution to the antinomy of taste: at once a subjective judgment (experience) resisting subsumption under a rule and a claim to universal assent, which, as Jay suggests, alerts us:

To the delicate interplay between subjectivity and intersubjectivity, bodily sensations and the assent of all who share the same capacity for

39 Jay, Songs of Experience, 405.
40 Jay, Songs of Experience, 405.
41 Jay, Songs of Experience, 405.
appreciating beauty forces us to acknowledge that experience is at once deeply personal and yet to a significant extent capable of being shared with others.\textsuperscript{42}

As has been noted in the preceding chapters the eighteenth century saw the coextensive emergence of art, aesthetics and the art museum. Objects that had once functioned as ornaments of social or political power or as revered objects of religious worship were relocated to the museum which shifted attention to the beholder and away from objective criteria of value, and became the focus of discursive exploration.\textsuperscript{43} Experience became a fundamental term for aesthetics, which implied, Jay posits, both a sense-based alternative to innate ideas, and accumulated wisdom produced by habitual learning over time.\textsuperscript{44} The centre of gravity of aesthetic discourse was by the eighteenth century, “firmly located in the subject and his or her experience or judgment of the object rather than the object.”\textsuperscript{45}

The German interpretation of the English word ‘experience’ by the two words—Erlebnis and Erfahrung—carry very different notions of experience.\textsuperscript{46} Erlebnis connotes a more immediate pre-reflective and personal variant of experience, while Erfahrung is associated with sense impressions or cognitive judgements about them, what Jay defines as, “an integration of discrete moments of experience [...] a more temporally elongated experience based on a learning process.”\textsuperscript{47} Erfahrung is a more dialectical notion of experience; it implies progression and as Jay explains actuates between memory and experience.\textsuperscript{48} While not always the case, Erlebnis often suggests individual ineffability, whereas Erfahrung tends to have a collective or more public character. Conceived more as something one possesses, Erlebnis is connected with a subject, and with the subjectivisation of aesthetics.\textsuperscript{49} Erfahrung is something one undergoes; it overcomes subjectivity by drawing us into the ‘event’ of meaning.\textsuperscript{50}

In the experience of art Gadamer maintains an Erfahrungs-aesthetic which considers that our relationship with works of art are deep and travel over an ongoing temporal span: we return to them so our understanding is continually renegotiated. Gadamer’s account submits that our experience of art is akin to significant life experiences. The accumulation of this kind of experience becomes formative learning, or Bildung, which Gadamer defines as “primarily the proper human way of developing one’s natural talents and capacities[...] without self-

\textsuperscript{42}Jay, Songs of Experience, 406.
\textsuperscript{43}Jay, Songs of Experience, 136.
\textsuperscript{44}Jay, Songs of Experience, 137.
\textsuperscript{45}Jay, Songs of Experience, 137.
\textsuperscript{46}Jay, Songs of Experience, 11.
\textsuperscript{47}Jay, Songs of Experience, 11.
\textsuperscript{48}Jay, Songs of Experience, 11.
\textsuperscript{49}Gadamer, Truth and Method, xiii.
\textsuperscript{50}Gadamer, Truth and Method, xiii.
interest.”\textsuperscript{51} Two important positions obtain from Gadamer’s thinking of the experience of art as \textit{Erfahrung}, both of which relate to his rejection of subjectivist aesthetics. If aesthetic experience is purely subjective, Gadamer argues, it disconnects, or severs the viewer from \textit{communal networks of meaning} in which the work of art is situated, and which illuminate personal experience in terms of what is socially shared. Secondly, attempts to render aesthetic experience as objective knowledge, that is academically legitimised by a third party, which the viewer may not endorse, makes individual experience the embodiment of socially or class sanctioned prejudice.\textsuperscript{52}

\textbf{Aesthetics}

Gadamer’s account of aesthetics does not accord with Kantian philosophical aesthetics; he is not principally concerned with pleasure. For Gadamer, aesthetics is not the study of specific forms of subjective pleasure derived from the experience of works of art, it is the study of what objectively informs our subjective awareness of art.\textsuperscript{53} “For aesthetic experience to have a content which can lay claim to be (in part) objective,” Davey writes, “it must have an ideational content which transcends the subjective limitations of the circumstances and scope of individual perception.”\textsuperscript{54} As indicated above, Gadamer’s approach to aesthetics is in the tradition of phenomenology; his interest lies in the place of art in our experience of the world.\textsuperscript{55} The most important contribution hermeneutics makes to aesthetics, Davey suggests, involves the argument that in the experience of art seeing and understanding are not merely passive.\textsuperscript{56} Rather, the viewer is a condition of what is held within a work of art coming forth, and furthermore, that revelation can change the subject-matter it discloses. Davey observes that this permits hermeneutic thought to draw a distinction between an artistic \textit{representation} and an artistic \textit{presentation}. Presentation has an altogether different connotation from representation, it suggests a \textit{placing} there, it gestures toward that which a work of art \textit{presents}, or offers up.\textsuperscript{57} What Gadamer is principally interested in is the cognitive aspects of experience: both what works of art \textit{address} and what they \textit{put at issue}. Hermeneutics insists that in any reflection upon our experience of art, we must focus on the question of meaning; what the work of art directs us to through its subject-matter.\textsuperscript{58} The significance of Gadamer’s hermeneutics is its ontological focus (Being) and

\textsuperscript{52} Nicholas Davey, \texttt{http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/gadamer-aesthetics/} Accessed 3 August, 2016
\textsuperscript{54} Davey, “The Hermeneutics of Seeing,” 4.
\textsuperscript{55} Davey, \textit{Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy}.
\textsuperscript{56} Davey, “The Hermeneutics of Seeing,” 4.
\textsuperscript{57} Davey, \textit{Unfinished Worlds}, 19.
\textsuperscript{58} Davey, “The Hermeneutics of Seeing,” 4.
capacity to interpret human understanding but also *misunderstanding* as a mechanism for effective communication.  

**Hermeneutic theory and the art museum**

Eilean Hooper-Greenhill contends that interpretation is a very loosely defined word in the museum context, suggesting that there is a significant difference between the way the word is used in hermeneutic philosophy and the way it is used in the museum. In the museum, she argues, interpretation is done *for you* or *to you*. In hermeneutics *you* are the interpreter; interpretation is the process of constructing meaning. Hermeneutic theory explains that understanding is reached through the process of interpretation. Gadamer explains the process of viewing a work of art, the process of understanding, as a process of looking from the whole to the detail and back again. The detail contributes to the understanding of the whole. At the same time, almost without the viewer being aware, the work of art is treated as part of the whole society, both now (the present) and in the past; it is situated within the viewers’ existing knowledge about the present and the past. In looking at a painting for example, the viewer becomes part of the hermeneutic circle *moving* between interpretations of parts of the painting and the whole painting, representing an emerging understanding of the phenomenon. Simultaneously, in the experience of a painting the viewer is checking and rechecking, revising ideas, trying out new ideas and rejecting those that don’t work. The process of looking at a work of art, the process toward understanding is a circular question and answer process, the hermeneutic circle. The hermeneutic circle proposes that understanding is developed through continuous dialogue between the whole and the parts of the work of art where meaning is perpetually modified as new relationships are encountered in the work. Gadamer argues that situated interpretive activity is central to all quests for understanding.

An experience of a work of art is approached with what Gadamer calls *prejudices*, not meant in a deprecatory sense, (for prejudices are born of our own historicity), and with a certain receptiveness to what is being encountered. Meaning is to be found neither wholly in the object nor wholly in the viewing subject, meaning is dialogic — a dialogue between the viewer and the work of art. Our receptiveness to the work of art creates dialectic between what is known, and the unknown. The dialectic allows revision of our prejudices by assimilating the unfamiliar with the familiar, which leads to new understanding and meaning, which, importantly, remains relative. Renegotiation of

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60 Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation*, 172. See Footnote: 86


understanding is a continual process. In the experience of a work of art, the meaning we elicit from it is open to revision; through subsequent engagements with it, conversations shared with others about it. This relates to Gadamer’s conception of experience as Erfahrungs-aesthetic, which considers that our relationship with works of art are ongoing over a temporal span.

To some degree, Gadamer’s hermeneutic philosophy has influenced change already manifest in museum practice. Lord points to the rejection of the idea that a work of art has a fixed meaning and the shift to socio-constructivist theories of inquiry and learning which assert that meaning is constructed from the present circumstances and attitudes of the people encountering it, as evidence of Gadamer’s influence on museum thinking. Even so, Gadamer’s account of how we experience, come to understand and know art is not an approach that is commonly deployed in traditional adult visitor engagement programs in public art museums. The aim of hermeneutics is understanding rather than explanation, it draws attention to the human being in the investigation of phenomenon being interpreted. It potentially mitigates the perceived disparities between the possibilities art offers us as viewers and actual outcomes of viewing experiences. Ideas and methods that are moving away from traditional museum pedagogy and deeper engagement with Gadamer’s philosophy have promising potential for taking his ideas so much further, to deepen our theoretical grasp of processes involved in interpretation. Gadamer elucidates the complex processes involved in cultural traditions and historical understanding, the role of language in human understanding and communication so crucial in the experience of interpreting works of art. Furthermore, I suggest hermeneutic philosophy has significant import for the training of museum educators, an area of museum practice much in need of professional and academic development. Gadamer’s philosophy provides a rigorous and felicitous theoretical paradigm for recalibrating art engagement practices. Its analytic and speculative theory of the meaning of art undermines the universal claim of (art historical) method to capture all aspects of a work of art’s meaning. As Davey posits, it offers a detailed analysis of how art’s cognitive claims might be made on a non-foundational basis.  

Hermeneutical aesthetics does not entail a ‘philosophy of art’ but a philosophical meditation on what happens to us in our experience of art. Rather than dwelling on the subjectivity of the experience of art, hermeneutic aesthetics seeks to illuminate what philosophical and existential determinants shape our perceptions of art; how our experience of art occasions certain ‘truths’, a ‘truth’ that is relative, historical and socially determined. A major theme of hermeneutic thought is that certain ‘truths’ can only be experienced subjectively, 

64 Davey, *Unfinished Worlds*, 7.
65 Davey, *Unfinished Worlds*, 3.
but as Davey notes, this does not render them subjective. In hermeneutics you are the interpreter; this subjectivity depends on historical and cultural ideas, which, in the experience of art, transcends the subjective yet achieves “personal perceptual instantiations within aesthetic experience.”\(^6\) Gadamer’s hermeneutic aesthetics does not merely re-interpret and re-present subject-matters, rather it extends and alters their being.\(^6\) For as Davey argues, it is in the notion of subject-matter that hermeneutic thought gains an insight into how a work of art can transcend the temporal restrictions of its own historical origin and affect the contemporary world. Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics promotes multiple subjective interpretations; the ‘truth’ of a work of art prevents these multiple interpretations from being merely arbitrary.\(^7\) While its ‘truth’ is only realised through its multiple interpretations and never appears as itself, as Lord argues, “it survives and transcends its interpretations as the criterion of their validity. [F]or hermeneutics there are certain fixed truths that are instantiated only in particular interpretations.”\(^7\) To make an interpretation, Lord goes on to explain, is in fact “to draw out the truth of the object, to relay that fixed truth in a particular way.”\(^7\) The ‘particular way’ Lord observes, is dependent on the situatedness of the viewer; the present circumstances, attitudes and knowledge of the viewer, but it will be “tied to the fixed truth of the particular object.”\(^7\) The viewer, or knowers’ present situation is always constitutively involved in any process of understanding, it is, Gadamer argues, the only possible starting point for understanding, and it is a _productive_ starting point.\(^7\)

The hermeneutical dimension plays a basic role in all experience of the world, including the natural sciences.\(^7\) Gadamer shows that understanding is not a subjective relationship to an ‘object’ but to “the history of its influence; in other words, understanding belongs to the being of that which is understood.”\(^7\) Heidegger’s existential hermeneutics and the closely related philosophical hermeneutics of Gadamer insist that hermeneutics is not a matter of interpreting the pre-given; understanding is not what we aim at but what we do; interpretation then is the working out of possibilities projected in

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\(^6\) Davey, _Unfinished Worlds_, 3.


\(^4\) Gadamer, _Truth and Method_, 117-118.


\(^7\) Lord, “From Document to Monument,” 357.

\(^7\) Lord, “From Document to Monument,” 357.

\(^7\) Gadamer, _Truth and Method_, xxii.


\(^7\) Gadamer, _Truth and Method_, xix.
understanding. Gadamer’s concern with art Davey writes is “its ability to disclose an understanding of both ourselves and our being in the world in an immediate, unique and revelatory manner altogether distinct from, but as defensible as propositional knowledge.” For Gadamer there is no strict demarcation between the perceptual and the conceptual, rather a productive confusion of thought and perception enables us to see an instance of an idea. As Davey notes, without such a fusing, metaphorical transfer would be impossible: to see a set of scales as the symbolic presence of justice requires a capacity to see a given object as an instance of something that it is not. For art to open our eyes to world it has to do something other than remain in the purely sensible: “it has to borrow a hermeneutic metaphor to speak and it can only do so if it successfully enables us to understand that there is something more to be seen than what is immediately before the eye.”

Davey makes the important observation that hermeneutic thought achieves an intimate appreciation of how art resides within the provocative tensions and interdependencies of sight and in-sight.

In Truth and Method Gadamer emphasizes the ability of language to say things over and above the said, he considers conversation to be the paradigmatic case of the disclosive dimension of language, which, when in process, discloses of itself subtleties and nuances which logical analysis could not foresee— what is said is not as important as what is unsaid, which the said brings to mind; what is revealed is occasioned by the conversation. For Gadamer, knowledge is constructed through dialogue; meaning emerges through dialogue, or a hermeneutic conversation between the work of art and the viewer/interpreter. The participants of the conversation will have undergone an intimate and unexpected alteration in their outlook. There is no fundamental difference for Gadamer between the disclosive powers of conversation and experiencing what art discloses to us, Davey writes,

what we know from the instance of conversation, what we undergo when a painting brings something to mind is neither as exceptional nor as subjective as it often seems. In that aesthetic understanding differentiates the saying from the said, the subject-matter from the interpretation, hermeneutics contends that our understanding of art is as discursive or dialogical as our understanding of language. (original emphasis)

In his essay The Relevance of the Beautiful Gadamer claims that works of art cannot be satisfactorily translated in terms of conceptual knowledge. It is

Gadamer's view that a work of art does not simply refer to a meaning that is independent of itself — because it invites many interpretations a work of art requires an ideality of possible meanings — which cannot be obviated by any one realisation. The work is always in access of its readings; its meanings are always more than its interpretations. In Chapter Six I discuss a corollary to Gadamer's ideality of possible meanings that a work of art communicates in the context of Kant's inferred notion of 'complete communication' — what is unaccounted for in the categorical operations of cognition and morality.

Here I return to the notion of play in Gadamer's hermeneutic thinking as providing the basis for his account of both experience and understanding. Art is always more, it shows something more than what is literally present to us in the work of art — it opens up through its symbolic character to a space in which both the world and our own being in the world are brought to light. It is in this way that Gadamer conceives art as presentational rather than representational. As the work of art does not represent anything other than itself, the meaning it carries can only come to the fore in its self-presentation. It is Gadamer's claim that the experience of art is the experience of meaning, and as such this experience is something that is brought about by understanding. To this extent, Richard Palmer observes, aesthetics is absorbed into hermeneutics, which separates Gadamer from more conventional justification of the aesthetic as offering a special kind of pleasure. It is Gadamer's view that aesthetic theory, largely under the influence of neo-Kantianism, became alienated from the actual experience of art. The response to art had become abstracted and 'aestheticised' as subjective response. Accordingly, as touched on in the previous chapter, aesthetic discourses in the nineteenth century art museum subordinate the specificity of the work of art and the viewer experience of it to the aestheticised codes of museum space and technologies of display. The human subject addressed by such displays is an inward-looking subject; the experience offered is solipsistic, contrary to Gadamer's conception of community, which I will come to comment on later in the chapter. Drawing on ideas of dialogue and hermeneutic situatedness and the concept of 'truth' as prior and partial disclosure, Gadamer's focus is on the direct experience of art, which he develops as an alternative to subjectivism. Importantly, Gadamer contends that what the subject-matter of a work of art brings to mind is not necessarily an object that is visually present. His notion of the capacity of subject-matter to bring something to the mind's eye that is not visible or legible in a work of art, the idea that art is presentational rather representational is poignantly evoked by Didi-Huberman.

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84 Gadamer, "The Relevance of the Beautiful," 146.
As previously discussed, painted in the 1440’s the fresco which unfolds the Christian story of the *Annunciation*, painted by Fra Angelico, is situated on the wall of a small-whitewashed cell in which we might imagine a monk in prayer and meditation. “It is with the emergence of its representational details” Didi-Huberman writes, “that the fresco will become truly visible — in the sense of delivering discrete, visual elements of signification — elements discernible as signs.”87 It becomes so, in the sense familiar to historians of art, who strive to “distinguish the master’s own hand from that of his students, to judge the coherence of the perspective construction, to situate the work in Fra Angelico’s chronology as well as in the stylistic landscape of fifteenth-century Tuscan painting.”88 Thus, we are capable, or supposedly so, Didi-Huberman proffers, of reading the story of the *Annunciation* in Fra Angelico’s fresco. “But let’s try to go a bit further” he writes:

Or rather let’s stay a moment longer, face to face with the image. Quite soon, our curiosity about details of representation is likely to diminish, and a certain unease, a certain disappointment begin to dim [...] the clarity of our gazes. Disappointment with what is legible: this fresco presents as the most poorly and summarily recounted story there could be. No salient detail, no discernible particular, will tell us how Fra Angelico ‘saw’ the town of Nazareth — the ‘historical’ site of the Annunciation—or help us to situate the meeting of the angel and the Virgin Mary. There’s nothing picturesque in this painting: it is a taciturn as they come [...] Luke relates the story in spoken dialogue, but Angelico’s figures seem frozen in a kind of silent reciprocity, all lips sealed. [...] The ‘disappointment’ we are talking about has no other source, obviously than the odd particular aridity with which Fra Angelico has grasped [...] the visible world of his fiction. Space has been reduced to a pure place of memory. [...] Only the two faces have been emphasised: heightened lightly with white, worked with crimson. The rest is but contempt for details, the rest is but strange lacunae, from the fleet pictography of the angel’s wings and the unlikely chaos of the Virgin’s robe to the mineral vacuity of the simple place that here comes to confront us.89

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Didi-Huberman goes on to explain how this impression of what he refers to as ‘ill-seen-ill-said’ (if it is not seen it is not there) has led many art historians to a mixed judgment of the Fra Angelico’s work generally. At times categorizing Fra Angelico as a naïve painter of religious iconography to which he exclusively devoted himself. A more positive account Didi-Huberman puts forward, is if the visible and the legible are not Fra Angelico’s strong points, that is because his concern was with, precisely, the invisible, the ineffable. If there is nothing between the angel and the Virgin in his Annunciation, that is because the nothing bore witness to the indescribable and unfigurable divine voice to which Angelico, like the Virgin, was obliged to submit completely. Such an interpretation, Didi-Huberman suggests, touches upon something pertinent to the religious status, “even the mystical status of the artist’s work in general,” but it refuses, he writes, to understand the means, the material in which this status existed. It turns its back to the specifics of painting and fresco. It does this so as to proceed without them — which is also to say without Fra Angelico — into the dubious realm of the metaphysics, an idea, a belief without subject. It thinks painting can be understood only by disembodying it, so to speak [...] it functions, [...] within the arbitrary limits of a semiology that has only three categories: the visible, the legible, the invisible.

There is, however, an alternative to what Didi-Huberman describes as “this incomplete semiology:

It is based on the general hypothesis that the efficacy of these images is not due solely to the transmission of knowledge — visible, legible or

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invisible — but that, on the contrary, their efficacy operates constantly in the intertwinnings, [...] of transmitted and dismantled knowledges, of produced and transformed not-knowledges. It requires, then, a gaze that would not draw close only to discern and recognize, to name what it grasps — [...] but would, first, distance itself a bit and abstain from clarifying everything immediately. Something like suspended attention, a prolonged suspension of the moment of reaching conclusions. [...] We would agree to surrender ourselves to the contingencies of a phenomenology of the gaze, perpetually subject to projection and transference [...] We would agree to imagine how a fifteenth-century Dominican named Fra Angelico could in his works pass on the chain of knowledge, but also break it up to the point of unraveling it completely, so as to displace its paths and make them signify elsewhere, otherwise.\(^{94}\)

Didi-Huberman draws attention to the need in the experience of a work of art to reconnect with what our knowledge had not been able to clarify in the fresco, in Gadamer’s terms, what we misunderstood, in the very conditions of the encounter, the works presentational figurability, that the fresco proposed to us at the beginning, to recall our paradoxical sense that there was not much to see in that hollowed out white space of nothing between the angel and the Virgin. But as Didi-Huberman insists, to say there is nothing is not to look, it is to be satisfied with what we are supposed to see. He writes:

Let’s look: there is not nothing, because there is white. It isn’t nothing, because it reaches us without our being able to grasp it, and because it envelops us without our being able [...] to catch it in the snare of a definition. It is not visible in the sense of an object that is displayed or outlined; but neither is it invisible, for it strikes our eye. [...] It is material. It is a stream of luminous particles in one case, a powder of chalky particles in the other. It is an essential and massive component of the work’s pictorial presentation. Let’s say that it is visual.\(^{95}\)

Didi-Huberman’s account of the experience of viewing Fra Angelico’s Annunciation, brings forth several key points of Gadamer’s account of how we might understand the experience of an encounter with a work of art. First, what the fresco addresses and what it puts at issue seems to exemplify Gadamer’s idea that the subject-matter of a work of art shows more than what is literally present. The fresco does not merely re-interpret and re-present the subject-matter of The Annunciation; rather it extends and alters the being of it, and the paths we take to understanding Fra Angelico's presentation of it. Secondly, misunderstanding, that is to say not grasping aspects of the work of art, alerts us to the dialectic between what the fresco reveals and what it conceals, in Gadamer’s terms the generative tension between sight and in-sight. Didi-Huberman’s account points toward the generative tension between the visual

\(^{94}\) Didi-Huberman, Confronting Images, 16.

\(^{95}\) Didi-Huberman, Confronting Images, 17.
and *visible*, suggesting the fresco shows more than what it literally represents. The power of the attribute of the white space in Fra Angelico’s *Annunciation*, between the angel and the Virgin, has *visual* redolence with the not *visible* action of the narrative. The fresco’s *visual presentation* opens up (to us) its symbolic character. As Didi-Huberman argues, it reaches us, its viewer, by other paths, “it is more event than painted object, [...] the phenomenon of something that does not appear, it offers itself as a ‘pure appearance of something’, [...] the quality of the figurable — concrete, illegible, presented.”6 Which, in Gadamer’s terms, creates a space in which both the world and our own being in the world are brought to light. The openness of a work of art to this kind of experience, depends on the hermeneutic consciousness of the viewer and the work’s presentational figurability; the conditions of possibility that emanate from the work, the formulated questions that it precipitates and a viewer’s background knowledge of the relevant field and its history.

Constitutive of understanding, for Gadamer, is a hermeneutic consciousness that must remain open to the meaning of the ‘other’ — that which is dissimilar or opposite to the Self. This always includes situating the meaning of the ‘other’ in relation to our own meaning or ourselves, foregrounding and appropriating our own prior meanings and prejudices. In his explanation of the history of effect as it relates to *fusions of horizons*, Gadamer further distinguishes the notion of understanding as being predicated on a dialogical conversation between past and present. This involves moving to a higher universality that eclipses not only our own particularity, but also that of the ‘other’ — that which is not familiar, nor known. In an encounter with a work of art, for example, we must imagine the situation of the ‘other’ and the work itself, but also bring ourselves to this other situation. In Gadamer’s account, to acquire a horizon means to look beyond what is readily available, not to look away, but rather, to see it more clearly within a larger context.7 Gadamer explains it this way:

> An essential part of the concept of situation is the concept of ‘horizon’ [...] Applying this to the thinking mind, we speak of narrowness of horizon, of the possible expansion of horizon, of the opening up of new horizons etc. [...] to have an horizon means not to be limited to what is nearest, but able to see beyond it. [...] Similarly, the working out of the hermeneutical situation *means the achievement of the right horizon of enquiry for questions evoked by the encounter with tradition.*8 (emphasis original)

The horizon of the present cannot be formed without the past; the fusion of horizons involves the hermeneutic task of allowing the tension of horizons, past and present, to consciously come forth.9 The process of understanding involves

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7 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 272.
a phase that projects the historical horizon, but this, in another phase, is overtaken by our present horizon of understanding, thereby fusing the horizons.

In order for a museum visitor to understand a religious icon they need to understand the historical circumstances of its maker, the beliefs, feelings, and convictions of those who worshipped it. Museum program designer, Ido Iurgal comments, this is not simply a matter of increasing the visitors’ knowledge, but to fuse his or her horizon with the horizon of the people to whom the icon had a significant meaning. This is an intellectual as well as an emotional process of empathy and identification with particular individual motivations and biographical experiences. This understanding is then overtaken by the visitors’ present horizon of understanding with which it then fuses. This conscious act of the fusion is, for Gadamer, the task of effective historical consciousness.100 For Gadamer, interpretation is not an occasional additional act subsequent to understanding; rather, understanding is always interpretation and thus interpretation is the explicit form of understanding.

Gadamer makes the important claim that application is an integral part of understanding and interpretation.101 Application, constitutes the possibility of transforming the knower, it is experience realised. Application, is to embrace understanding in one’s personal life, and is the general principle of all understanding. To understand is to see the application of what is understood.102 Gadamer emphasises that hermeneutics has to do justice to the experience of the being of art that is so important to our hermeneutical experience per se, his philosophy gives attention to insights that are rehabilitated from the humanist tradition, explaining that the starting point for his work was an acknowledgement of the fact that: 103

the historical human sciences, as they emerged from German romanticism and became imbued with the spirit of modern science, maintained a humanistic heritage which distinguishes them from all other kinds of modern research and brings them close to other, quite different, extra-scientific experiences, and especially those proper to art.104

What is under consideration in Truth and Method is not a dispute about the difference of methodological approach in the human sciences and the natural sciences. More exactly, Gadamer argues, “the difference that confronts us is not in the method, but in the objectives of knowledge.”105 He goes on to explain that:

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100 Gadamer, Truth and Method, 274.
103 In this context the humanist tradition refers to a philosophical viewpoint that emphasizes the value and agency of human beings, individually and collectively.
104 Gadamer, Truth and Method, xvii.
105 Gadamer, Truth and Method, xvii.
The question I have asked seeks to discover and bring into consciousness something that methodological pursuit serves only to conceal and neglect, something that does not so much confine or limit modern science as precede it and make it possible.  

Gadamer’s purpose here is not to refute that the sciences have their own standards by which progress and development in various fields of research are assessed. More precisely, Gadamer is continuing a tradition that gives emphasis to humanistic themes such as Bildung and the importance of memory and authority. Important questions are raised by Gadamer’s inquiry: what kind of knowledge does he refer to in his claim that the historical sciences, as they emerge from German Romanticism, maintain a humanist heritage which distinguishes them from all other kinds of modern research? In what way do the historical sciences bring us closer to other quite different, extra-scientific experiences, especially those peculiar to art? How should we describe these extra-scientific experiences, and what are their purposes? Gadamer argues in his essay, The Problem of Historical Consciousness, that the aim is to recognise an “entirely different notion of knowledge and truth (in this sphere).” A consistent feature of Gadamer’s philosophical work is an engagement with art which grounds understanding in the linguistically mediated happening of tradition. Participation, or engagement and application exemplifies Gadamer’s hermeneutics, while the hermeneutic approach to art itself represents a rethinking of aesthetics through the integration of aesthetics and hermeneutics, he writes:

The hermeneutical process is always present when we experience something, when unfamiliarity is overcome; where enlightenment, insight and appropriation succeed, these all take place in bringing something to words and into common consciousness.

In the quote that heads this chapter Gadamer writes: “The fact that through a work of art a truth is experienced that we cannot attain in any other way constitutes the philosophic importance of art.” Gadamer’s hermeneutic philosophy offers a way of comprehending profoundly and cogently the experience of encountering works of art. Explication of the processes involved in

106 Gadamer, Truth and Method, xvii.
107 Bildung originates from the German bild meaning ‘form’ or ‘image’. Broadly speaking Bildung means to form, the ‘formation’ of an individual Gadamer defines Bildung as “…primarily the proper human way of developing one’s natural talents and capacities... without self-interest.” Gadamer, Truth and Method, 11, 14.
our hermeneutic experience of art in Gadamer’s account of understanding, of learning and knowing as the ground of experience, are important educational dispositions. It allows the kind of knowing we obtain from the experience of art to be altogether different but as defensible as propositional knowledge. Gadamer’s hermeneutic philosophy offers an alternative approach to the production of knowledge, a corrective to what Aaron Stoller identifies as a way of educational thinking:

which increasingly images knowledge as facts, and knowing as a cognitive act of reproduction: that fragments knowledge into discrete categories, separating subject matter from lived experience, facts from values, and emotion from cognition.114

In so doing, Stoller continues, “it mistakes the originating purpose of knowledge creation — emergent problem solving — for the reified results of past inquiries.”115

The Bildung tradition of education is not focused on essential categories of knowledge, but on the way in which one comes to know.116 It shifts the centre of gravity in education, Stoller writes, “it elevates the unique and continual reconstruction that the self undergoes as part of the process of education as the guiding force of education. Here, education is an act of doing or making, which is ultimately transformational of both self and world.”117 The structure of the concept of the educational paradigm Bildung is crucial to Gadamer’s metaphysics of experience, specifically the concept of Erfahrung which grounds knowing and resists the subject/object dichotomy.118

Hermeneutic experience accepts that an object does not exist as a thing-in-itself. Rather, everything known always exists for some purpose and within the relational context of a dynamically emerging horizon of understanding.119 In arguing the universality of historical prejudice and reconstructing the very notion of prejudice so that it is a productive and necessary part of knowing Stoller argues that Gadamer establishes:

A model of knowledge that is grounded in a synthetic and dialogical metaphysics of experience. There is now no such thing as facts without values, or knowns without knowers. [...] There is absolutely no form of knowing which stands outside the boundary of hermeneutic experience.120

115 Stoller, Knowing and Learning, 8.
116 Stoller, Knowing and Learning, 14.
117 Stoller, Knowing and Learning, 11.
118 Stoller, Knowing and Learning, 14.
119 Stoller, Knowing and Learning, 17.
120 Stoller, Knowing and Learning, 18.
Furthermore, Gadamer rejects the idea of authorial intention whereby the role of the observer of a work of art (or literary text) is to reconstruct the artist’s intention through a rational and cognitive process. To the contrary, Gadamer’s hermeneutics establishes a circular and dialogical structure of coming to know a work of art.\(^\text{121}\) To achieve this, Gadamer reconstructs the positionality and relationship of the viewer to the work of art. Like philosopher Martin Buber, Gadamer rejects the ‘I–It’ relationship imagined by authorial intention, and reconstructs it as a triadic structure: the ‘I-Thou-We’ relationship.\(^\text{122}\) For Buber and Gadamer the difference between ‘I-Thou’ and ‘I-It’ is not in the object to which we relate but in binding the relationship itself. Gadamer argues in Truth and Method that this triadic structure is a basic foundational block to the structure of human relationships and acknowledges that the ‘I-Thou-We’ relationship is allied to notions of friendship in classical philosophy.\(^\text{123}\) I will return to the idea of friendship in the context of dialogue-based museum programming later in the chapter.

Therefore, by Gadamer’s account, knowing or meaning making is a relational act that emerges within the context of a community of knowers.\(^\text{124}\) To state this more precisely, Gadamer’s triadic structure of knowing is a dialogical movement that is occasioned when two things – a person and a work of art – arrive at a third place: knowing and understanding.\(^\text{125}\) As Stoller notes, this is not only the motion of the hermeneutic circle, but also the structure of Bildung as it concerns the relationship between a person and culture. Gadamer terms this occasioning of understanding the fusion of horizons.\(^\text{126}\) Importantly, he ascribes that act of meaning-making as taking place in time, as part of the event structure of history: “it always already involves knowers and knowledge embedded in history: the triadic dialogical structure embeds both the knower and the knowledge produced in the particular historical circumstances of its creation.”\(^\text{127}\) Gadamer’s concept of the horizon of understanding is the scaffold for all experience and therefore the ground of knowing. The conditions for knowing in Gadamer’s metaphysics of hermeneutic experience denote that making knowledge is always emergent and conditional: knowing is an emergent property of experience.\(^\text{128}\)

The role of play is a central idea in Gadamer’s hermeneutic thinking, and provides an account of the experience both of art and understanding.\(^\text{129}\) Gadamer stresses the creative participation of the viewer as well as the artist. As discussed above, for Gadamer, the symbolic character of art is seen as showing an excess of

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\(^{122}\) Martin Buber, Between Man and Man, (New York and London: Routledge, 2002)

\(^{123}\) Gadamer, Truth and Method, 485.

\(^{124}\) Stoller, Knowing and Learning, 20.

\(^{125}\) Stoller, Knowing and Learning, 20.

\(^{126}\) Gadamer, Truth and Method, 269.

\(^{127}\) Stoller, Knowing and Learning, 20.

\(^{128}\) Stoller, Knowing and Learning, 21.

meaning, something more than is ostensibly present, in reference to something outside itself. Conceived as an especially valuable form of play, art opens up a space through its symbolic character. Gadamer builds on Kant’s aesthetics in his valuation of art as play, play as a serious part of human life that can communicate something, that can mean something. In the experience of art we are able to ‘dwell’ with the work in a way that takes us out of ordinary time into what Gadamer calls ‘fulfilled’ or ‘autonomous’ time, a particular temporality that belongs to the experience of art.

For Gadamer, understanding takes place in our engagement with art within the interpretive horizon of the historical person who has anticipations of meaning. He places emphasis on the experience of art that is understood as a co-operative activity involving the creative participation of viewers; their imaginative effort, if a meaningful encounter, can lead to self-understanding and change. In Gadamer’s account the viewer’s historicity, imagination, present situation, and application are constitutively involved in the process of understanding a work of art. This is particularly the case when, as viewers, we encounter phenomena the meaning of which is not immediately understandable. The concept of play which Gadamer emphasises in the experience of art forms the basis of his ontological structure of art, placing emphasis on participation, not the disengaged disinterested exercise of subjectivity. However, Davey makes the point that Gadamer reinvents aesthetics in a phenomenological framework in order to defend the constructive role of subjectivity within aesthetic experience. Like a game, something that has its own order and structure to which one submits, this conception of play is exemplified in the account given above of Didi-Huberman’s viewing of Fra Angelico’s Annunciation. Here play implies dialogue with the work, the viewer’s hermeneutic situatedness, and taking time to really look, to ‘dwell’ along with the work to understand the (relative) ‘truth’ of the work. This resonates with Gadamer’s idea that a work of art has a festive, as well as a playful character, since the notion of festival takes us out of ordinary time, into ‘fulfilled’ time and opens us up to the possibility of community.

Gadamer’s hermeneutic process is helpful for comprehending the experience of encountering a work of art as both a transactional and dialectical event. Educational psychologist Scott Paris asserts that aspects of self-knowing are pertinent to the experience of art in the museum: the self as agent and the self as an aggregate of personal experiences, the self as subject, and the I-self, as an

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131 Richard E. Palmer, ed. The Gadamer Reader, 123.
134 Davey, Unfinished Worlds, 4.
active knower with self-awareness.\textsuperscript{136} Facilitating an encounter with art for art museum audiences that enables a potentially deep appreciation and clearer expression of what such an encounter might hold, involves a process of immersion, seeking and probing the work, dwelling with it and attending to and registering response, in order to understand and disclose both aesthetic response and the historical tradition that reflects on it. Bridging the gap between the familiar world in which we stand and strange meaning that a work of art may present, that resists assimilation. Hermeneutical phenomena encompass both the alien, which we strive to understand, and the familiar world, which we already understand.\textsuperscript{137}

Hustvedt writes, seeing anything is immensely complex, “in order to absorb an image we must isolate and assign value to whatever we are looking at [...] examining every part of an image requires long viewing sessions.”\textsuperscript{138} We make discriminations about colour, composition, detail and the whole canvas, although we take these discriminations for granted, “the ability to make them is rooted in the physiology of experience.”\textsuperscript{139} We “perceive through language and the whole symbolic level of human experience it brings with it – long established cultural hierarchies and pictorial codes that shape expectation, recognition and memory of what is seen.”\textsuperscript{140}

Gadamer criticises the methodology that alienates the knower or viewer from her/his own historicity. “The knower” (or viewer), Gadamer asserts, “cannot leave his immediate situation in the present merely by adopting an attitude.”\textsuperscript{141} Gadamer takes the boundness of the viewer to his or her present horizons and the historical temporal gulf separating her from the work of art viewed, to be the productive ground of all understanding – not negative factors to be overcome.\textsuperscript{142} Our prejudices are not impediments that cut us from the past; they are the positive enabling condition of historical understanding, commensurate with human infinitude.\textsuperscript{143} Gadamer’s process of understanding as the fusion of past and present horizons has more in common with a dialogue between persons, or the playful buoyancy of a game in which the players are absorbed, than it does with a methodologically controlled investigation of an object by a subject.\textsuperscript{144} It takes our historicity, our prior involvement and prejudices, as an enabling condition, not as a barrier to understanding, but as the condition of its

\textsuperscript{138} Hustvedt, \textit{Mysteries of the Rectangle}, xvi.
\textsuperscript{139} Hustvedt, \textit{Mysteries of the Rectangle}, xvi.
\textsuperscript{140} Hustvedt, \textit{Mysteries of the Rectangle}, xvii.
\textsuperscript{141} Gadamer, “Philosophical Hermeneutics”, xiv.
\textsuperscript{142} Gadamer “Philosophical Hermeneutics,” xiv.
\textsuperscript{143} Gadamer, “Philosophical Hermeneutics,” xiv.
\textsuperscript{144} Gadamer, “Philosophical Hermeneutics,” xiv.
occurrence. Our historicity is ontological; the knower’s own personal situation is already constitutively involved in any process of understanding.

It is Gadamer’s conviction that works of art are valued because they seem to partake in our lives. We come to know and understand things as an emergent property of our transactional relationship with the world through creative active experience: cognitive, intuitive and aesthetic. Encounters with works of art imply an embodied, interactive experience. Our responses to works of art depend on who we are, on our character, which, as Hustvedt suggests, “underlines the simple truth that no person leaves [himself or herself] behind in order to look at a painting.” When we encounter a work of art our history must be brought into and in some way centre the pedagogical moment: our ‘prejudice’ constitutes the judgment we make before all elements that determine the work have been examined. Our prejudice is part of the fore structure of our understanding and a necessary part of coming to know the work. Our prior experience is central to the way in which our horizon of understanding takes shape. Through our active participation — cognitive, intuitive and aesthetic — in a work’s presentation, we move between the familiar and the unfamiliar in a process of hermeneutic reinterpretation. Realisation of the inadequacy of our current horizon of understanding initiates the process of interpretation or translation, initiating a point of entry to authentic dialogue with the work. Interpreting the work involves allowing ourselves to explore alien or unfamiliar horizons as we interact with it, exploring multiple perspectives, transactionally examining them until we create our own horizon in light of our alienated experience, in order to clarify and expand our understanding, transforming ourselves and the work of art. As Gadamer argues, our understanding is always subject to revision when we are confronted with more convincing evidence and interpretation; the hermeneutic circle concerns the tentative nature of understanding.

When we attend to the work’s subject-matter, Davey writes “what is more than the work presents itself through the work and thereby finds a place in our world.” “Intimacy, nearness, vivacity, directness, nakedness, or graciousness,” Davey goes on to explain:

[A]re not objects and yet, as phenomenological realities capable of radically reshaping our lives, they are forcefully and effectively present in the world. Because these entities are not objects in the spatio-temporal sense, many have inexplicably judged them to be subjective apparitions, appertaining only to the preferences of the viewer, and not to the properties of the viewed object. Gadamer openly accepts that the

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145 Hustvedt, Mysteries of the Rectangle, xix.
spectator is a condition of a spectacle coming forth, but he completely rejects the idea that what comes forth is relative to the spectator alone.\textsuperscript{147} Although we cannot see nakedness in the same way we see the naked, or cannot touch nearness in the way I can pick up that which is nearby, we can sense the presence of these qualities and be as profoundly affected by them as by the immediacy of the tangible. By means of art these qualities gain a tangibility of presence which without art’s mediation the world would not have. By allowing qualities such as privacy to come forth the artwork allows us to see entities in the world which we would not otherwise see. Privacy can only be presented (darstellen) not represented (vorstellen).\textsuperscript{148}

Sometimes we struggle to name the emotions we experience in an encounter with a work of art. They are, Hustvedt writes, “often cruder than the words we assign to them”, however, “visceral responses to an image are inevitably avenues to meaning, pursuing that meaning is the single most fruitful way to discovery.”\textsuperscript{149} And yet, Hustvedt argues,

d the world of museums has produced a cult of expertise and mythos of greatness that weight the ordinary pleasure of looking at art and responding to it with an alarm about ignorance.\textsuperscript{150}

For Gadamer, the aesthetic content of a work of art is transactional, or dialectical, realised between the work of art, the artist, and the viewer. In Truth and Method Gadamer favours dialectic experience that is not exemplified by definitive knowledge. In the openness to experience that is made possible by experience itself; Erfahrung becomes the experiential modality for understanding in art. It is significant, particularly in the museum setting, that Erfahrung implies the experience of social interaction, a historical communal ontology that connotes experience of a community. Gadamer promotes a socio-historical concept of experience that grounds the communal experience in the institutions of tradition. Erfahrung is primarily a civic experience, and its communalism stems from the ontological distinction between the individual and the community.

The connotations and philosophical origins of Gadamer’s conception of understanding show a cognitive, a practical and a linguistic element, which Jean Grondin posits are exemplified in the notion of application in understanding.\textsuperscript{151} For Gadamer, understanding involves action, a putting into practice, which

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\textsuperscript{148} Davey, “The Hermeneutics of Seeing,” 20.
\textsuperscript{149} Hustvedt, Mysteries of the Rectangle, xxi.
\textsuperscript{150} Hustvedt, Mysteries of the Rectangle, xxi.
\end{flushright}
Grondin suggests is akin to translation. The meaning of a work of art that is understood needs to be applied, or translated. What we translate from our understanding of a work of art is something that was unfamiliar but is somehow made more familiar through the process of interpretation. Even if we cannot say exactly what we understand we can attempt to unfold our understanding of the work in words, words that are our own that reflect our understanding and which we hope will communicate our understanding to others. It is the possibility of understanding that is played out within Gadamer's notion of understanding; it implies putting understanding into words; to understand is (to translate) to put into words. Our understanding is always subject to revision when confronted with more convincing evidence of interpretation. The basic hermeneutical experience is, for Gadamer, that our expectations of understanding are crushed. True experience that leads to in-sights is negative, Gadamer argues, it must always be open, and lead to new experience. For him, understanding is always achieved through dialogue. Language is the communicative mediation which establishes common ground. As in Gadamer's conception of play, this entails a "common willingness of participants in conversation to lend themselves to the emergence of something else, or 'thing' which comes to presence in conversation." 

Museum educator Jennifer Eiserman makes connections with Middle English definitions of the words 'comfort', 'community' and 'conversation': com-fort meaning together strong; co-munite: meaning together strengthened, making them essentially the same; while 'conversation' is defined as "to live or having one's being in or among." The words community and conversation both imply the idea of 'being together' and, for Gadamer, conversation is the fundamental structure of understanding. In the process of conversation participants work out affiliated subjects. Participants in the conversation 'belong' to and with each other, they 'belong' to and with the subject of their discussion, and they mutually participate in the process that brings forth the nature of the subject at hand. Eiserman claims, if we are not participating in the conversation we are not part of the community involved in that conversation.

Gadamer's distinction between binary (someone understands something) and tertiary understanding (one person coming to understanding with another about something they both understood) show that while tertiary understanding links conversation, understanding and community, binary understanding seems to
have no need of community. An implication of Gadamer’s notion of binary understanding is that a viewer of a work of art can either understand or not understand what is presented to her or him; participation in community is predicated on whether there is understanding. Gadamer’s conception of tertiary understanding, as one person coming to an understanding with another about something they both understand, is a socio-collective interactive or a more public notion of understanding. Communalism is a condition of Gadamer’s notion of tertiary understanding. The associative meanings of communality, conversation and understanding, which are embedded notions in Gadamer’s hermeneutic process, require that conversation or dialogue takes place. Eiserman points to Gadamer’s conception of binary understanding as illustrating traditional methodological practice of art museum education, what she terms the ‘all or nothing’ approach to engaging the viewing public with works of art. Eiserman argues that such an approach does not prepare nor help museum participants to understand works of art because this model of practice reflects a limited conception of understanding typified by the negative inflection Gadamer gives Erlebnis. Conversely, Gadamer’s account of tertiary understanding as an educational orientation characterised by Erfahrung brings into play critical pedagogical concerns that give greater attention to the active agency of audiences in the process of knowledge production, thus reflecting concern for a social relationship between things and people. That is to say, a participative communal experience of inquiry brings forth an event of understanding a work of art, allowing a multi-voiced conversation concerning a common topic, what the work of art brings forth as subject matter. Gadamer insists the meaning of a work of art is not arbitrary, it is explored in the subject matter of its presentation; it comes forth in the interstices of the interactivity of the viewer, the work, and the artist.

Hermeneutics and the educative process

Taking up Gadamer’s notion of communalism Eiserman considers the possibilities of the museum as a place that encourages conversation; our experience of art being like a game we play. Eiserman takes the work as a meeting place for conversation, she writes:

Both games and meeting places have well-defined boundaries and rules of conduct. Hence, although no two instances of the playing of a game have the same moves, nor the same outcome, there are right ways to play the game; there are also wrong ways. Similarly, with a conversation, no two discussions of a given topic will exactly replicate one another. Different

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160 Gadamer, Truth and Method, 158.
161 Gadamer, Truth and Method, 17.
subject-matter emerges and we draw different conclusions. Viewers come to understand a work of art differently from one another. However we can recognise in all these understandings a conversation on a common topic. We can identify a game commonly played.162

Moving away from the dominant convention of lecture-style information delivery about works of art prevalent in some visitor-education programs Eiserman situates the work of art in the museum as the meeting place for the conversation, to which visitors are invited to participate in dialogue with the work, and with others, forging links between conversation, and community, and moving mutually in the process that brings out the nature of the subject-matter.163

The conversation, Eiserman suggests, helps visitors to learn the rules and culture of a work of art — we take part in the conversation which the work initiates — the work of art is a witness to the journey of understanding that those in the conversation have travelled.164 Conversation receives its basic orientation from a line of questioning that arises from the work of art being encountered or responds in a critical way to what emerges there.165 Stoller observes that “hermeneutic dialogue does not occur by accident, but requires the mutual intention, willingness, and trust on the part of all players if it is to occur,” it requires the opening of “a kind of conceptual gap [...] which develops into reflective inquiry.”166 As Charles Taylor intimates in the quote at the top of the chapter, interpretation is an attempt to elucidate, to make sense of an object of study, a work of art, which in some way is confused, incomplete, cloudy, and seemingly contradictory. The question, according to Gadamer, is the starting point to this process, which opens the hermeneutic space in preparation for the event of play and fusion of horizons — Gadamer writes in Truth and Method:

The openness of what is in question [in an encounter with a work of art] consists in the fact that the answer is not settled. It must still be undetermined, awaiting a decisive answer [...] It has to be brought into a state of indeterminacy, so there is an equilibrium between pro and contra. The sense of every question is realised in passing through this state of indeterminacy, in which it becomes an open question. Every true question requires this openness.167

Understanding a work of art occurs, by Gadamer’s account, when we experience these disrupted situations develop into what he terms the event of play, whereby we struggle to revise and accommodate the gaps in our understanding, in

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162 Eiserman, Comfort, Conversation, Community, 26.
163 Gadamer, Truth and Method, xii.
164Eiserman, Comfort, Conversation, Community, 129.
166 Stoller, Knowing and Learning, 96.
167 Gadamer, Truth and Method, 357.
collaborative dialogue with others, to mutually determine meaning, through these experiences we find meaning. Lecturing is not a substitute for participants thinking for themselves, but as Paul Fairfield suggests, it is a means of ensuring that such thinking and conversations are based on adequate understanding of the subject matter. Lecturing on subject matter is not an alternative to dialogue but an indispensible part of it; dialogue presupposes both informed participants and a common orientation toward a productive line of inquiry concerning a particular work of art. Art historical and other cultural contextual material is necessary to ensure contributions to the conversation are both informed and moderately insightful. In the museum setting most often it is the educator who initiates this. While some people may feel uncertain about their skills and abilities to participate in the conversation, they can be enabled to ‘borrow’ words and develop skills to interact when they have models to emulate, in an atmosphere of reciprocity. It is Gadamer’s claim that a form of friendship emerges in the shared articulation and understanding of a subject-matter; friendship reveals the relationships between the persons that make the conversation possible. The point is to encourage participants to join in the conversation that is their own culture, or some specialised discourse within it, and to cultivate the means of taking it further. The play structure of the conversation is relatively informal, too much structure or control prevents a game from coming into its own and effectively removes the freedom of the players to invent novel moves, to use their judgement, form questions, and to think outside the framework of rules. There is a haphazard quality in every genuine conversation. As the museum educator steps out of the role of the one who knows and assumes the role of interlocutor there is a relinquishing of control that allows the conversation to take on a life of its own, and lead in a direction that no one anticipated. As the transition is made from lecturing to discussion, it behoves the educator to pose a line of questioning of the work of art.

Our understanding always occurs on the basis of our historicity. For Gadamer, the effect of history is a structural element of understanding: interpretation of works of art, even works from the past, is ‘prejudicial’, in the sense that it is always inclined to present concerns. In an encounter with a work of art, whenever we understand, we are involved in a dialogue that encompasses both our own self-understanding and that of the work encountered. As they become apparent in the process, our prejudices play a role in opening up what is to be

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170 Eiserman, Comfort, Conversation, Community, 129.
173 Fairfield, “Dialogue in the Classroom,” 82.
understood; Gadamer holds that the moments when we understand are characterised by the experience of the connectedness of all that makes that experience what it is. Gadamer recognises that the viewer requires distance but this is not a separation, it is “a distance that precludes practical or goal-oriented participation. The distance necessary for seeing, and thus makes possible a genuine and comprehensive participation in what is presented.” The conception of hermeneutic participation in the experience and understanding of art espoused by Gadamer suggests valuable theoretical grounds for structuring art engagement strategies in the museum enacted by hermeneutic practice.

For Gadamer, understanding is not reproduction but essentially a mediation or transaction of past meaning of a work of art into the present. Intrinsically dialectic, it involves an experience integrating the viewer’s and the object’s historicity, which in the present is experienced as personal encounter. Importantly, art’s historical heritage can be found within it, but as Gadamer argues, it is not the intention that a work of art is to be understood only historically; it offers itself in a presence, is open to possibilities of comprehension, there is no absolute meaning. For Gadamer, there is no play if there is no viewer; the work of art claims the viewer, and the aesthetic experience is about responding to the claim the work makes. By accepting the claim we accept the invitation to play offered by the work, and we become involved in the community of which the work is a part.

Hermeneutics is primarily the art of understanding and of making something understood by someone else. “It is always present”, Gadamer writes, “when we experience something, when unfamiliarity is overcome; where enlightenment, insight and appropriation succeed, these all take place in bringing something into words and into common consciousness”. Thus a work of art has its being as a work of art by being brought to realisation in experience. Gadamer cautions against interpretive methodology, informed by the process of objectivising, that ‘over illuminates’, and that does not allow a work of art to appear in its own right. Only by resisting ‘individuating objectification’ can interpretation really serve the encounter itself, which has its being in the event of the encounter; the artwork’s assertion becomes accessible in the encounter.

This chapter has explored central themes in Gadamer’s hermeneutic philosophy. Gadmer’s assertion of meaning as primary redefines subjective response to

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175 Gadamer, Truth and Method, (2nd. Rev. ed.), 124
works of art as participatory interaction within a nexus of cultural relationships that informs but transcends being of individual participants. The interplay of the analytical and the speculative dimensions of meaning are crucial to Gadamer’s account of the meaning within the experience of art in its opening of space between the once understood and the now understood, that is to say its transformative capacity. This is the educative process operating within hermeneutic transmission and reception. The educative quality of the conversation consists in articulating questions and judgments that others may challenge, testing of prejudices to which Gadamer refers and, above all, emancipating the role of spectator to become an agent in their own intellectual life and in the conversation that is their culture. Properly conducted dialogic explorations of works of art lead conversants beyond the intellectual comfort of settled judgment and reified systems of thought.

The importance of Gadamer’s aesthetic hermeneutic philosophy for museum visitor engagement strategies lies in the suggestion that the power of a work of art resides not in itself, as an autonomous aesthetic object, but in its dialogical capacity to ‘affect’ change in a viewer’s field of understanding. Didi-Huberman’s perciptient account of his experience of Fra Angelico’s’ Annunciation exemplifies Gadamer’s conception of understanding; to understand oneself as a transactional being within tradition, both constrained and enabled by it, seeking to clarify in the experience of art what we misunderstand. As Didi-Hubermann elucidates, Fra Angelico’s Annunciation does not merely re-present the subject matter, it extends and alters the being of it. Taking a hermeneutical transactional approach to this work Didi-Huberman is alert to what is revealed and what is concealed there, seeing more than is literally there, transforming the knower and the known.

That value of a work of art lies in what it has to ‘say’ to us. Gadamer’s philosophy opens up possibilities for articulating a museum pedagogy that endeavours for complexity rather than efficiency and simplicity. Hermeneutic inquiry exposes participants to temporal moments of creative action, bringing forth through their own interpretive agency opportunities for knowledge, understanding, and transformation. Externalised and shared in conversation (as linguistic understanding) visitors collectively produce from their experience of works of art ‘publicly’ acceptable meaning. A Gadamarian hermeneutic pedagogy will recognise that inquiry is creative, difficult, intuitive, and often productively disturbing and includes situational and non-cognitive dimensions.

Hooper-Greenhill suggests the museum might be seen as cultural borderlands, where different events and practices are possible, “where a language of possibilities is a potential and where diverse groups and sub-groups, cultures

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and sub-cultures may push against and permeate the allegedly unproblematic and homogeneous borders of dominant cultural practices.”

A vital aspect for rethinking the relationship of the museum to its audiences is what counts as knowledge, how it might be known, and who produces it. These ideas are of general concern in the work of philosopher Jacques Rancière. Analysis and undoing of the various obstacles that challenge the exercise of thought and speech are explored in Rancière’s works *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation* and *The Emancipated Spectator*. It is Rancière’s claim that all people are “virtually capable of understanding what others have done and understood.”

The focus of Chapter Five, an exploration Rancière’s ideas of intellectual equality and emancipatory pedagogy, will expand some of points of discussion undertaken to this point.

In the next chapter I build on connections between hermeneutics and education to investigate the contemporary relevance of John Dewey’s aesthetic and experiential philosophy for art museum public educational practice. There is a resonance in Gadamer’s hermeneutics and the American pragmatism of Dewey, particularly in their accounts of participation and experience in the interaction between works of art and people. Experience is fundamental not only to Dewey’s theory of education and aesthetics but to his entire body of philosophical work. In his late work *Art as Experience* (1934) Dewey understands art as *experience*; a critical-creative process of doing and undergoing, giving and receiving, that bears its own reward through reflexive human agency.

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Chapter Four

John Dewey and the experiential standpoint: Knowing as an emergent property of experience

In a museum we are always at work on ourselves. When we think in the presence of problems that provoke and engage us, we complete parts of our unfinished selves and begin to discover new unfinished parts of ourselves. ... Our lives and strengths are proven in the presence of things we do not understand.

David Carr. ¹

The thinker has his esthetic moment when his ideas cease to be mere ideas and become the corporate meanings of objects.

John Dewey ²

The simple possibility that things might proceed otherwise [...] is sufficient to change the whole experience of practice and, by the same token, its logic.

Pierre Bourdieu ³

From the late decades of the twentieth century there has been a revival of interest in John Dewey’s thought on philosophy and education. This interest has been influenced by discussion concerning a philosophy of education that is appropriately comprehensive to understand education in diverse contexts and an increasingly global and multicultural world. ⁴ Contemporary research in the field of education is once again turning to aspects of Dewey’s philosophy of experience. The concept of experience as experimental inquiry is fundamental not only to Dewey’s theory of education, but also to his entire philosophical oeuvre.

The previous chapter focussed on the hermeneutics of experience in the process of coming to understand a work of art elucidated in Gadamer’s hermeneutic philosophy. The focus in this chapter concerns the pedagogical implications of Dewey’s theory of ‘experimental knowing’ for an experiential museum pedagogy. For Dewey, the knower is an interpretive seeker and knowing is an act of inquiry; value is determined “by the consequences they effect in existence as that is perceptibly experienced.” ⁵ The radical premise of Dewey’s philosophical

pragmatism is not just that knowledge is interpretation, but that the meaning and value of ideas lies in their enabling conditions and outcomes.\(^6\)

Dewey’s large body of philosophical work can be read in the spirit of what philosopher Richard Shusterman describes as his ‘theoretical activism’.\(^7\) This is in accord with the socio-political aspirations of Dewey’s philosophy: the human disposition to engage the world through cooperation and communication so it enriches our lives with sense, meaning and value. In Dewey’s conception of experiential inquiry and art as experience I identify theoretical opportunities for an emancipated museum pedagogy that potentially transforms the situation of the audience in relation to works of art. I argue that Dewey’s philosophy offers different ways to understand pedagogical action, pedagogical content, and pedagogical outcome in the practices of public art museums.

Dewey’s philosophy took a cultural turn in education long before this move became more widespread in the second half of the twentieth century in new contexts of cultural diversity, multiculturalism and questions of cultural identity.\(^8\) Taking a twofold perspective Dewey recognises the importance of nature for human culture while understanding that the development of human culture impacts and changes nature.\(^9\) By Dewey’s account, communication, involving interaction and transaction, is the principal activity that connects culture and education.

Remarking on contemporary society Paul Fairfield argues that the art of thinking, whatever we take this to mean in specific terms, seems to be out of line with the times. Fairfield contends that a variety of historical conditions from the scientific and technological to the philosophical and epistemological, the economic, political and social have had the effect of not only reducing thought to a technique but have also gradually reduced opportunities for its exercise.\(^10\) “Thought is increasingly the preserve of expertise,” Fairfield writes, “something that ordinary persons need not, and perhaps ought not engage in [...]” Our conceptual framework has become excessively beholden to technology.\(^11\) I concur with the idea that underlies Fairfield’s observation: that the central business of education is, at all levels the cultivation of intellectual agency, which “necessitates acquiring a good deal of information and scientific knowledge but also surpasses that.”\(^12\)

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\(^12\) Fairfield, *Education After Dewey*, 7.
The public art museum is a unique and critical educational site for both cultivating and exercising the art of thinking in the contextual situation of works of art. Dewey’s principled account of the educational process offers an apposite theoretical paradigm for re-imagining pedagogical practices that promote the educational potentialities of this institution and the role of art in our lived experience. Dewey’s explicit grounding of education in a theory of human experience addresses important questions concerning pluralism, human agency, democratic participation, and the role of cultural practices in our lives, all concerns that are at the forefront of contemporary progressive museological research.

Theories of interactive-constructivism, experiential learning, hermeneutic philosophy and intellectual emancipation have opened up new possibilities for museum practices over recent decades. Recognition of ‘active audiences’, constructivist and interpretist learning theories, the concept of differentiated audiences and the complexities of multicultural societies have meant reframing museum education practice more broadly as interpretative and experiential, where interest in the viewer is served by meaningful encounters with works of art.  

Museologist Sandra Dudley postulates that:

A current, indeed dominant, view within museum studies and practice is that the museum is about information and that the object is just a part – and indeed not always an essential part – of that informational culture.

Similarly, in his late work *Art as Experience* (1934), Dewey argues that:

Instruction in the arts [...] is something other than conveying information about them. It is a matter of communication and participation in values of life by means of the imagination, and works of art are the most intimate and energetic means of aiding individuals to share in the arts of living.

From very different historical moments both Dudley and Dewey ratify a principal claim of this thesis: that there is scope to significantly augment traditional art museum practices that inform and shape the nature and quality of the relationship between the art museum’s visiting publics and works of art. I consider that Dewey’s philosophy has contemporary relevance to education generally. In the parameters of this project I argue that Dewey’s account of the educational process has important insights that bear on how art museums might better approach encounters between persons and works of art. Dewey did not refer to interactive constructivism in his writings, however it is within this...

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contemporary conception of education that I interpret his work and see its pertinence for rethinking the cultural and educational practices of the museum.

Rejecting Cartesian epistemological and metaphysical dualisms Dewey’s philosophy takes as its point of departure the fundamental unity of humankind and nature. Dewey challenges the way in which Western philosophy had developed wherein the ‘object side’ of the philosophical subject/object dualism was claimed by the mechanical worldview of modern science.\textsuperscript{16} As a consequence of this claim, educational theorist Gert Biesta writes, “all aspects of human ‘being-in-the-world’ that do not fit into this worldview have been relegated to the domain of human subjectivity.”\textsuperscript{17} The net practical effect of which, Dewey claims:

\begin{quote}
[I]s the creation of the belief that science exists only in the things which are most remote from any significant human concern, so that as we approach social and moral questions and interests we must either surrender the hope of the guidance of genuine knowledge or else purchase scientific title and authority at the expense of all that is distinctly human.\textsuperscript{18}
\end{quote}

Dewey’s purpose in starting his philosophical thinking from the unity of man and nature is, as Biesta explains,

\begin{quote}
to find a way out of the dilemma between ‘inhuman rationality’ and ‘human irrationality’;[...] for this reason [Dewey] explores the possibility of a philosophy that does not start from the separation of man and the world but holds them both in their original unity [...] [I]nspired by Darwinian evolutionary theory, [and] cultural anthropology [...] which Dewey calls ‘cultural naturalism’\textsuperscript{19} man is considered to be an acculturated organism.”\textsuperscript{20}
\end{quote}

Dewey’s philosophy of experience is appositely insightful from the perspective of articulating educational practices that facilitate meaningful interactions between human subjects and works of art in public museums. An imbricate aspect of Dewey’s understanding of experiential situations is his analysis of systematic knowing, or \textit{inquiry} which has a functional role within the framework of his experiential philosophy. Dewey’s conception of \textit{knowing} (or inquiry) is one type of experience that is grounded and orientated by experiences that are not primarily cognitive. For Dewey, knowing is systematic inquiry. Moreover, Dewey’s conception of the experiential situation entails the possession of persuasive qualities which unify and set apart some experiential situations from others. This qualitative mode points to the fundamental role that aesthetic

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{17}{Biesta, “Practical Intersubjectivity,” 305.}
\footnotetext{20}{Biesta, “Practical Intersubjectivity,” 305.}
\end{footnotes}
categories play in Dewey's experiential theory. The *consummatory* phase in the flow of experience is one that is dominated by aesthetic wholeness, integrity and fulfilment, what Dewey terms as an experience. Dewey writes:

Then and then only is [experience] integrated within and demarcated in the general stream of experience from other experiences. A piece of work is finished in a way that is satisfactory; a problem receives its solution; a game is played through, a situation, whether that of eating a meal, [...] [or] carrying on a conversation, writing a book, [...] is so rounded out that its close is a consummation and not a cessation. Such an experience is whole and carries with it its own individualizing quality of self-sufficiency. It is an experience. 21

A central aspect of Dewey's theory of experiential situations is his rejection of a conception of experience that is contrasted to 'thought' or 'reason' or 'inference'— that is to say, a concept underscored by an epistemological belief that experience is limited to what is sensed, perceived, or remembered. 22 In *The Need for Recovery of Philosophy* Dewey writes, “in the traditional notion experience and thought are antithetical terms [...] But experience, taken free of the restrictions imposed by the older concept is full of inference.” 23 In Dewey’s account experience can be non-rational or irrational, but it can also be funded with intelligence and controlled inference. The proper contrast for Dewey is not between experience and reason, but between experience and that funded by the procedures and results of intelligent activity, and experience that is not. 24 Dewey writes: “Experience in its vital form is experimental, an effort to change the given; it is characterised by projection, by reaching forward into the unknown,” it is future oriented.25 Emphasising that experience is not primarily a “knowledge-affair” Dewey highlights *inquiry* as a mode of discourse which is located and controlled by a wider context of experience — moreover, experience and inquiry are not limited to what is mental, private and subjective. 26 “An experience that is an undergoing of an environment and a striving for its control in new directions is pregnant with connexions,” Dewey argues. 27 The principal question for Dewey is the quality of interactions and transactions we have with the objective world.

Shusterman argues that by making experience central to his philosophy of art, Dewey demonstrates how his empirical pragmatism was richly rounded, capable of healing the schism between the cultures of art and science, that it was not

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narrowly scientific.\textsuperscript{28} In his work *Experience and Nature* Dewey considers philosophy valuable as “a study [...] of life experience” that melioristically aims to develop “the potentialities of daily experience for joy and self-regulation.”\textsuperscript{29} Acknowledging that art, nature, and other things often occasion a distinctly intense and satisfying experience in its unity and consummation, which sets it apart as an experience, Dewey also claims that a grounding aspect of aesthetic experience was the basic foundation for constituting any situation as a coherent identifiable experience.\textsuperscript{30} Dewey’s account of aesthetic experience is an experience especially and distinctively unified, that “stands out” appearing as “complete in itself, standing out because marked out from what went before and what came after,” integrated in its fulfilling consummation.\textsuperscript{31}

Knowledge is corrigible, philosopher Richard Bernstein argues, our imaginations need to dispose us to other points of view in light of new evidence from other persons and ideas.\textsuperscript{32} Dewey emphasises the value of the perspective of human agency in its interaction with the world. He critiques “the quest for certainty” and what he called the *Spectator Theory of Knowledge*, seeing this as a quest for a security “that escapes the contingency, uncertainty, and openness of experience.”\textsuperscript{33} Certainty, Bernstein argues with Dewey, does not entail “epistemological incorrigibility; what I take to be certain may turn out to be mistaken.”\textsuperscript{34} For both pragmatism and hermeneutics, the idea of first starting points and end points in inquiry and experience is misguided, we are always in the midst of action. As finite fallible beings engaged in the open-ended process of interpretation and inquiry, we are never in a position to claim we have achieved final comprehension. Knowing involves active experimentation and problem solving, knowing is a form of doing, it is an activity.\textsuperscript{35} For Dewey, like Gadamer, there is never ultimate finality to the ongoing process of interpretation. For Dewey *inquiry* is an action which is initiated by an obstacle to successful human understanding, which proceeds as active interaction with that object of study or situation, through experimentation to resolution and thereby re-adapting to the situation, allowing the process of human inquiry to continue. It is Dewey’s view that we need to cultivate those habits that enable us to cope with the contingencies of life, the unfamiliar and unknown. Dewey argued the need to develop social institutions and habits that cultivate creative intelligence; his

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[28]{Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics.* 30.}
\footnotetext[29]{John Dewey, *Experience and Nature,* LW: 1: 40-41.}
\footnotetext[30]{Shusterman, “Dewey’s Art as Experience: The Psychological Background,” *Journal of Aesthetic Education,* 44:1:2010: 30-31.}
\footnotetext[31]{Dewey, *Art as Experience,* 43.}
\footnotetext[33]{Bernstein, “Pragmatism and Hermeneutics,” in *John Dewey and Continental Philosophy,* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 2010), 151.}
\footnotetext[34]{Bernstein, “Pragmatism and Hermeneutics,” 151.}
\footnotetext[35]{Bernstein, “The Pragmatic Turn,” 2013.}
\end{footnotes}
understanding of intelligent activity is articulated in the context of his theory of experiential situations.

**Dewey’s experiential situations**

Dewey postulates as axiomatic to his philosophy of education the idea that there is an intimate link between the processes of actual experience and education. Dewey understands education as experience, experience as thinking, and thinking as inquiry. The role of dialogue is embedded in Dewey’s idea that thought comes to fruition only through communication. Its realisation is most complete when we think together, in face-to-face relationships by means of direct ‘give and take’ and by sharing our experience through dialogue. Thought is first and foremost a matter of communicated experience and, according to Dewey, experience takes the form of inquiry. We can assume that, for Dewey, thought finds its natural home in conjoint inquiry. As Philip Cam argues, this conception is in opposition to “the idea that thought is primarily private in-the-head ratiocination,” as implied by traditional transmissive educational strategies. If we apply Dewey’s theory of reconstructed experience to the experience of a meaningful encounter with a work of art in the museum it entails structuring the educational event around the phases of experiential inquiry and dialogue in a collective situation.

Dewey’s theory of critical inquiry suggests purpose always starts with an impulse. If we apply Dewey’s phases of inquiry to the experience of observing a work of art, purpose arises from a person’s initial and direct intuitive experience, and subsequent conceptual analysis of the phenomena being perceived which this transforms into a purposeful inquiry of that work. The initial experience represents a pre-reflective understanding of what is observed and it also initiates further analytical action. The importance of purpose must be emphasised in the process of coming to know a work of art intimately. Only then can an educative experience be facilitated. An understanding of the significance of what is seen includes understanding the consequences that result when what is seen is acted upon in the inquiry process. For Dewey, inquiry is the basic process by which meanings and knowings emerge from within the transactional experiences of persons and contextual field.

Dewey argues that our experience, discernments, and thoughts about objects and events are not ever carried out in absolute isolation but only in terms of a contextual whole, which he calls a ‘situation’. Bernstein points out that ‘knowing’ as systematic inquiry can only be properly understood when we realise its

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function within the larger context of Dewey's theory of experience. When Dewey writes of 'nonreflective' or 'noncognitive' experience, he means the type of experience in which knowing or inquiry is not the primary objective, he argues:

[A]nyone [who] recognizes the difference between an experience of quenching thirst where the perception of water is a mere incident, and an experience of water where knowledge of what water is, is the controlling interest; or between the enjoyment of social converse among friends and a study deliberately made of the character of [...] the participants; between esthetic appreciation of a picture and an examination by a connoisseur to establish the artist,”

recognises the distinction between noncognitive or nonreflective experiences and experiences in which knowing is primary. Importantly, Dewey does not deny that there is thinking or conscious awareness in all human experiences. Rather, it is his contention that we “distort our experience as lived if we consider that the paradigm for all experience is knowing. For Dewey, every experience involves a transaction between a living human organism and its environment. In every experience there is both undergoing and activity, which are mutually related and interdependent. Inquiry, by Dewey's account, is a self-activity that can put any claim into jeopardy, which means that all knowledge claims or validity claims are fallible, open to further testing, criticism and modification. Dewey rejects the 'subjectivist' turn philosophy took after Descartes. Like other Pragmatists, Charles Sanders Pierce and William James, Dewey argues that the conception of experience as mental, private, and subjective is fallacious. While acknowledging that there is no experience without an experiencer and an experiencing — but experience is not exclusively private. Correspondingly, Immanuel Kant's notion of sensus communis holds that the communicability of something, a feeling, a thought, means that in principle others could think what I think, and feel what I feel. On Kant’s account in the Third Critique all human beings have the conditions for such feeling or thought; sensus communis is built into the very notion of aesthetic reflective judgments. Therefore, such judgements are not questions of private feeling but an assumed public sense. I return to a fuller discussion of Kant’s aesthetic theory in Chapter Six.

In contrast to the prosecution of museum education in terms of information transfer, I propose emphasis be placed on the process of active experiential inquiry from the standpoint of museum visitors’ encountering works of art. Such an approach to pedagogy is critical in public programming designed for adults,

38 Bernstein, Praxis and Action, 203.
40 Bernstein, Praxis and Action, 204.
41 Bernstein, Praxis and Action, 204.
42 Bernstein, Praxis and Action, 204.
an area of art museum practice that although some significant steps have already been taken in this direction, is largely under researched. For example, research undertaken (2011) at the J. Paul Getty Museum by Rika Burnham and Elliott Kai-Kee on experiential interpretation that draws on hermeneutic and experiential philosophies of Gadamer and Dewey is an important resource for emerging art museum educators.

The redistribution of knowledge and practice in the art museum is a principle and timely theme addressed by Tate Encounters (2007-2010), a collaborative and interdisciplinary research project led by Andrew Dewdney at London South Bank University in London, Victoria Walsh at the Tate, and David Dibosa at the Chelsea College of Art. As previously mentioned, Tate Encounters opens up important questions concerning practice and new research landscapes for new models of practice-based and practice-led research. Reconceptualisation of art museum education practice in the direction of an interdisciplinary focus is critical to lead to new forms of knowledge production for the art museum and to maintain and deepen its relevance in the public sphere. Expanding its conceptual base and performing pedagogy differently in the art museum assumes urgency in terms of augmenting the potentialities of the institutions’ educational reach and import. Museum pedagogy requires a broader disciplinary base in order to trace the relations between the art museum and the life-world of visitors, recognising the specificity of the visual, not solely as art history but as a practice of viewing that connects the visual of the everyday with the practice of viewing inside the art museum.

As a product of culture, art is a significant expression of human experience that has an affinity for shared common values. As such, art is a critical agent in prevailing social and cultural conditions. Dewey’s ambitious claim for the potential of art is demonstrated in Art as Experience (1934). Art does more than provide us with fleeting moments of elation and delight; as Philip Jackson puts it, art “expand[s] our horizons […] contribute[s] meaning and value to future experience. […] modif[i]es our ways of perceiving the world, thus leaving us and the world itself irrevocably changed.”

Dewey approaches an experience of art as a kind of responsive activity, allowing the work of art to guide us in the exercise of our knowledge and imagination. The dynamics of art for Dewey derive from his view of experience in general:

45 Dewdney, Dibosa and Walsh, Post-Critical Museology. The majority of the research data is available on the Tate website, Accessed March, 2016 http://www2.tate.org.uk/tate-encounters.on the website
The world we have experienced becomes an integral part of the self that acts and is acted upon in further experience. In their physical occurrence, things and events experienced pass and are gone. But something of their meaning and value is retained as an integral part of the self. Through habits formed in intercourse with the world, we also in-habit the world.48

Dewey’s conception of the enduring changes that constitute the power of art derives from his account of how experience operates in general. Dewey repositions our experience of art within the realm of ordinary life while recognising the importance of art objects and events as ‘carriers of meaning’.49 It is Dewey’s belief that the cumulative experience of art liberates us by expanding our emotions and perceptions. It influences future experience while fostering changes that endure over time:

Through art, meanings of objects that are otherwise dumb, inchoate, restricted, and resisted are clarified and concentrated, and not by thought working laboriously upon them, nor by escape into a world of mere sense, but by creation of a new experience. [...] [W]hatever path the work of art pursues, it, just because it is a full and intense experience, keeps alive the power to experience the common world in its fullness. It does so by reducing the raw materials of that experience to matter ordered through form.50

In Art as Experience Dewey re-explores and affirms the place of aesthetics in its evaluative, phenomenological, and transformational sense for art, artists and audience as perceiving subjects.51 Dewey expands our restricted cultural and intellectual presuppositions of what constitutes aesthetic experience. His account of an experience denotes a particular class of experience; it refers to those experiences that are particularly meaningful, important and aesthetic, which induce an expansion of perceptual acuity, meaning and value. Our interactions with works of art characterise what it means to undergo an experience; an experience leads to integrated consummatory experiences epitomised by their intensity and meaningfulness.52 According to Dewey:

Art throws off the covers that hide the expressiveness of experienced things; it quickens us from the slackness of routine and enables us to forget ourselves by finding ourselves in the delight of experiencing the world around us in its varied qualities and forms.53

Art induces aesthetic experience, “experience in its integrity.”54 There are, of course, many degrees of experience and only a few will turn out to be life

48 Dewey, Art as Experience, 104.
49 Jackson, John Dewey and the Lessons of Art, 111.
50 Dewey, Art as Experience, 132-33.
52 Jackson, John Dewey and the Lessons of Art, 33.
53 Dewey, Art as Experience, 104.
54 Dewey, Art as Experience, 274.
transforming. However, it is Dewey’s claim that the ‘lessons’ of worthwhile experiences will be absorbed and brought to bear on subsequent experiences. For Dewey, along with continuity, interaction is a central principal for interpreting an experience in its educational function and force. He writes:

[Interaction] assigns equal rights to both factors of experience — objective and internal conditions [subjective]. Any normal experience is interplay of these two sets of conditions.”

Taken together, or in their interaction, the objective and subjective form is what Dewey calls a situation. Dewey’s concern is that education does not violate the principle of interaction from one side: both objective conditions and subjective conditions shape what kind of experience is had. Dewey’s philosophy takes a new orientation of consciousness, an orientation he calls ‘contextual’ which involves the “reversal of traditional philosophical ideas about the mind, reason, conception and mental processes,” The new centre of consciousness, or the new conception of mind is the context of human existence — the existential relation to a total situation in the world, a relation characterised by affection, as well as rational understanding of nature and the sociocultural environment.

For Dewey,

[the] mind is no longer a spectator beholding the world from without [...] The mind is within the world as part of the latter’s own ongoing process. It is marked off as mind by the fact that wherever it is found, changes take place in a directed way, so that a movement in a definite one-way sense—from the doubtful and confused to the clear, resolved and settled — takes place.

The act of knowing shifts from “an outside beholding to knowing as an active participation in the drama of an on-moving world.” Knowing is a transformational act, the “transformation of disturbed and unsettled situations into those controlled and more significant.” The functional equivalents of mind — knowing, imagination, and intelligent action — are for Dewey inherent in experience.

Dewey holds that the transaction between organism and environment results in changes to both; that changes brought about in the organism predispose it to (re)act in future situations in a more specific way. These acquired dispositions Dewey calls habits; human action is primarily habitual action. Dewey’s theory of habits relate to cultural customs and institutions. Habits are generated as well as

generating powers of behaving in culture; they have a biological impulse but are not determined by nature. \(^{61}\) Habits mean, for Dewey, that an individual undergoes a modification through experience, such a modification forms a predisposition to easier and more effective action in the future. Therefore it also has the function of making one experience available in subsequent experiences. \(^{62}\) Dewey refers to habits of action and habits of thinking, whereby through social interaction habits of action and thinking are developed and changed. \(^{63}\) As Garrison, Neubert and Reich note, in this way Dewey's habits of thinking and intelligent problem solving contribute to the growth of cultures: “Habits emerge from interaction of natural and cultural factors as they affect individual conduct. They are potentials that exist in different forms such as cognitive, emotional, social, communicative, and aesthetic habits.” \(^{64}\) Habits are active tendencies and must, to a certain degree, remain flexible and open to development in order for learning to continue.

By making experience central to his philosophy of art and education a principal question Dewey emphasises is the quality of interactions and transactions we have with the objective world. Moreover, he suggests that education is essentially a social process. Dewey's claim that aesthetic experience is a key factor in understanding all experience and unifies many of the presumed dualisms like body and mind, nature and culture, theory and practice, which, he maintains, distort our thinking about art and life. Dewey understands mind and body as an essential unity; he insists, “biological factors lie at the roots of the aesthetic.” \(^{65}\)

For Dewey, experience can be cognitive and noncognitive, it includes both object and subject, wherein the distinction of object and subject is a dynamic functional distinction arising within experience. It involves both the content of the experience and the manner in which something is experienced. As his notion of human experience is situated in historical, social, and political contexts, the defining of art as experience ensures that these contexts are given the attention they warrant — rather than isolating the aesthetic in narrow formalism or structuring the experience of art in academic articulations or scientistic discourse. \(^{66}\) Dewey’s conception of experience as essentially embodied means that experience cannot be confined to mere intellectual cognition; it involves the whole person. As both noun and verb 'experience' signifies both a completed event and a process: immediacy and continuance. Dewey's philosophy of experience marks an important understanding of the dialectic conception of

\(^{63}\) Garrison, Neubert and Reich liken Dewey's ideas of habits to the concept of *habitus* developed by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. See: *John Dewey's Philosophy of Education*, 5.
\(^{66}\) Shusterman, “Dewey's *Art as Experience*,” 31.
objective and subjective experience and the transactional participation of the human agent in the process of inquiry.

The role of scholarly knowledge pertaining to a work of art ought not to eclipse the individual capacity or prospect for personal (intuitive) experience. A rehearsed academic interpretation of a work of art Dewey argues, diminishes access to meaning.\textsuperscript{67} On the other hand, if it arises from, and is relevant to, the inquiry it enables and enlarges the participatory capacity for knowing. Dewey defines some experiences as ‘educative,’ when they have the capacity to influence later experiences and growth, and when they provide continuity. It is his claim that art, like science, is a product of intelligent experience: both deploy experience to evaluate success of \textit{active inquiry}, and both consider \textit{enhanced} experience as a principal “motivating aim or value.”\textsuperscript{68}

Dewey’s experiential theory and associative critical inquiry can be appropriated to the contextual situation of museum visitors encountering a work of art. For example, a contextual field can emerge through the public thinking and conversation of both educator and visitors that decentralises canonical art historical concerns and validated answers, to enable deep looking and to bring their ‘lived lives’ to the encounter.\textsuperscript{69} A contextual situation receptive of thought fosters thinking in an unbounded mode and opens a space for those perceiving a work of art to take a critical stance. It is possible within the institutional frame of the art museum to further the chance of equal participation, of thinking and communicating together. As I have suggested above, a Deweyan standpoint recognises both the objective and subjective conditions of the experiential situation that inquiry of a work of art brings into being. This involves the flexible use of funded experiences and scholarly erudition as well as pre-reflective personal or subjective (intuitive) experience in the exercise of personal judgment. Dewey’s experiential context temporarily foregoes the disciplinary ‘will to know’, which underlies academism, in exchange for what Rudi Laermans calls “a kind of experimental prudence,”\textsuperscript{70} thereby affirming the moment of not knowing in the process of knowing. In emphasising the active intellectual agency of viewing subjects Dewey seeks to collapse intellectual distance between the inquirer and the inquiry field or object, in order to achieve an affectional standpoint. Such a standpoint Dewey considers necessary to comprehend the facts of the contextual situation, its uniqueness and dynamics. In the case of perceiving a work of art, we need to recognise that to essay the unique quality of the situation it must first be felt and then funded by experience (prior and


\textsuperscript{68} Shusterman, “Dewey’s Art as Experience,” 30.


\textsuperscript{70} Rudi Learmans, “The Teaching Process of Theory and Art,” 65.
present) and verified knowledge pertaining to the perceived object. Dewey explains it in this way:

[I]t is possible to carry on observations that amass facts tirelessly and yet the observed ‘facts’ lead nowhere. On the other hand it is possible to have the work of observation so controlled by a conceptual framework fixed in advance that the very things which are genuinely decisive in the problem in hand and its solution, are completely overlooked. Everything is forced into the predetermined conceptual and theoretical scheme. The way, and the only way to escape these two evils, is sensitivity to the quality of a situation as a whole. In ordinary language, a problem must be felt before it can be stated. If the unique quality of the situation is had immediately, then there is something that regulates the selection and the weighing of observed facts and their conceptual ordering.71

Dewey cautions that conceptual verified knowledge brought to the contextual situation must be relevant to questions that emerge in experimental problem solving in order to augment further understanding. To the higher intensity of interaction between a person and a contextual field of inquiry Dewey gives the name ‘transaction’.72 When the elements of an interaction, the perceiver and the perceived for example, become integrated the structure of this relationship takes on a transactional character. The idea of transaction is key to Dewey’s theory of language, his contextualist orientation to knowing, and also his conception of art.73 Dewey understands that language as a mode of interaction “brings with it the sense of sharing and merging in a whole” — a contextual field in which the elements of language work as threads between participating persons and the contextual field.74 He suggests that, “forms of language are unrivalled in ability to create this sense [of wholeness] at first with direct participation on the part of an audience; and then [...] through imagination and identification.”75

**Dewey’s theory of communicative action**

For Dewey, communication is the medium of social interaction and participation: “Education, as we conceive it, is a process of social interaction carried on in behalf of consequences which are themselves social — that is, it involves interactions between persons and includes shared values”76 and interaction is always a case of establishing relations. For participation in education, it is crucial that all individuals have the chance to articulate their own views, interests, desires, and intentions as effective components in the interactive process.77 “In art, as in nature and in life,” Dewey writes, “relations are modes of interaction,”

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73 Scott, *Frontiers of Consciousness*, 103.
of an agent with other agents or with objects of the natural or social world.” Dewey therefore understands education as a co-operative and constructive process engaged in and by active intellectual agency. If we relate this understanding of education to the cultural and educational practices of the art museum it implies visitors are provided opportunity to expand their constructive agencies to solve problems raised by particular works of art through interaction with those works and other people. Perceivers need to observe and absorb phenomena which manifests itself in the emergent contextual situation of the work of art in order to produce meanings and evaluative understanding. Participants in the ‘interpretative community’ share their intuitive thoughts to conceptualise their ideas. To extract meaning participants draw from prior and present experiences and objective verified knowledge pertinent to the situation — to weigh observed facts and their conceptual ordering. Accordingly, the role of the museum educator becomes that of creative director of the inquiry situation, which implies indirect forms of stimulating, informing, and co-ordinating cooperative problem solving processes.

Dewey’s philosophy of education is founded on an emergent, constantly evolving ‘curriculum’ in response to the concerns of a particular community of inquirers. It is necessarily flexible, responsive, and collaborative. It recognises adults as agents in their own learning. His approach is not prescriptive. A Deweyan orientated inquiry of a work of art in the museum might gather a small group of adults around the object for the purpose of sustained and attentive looking. It is an interactive cooperative enterprise of looking together and sharing thoughts and observations. Collectively, the participants and the educator engage in the inquiry of the work, allowing time and space for silence and for conversation. It is through the individual participants sharing their initial experience of the work of art that the collective experience emerges, and from which it will flow. The emotional and intellectual response to the work of art, which ideally will draw on past and present experience of the participants, will form the ‘emergent (in common) curriculum’ of the community of inquiry. What emerges may be wide-ranging or focus on a particular observation or reflection. The inquiry is instigated and driven by positive confusion or questions precipitated by what has been observed in the work of art’s presentation and how the participants make meaning from their experiences, and reflect on them. This involves the construction of concepts from initial reflections or knowledge mediated by the work. Reconstruction of the conceptualised experiences of participants ensues from a summary of the insights that the conversation has collaboratively produced. Conversation extends the participant’s experience, creating a shared field of inquiry concerning the work of art. An emergent premise concerning the work might be followed by reference to external contextual or canonical

78 Dewey, Art as Experience, 134.
knowledge. However, Dewey's insists that 'experimental knowing' is context and community specific and guided by the interests of the inquirers.

Biesta identifies the main characteristic of human interaction in Dewey's philosophy as the fact that it is a form of interaction in which the activities of the participants are regulated by their ongoing interaction. Human interaction is therefore a matter of cooperation. The cooperation comes about because person B acts on the meanings of the sounds and gestures of person A. The successful cooperation of A and B requires that B understands the actions of A as symbols, as events referring to something else, namely, to what A intends to accomplish (together with B). The characteristic thing about B's understanding of A's gestures and sounds, therefore, is that she or he responds to the things from the standpoint of A. For Dewey, “this is the essence and import of communication [...] Something is literally made in common in at least two different centres of behaviour.” By Dewey's account, "To understand is to anticipate together, it is to make a cross-reference which, when acted upon, brings about a partaking in a common, inclusive, undertaking.

Dewey's understanding of communication in qualitative educative experience has critical import for pedagogical action in the art museum. Communicative action is linked to Dewey's conception of democratic pluralism and consequently it implies respect and justice for difference. That is to say, to understand what presents as different without imposing our own prejudices in order to seek a common ground with what is different. Participation and a shared community is created in the experiential situation through language; it is necessarily a part of the contextual structure of all experience. Dewey writes:

> A universe of experience is the precondition of a universe of discourses. Without its controlling presence, there is no way to determine the relevancy, weight or coherence of any designated distinction or relation. The universe of experience surrounds and regulates the universe of discourse but never appears as such within the latter.

For Dewey, the starting point for learning situations should be shared activities that require communication inherently significant and worthwhile for those participating in the 'interpretative community' of the inquiry. It is pedagogically important that museum educators develop strategies for eliciting dialogue within the interpretive community. In Dewey's account, language is always a form of action and in its instrumental use is always a means of concerted action.

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for an end, as such it brings with it a sense of sharing and merging in a whole — in the process of inquiry language serves to connect intuition and thought with the field of experience. As noted above, language for Dewey is unrivalled in its ability to create participation and is the basic process by which meanings and knowings emerge from within the transactional experiences of persons.

The word ‘event’ for Dewey implies action or putting out of energy in an organised framework of actualities, a ‘situation’: “Every existence is an event.” Dewey’s concept of the contextual field is a metaphor which he applies to every event and occurrence. Reference to the “experiential field” brings to attention the fact that all experience, including both knowing and acting, is in and of a situation, context, or field — mind and matter in Dewey’s view are “significant characters of events,” not substantial and independent existences. Scott makes the observation that while consciousness and its environment are “characters” the contextual event has an ontological primacy; consciousness is the mode of interaction or transaction between the live creature and “the open universe of events.” For Dewey the mark of consciousness is the transformation of an existential situation from relative indeterminacy to a higher state of qualitative meaning and unity. The ideality of concrete experience in its inclusive integrity does not divide between action and material, subject and object, “but contains them both in unanalysed totality.”

Going beyond Kantian subjectivism Dewey shifts the philosophic conception of mind from a spectator located in internal psychic space to a new perspective of mind as an active “character” participating constructively in the shaping of events. Consciousness is not confined within a subjective realm. Dewey’s philosophic standpoint puts the context of our existence at the centre; whereby our existential relation to the total situation of the world is a relation characterised by affectional, as well as rational understanding of nature and the socio-cultural environment. For Dewey, art, like language, is inherently transactional. While language exists only when it is both spoken and heard, “the work of art is complete only when it works in the experience of others other than the one who created it.” Or, as Scott says: “The work of art works through embodying and communicating organised energies; it does more than lead to an experience it constitutes an immediate realisation of qualitative experience, which can be recreated in its general form by the attentive perceiver.” Therefore, the integration of ‘subject’ and ‘object’ in the experience of a work of

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87 Scott, Frontiers of Consciousness, 99.
89 Scott, Frontiers of Consciousness, 100.
91 Scott, Frontiers of Consciousness, 94.
92 Dewey, Art as Experience, 106.
93 Scott, Frontiers of Consciousness, 104.
art, the immersion in the energy field of the work represents a transactional unity. Scott observes that aesthetic form for Dewey does not merely concern the internal formal elements in an art object: it concerns the structure of the experiential field made possible by the work of art for the perceiver. The experiential field makes a certain scope possible while the perceiver of the work actualises these possibilities by his or her contributing attention and mental energies:

Experience is the result, the sign, and the reward of that interaction of organism and environment, which when it is carried to the full, is a transformation of interaction into participation and communication. Aesthetic experience is experience in its integrity and it is Dewey’s model for understanding all experience. By his account, the essential characteristic of aesthetic experience is this quality of original participation. In this way, it becomes the guide to properly understanding the participatory, that is, transactional, nature of all experience. The valuable contribution of the aesthetic, by Dewey’s account, is its ability to reveal the ‘dynamic organisation’ of experience. Dewey seems to be suggesting that through our dialogue with art we are also in dialogue with the nature of experience (life) itself. Works of art invite participation in what Scott describes as the higher densities of experience touched by artists and embodied in works of art. Without transaction of energies between a work of art and a perceiver, of ‘doing’ and ‘undergoing’ there is not perception, Dewey claims, but merely recognition. Perception involves the going-out of energy in order to receive, “We must summon energy and pitch it at a responsive key in order to take in.” Dewey’s concept of art’s moral function is not one of moralising — but of “teaching us” to be more perceptive — “to remove prejudices, do away with the scales that keep the eye from seeing, tear away the veils due to wont and custom, perfect the power to perceive.”

Dewey’s phases of inquiry

By Dewey’s account, inquiry is the intelligent reflection and contemplation of experience in the quest for conscious understanding, insight and knowledge. The aim of inquiry is the reconstruction of some indeterminate situation. He explains:

Inquiry is the controlled or directed transformation of an indeterminate situation into one that is so determinate in its distinctions and relations as

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94 Scott, Frontiers of Consciousness, 105.  
95 Dewey, Art as Experience, 22.  
96 Scott, Frontiers of Consciousness, 105.  
97 Dewey, Arts as Experience, 53.  
98 Dewey, Arts as Experience, 325.  
to convert the elements of the original situation into a unified whole.\textsuperscript{100} (emphasis original)

All situations are composed of the convergent interactions of events that include the inquirer as a participant, not as a spectator. For Dewey, confusion and disruption initiate a given line of inquiry, through observation of relevant phenomena and the formulation of a hypothesis to resolve the given perplexity, refining and testing that hypothesis through application and observation of its consequences, and the inference of a conclusion.\textsuperscript{101} Fairfield writes: “It is the nature of thought to arise from experience and [...] to return to it in order to provide illumination and to clear up the perplexities that it continually generates.”\textsuperscript{102} The task of the educator in Dewey’s words “is to protect the spirit of inquiry, to keep it from becoming blasé from over excitement, wooden from routine, fossilized through dogmatic instruction, or dissipated by random exercise upon trivial things.”\textsuperscript{103} The concept of inquiry is fundamental here; importantly it places the agent of the inquiry, a person seeking to understand a work of art, for example, in a different role. It challenges the conventional ‘positionality’ the museum ascribes to visitors in the experience of coming to know a work of art. It brings into question the pedagogical integrity of positioning those ‘encountering’ a work of art as passive, silent recipients of pre-rehearsed transmitted information.\textsuperscript{104} Thus, for Dewey, education is essentially a transition in our experience of ourselves and the world — requiring active inquiry of the problem at hand, a meaningful engagement with work of art, for example, through critical reflection and the acquisition of pertinent information — wherein the search for solutions rearranges our prior understanding.

The pedagogical content of Dewey’s experiential paradigm emerges from interaction, construction, and reconstruction of what experience produces in the different phases that structure experiential inquiry. Experiences felt as obstacles to interpreting or understanding a work of art initiate inquiry. They are positive and productive in stimulating and deepening engagement in the cycle of inquiry and potentially lead to deepened engagement. Dewey explains that we only have experience in the full sense if we are involved in an active phase of doing as well as a passive phase of undergoing — only when these phases are connected can we speak of meaningful experience.\textsuperscript{105} If these aspects are separated experience loses its vitality, it degenerates to a less meaningful routine or superficial experience. Connection between the active phase of doing and a passive phase of undergoing can only be achieved through reflection, experimentation, real problem solving, and the construction of solutions for problems that necessarily

\textsuperscript{101} Fairfield, \textit{Education After Dewey}, 44.
\textsuperscript{102} Fairfield, \textit{Education After Dewey}, 44.
\textsuperscript{103} John Dewey, \textit{How We Think}, LW: 8:1933 : 207.
\textsuperscript{104} Fairfield, \textit{Education After Dewey}, 5.
\textsuperscript{105} Garrison, Neubert and Reich, \textit{John Dewey's Philosophy of Education}, 12.
come from the participant viewers’ actual experience of a work of art in the first place. This is, significantly, not primarily from pre-established information or academic discourses, because if we only passively perceive a situation without experiencing the consequences in an emotional and reflective way, we will not seriously and sustainably reconstruct our habits of mind, nor develop dispositions to enable learning.

Dewey holds that the world and our experience is an inextricable mixture of the stable and the precarious. Dewey holds that the world and our experience is an inextricable mixture of the stable and the precarious. Learning is key to all meaningful experience; understood as an active process of meaning construction undertaken through five phases of inquiry by participants of the contextual field. Transformative learning takes place in the tension of the precarious aspect of experience, that which is unfamiliar, and the continuity of prior experience that has become incorporated as familiar. Garrison et al. avow that Dewey’s theory of experience represents an important cultural turn in philosophy, providing a perspective of knowledge as an instrument of culture. Inquiry does what habits alone cannot do: it constructs, and reconstructs habits and thus enables continuous growth.

Cognitive meaning construction makes experience intelligent and what Dewey calls “warranted assertion” of judgments are the products of inquiry — the goal of inquiry is always the reconstruction of some indeterminate situation. A work of art may confuse in our attempts to interpret it, and subsequently present a disruptive situation. Reconstructing an existential situation might require reconstructing the beliefs and values of the inquirer — for Dewey, inquiry is always value–laden. His reflective inquiry moves from ‘pre-reflective’, disrupted, affectively disturbing, doubtful situation to the ‘post-reflective’, functionally coordinated, unified situation. Dewey insists, “in inquiry, the existence that has become doubtful always undergoes reconstruction,” and all situations are comprised of the convergent interaction of events that include the inquirer as a participant and not as a spectator. Both experience and reality describe the contextual field.

Interpreting a work of art from any historical era can present museum visitors with a disruptive situation wherein habitual functions of perceiving, recognising, and imagining fail them. An interpretive community of participants, in a symmetrical relationship with a museum practitioner, start the cycle of inquiry from their own initial intuitive responses to the work. Participants of the ‘interpretive community’ each constructs their own meaning from their experience of the contextual situation for themselves. Generated by active

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110 Garrison, Neubert and Reich, John Dewey’s Philosophy of Education, 58.
interaction with the work of art, participants determine the situational ‘facts’ which are inevitably diverse in character and type. These include the physical characteristics of the museum, the artistic object of inquiry, the behaviour and perspectives of other participating interpreters. Positioning themselves affectively in relation to the work of art in order to interact sympathetically with it, members of the interpretive community work to discern qualitative meaning. As noted above, both experience and reality describe the contextual field.

Encountering a work of art from an interactive affective stance requires us to stop, to think, observe and remember in an attempt to co-ordinate our response. We need to consider what the work of art points to and what it can be taken to be indicative of. As Dewey argues, we feel such situations before we think about them and the feeling accompanies the thinking — we start with a felt situation, not yet a problem. Dewey explains: “Intuition precedes conception and goes deeper” and the “intuition signifies the realisation of a persuasive quality [...] [while] [r]eflection and rational elaboration spring from and make explicit a prior intuition.”

The central premise of Dewey’s contextualism is that the situational field is composed of events that entails active intellectual agency and the naming and sign-process of language in an organised framework of facts generated by the transactional relationship between the event of the situation and the perceiving subjects. Contextualism implies that experiential inquiry of a work of art is galvanised by positioning the perceiver herself or himself at the standpoint of experience, which involves her or his participation with the object of perception, in connection with the contextual whole, not as an isolated spectator. Growth and new experiences arise through active exploration of the questions that the work might present, the attempt to conceptualise and articulate what the experiential situation raises and its possible resolution.

Bringing people to an appreciative and meaningful engagement with works of art is a complex matter. A significant barrier to transformative pedagogical outcomes in art museums is programming structured solely by a one-way delivery of information about works of art. Information is educative if it grows naturally out of some question advanced by an inquirer, and that it increases the efficacy of his or her familiarity with the object of inquiry or deepens meaning. Dewey’s reconstructive function of inquiry, that is, thought generated by doubt or confusion that begins inquiry, is abrogated by the museum expert who points out conventional problems or simply relates established facts. Take for example, a situation where pre-established knowledge pertaining to a work of art around which a group of museum visitors is gathered, ‘listening’ attentively, and not invited to a participatory role, the opportunity for their intuitions to aid their

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112 Garrison, Neubert and Reich, John Dewey’s Philosophy of Education, 80.
conceptualisation of the object in question is not enacted. Enacting pedagogical praxis in the art museum participants are crucially regarded as collaborators in posing of questions and making of meaning, as fellow discussants and inquirers in the conversation that is their culture. We use knowledge already in our possession to work out what a work of art might be about, to explore possible solutions, formulate new ideas, collect data, and engage experimental speculation to gain some ideas concerning the work in question.

In reflective thought, Dewey writes, “suggestions just pop into our heads.”113 These are the conditions and primary material of logical ideas. This second phase of Dewey’s reconstructive inquiry is ‘intellectualisation.’114 Dewey holds that in every case where reflection actively ensues, there is a process of intellectualising what at first is an emotional quality of the whole situation. Observation and fact gathering transform the experiential situation into a cognitively graspable one where the issues it presents for solution can be extracted and conceptualised by inquirers. Participants of the interpretive community must own the issues presented through their own interactive experience. Here, at this phase of inquiry lecturing or the provision of historical or other knowledge pertinent to the inquiry will help participant interpreters intellectualise the contextual situation. Facts are important to support the process of inquiry but they are not in Dewey’s terms knowledge and understanding, or the aim of education.115 In accord with his overall concept of experience Dewey’s pragmatic understanding of education axiomatically holds that “[e]very educative process should begin with doing something; and the necessary training of sense perception, memory, imagination and judgment should grow out of the conditions and needs of what is being done.”116 (emphasis in original)

Gadamer writes in Truth and Method, that understanding is expressed in language, initiated by inquiry and continuous positing of questions and answers, in the never-ending process of finding words to communicate what we think, feel and see.117 Conversation is the process of coming to an understanding. Shared interpretation broadens the scope of museum pedagogy as part of a larger hermeneutic process. Congruently, Dewey argues that learning situations should be shared activities requiring communication, inherently significant and worthwhile for those participating. It is pedagogically important that thoughts and ideas constructed and reconstructed in the inquiry process are shared through conversation. Dewey writes that through communication situations or events readapt to “the requirements of conversation [...] Events turn into objects, things with a meaning.”118 To the extent that it is mutual, conversation involves

114 Dewey, How We Think, LW: 8: 1933: 201.
participation and sharing, and communication, it is ‘educative’. Through the process of communication, events change from the level of the external or unfamiliar to that of revealed and clear meanings. Observation, facts, data, refer to what exists; they are existential, while hypotheses, concepts or ideas are abstract, formal and logical, they are essences that have been extracted through prior or present inquiry.\footnote{Garrison, Neubert and Reich, \textit{John Dewey’s Philosophy of Education}, 66.} They can be reflected upon, contextualised and scrutinised in new ways, seen from new perspectives, shared by a community of understanding. We cannot educate directly, Dewey argues, “but indirectly by means of the environment”\footnote{Garrison, Neubert and Reich, \textit{John Dewey’s Philosophy of Education}, 78.} which we shape. Communication is a fundamental component of such situations; it is the process of creating participation and common understanding.\footnote{Dewey, \textit{Art as Experience}, 244.} In the example sketched above of a community of inquiry encountering a work of art in the museum, communication is an essential component of the experiential pedagogy that structures the emergent properties of experience; it creates participation, and the ground for common understanding.

A critical aspect of Dewey’s theory of experiential reconstruction is the power to develop and grow; we reconstruct ourselves by learning. This is the pedagogical outcome of Dewey’s phases of reflective inquiry. It is the experience whereby we reconstruct our habits of action, and thereby our minds, selves, society, institutions and cultural practices.\footnote{Garrison, Neubert and Reich, \textit{John Dewey’s Philosophy of Education}, 68.} The consequence of Dewey’s theory of educative reconstruction through critical inquiry can be understood as “renewal” or “re-creation.”\footnote{Dewey, \textit{Democracy and Education}, MW :9: 1916: 82.} For Dewey when we act we express the present self — however the consequences of our acts return to affect us in the future, so we also form the future self.\footnote{Garrison, Neubert and Reich, \textit{John Dewey’s Philosophy of Education}, 47.} Habits include the formation not only of intellectual dispositions to act but also emotional attitudes, and sensitivities as well as interests. The final phase of Dewey’s cycle of inquiry follows the formulation of logical hypotheses to determine conceptual possibilities and involves testing the implications of conclusions inferred.

The pedagogical action and content of Dewey’s experiential situations can be elucidated in the setting of an art museum by analysing differences between information-based and experienced-based museum programs. As touched on above, information-based programs frequently provide exposure to works of art without providing opportunity for personal engagement by those participating in the process, thereby limiting inquiry of them. Misrecognition of the intellectual agency of the viewing subject in the inquiry of a work of art often involves viewers’ listening to an expert rehearsing established knowledge about a work of art. By Dewey’s account, this modality is not meaningful enough to
deeply engage the viewers’ own felt intuition and thinking; “arresting or distorting the growth of further experience.”125 The distinction between these two program modalities is characterised by Dewey’s conception of experience that necessarily comprises both *experiencing* as well as the *experienced*. Dewey distinguishes between primary experience and secondary, or reflective, experience. Primary experience is not yet reflective: it becomes reflective if we ourselves define or perceive the experiential situation as problematic. This implies that we need to respond to the experience of the object of our inquiry intuitively and intellectually in order to initiate engaged inquiry. For example, an initial encounter with a work to paraphrase Foucault, can be a fundamentally confusing and puzzling thing to be inquired into. If we think back to T.J. Clark’s experience of Poussin’s *Landscape with a Man Killed by a Snake* discussed in Chapter Two, his initial observation of the visual phenomena of the painting was positively disruptive and thus instigated and drove a given line of inquiry. Primary pre-reflective intuitions, through the process of reflection are constructed and conceptual ideas mediated by the work, reconstructed as secondary experience through the process of experimental inquiry, in an attempt to resolve the work’s given perplexity. We could learn about the work from a museum expert, from others telling us about it, however, although reflective secondary experience helps us process our primary experience of the work of art, relying solely on the secondary experience of others risks us loosing vital contact with our world through primary encounters. Such connection is achieved through experimentation, the construction of solutions that arise from the participants’ experiences in the first place. Dewey’s concept of experiential situations means it is crucial that participants have sufficient opportunities to actively use cultural resources and to construct their own learning processes, in cooperation with others. Otherwise, our experience will remain superficial and will not contribute much to growth or learning. The accent of Dewey’s philosophy on experience, participation, and thinking requires museum educators to understand the nature and purpose of education in the larger context of human experience. It cannot be denied that a working knowledge of art theory or history can substantially enhance our encounters with art objects of all sorts. Dewey does not deny this, on the contrary, he appreciates the role that art as a developing historical practice plays in interpretation. Dewey’s philosophy endorses shared experiences and practices, he wants to direct us toward more and better aesthetic experiences, not legislating as to what is, and what is not a ‘genuine’ work of art. Nor does he want to focus on issues of the identity of art objects to virtual exclusion of phenomenological considerations. As Granger argues, it is crucial to Dewey that the parameters of art are neither

definitely marked off within the aesthetic dimension of lived experience, nor limited to certain prescribed institutional or cultural contexts.\textsuperscript{126}

Kant’s idea of the capacity of aesthetic reflective judgment to augment our communicability and sociability is captured in Dewey’s notion of community of inquiry. As a pragmatist, John Dewey was interested in the integrity of art, culture and everyday experience. Dewey developed pragmatism as a theory of inquiry, placing emphasis, like Gadamer, on the role of audience as integral part of a work of art, as more that a passive recipient. Dewey moved away from Kant’s transcendental approach to aesthetics that emphasised the unique character of art and the disinterested nature of aesthetic experience. For Dewey, works of art do not afford a unique kind of experience: the problem he poses is “recovering the continuity of aesthetic experience with normal processes of living.”\textsuperscript{127} For him, an experience is aesthetic when it is fully undergone, this means that experience is engaged in fully, with attention and reflection.\textsuperscript{128} This involves thinking of experience as an \textit{event}, with a beginning and end. An aesthetic experience for Dewey and Kant involves externalising ideas, which in consequence become an object for critique and reflection, an occasion for further insight and \textit{in commons} understanding.\textsuperscript{129}

\textbf{Art as experience}

A principal theme of Dewey’s late philosophical work, \textit{Art as Experience}, endeavours to change how we think and talk about art and its value in human experience. The persuasiveness of Dewey’s consideration of the purpose of art lies within his account of the continuity of art and everyday experience. Dewey’s thesis in \textit{Art as Experience} includes many philosophical, psychological and sociocultural dimensions.\textsuperscript{130} Its central thrust, at a broad level, is the idea that in learning to make more of everyday experiences in an imaginative and sensitive manner, we liberate the potential meaning of things. When we are able to achieve this, Dewey claims our experiences are prone to possess a holistic integrity lacking in our quotidian lives. Such an enhanced sense of attunement with people and things, “nourishes the human \textit{erōs}.”\textsuperscript{131} That is to say, it nurtures the inherent need for human beings to live a life of expanded meaning and value.

\textsuperscript{126}David A. Granger, \textit{John Dewey, Robert Persig and the Art of Living: Revisioning Aesthetic Education}, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 112.
\textsuperscript{127}Dewey, \textit{Art as Experience}, 10.
\textsuperscript{128}Dewey, \textit{Art as Experience}, 22.
\textsuperscript{129}Jennifer A. McMahon, \textit{Art and Ethics in a Material World}, 49.
\textsuperscript{130}Granger, \textit{John Dewey, Robert Persig and the Art of Living}, 7.
A shared dialogical inquiry practice to investigate a work of art in the museum enables a collective situation to emerge in which something genuine may happen through the public thinking of those who constitute the ‘interpretive community’. Decentralising canonical problems and validated answers, the learning situation willingly becomes uncertain, and receptive to thought. Dewey’s method of inquiry replaces the quest for absolute certainty by cognitive means, knowing cannot be separated from the active agency of the human inquirer as *knowing* is an emergent property of interpretative experience. However, this does not mean that an individual’s ‘own’ meaning of a work of art is self-generated or autonomously created; rather, it is the consequence of a complex series of interactions and inter-subjective relations. In the interest of generating a creative learning situation receptive to thought, canonical concepts are explained and the arguments of canonical authority are then explored as they arise in the inquiry, through dialogue, which potentially redefines positions held by educator and participants in more equal terms. Experiential inquiry seeks to create a peculiar experience of commonality or togetherness and a specific social productivity that invites all participants to think in an unbounded mode, beyond the cultural clichés or personal inhibitions. Such an approach aims to re-articulate pedagogical epistemologies that frame educative experiences by emphasising interactivity between art and audiences, opening the space for experiential inquiry and dialogue. In Deweyan terms, this is an approach that recognises the centrality of dialogue in activating the process of inquiry.

Similarities between Dewey’s theory of inquiry and contemporary art sociologist Rudi Laermans’ notion of ‘doing theory’ are helpful in further articulating an alternative, more interactive, form of learning with works of art in the museum. Laermans, like Dewey, emphasises the experiential encounter with a work of art and the consequent shift between theoretical concepts and insights and the participant’s own co-thinking. Structured as an open dialogical practice, a kind of ‘thinking-aloud-together’, which Laermans describes as a form of ‘pedagogical commonalism’, enables participants to find new voices and to then voice them. Initially, the voices might represent a traditional approach, the presentation of abstract concepts relative to the work that is the focus of inquiry. However, there emerges an unplanned being in-common animated by the dialogue taking place, which precipitates seemingly unimportant remarks and momentarily transforms the space of education into a heterotopia. Similarly, Dewey’s theory of inquiry asks for the willingness to give in to an *uncontrollable receptivity* of thought that profoundly questions everything that seems normal, obvious, or received.

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133 Laermans, “Teaching Theory and the Art of Not-Knowing,” 64.
134 Laermans, “Teaching Theory and the Art of Not-Knowing,” 64.
135 Laermans, “Teaching Theory and the Art of Not-Knowing,” 68.
136 Laermans, “Teaching Theory and the Art of Not-Knowing,” 68
have an educative experience in the Deweyan sense, participants must encounter the existential process of an emerging problematic that involves reconstructing their environment.\(^{138}\) Like any subject of study, coming to know and understand a work of art, for Dewey, is a property that emerges from the process of inquiry; art is a naturalised form of knowing and understanding, and all knowing and meaning-making is a form of creative action because it is grounded in active productive inquiry. For him, the making of art is the most explicit representation of the full arc of his concept of an experience of inquiry, of expressing the affective non-cognitive dimension of lived experience. Objects of inquiry and objects of making exist within and are interrelated to particular environments: physical, social, cultural and emotional. The tool of inquiry needs to be given to museum visitors through a process they themselves must undergo; the experience of inquiry enables the tool to become meaningful. While factual content plays a role in educative inquiry, the goal is not to transmit content. More exactly, the aim is to expand the capacity for meaning-making via the development or cultivation of habits of inquiry. In Dewey’s account, inquiry moves toward the creation of meaning because facts and ideas are operational; they are not complete in and of themselves, but are inter-subjective and form part of the distributed relationships that exist in experience.\(^{139}\) As he states, “the operative force of both ideas and facts is thus practically recognized in the degree to which they are connected with experiment.”\(^{140}\)

Perceiving a work of art in the museum a person may realise she is becoming interested in matters that have not previously engaged her. She subsequently takes them up in a more personal way: private experiences are reconsidered, individual views become open to revision, discussed concepts or abstract ideas are thought through. From a Deweyan perspective ‘interest’ is conceived in its action-oriented form and is seen as a means to personal experiencing of the content of a work of art. What arises in this process and the emergent situation is not just an understanding of what is seen, felt, and thought in the encounter with art, but a transformation of one’s self and subjectivity. A central feature of Dewey’s empirical philosophy is the increased valuation of affective, (or what he terms ‘qualitative’) mode of understanding. Dewey reconstructs the idea of ‘experience’ as a framework of relations embedded with meaning, an emergent consciousness which connects individual human subjects to qualitative meaning and other human beings.\(^{141}\) Experience and reality are terms in Dewey’s philosophic scheme which describe a contextual field from differing points of

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\(^{138}\) Stoller, Knowing and Learning as Creative Action, 63.

\(^{139}\) Stoller, Knowing and Learning as Creative Action, 65-66.


\(^{141}\) Scott, Frontiers of Consciousness, 6.
view. The field itself, the ‘situation’ or ‘context’ is “a structural integer that cannot be arbitrarily divided into subjective and objective parts.”¹⁴²

Dewey’s work phenomenologically shifts the grounds of inquiry into the concrete existential phenomena of understanding from epistemology to ontology.¹⁴³ He would concur with Gadamer’s assertion that the dialectic of experiential inquiry has its proper fulfilment not in definite knowledge, but in the openness of experience that is made possible by experience itself.¹⁴⁴ Broadly conceived, education for Dewey at all levels operates on a model of experiential inquiry, he emphasises the centrality of education to our existence as human beings. In the framework of the naturalistic foundation of his philosophy Dewey’s conception of experience understands the live creature (acculturated organism) and the environment as integrally linked in transactional relations as phases of a single experiential configuration. Human experience is a continual process of acting and reacting, synthesizing and transforming an environment. It is the nature of human experience, Dewey believed, to search for a resolution to the complexities with which we are confronted, whether this be coming to understand a work of art or an everyday life problem.

In Dewey’s schema the value of works of art is the instruction they add to our lives by enhancing powers and methods of intuition. To the degree that the agencies of feeling and thought fuse together, “sense material becomes pregnant with meaning” such that we achieve what Dewey terms “esthetic experience,” which funds the means and the media for an everyday poetics of living.¹⁴⁵ He argues that artists have sensitivity to the conceptually vague yet ontologically significant qualities that govern the contexts of every experience by intuitive or affectional modes of knowing.¹⁴⁶ Dewey affirms the metaphorical dimension of art when he writes that it has always been the function of art to,

break through the crust of conventionalised and routine consciousness [...] artists have always been the real purveyors of news, for it is not the outward happening in itself which is new, but the kindling by it of emotion, perception and appreciation.”¹⁴⁷

For Dewey, the way we think and act with art and the aesthetic suffers immeasurably when cognitive meanings are granted a monopoly in experience; we eschew the immediate enrichment of experience for more exclusively instrumental ends if we attend only to extrinsic meanings or values.¹⁴⁸ For him, experience will fail to become art whenever intrinsic meanings and values are

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¹⁴⁶ Scott, *Frontiers of Consciousness*. 98
not allowed to emerge and develop in a perceptual and satisfactory way. The contribution of art and aesthetics is therefore the heightened awareness of perceptual sensitivity that accompany “imaginative vision.” He writes that art often furnishes a sense of possibilities for new meaning and values “that are unrealised and might be realised,” aesthetic experience is inherently revelatory in character. It acquires this property by organising experience around our perceptions of the qualitative uniqueness of some object or situation. With this reconstructive activity a new dimension of the meaning of the human encounter with the world finds expression. The customary associations that seemed inseparable from the object or situation, prescribing its very nature and possibilities are remade framing its expressive qualities in a dramatic and novel way. This contextualisation Dewey contends is how the ‘arts’ work in experience. He writes:

The conception that objects have fixed and unalterable values are precisely the prejudice from which art emancipates us. The intrinsic qualities of things come out with startling vigor and freshness just because conventional associations are removed." It could be argued, Granger suggests, that this re-presentation is especially pronounced with new movements in the arts. In conceiving original media and/or subject matter art often demonstrates a profound capacity to express something new in experience, some new context and mode of interaction between self and world.

In an aesthetic experience a person’s relationship with the world is transformed. We come to see other people, or our self, in new ways and in the new aspect of the world we find new meaning, and value this new perspective. Therefore, aesthetic experience has the capacity, Dewey writes,

to introduce us into a world beyond this world which is nevertheless the deeper reality of the world in which we live in our ordinary experiences. We are carried out beyond ourselves to find ourselves.

Art as experience “restores continuity between the refined and intensified forms of experience that are works of art and everyday events [...] that are universally recognised to constitute experience.” Art gives us access to a form of freedom; Dewey tells us the “realm of meanings is wider than that of true-and-false meanings; it is more urgent and more fertile [...] [Aesthetic] meanings, moral

149 Granger, John Dewey, Robert Persig and the Art of Living, 102.
150 Dewey, Art as Experience, 345.
151 Dewey, Art as Experience, 346.
152 Dewey, Art as Experience, 95.
153 Granger, John Dewey, Robert Persig and the Art of Living, 104.
154 Dewey, Art as Experience, 199.
155 Dewey, Art as Experience, 3.
meanings, a large part of the goods of life are matters of richness and freedom of meanings to which truth and falsity as such are irrelevant.¹⁵⁶

Culture, for Dewey, is essential to education and nature and culture are relational to each other, existing as the tensional relationship in which human living and its potential take place.¹⁵⁷ Dewey acknowledges that taste is not simply given by nature but represents an aesthetic experience rooted in culture:

The principles of taste are the product of the reflective analysis of the understanding as it goes over the action of aesthetic feeling, and attempts to discover the lines along which the later spontaneously expresses itself. [...] It follows that taste is something individual in its nature, depending upon the aesthetic capacity and culture of the one exercising it.¹⁵⁸

Culture consists of discursive fields of symbolic practices where meanings are constructed, articulated and communicated between participants. Questioning and experimenting by an individual person encountering a work of art in the museum is rooted in shared cultural pre-understandings which implies that pre-reflective and critical analysis, constructed and reconstructed solutions attained are expressions of cultural viability.¹⁵⁹ This implies that reflections, constructions and reconstructions, experiments and solutions involved in the processes of inquiry concerning a work of art ‘fit’ and make sense within a given frame of a particular interpretative community. For interactive constructivism, and Dewey, the interpretive community in which a person partakes always informs the approach to the object of inquiry — other interpretive communities may have different experiences and construct different interpretations. Dewey uses the term warranted assertion, in preference to belief or knowledge as he argues that it "designates a potentiality rather than an actuality [and] involves recognition that [...] conclusions of special inquiries are parts of an enterprise that is continually renewed."¹⁶⁰ Dewey’s notion of fallibilism points to the temporal and experimental character of truth and claims that any validity claim can be challenged and modified; hence inquiry is open to correction. Essentially fallibilism implies open mindedness and a willingness to learn from others.¹⁶¹ By Dewey’s account, there can be no escape from the plurality of traditions and perspectives, which means taking one’s fallibility seriously, resolving that, as Bernstein writes, “despite our commitments and beliefs we are willing to listen to others without denying or suppressing the otherness of the other.”¹⁶² This

¹⁵⁷ Garrison, Neubert and Reich, John Dewey’s Philosophy of Education, xii.
¹⁶² Bernstein, “The Pragmatic Roots of Cultural Pluralism.”
implies a willingness to enlarge our horizons in and through the encounter with others.

The concept of communication is the process that links Dewey’s theory of culture and education whereby communication is the process of creating participation, of making common what had been isolated and singular; and part of the miracle it achieves is that, in being communicated, the conveyance of meaning gives body and definiteness to the experience of the one who utters as well as that of those who listen.”

Dewey’s ontology implies that knowing and learning are dyadic concepts, which are inter-subjectively brought into being by inherently creative acts. Habits, which produce meaning come about in the transaction of the acculturated organism and environment; a sociocultural environment in which we have the ability to react to the meaning and behaviour of fellow human beings.

A consequence of understanding education in terms of practical inter-subjectivity is the acknowledgement that education is a process of acculturation. As Biesta explains, understanding education in terms of practical inter-subjectivity means that pedagogical action is not a one-way process in which “meaning is transferred from one (already acculturated) organism to another (not yet acculturated) organism, but as a co-constructive process, a process in which both participating organisms play an active role and in which meaning is not transferred but produced.” It entails that pedagogical action is thought of as a co-construction process in which meaning is produced, as purposeful social cooperation. Biesta points out that the initiating point of this process — the inquiry — lies in the inter-subjective contextual field in which inquirers participate, “a field which is at the same time established by the inter-subjective cooperation.” Thus, the meaning and content of education is the accomplishment of all the cooperating participants and not as something fixed that has to be transferred.

Learning in Dewey’s philosophic framework is used in its broadest sense, encompassing cognitive, affective and embodied processes. Learning is the key to all meaningful experience provided that with Dewey we understand learning as an active process of construction of meanings by learners themselves. Learning is primarily an activity that arises from the personal experience of grappling with problems. Dewey’s theory of inquiry brings to the fore important philosophical and pedagogical insights for reconceptualising art museum...
pedagogy that potentially induces viewers to experience a work of art in a vital and personal way. Through its concrete properties the art object can stimulate new insights and new understandings. It can act as a catalyst to express or clarify thoughts or feelings already present in the perceiver’s experience, while also enabling the perception of new details and insights. It is crucial that the inherent character of the work of art have influence in the interpretive process. The pedagogical praxis of the museum must recognise that the tools of inquiry only become meaningful if viewers themselves undergo an experience of inquiry, which breathes life into the process. As Stoller asserts,

[...] education occurs when individuals become partners in conjoined and cooperative activity so they are emotionally bound to the emerging situation. Only then can they understand the consequences of their action and, as a result have a shared stake in the resolution of a problematic situation.\textsuperscript{169}

Dewey’s concept of positive perplexity in the experience of encountering a work of art in the museum, potentially becomes a self-motivational inquiry by the perceiving subject that begins with a ‘discovered’ problematical situation; a question presented by the work of art, or an idea that becomes relevant precisely because it presents as perplexing and requires active reflection.\textsuperscript{170} Dewey distinguishes between perception and recognition as a way of demonstrating access to art’s qualitative modality.\textsuperscript{171} Recognition occurs when we experience a thing and interpret it only as something we already know. The act of recognition may be conscious or unconscious, may or may not cause pleasure, may or may not restore balance; it does not produce a new organisation of feeling, attention, or intentions.\textsuperscript{172} We often relate to objects through recognition simply because of habituation, or because we are unable to give our full attention to all the information received from the environment. Perception, on the other hand, occurs when we experience a thing and realise its own inherent character.\textsuperscript{173} In our perception of a work of art it imposes certain qualities on us that create new insights, and according to Dewey’s philosophy, this is what makes any experience aesthetic. Perceptual reception of a work of art involves active engagement, criticality, and creative inquiry, so that its qualities may modify previously formed habits or interpretive associations. In perception, the objective qualities of objects are intrinsic to our experience whereas in recognition they are extrinsic.\textsuperscript{174} It is Dewey’s claim that cognition plays only a small part in the overall structure of an experience. While it has cognitive phases, inquiry includes both a felt beginning and ending; it is mostly guided by intuited

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\item \textsuperscript{169} Stoller, Knowing and Learning as Creative Action, 73.
\item \textsuperscript{170} Hennes, “Rethinking the Visitor Experience,” 116.
\item \textsuperscript{172} Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, The Meaning of Things, 44.
\item \textsuperscript{173} Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, The Meaning of Things, 44.
\item \textsuperscript{174} Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, The Meaning of Things, 181.
\end{itemize}
‘feel’ of emerging situations and is structured by embodied habits. 

Dewey believes that exemplary instances of an experience are what the arts provide; although it is axiomatic to Dewey’s philosophy of experience that the aesthetic is not restricted to art. Dewey is critical of the art museum because he sees the institutional framing of art as a distancing agent between the meaning of art and everyday common experience. He writes:

When artistic objects are separated from both conditions of origin and operation in experience, a wall is built around them that renders almost opaque their general significance, with which esthetic theory deals.

It is his claim that in the idea of art we find the moment in which human alienation is overcome and our need for the experience of meaning and value is satisfied. The value of experiences of works of art lies in interactive engagement, recreating and responding productively to what is given, not as a passive spectator. The experience of art Dewey values is a full embodied one, not something that can be expressed in narratives of art historical development. I concur with Dewey’s claim that attending to the objecthood of art to the virtual exclusion of aesthetic experience has evident limitations. As Dewey argues, privileging the cognitive obviates the possibility of immediately 'had' or felt meanings. For Dewey,

[art] has the faculty of enhancing and concentrating [the] union of [sense] quality and meaning in a way which vivifies both. Instead of cancelling a separation between sense and meaning (asserted to be psychologically normal), it exemplifies in an accentuated and perfected manner the union characteristic of many other experiences, through finding the exact qualitative media that fuse most completely with what is to be expressed.

Correspondingly, Shusterman argues that the privileging of objecthood makes more or less superfluous the non-cognitive dimension of art (the phenomenological) by admitting only cognitive or symbolic meanings (the semantic). The entire framework of Dewey’s philosophy underscores the impossibility of understanding art completely by merely processing aspects of cognitive or symbolic meanings in an art world context.

Dewey approaches an experience of art as a responsive activity, letting the work direct us in the exercise of our knowledge and imagination. He develops a

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175 Stoller, Knowing and Learning as Creative Action, 61.
176 Dewey, Art as Experience, 6.
177 Dewey, Art as Experience, 3.
178 Dewey, Art as Experience, 10.
180 Dewey, Art as Experience, 264.
construct of an experience that refers to a special class of experience, including those which are particularly meaningful, important, and aesthetic. In Dewey’s aesthetic philosophy, art is understood in its own terms with emphasis on the relation of perceptual response to meaning-making processes. He seeks to reposition the experience of art into the realm of ordinary life and he claims that these art-centred experiences are educative. He emphasises the importance of the learner’s participation in the formation of purposes that direct his or her activities in the learning process. Dewey understands ‘aesthetic’ in the broadest sense. For him, the aesthetic dimension is an important aspect of how we relate to the world. He does not limit aesthetic experience to art but considers it a potential element of all experience.¹⁸²

Nor is Dewey’s aesthetic experience an interiorised ‘aesthetic differentiation’ or ‘aesthetic consciousness’ but the final and consummatory phase of any experience that flows from common, shared and public life. He states:

> Experience in the degree to which it is experience is heightened vitality. Instead of signifying being shut up in one’s own private feelings and sensations, it signifies active and alert commerce with the world; at its height it signifies complete interpenetration of self and the world of objects and events [...] Because experience is the fulfilment of an organism in its struggles and achievements in a world of things, it is art in the germ.¹⁸³

The educative import of art is a consistent and strong theme throughout Dewey’s philosophy. In this chapter my purpose has been to elucidate aspects of his theory of experiential situations toward articulating a felicitous pedagogical praxis in the contemporary educational context of the art museum. I have argued that Dewey’s notion of reflective education, articulated in his theory of inquiry, his aesthetic and his experiential philosophy, afford generative ground on which to enact pedagogical praxis that promotes meaningful experiential transaction between people and works of art. Such praxis both recognises and seeks to instigate a process of deeper inquiry of works of art recognising the affectional and the rational in experience and education.

¹⁸³ Dewey, Art as Experience, 19.
Chapter Five

Emancipating the spectator into a participator

[T] here is a shift of focus towards reconnecting with the visitor by designing more personally meaningful exhibitions – [an] augmentation of the museum as a participant in a dialogue with the visitor [...] a new culture of museum – making that accepts multiple dialogues co-occurring in a place, and one where active debate can occur between an institution, its spaces, and the users who make the space relevant to their lives.

Jana Macalik, John Fraser and Kelly McKinley ¹

The object of art also possesses a subjecthood, in the sense of an agency distinct from the artist who made it – an agency that compels viewers to respond in certain ways.

Michael Ann Holly ²

The development of man’s capacity for feeling is, therefore, the more urgent need of our age, not merely because it can be a means of making better insights effective for living, but precisely because it provides the impulse for bettering our insights.

Friedrich Schiller ³

Audience participation is a current subject of exploration in museum discourse and practice principally motivated to achieve ‘cultural access’ and ‘social inclusion’. Responsive to contemporary research on the relational ordering between museum visitors and cultural material, this thesis explores ways in which the pedagogical scheme of the art museum that brings people and works of art to an encounter might be re-envisioned. It raises questions concerning what it means to take part in culture beyond the audience function as recipient of a planned process of cultural reception traditionally ascribed by the museum’s pedagogical and interpretative strategies.

Art historian and cultural theorist Irit Rogoff argues for the need to shift audience participation in a way that transgresses the binary of actors and spectators; where being a spectator means being passive, where looking is conceived as the opposite of action. Rogoff argues that when ‘art’ becomes an open interconnective field then the potential to engage with it as a form of cultural participation — rather than as a form of either reification, representation, or contemplative edification — comes into being.4

As noted in Chapter Three, the museum might be seen as cultural borderland, where different events and practices are possible, “where a language of possibilities is a potential and where diverse groups and sub-groups, cultures and sub-cultures may push against and permeate the allegedly unproblematic and homogeneous borders of dominant cultural practices.”5 A vital aspect for rethinking the relationship of the museum to its audiences lies in questions of equality, what counts as knowledge, how it might be known, and who produces it. It entails understanding participation differently and reformulating the conditions that determine audience ‘positionality’.

The philosophical writing of Jacques Rancière provides a critical contemporary reference point in current debates concerning institutional frameworks and practices that determine the ways in which individuals and communities participate; what it means to participate in cultural practices. Rancière’s work links educational thought with political, historical, and aesthetic ‘interventions’. He seeks to rehabilitate learning and looking as an activity, arguing that it necessarily involves the redistribution of allotted roles, customary expectations, and established identities.

The purpose of this chapter is to analyse and review aspects of Rancière’s work to determine the implication of his ideas of equality, intellectual emancipation, and active spectatorship for rethinking audience participation in the art museum. A key thread running through Rancière’s work is the prospect of individual agency, the desirability for individuals to think and act for themselves, predicated upon a sense of the capacity of each and every individual.

In *The Emancipated Spectator*6 Rancière argues that spectators are ‘active’:

> Emancipation begins when we challenge the opposition between viewing and acting [...] It begins when we understand that viewing is also an action that confirms or transforms the distribution of positions. The spectator also acts, like the pupil or the scholar. She observes, selects,

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compares, interprets. She links what she sees to a host of other things [...] in other kinds of places. She composes her own poem with the elements of the poem before her.\footnote{Rancière, The Emancipated Spectator, 17.}

What is felt or understood by the viewer in encountering a work of art is acted on and known only by connecting it with what the viewer has already seen and spoken, done and dreamt, or experienced.\footnote{Rancière, The Emancipated Spectator, 13.} She participates in the performative field or contextual situation of what she encounters by refashioning it in her own way, as a distant spectator and active interpreter of what is in front of her. In this notion there is a necessary distance between the idea of the artist and the sensation or comprehension of the viewer; a third thing which Rancière suggests subsists between them, “excluding any uniform transmission.”\footnote{Rancière, The Emancipated Spectator, 14-15.} For Rancière spectatorship is not effect-free. His agenda is to replace a relatively detached looking with more overt forms of engagement with art; the emancipated spectator is someone who is involved, a concept which raises questions concerning agency and participation in the contextual situation of a work of art.\footnote{Rancière, The Emancipated Spectator, 19.} Rancière reconfigures the spectator as already an actor in her own story, he argues that we learn and teach, act and know as spectators, who all the time are linking what we see to what we have seen and said, done and dreamed.\footnote{Rancière, The Emancipated Spectator, 17.}

The first section of the chapter explores the philosophical writing of Rancière to elucidate his perspective on the politics and practices of participation. I draw on Rancière’s conception of emancipation and intellectual equality to elucidate issues pertaining to human agency in the pedagogical and mediatic processes of the art museum. For Rancière, it is in the power of associating and disassociating that the emancipation of each of us as spectator resides. He maintains that everywhere there are starting points, intersections and junctions that enable us to learn something new if we refuse: first, radical distance, secondly the distribution of roles, and thirdly the boundaries of territories.\footnote{Rancière, The Emancipated Spectator, 13.} Rancière enjoins us to recognise the knowledge at work in the ignoramus and the activity peculiar to the spectator.


\footnote{Rancière, The Emancipated Spectator, 13.}
[W]hen we understand [...] the relations between saying, seeing and doing themselves belong to the structure of domination and subjection. It begins when we understand that viewing is also an action that confirms and transforms this distribution of positions.13

Rancière extols participation rather than spectating, acting rather than detached looking. His concern is with the political aspects of spectating by way of the spectator having a place, a position, and knowing what that place can mean and can be.14 The subjectivity of the passive spectator is, for Rancière, the site of a fundamental inequality: that is to say, the idea of passivity presumes a smooth communication (a direct transmission) of media and message. Emancipation from this inequality of transmission comes when the subjectivity of spectatorship is disfigured, and then reconfigured, as an attentive looking that actively observes, selects, compares and interprets.15

I give an account of Rancière’s regimes of art, that is, art’s theoretical framing and historical trajectory, and attendant modes of reception, to further elucidate art’s presentation and interpretation in the museum. Rancière formulates three regimes of art that show how modes of perception and affect, and forms of interpretation defining a paradigm of art, take shape.16 The conceptual matrix of the regimes of the arts that Rancière defines, articulates the particular ways in which a given period conceives of the character and logic of artistic representation. It is the aesthetic regime of art that has framed and impacted the last two hundred years of artistic production that is the main focus of discussion. It is only in this egalitarian regime that art is identified in the singular, and in which the public art museum emerges and the term aesthetics is introduced into the philosophical lexicon.

In the second section of the chapter I focus on the work of cultural theorist Mieke Bal, in particular her practical museum interventions and theoretical reframing of the museum’s conceptualization of its public as an undifferentiated mass. Bal’s cultural analytic is premised on an understanding of viewing positions as asymmetrical and entangled with the museum’s relationships of power and dominance.17 Bal’s approach characterises the basic positions involved in the museum’s exhibitionary scheme as ‘persons’ in a discourse, where the first person is the one ‘speaking’, the second person is the audience who is ‘talked to’ and ‘listening’, and the third person is the, present and not present, work of art.

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16 Rancière, Aisthesis, xi.
which is ‘talked about.’ Bal brings into view the ethical implications of spectator agency and ‘positionality’ in the expository address of the museum, proposing a transformation of the museum’s relationship to its publics by putting audience into practice. Rancière and Bal hold that the interpretation of, and attention to, works of art are not conditional primarily on access to disciplinary authoritative knowledge; effort, desire and will are required to be attentive toward something. Attention allows the opportunity to be in the presence of something, which, as Rancière states, “opens a space of a new consciousness, of an overtaking of the self that extends each person’s ‘own affair’” to the point where it is part and parcel of the common reason enjoyed by all.

The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Resistance to educational inequalities

In *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation* Rancière presents an exposition of the pedagogic method of ‘intellectual emancipation’ developed by the revolutionary and educational philosopher Joseph Jacotot (1770-1840). Jacotot, a radical nineteenth century pedagogue, articulates a story of a method of instruction to overthrow educational hierarchies. Through Jacotot’s account of ‘universal teaching’, Rancière presents a metaphor for an emancipatory education based on intellectual equality that brings into view political and ethical concerns that relate to the position and agency of the addressee (student) in an educational event. The principle assumption of *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* is that explication runs counter to emancipation. This anti-explanatory message is delivered through the writings of Jacotot who became a lecturer in French literature at the University of Louvain, in the Netherlands in 1815, teaching students who did not speak French. Unable to speak Flemish himself Jacotot came up with the idea of giving his students a bilingual version of Fénelon’s *Télémarque*, a widely read and admired eighteenth century didactic novel. Jacotot set his students the task of learning French by deciphering this text in its original language with the assistance of the Flemish translation. To Jacotot’s surprise the students managed to master the task to the level of being able to write essays in French about the book. Jacotot’s pedagogical experiment resembles a thought experiment. It advocates an anti-explanatory pedagogic system based on the premise: “every human being must necessarily be capable of learning by himself (through trial and error, guesses, and self-correction), since this is how all of us learned our

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mother tongue.” An implicit assertion of *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* is that the teacher’s main function is not to transmit content (to give his knowledge to the ignorant pupils) but to drive his student’s will and desire to learn. Based on the absence of any form of explanation in the achievement of his students, Jacotot developed a radical pedagogical reform, which he called ‘universal teaching,’ later known as the ‘panecastic system.’ Jacotot’s pedagogical theory does not dispense with the teacher but repositions the teacher as a facilitating commander of his or her student’s will. A further corollary of Jacotot’s experiment, which Rancière brings into view, is that the act of explanation instils a sense of inequality thereby annuling the spontaneous power to learn by oneself. Through the process of socialisation students learn that they are ignorant, incapable of eluding ignorance by their own efforts. Consequently students are convinced of their incapacity to learn by themselves, and thus affirming an inequality of their intelligence. Learning is, for Jacotot and Rancière, a matter of will, effort, and attention.

Rancière’s writing in subsequent books is a systematic development of Jacotot’s axiom according to which “the same intelligence is at work in all acts of the human spirit.” In *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* this axiom is applied to education and taken in many other directions by Rancière’s in his later works, extending to politics, aesthetics and art. As Jean-Philippe Deranty has noted, the idea that “the same human intelligence is at work in all acts of the human spirit” is to be seen not just as a claim about capacities of individuals but also about the possibilities of communication between human beings. Developing further Jacotot’s conception of equality of intelligence Rancière connects his political theory with poetic and aesthetic concerns in his notion of ‘sharing’ or ‘distributing’ of the ‘sensible’: a *partage du sensible* which he articulates in *The Emancipated Spectator*. As Deranty observes the concept of a ‘partage du sensible’ denotes the critical intuition at play in the notion of ‘thought from below.’ That is to say, Rancière’s concerns are with the ways in which thoughts, voices, and actions of the dominated are made invisible and inaudible in the hierarchy of social activities that underpin the social order. In Rancière’s work the question of social domination can be rearticulated in terms of which activities, and whose activities, can literally be seen and heard. For Rancière, the source of inequality

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23 Citton, “‘The Ignorant Schoolmaster:’ Knowledge and Authority,” 27.
24 Citton, “‘The Ignorant Schoolmaster:’ Knowledge and Authority,” 27.
is a problem of perception, in philosophical terms ‘aisthesis’ — the “category designing the sensible fabric and intelligible form of what we call Art.”

Deranty explains further Rancière's conception of a 'partage du sensible':

sharing of the sensible signifies the logic wherein society relies on bringing people together as individuals and groups (sharing as in having in common), while functioning on the basis of the separation between those whose voices and actions count, are meaningful, and those who remain invisible and inaudible, (sharing as separating).

The political implications of *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* lie in Rancière’s assertion that the verification of the presupposition of equality of intelligence is axiomatic to emancipatory practice. As Yves Citton argues, the structural inequality of the explanatory model that Jacotot exposes helps us to see that the expert tends to make ineffective the democratic process. This occurs because of the very position from which he pretends to enlighten. Despite his good will the enunciation of the expert divides the citizenry in two: those who have the knowledge (who are entitled to command) and those who lack the knowledge (and must obey). Rancière certainly does not denounce “those who have knowledge” but those who let their expert knowledge become a tool for silencing the claims and resistance expressed by “the ignorant ones.” In Jacotot’s narrative the ignorant person is not simply defined by a mere lack of knowledge, but by an oppressive structure that transforms a perfectly able intellectual agent into a powerless recipient who passively absorbs forms of knowledge produced for him but never by him. So the lesson Jacotot offers is: to be attentive to the stultifying corollary that accompanies any discourse of expertise, as Citton points out, “it is in the nature of explication and expertise to produce the very inequality of knowledge and power it pretends to correct.” By contrast to the expert, the empowering emancipator, rather than pretending to give something that is lacking (knowledge or understanding) intends to reveal a power (to understand) that is already present even though it may not be accessible to him without the mediation of the emancipator. Accordingly, the problem in education, for Rancière, is not to transmit knowledge rather “the problem is to reveal an intelligence to itself.” Jacotot’s pupils had the capacity within themselves to learn by themselves: the schoolmaster made available the opportunity — a context, a situation a framing structure — through which their power to learn was actualised. Rancière’s radical concept of transformation consists not in a

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transmission of power (which would imply and produce inequality between the giver and receiver) but in the realisation and actualisation of a power whose source is located within the agent herself. As Citton observes, the emancipatory educator’s role does not, therefore, consist of providing the agent with a lack (knowledge or understanding, intelligence or power) but simply in helping them remove the obstacles that separate them from their own power. Politics, as Rancière articulates it, in this context consists in producing or exploiting the practical conditions, that is to say, the contextual situation, structural framing that will solicit the agent’s will to use the power at his or her disposal. As equality of intelligence cannot be observed as such in its given manifestations it has to be considered a premise that needs to operate as a presupposition because for Rancière, “equality is not an end to attain, but a point of departure, a supposition to maintain in every circumstance.” The principle of equality is a keynote in Rancière’s philosophy, he writes: “Emancipation is the consciousness of that equality, of that reciprocity that alone permits intelligence to be realised by verification.” His theory of egalitarianism is the idea of equality and emancipatory action in which speech and expression are central; equality is the equality afforded people when they are taken seriously, as valid participants in a dialogue, as people who make sense.

I argue that elements of Rancière’s philosophy open up new insights for re-examining the implications of audience ‘positionality’ constructed by the traditional pedagogical scheme of the art museum. The notions of intellectual emancipation and equality of intelligence that Rancière foregrounds make understanding a material practice an act, not a state. By extension, learning is important not so much because it sustains the transfer of knowledge, but because it is concerned with the transformation of individuals. The emphasis Rancière places on active agency has significant implications for how the museum positions its audience, to transform the production of knowledge into a participatory practice. Rancière figures knowledge within an evolving set of relations, a move that, Caroline Pelletier observes, focuses analysis on the principles by which knowledge is recognised within a collectivity, rather than whether knowledge is possessed. Rancière’s idea that learning takes place through participation contrasts with the historical emphasis in education on

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38 Citton, “The Ignorant Schoolmaster:” Knowledge and Authority, 31.
39 Citton, “The Ignorant Schoolmaster:” Knowledge and Authority, 33.
40 Citton, “The Ignorant Schoolmaster:” Knowledge and Authority, 31.
42 Rancière, The Ignorant Schoolmaster, 39.
45 Pelletier, “No Time or Place for Universal Teaching,” 101.
transmission and instruction; his concerns, as Pelletier attests, are with how human subject’s (learn) to think the world in particular ways.46 Many claims made in The Ignorant Schoolmaster resonate with contemporary learning theory47 and the hermeneutic and phenomenology of both Gadamer and Dewey discussed in the previous two chapters. Recent socio-cultural theory has moved away from the metaphors of transmission, and as Pelletier argues, foregrounds terms such as ‘participation’, so that ‘understanding’ becomes a material practice, an act and therefore a negotiated, mediated process of transformation rather than acquisition.48

Rancière’s description and propositions of intellectual emancipation aim to reframe the conception of the spectator by challenging the idea that looking implies the opposite of knowing, the opposite of acting. The Ignorant Schoolmaster’s theory of intellectual emancipation informs Rancière’s thinking on art and politics. In this work Rancière exposes what he defines as self-supressing mediation as the process that is supposed to take place in the pedagogical relation. The role of the schoolmaster in the (master/explicator) pedagogical process is posited as the act of supressing the distance between his knowledge and the ignorance of the ignorant — his lessons are continuously aimed at reducing the gap between knowledge and ignorance. However, in order to reduce the gap he has to reinstate it ceaselessly in order to replace ignorance with adequate knowledge. The master is the one who knows what remains unknown and knows how to make it knowable. This pedagogical scheme is set up as a process of objective transmission to be exactly conveyed from the master’s mind into the mind of the pupil. As Rancière avows, this equal transmission is predicated on a relation of inequality. The pedagogical distance between determined knowledge and determined ignorance is Rancière’s metaphor for the radical break between two intelligences. Rancière posits that the first knowledge the master transmits to the student is the knowledge of his incapacity because the student cannot understand on his own. This results in the verification of the inequality of the students’ intelligences, which Jacotot calls the process of stultification. According to Jacotot’s experiment, the opposite of stultification is emancipation — emancipation is the verification of equality of intelligence not the equality of all manifestations of intelligence. Rancière’s emancipation entails an idea of distance opposed to the stultifying one; distance is the normal condition of any communication. It is not a gap that calls for an expert to suppress it for it is the way between what is already known and what is still not known but can be learnt by the process of observation, telling what has

46 Pelletier, “No Time or Place for Universal Teaching,” 102.
48 Pelletier, “‘No Time or Place for Universal Teaching,” 101.
been seen and verifying it. The ‘ignorant master’ needs not be ignorant but needs to dissociate his knowledge from his mastery, does not teach his knowledge to the students but commands them to venture forth in the forest, to tell what they see, what they think of what they have seen, to check and so on. Rancière posits that to recover the gap between two intelligences is to practice the equality of intelligence. Intellectual emancipation means the awareness of the enactment of that equal power of translation and counter-translation, which Jacotot’s students actualised. Joseph Tanke writes that for Jacotot “the equality of persons is not a goal to be advanced by educational or political reform, it is a principle that is either verified or denied by our educational, cultural and political practices.” The Ignorant Schoolmaster illustrates a key principle of Rancière’s philosophy, his interest “in the exploration of the powers of any man when he judges himself equal to everyone else and judges everyone else equal to him.”

Extending the lessons he draws from Jacotot, Rancière asks that we recognise in the spectator the same active power of intelligence that Jacotot brought to light in his students. An emancipatory conception of the spectator brought into practice in the museum will recognise in each spectator an already possessed capacity to find for herself a meaningful and self-creative appropriation of a work of art presented to her. The experience of an encounter with a work of art is an analogous activity which generates processes of attention, selection, anticipation, retrospection, and translation. Redefining the relation between politics and art Rancière examines art in terms of perception rather than a work of art’s attributes, thereby putting forth a philosophical conception of emancipatory education as a critique on the limitations of the explicative order of education.

Rancière is alert to the possibilities in art for instituting practices of equality. In The Emancipated Spectator, he contests the theoretical supposition that what the spectator understands will be what was intended for her by the artist. For Rancière the idea of emancipation begins when we recognise that viewing subjects actively transform and interpret works of art. Rancière insists on the intelligence and creativity of the spectator, rejecting the idea of direct transmission from one mind to another. There is a distance between the work of art and the spectator, but there is also the distance between the presentation (or performance) itself. It stands, Rancière writes,

49 Rancière, The Emancipated Spectator, 11.
52 Citton, “‘The Ignorant Schoolmaster’: Knowledge and Authority,” 36.
53 Citton, “‘The Ignorant Schoolmaster’: Knowledge and Authority,” 37.
54 Citton, “‘The Ignorant Schoolmaster’: Knowledge and Authority,” 36.
55 Rancière, The Emancipated Spectator, 14.
as the ‘spectacle’ between the idea of the artist and the feeling and interpretation of the spectator. This spectacle is a third thing, to which both parts can refer but which prevents any kind of ‘equal’ or ‘undistorted’ transmission. It is a mediation between them. The mediation of a third term is crucial in the process of intellectual emancipation.”

To prevent stultification there must be something between the master and the student. The same thing links them which separates them; Jacotot posits the book as the third thing, the in-between thing — foreign to both master and student — where they can verify what the student has seen, what he thought about it, and what he thinks of what he has thought. Understanding a work of art, or a book, does not consist in explaining it from a position of superior knowledge and authority, Citton writes, but in “translating it, in appropriating it within an act of (self as well as social) transformation that constantly rewrites the book according to the ever-changing demands of new situations.” For Rancière, it is a matter of linking what one knows with what one does not know, of being simultaneously active agents who show their capacities and spectators who are looking for what these capacities may produce in a new context, among unknown people. The effect of an artistic presentation cannot be anticipated, it calls for spectators who are active interpreters, who try to invent their own translation in order to appropriate the story for themselves, to make it their own story. For Rancière, an emancipated community is a community of storytellers and translators.

In a museum, Rancière posits, there are only individuals “weaving their way in the forest of words, acts, and things that stand in front of them or around them.” The potential collective power which is common to museum visitors, he contends, is not the status of members of a collective body, nor a peculiar kind of interactivity. It is the power of individuals translating in their own way what they are looking at. It is Rancière’s idea that the collective power shared by spectators does not stem from the fact that they are members of a collective body or some form of interactivity — it is the power each of them has to translate what they perceive in their own way. To link it to the intellectual adventure that makes individuals similar to all the rest in as much as their adventure is not like any other. The common power is the equality of

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58 Citton, “The Ignorant Schoolmaster”: Knowledge and Authority,” 37.
intelligence. This power binds individuals together, makes them exchange their intellectual adventures (in so far as it keeps them separate from one another) and able to weave their own path. Emancipation starts when we realise that looking is also an action that confirms or modifies the distribution of the sensible, and that ‘interpreting the world’ is already a means of transforming it and of reconfiguring it. We participate in the performance of art if we are able to tell our own story about the story which is in front of us. An important condition of the emancipation of the spectator, for Rancière, is precisely the creation of places where works of art, or performances of art, are not constrained to a specific audience or specific function. The formation of the public art museum as an autonomous space at the end of the eighteenth century was significant in this respect. The French Revolution and the opening of the Louvre in 1793 gave a new status to works of art. In the past, works of art had been admitted into a double hierarchy as Rancière relates:

There was the academic hierarchy of genres of painting linked to the dignity of their subjects and there was the social hierarchy linked to the function of works of art, destined to illustrate religious dogmas, to glorify monarchy, or to set the décor of aristocratic life.

The Louvre museum and other European art collections established in the late eighteenth century were presented for the viewership of anonymous visitors and spectators. In front of works of art in the museum, Rancière suggests, the hierarchies of genres tended to vanish; “separated from their hierarchical destinations, [works] were increasingly perceived as expressions of the collective grandeur of the people and of their collective cultural patrimony.” Even the seizures of works of art by the French revolutionary and Napoleonic armies he proposes, resulted in creating the new visibility of art; relocated art into the museum and brought forth a wider distribution of forms of human experience. The establishment of the art museum created a place of individual experience, the possibility of new forms of perception, which at the same time breaks an existing distribution of the sensible. It creates the possibility, Rancière suggests, of new forms of perception, which in turn create new forms of social exchange and collective political subjectification. He maintains that what allows the spectator to create his or her own story is the existence of places whose status remains more or less undetermined. In the contemporary context the art museum is often considered to be an endorsement of high art — where modes of exhibition and explanatory labels tell visitors what they must see. Yet,

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62 Rancière, The Emancipated Spectator, 16-17.
64 Arnall, Gandolfi and Zaramella, “Aesthetics and Politics: An Interview with Jacques Rancière,” 2.
65 Arnall, Gandolfi and Zaramella, “Aesthetics and Politics: An Interview with Jacques Rancière,” 2.
during the nineteenth century the museum, Rancière argues, was a place of confusion, which triggered concern about the capacity of people visiting to know or judge works of art and over time

the new institution created a certain form of policy [of education] [...] more or less putting lay people out of the museum to have them re-enter through educational programs.68

Rancière infers that the development of public education constrained the visitation of certain groups of society, separating the public by determining for each audience what is supposed to be their lot.69 Counter to intention, Rancière suggests, the result was the exclusion of some social groups who perceived themselves, or were perceived, as lacking the capacity to participate.70 This establishes a hierarchy between those who know, and those who do not know, who need to be told — an unequal ‘partage du sensible,’ signifying “the conditions for sharing that establish the contours of collectivity (partage as sharing) and the sources of disruption or dissensus of that same order (partage as separating).”71 The dividing line between the sensible and the insensible is for Rancière the site of political struggle. This struggle is made manifest when individuals or collectivities whose modes of perception are deemed illegitimate (i.e. insensible) by a governing partition of the sensible, demand to be taken into account.72 As Davide Panagia notes, Rancière’s ‘partage du sensible’ is thus “the site of political contestation directed at the subjugating criteria that impart propriety and perception and that structure a society’s common order.”73 As remarked above, Rancière’s concern is with the political aspects of spectating by way of the spectator having a place, a position, and knowing what that place can mean and be. Equality begins with a de-composition of the dividing line; a ‘partage’ between the sensible (those who know) and the insensible (those who do not know), in exactly the way Rancière illustrates in Jacotot’s pedagogical experiment. The act of aesthetic partaking as Rancière defines it, is the reconfiguration of the perceptual disposition and as Panagia observes “the ability to share, or participate in a collectivity (i.e. belong to it) is rooted in distinct conditions of perception that establish a correspondence between an [artistic] object’s impressions and its meaning.”74 Presupposing the intelligence at work in each spectator, an emancipatory conception of art means recognising each spectator as an active translator, who can and does find a meaning; a self-creative appropriation of what s/he is viewing. The presupposition of equality is

a basis for the existence of politics in general, however Rancière’s ‘aesthetic regime’ is based on a more specific form of equality in so far as it is the opening of space where there is no hierarchical presuppositions, it is the theory of the possible community of equals. At the basis of the ‘aesthetic regime’ is an egalitarian presupposition, which supports the possibility to perceive and appreciate objects as artistic. Further, the idea of aesthetic equality entails the idea of aesthetic education.

In defining distinct regimes of art, Rancière traces art movements that dismantle and eclipse the normalised standards of what were hegemonic artistic paradigms in Europe. Romanticism, toward the end of the eighteenth century, and Realism in the nineteenth, both dismantle certain features of the previous artistic regime, which Rancière calls the ‘poetic’ or ‘representative’ regime. Following the ‘representative regime’ is the ‘aesthetic regime’, the features of which make visible content and experiences previously unseen, unspoken, or marginalised. These features include subject matter, style and genre, exemplified in the work of Realist artists such as Gustave Courbet (1819–77), Édouard Manet (1832–83), and Adolph von Menzel (1815–1905), and record what art historian Toni Ross refers to as “the anonymous poetry of the undramatic, trivial and common place aspects of modern life.” Ross writes that Rancière conceives of aesthetics, beyond the realm of art, as the multiple ways in which any social order establishes different modes of perception, furthermore, Rancière’s conception of aesthetics includes both art practices and the framing theories of production and reception. He conceptualises both politics and artistic practices as capable of reconfiguring the dominant political or social perceptions of reality. That is to say, for Rancière, art and politics share a potential to dispute the sense that existing meanings of sociocultural life are incorrigible or inevitable.

**Regimes of the arts**

Rancière insists that the virtuosity of great men or women artists, or biographic approaches to art history that privilege a single artist’s creative production is not sufficient enough “to open the doors of artistic visibility.” On the contrary, artistic cases are rendered significant and intelligible within specific ‘regimes of art’, or as Ross suggests, different systems of making, conceptualising and accessing artistic activity. The ‘regimes of the arts’ are for Rancière a rubric that brings into view his aesthetic thinking, with its own conceptual vocabulary and analytic strategies. Rancière’s framing of the regimes of the arts performs a

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78 Ross, “Image, Montage,” 152.
polemical role while also deconstructing the modern understanding of art denoted by the term ‘aesthetic’ from the classical understanding captured in the terms ‘poetic’ and ‘representative’.”80 Rancière does not take ‘art’ to be a historical continuum, instead, he maintains that there is no ‘art in general’ but only historically constituted ‘regimes’ that form a given distribution of the sensible and “determine the framework of possibility for artistic production and theoretical reflection on art.”81

In his work Aisthesis: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art (2013) Rancière describes his conception of three historically constituted, although not strictly chronological, regimes of art to designate a matrix of historical interpretation that allows for the politics of a particular conception and practice of art to come into view.82 It allows us to reconstruct the practical and conceptual networks that account for the emergence of a given ‘distribution of the sensible.’ 83 Rancière deploys the regimes of art to challenge some of the prominent approaches to art in the contemporary humanities, many of which have been incorporated into museological and art historical discourse. In particular he rejects interpretations of art that frame artistic practices in linear, mono-causal historical narratives. For example, formalist accounts that interpret the history of art form as a movement of (Greenbergian) purification towards the apprehension by an art form of the specificity of its own medium (like surface and colour for painting).84 Additionally, as Deranty remarks, he rejects metaphysical interpretations of art that read modern works of art against the background of a purposive or “teleological vision of history, as the unfolding of some essential logic.”85 Rancière’s broad-brush framework of the regimes of art gives only the rudimentary features of each historical understanding of art, within which artists creatively develop their own expressive modalities.

Briefly stated, a ‘regime of the arts’ defines the specific ways in which a given epoch conceives of the nature and logic of artistic representation. Rancière’s purpose is primarily philosophical. He seeks to highlight the fact that the conception of what artistic practice means or what an artist is, are thoroughly historical, in the sense that they evolve over time. “There is not art,” Rancière writes, “without eyes that see it as art.”86 In this, Rancière can be seen as reflecting the philosophical lineage of Hegel who emphasised the historical nature of ‘ideas of art’ and thus the temporal relativity of the conceptual

categories through which human beings made sense of the world, themselves, and their society. At another level, political thinking motivates Rancière — he insists that conceptions of what artistic representations are and what they achieve develop within a broader understanding of society. In Rancière’s philosophical scheme regimes of art are intimately linked to the ‘partage du sensible’ which gestures to the political underpinning of social perception and artistic expressions are not defined in isolation from the rest of the social world.

Of the three historical regimes of the arts the ‘aesthetic’ is the most important, as it defines the parameters of artistic practice in the context of our own time. The aesthetic regime is coincidental with art’s singularity from the late eighteenth century, the development of the discipline of art history, and the historical trajectory of the modern art museum. Rancière’s categories of the ‘ethical,’ the ‘representative’ and the ‘aesthetic’ which name the principle regimes of art, are meta-historical categories which can co-exist in the same historical period.

Each of Rancière’s regimes gesture to three different ‘ideas of art,’ which coalesce around five structural elements, the specific relations of which define in each case a historical regime of the arts. Accordingly, each ‘regime of arts’ links together in a specific way the following structural elements: first, the world itself in its material and human dimensions; second, what is significant (both meaningful and socially valuable), and thus worthy of representation; third, language, or speech, or text, as the discursive articulation of meaning; fourth, the artefacts in which meaning is expressed, and a range of artistic forms, for which Rancière uses the generic term image. The fifth structural element is the community to which the artist addresses himself/herself, effectively as an actual audience, but also more loosely as a virtual addressee of the artistic message.

The ethical regime of images came into being in ancient Greece and is exemplified in Plato’s writings on the distribution of images that would best serve the ethos of the community. It is concerned with distinguishing true art – by which is meant art that is both true to its origin and to its telos of moral education — from an unsatisfactory imitation that distances the community from truth and the good life. The representative or poetic regime of the arts has its genesis in Aristotle’s Poetics but came into its full flourish only in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It frees the arts from the moral imperatives of the ethical regime by identifying a unique domain of fiction with

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88 Deranty, “Regimes of the Arts,” in Rancière: Key Concepts, 118.
its own set of guiding principles: the hierarchical distribution of subject matter and genres, its own time and space, the principle of appropriateness by which action and modes of expression are adapted to the subject matter presented and the genre employed, and the elevation of speech-as-act over action and visual imagery.93 Under the tutelage of Aristotle’s theory of tragedy and classical rhetoric, the classical system of representation, as Deranty explains, made the intelligible ‘conceptual’ content the primordial part of all aspects of the work of art.94 What is ‘poetic’ in works of art, is the value of the story, beyond their specific medium, all works of art in the representative system tell stories which can be retold in different medium — from painting to narrative, from tragedy to painting. Reading a poem is like watching a painting and ‘a picture is like a poem.’95 The entities of representation are fictional entities. Rancière affirms they are exempt from any judgement of existence, and thus released from Platonic questioning about their ontological consistency and ethical exemplariness. This system adjusts the relations in visual art between what can be seen and what can be said, there are rules of appropriateness between a particular subject and particular form. The presupposition is that some subjects are suitable for artistic representation, while others are inappropriate, that some are appropriate for a particular artistic genre and others are not.96 For Rancière, representation as a specific mode of art means first of all a dependency of the visible on speech, that is to say, the discursive articulation of meaning. All arts in the ‘poetic’ or ‘representative’ regime rely on the conception of the relationship between meaning and the world that favours the verbal articulation of meaning. In The Future of the Image Rancière writes:

In it [i.e. representative regime] the essence of speech is to make seen, to order the visible by deploying a quasi-visibility wherein two operations are fused: an operation of substitution (which places ‘before our eyes’ what is removed in space and time) and an operation of exhibition (which makes what is intrinsically hidden from sight, the inner springs motivating characters and events visible).97

Rancière goes on to explain that the representative system of art adjusts the relations between what can be seen and what can be said, between the unfolding of schemas of intelligibility [language, text] and the unfolding of material manifestations [image].98 The representative regime was organised on the commensurability of structures and norms organising the social and fictional world, the fictional had to abide by its own hierarchy of topics, genres and styles. Historical narrative painting of heroes, gods, and kings, and official portraits, for

94 Deranty, “Regimes of the Arts,” in Rancière: Key Concepts, 121.
95 Deranty, “Regimes of the Arts,” in Rancière: Key Concepts, 121.
example, had to duplicate the ideal relationship between the intelligible and the material in the real world. Underpinning these similarities a code operated that destined the noble, powerful, and the knowing as naturally destined to rule over the low, the poor and the ignorant. The logic of the representative regime of art enters into a relationship of global analogy with an overall hierarchy of political and social occupations. This is reflected, for example, in official portraits where the identity of subjects is constructed in part by the space the subject is shown to inhabit and the material attributes represented within that space. As art historian Marcia Pointon suggests, we turn not to their faces for information about the identity of the portrait subject but to the environment which shapes the subject, which they reciprocally shape and in which they are represented. If we take the example of Hans Holbein the Younger’s painting, The Ambassadors (1533), the environment which shapes the subjects, which they reciprocally shape, is itself a shaping process. Holbein's representation of the environment tells us about the ambassadors and their world, it is a function of representing the individuality of these human subjects and their social reality. Portraiture of this type represents each human subject as unique. Whereas the individual identity of the human subjects depicted in genre painting is not ascribed. For instance, the genre scene painted by Dutch artist Nicolaes Maes, The Idle Servant (1655), which represents kitchen maids engaged in common domestic activities. In this painting the individuality of each of the human subjects is supressed by the generic nature of the scene and domestic activity that they are undertaking. What we respond to in the painting is the social narratology of everyday day life enacted by ordinary people. The official portrait painter, on the other hand, must make us feel that we are seeing the representation of a particular individual.

Rancière’s representative regime entails the notion of representation or mimēsis that organises the ways of doing, making, seeing and judging.¹⁰² It is not an artistic process, but, as Rancière affirms, a regime of visibility regarding art. The representative regime of art gives primacy of action over characters, narration over description, the hierarchy of genres according to the dignity of their subject matter, and the art of speaking that combine as an analogy of the social community.¹⁰³ The primacy of speech means the primacy of the textual over the visual; or as noted above, of the discursive articulation of meaning, that is, language and text over image, the forms created by artistic practice, which can also be verbal images. The power of speech is, Deranty notes, to “make visible, to name and explain what is invisible, because it is distant in time and space, or hidden like the inner motives of characters, or some invisible forces at play.”¹⁰⁴

The aesthetic regime, Rancière’s name for aesthetic modernity, fulfils the purpose of identifying the specific features of an understanding of art characteristic of modern society. That is to say, the society that was brought

forth by the political, economic, and cultural revolutions of late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Rancière's *aesthetic regime* – the cultural transformation that took place at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth – cuts across the categories under which public art museum collections are organised.\(^{105}\) In an expansion of Kant's *Third Critique* (1790) and Schiller's *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Mankind*, (1794) Rancière's ‘aesthetic regime’ generates a new form of experience that suspends the traditional relationships characterised by everyday experience. Art is the occasion for an experience that disrupts the impact of the constancy of everyday life; as such, art is not independent of other aspects of life. For Rancière, Joseph Tanke observes, the power of aesthetic identity lies in art’s difference from the everyday, rather than its identification with it.\(^{106}\) Rancière's concept of aesthetic art rejects the idea that things have a single and definitive meaning, aesthetic art represents one way that the meaning of an object, body, policy, or community of people can be contested. In abolishing the hierarchical rules of representation, the aesthetic regime has promoted the equality of subjects, the dissolution of genres, the indifference of style in relation to content, and the power of writing and other ‘mute’ things over the presence of speech in the modern age. It is in this egalitarian regime that art is identified in the singular.

The advent of democracy, and with it the rise of the principle of equality, Deranty observes, challenged the hierarchical worldview of the representative regime.\(^{107}\) However, aesthetically, even in the new regime modern art remains partially shaped by the logic of representation – despite the opportunities opened up by the new regime. The primacy of fiction, of the narrative over the expressive is replaced by the primacy of language. The work of art in this regime is distinguished from other artefacts, making it a special spiritual entity, which stems from the powers of language itself, not from the arrangement of (narrative) actions.\(^{108}\) Expression is what is strived for now in artistic form — language is no longer seen as a medium in which a truth external to it comes to be represented. There is in the aesthetic regime defined by Rancière, a fundamental shift in the way in which meaning and the world are seen to relate. In the aesthetic regime, the world itself, at all levels, including the material ones, is seen to entail meaning.\(^{109}\) What made the arts comparable in the previous era were the stories they were to represent — now, the common element is that all the arts are a form of language, bringing them to a kind of superior form and


\(^{106}\) Tanke, “What is the Aesthetic Regime,” 77.


reflexivity, the discursivity inherent in the world itself. Deranty observes that change to the aesthetic regime corresponds to the change from a poetic system where representation (mimēsis) is the guiding principle to one where it is expression. Now, every subject, every action from the heroic to the trivial, can be treated in any genre, with any style, live, active, efficient speech, the speech of power as an ideal model gives way. In the aesthetic regime language is present in different forms everywhere, it is the common element of all the arts now. Our immersion in the world is conceived as a discursive process oriented to the interpretation of the world. The human world is conceived as an inherent part of the world as a whole, it is seen to reflect in higher order of awareness the indirect language of the world itself, enabled because of the general expressivity of the world. Rancière ascribes an ‘everything speaks’ attribute to the aesthetic regime that presumes “a capacity for expression inscribed in the world in all its manifestations and dimensions.”

In the aesthetic regime there are fundamentally two different forms of language: first, ‘metaphorical’ language of nature and things can only be an implicit or indirect language, not to be confused with the second form, language in the strict and proper sense, of human language. In this regime these two forms of language are intimately related, because the human world is now conceived as an inherent part of the world as a whole. Deranty remarks: “Human language is now seen to reflect in a order of awareness the indirect language of the world itself.” But as Deranty goes on to note, the expressivity of human language would not be possible without the general expressivity of the world. For Rancière this logic of reciprocal exchange and belonging, which views the smaller part as participating in but also rearticulating the reality of the larger part, is also at play between the language of the artist and the language of the community. Ultimately, as Deranty remarks, “the aesthetic regime is premised on the model of a circle uniting in one phenomenon of general inter-expressivity of the artist, his or her community, and the world itself.” In Moments Politiques: Interventions 1977-2009, Rancière writes:

The representative circle defined in a specific way the society in which the act of speech took place, as a set of legitimate relations and criteria of legitimacy between the [artist], his ‘subject’ and the audience. The rupture of this circle makes the sphere of [art] coextensive with social relations. It brings together in one direct relation of inter-expression the

12 Deranty, “Regimes of the Arts,” in Rancière: Key Concepts, 126
14 Deranty, “Regimes of the Arts,” 126
15 Deranty, “Regimes of the Arts,” 126
singularity of the work of art and the community that the later manifests. Each expresses the other.\textsuperscript{116}

Rancière’s aesthetic system is based on the contradiction between the ideal of articulating the language of things themselves and the lack of necessary link between signifiers and their referents. This lack prevents expression from fully capturing the meaning of the world, either because the later remains reticent to expression, or because it overflows it. This is an idea I will return to in the discussion of Kant’s conception of ‘incomplete language’ in the next and final chapter.

Aesthetics advances an idea of art as shaped by materials gathered from the products and practices of the everyday, and, yet its form as art, to some degree marks it in some significant way different from it.\textsuperscript{117} For Rancière, the contemporary paradigm of the arts is one in which, on the one hand, artists work to develop expressive means that would be commensurate with the meanings of the world itself, in tune with the state of the community (present or future); while on the other hand, any attempt to link meaning and expression in some necessary way is not adequate. This aspect of the modern paradigm makes any attempt to signify and express inherently incomplete. As Deranty explains, image takes precedence over text: the figurative expressions created by language use (not just verbal images but also those of all other media) are not exhausted by their intended meanings, the representative paradigm,

put images under the sway of story (the intelligible, ‘conceptual’ aspect): the ‘sayable’ was to regulate the ‘visible’; logical connections gave an order to the successions of figures.\textsuperscript{118}

Rancière writes, the aesthetic regime:

[C]ontrasting with the representative scene of the visibility of speech is an equality of the visible that invades discourse and paralyses action. For what is newly visible has very specific properties. It does not make visible; it imposes presence […] (and possesses an) inertia that comes to paralyse action and absorb meaning.\textsuperscript{119}

As Rancière understands it, in the regime of modernism, the various arts are increasingly engaged in the activity of constructing the shared world; in undertaking this project the arts continually shift strategies and employ common

\textsuperscript{117} Deranty, “Regimes of the Arts,” 127.
\textsuperscript{118} Deranty, “Regimes of the Arts,” 129.
\textsuperscript{119} Rancière, \textit{The Future of the Image}, 121.
approaches. For Rancière, the aesthetic regime of the arts is the abolition of the hierarchies entailed in the preceding ‘representative regime’. As Tanke has observed, Rancière seeks to rehabilitate the act of looking as an activity, arguing that it involves the redistribution of allotted roles, customary expectations, and established identities. This might be seen as analogous to the subject matter of art in the ‘aesthetic regime’ that represents the domestic, undramatic, insignificant and commonplace. Rancière’s formulation of the aesthetic regime of art in *Aisthesis: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art* (2013), and *The Emancipated Spectator* (2009), re-explores the question of spectatorship in order to show how, contrary to being the place in which individuals are locked into positions of passivity, “viewership reconfigures the division of labour by implementation of practices of equality.”

I understand Rancière’s notion of the emancipated spectator as indicative of the positive features that he identifies in contemporary viewership — despite all that we know about spectacle and the commodification of art. Rancière seeks to reshape looking as an activity, reconfiguring allotted roles and disrupting established identities. This thinking on art, education, and politics in Rancière’s work is deeply informed by Joseph Jacotot, the ignorant schoolmaster, who sought to overthrow educational hierarchies. By Rancière’s account aesthetic experience reaffirms the principle of equality by treating all to whom a work of art is addressed as capable of understanding and translating the message.

As noted above implicit in Rancière’s formulation of the regimes of art is an analytic of the ‘*le partage du sensible*’ that entails the idea that a given distribution delimits forms of participation and subjectivity. It does this by first defining what is visible or invisible, audible and inaudible, said and unsaid. The construction of these binary oppositions is, for Rancière, as Tanke attests, political to the degree that they define ways of being, that is, forms of subjectivity. A ‘*partage du sensible*’ is also a sharing of the sensible, that is, a way of defining a world that is common. The aesthetic regime establishes the autonomy of art and the identity of its forms which life uses to shape itself. In their resistance to simple interpretation Tanke suggests:

> [W]orks of art function as a reproach to the idea that what happens to our senses could ever be applied with a uniform meaning [... ]Arts sensible heterogeneity holds out the promise that the sensible more generally can be reconfigured [...] Aesthetic art is that which cannot but call into

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question the meanings assigned to roles, practices, and capacities because it is what questions the process of assigning meaning as such.  

Aesthetic art is at once composed of the materials gathered from the everyday distribution of the sensible, and yet, because of its form as art, marked as different in some significant way from it. Rancière conception of the shared aspect of the distribution of the sensible lays emphasis on the social nature of these distributions while he also elucidates their political potential. That is to say, to rehearse Tanke’s words, the (aesthetic) possibility that “lurks in art for instituting practices of equality,” while not all distributions of the sensible partake of equality, “the inter-subjective verifiability of aesthetic experience tacitly posits Jacotot’s principle.” According to Rancière:

The artist’s emancipatory lesson [...] is this: each one of us is an artist to the extent that he carries out a double process; he is not content to be a mere journeyman but wants to make all work a means of expression, and he is not content to feel something but tries to impart it to others. The artist needs equality and the explicator needs inequality.

For Rancière, the promise of aesthetic experience pertains to its potential for overturning established hierarchies, while the principle of equality provides a means for judging between the regimes of his analysis. The aesthetic is political for Rancière, in that it enables individuals a separation from their prescribed functions and roles within the social relations. Aesthetic experience has a political effect to the extent that the loss of destinations it presupposes disrupts the way in which bodies fit their functions and destinations. Aesthetic experience is, Rancière writes, “a multiplicity of folds and gaps in the fabric of common experience that change the cartography of the perceptible, the thinkable and the feasible.” The aesthetic is not the utopian principle of articulating the sensuous with the conceptual, an idea conceptualised by Schiller, but instead it is a process of ‘dis-identification’.

Researching nineteenth century archives of workers and artisans Rancière explores the emancipatory and political character of the aesthetic exemplified by a diary entry of a joiner that describes his aesthetic experience of the view from the window of the room upon which he is working. What this represents is a disconnection of the senses, an undoing of the correspondence between a now distracted gaze and the body of the skilled worker. The worker’s aesthetic

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125 Tanke, “What is the Aesthetic Regime?” 71-81.
126 Tanke, “What is the Aesthetic Regime?” 71-81.
130 Rancière, The Emancipated Spectator, 72.
131 Rancière, The Emancipated Spectator, 69, 72, 73.
132 Rancière, The Emancipated Spectator, 71.
experience disrupts the way his body is supposed to fit its function, purpose and social destination. By Rancière’s account an emancipated proletarian is a dis-identified worker: if individuals possess the sensory and intellectual equipment appropriate to their duties and position within a division of labour, then their emancipation involves breaking the fit between their capacities and their occupation. The worker’s seizure or appropriation of a uniquely aesthetic experience separate from her or his labour represents the dis-identification with her or his supposed and expected mode of being or condition.\textsuperscript{133} Hence, Rancière recasts the critique of the passive and ignorant spectator: workers who become spectators disrupt the given ‘distribution of the sensible’ to which they are fitted.\textsuperscript{134}

As previously remarked, Rancière’s emancipated spectator actively transforms and interprets works of art, what he or she feels, thinks and understands. The work of art emerges as an alien entity that the spectator and the artist verify together, thereby verifying the equality of intelligence. Rancière’s positive formulation of equality as an educational concern raises ethical and political concerns pertinent to the museum’s educational strategies. Instead of bridging the gap between the one who knows and the one who does not, thereby creating equality from inequality, explanation actually enacts, and in a sense inaugurates, and then perpetually confirms this inequality.\textsuperscript{135} It is not so much that the learner is in need of explanation; rather, the learner is constituted as such by the very act of explanation. The learner is the one who is unable to learn without explanation, without the intervention of a ‘master-explicator’. In the museum context this would be the museum’s professional expert. The ‘explicative-order’ is founded on what Rancière calls the ‘myth of pedagogy’, which he describes as “the parable of a world divided into knowing minds and ignorant ones, the capable and the incapable, the intelligent and the stupid.”\textsuperscript{136}

Importantly, Rancière’s articulation of emancipatory education still advocates for authority in education. However, for Rancière, this authority is not based on a difference of knowledge, insight and understanding. Rather, his expert (schoolmaster) is ‘a will’ that sets the ignorant person on a course for learning, instigating a capacity already possessed.\textsuperscript{137} To achieve this, the viewer or learner requires great attention, not an explanation, to the object of study. On the part of


\textsuperscript{134} Spencer, Review, Jacques Rancière, The Emancipated Spectator.

\textsuperscript{135} Rancière, The Ignorant Schoolmaster, 6.


the viewer, in the context of the museum, this entails making an effort to use her or his intelligence.

**Audience positionality and dialogicality**

Arguing for a radical transformation of the relations between the museum and its viewing public, cultural theorist and art historian, Mieke Bal, investigates the 'language of museums' with the aim of foregrounding the various relationships that can be negotiated between museums and their participating audiences. Bal’s research seeks a more nuanced understanding of art’s reception in the museum. Her writing gives attention to the expository practices of the art museum and explores ways to put audience *into* practice, to incite their active participation with works of art.138 In her *Double Exposures: The Subject of Cultural Analysis*, Bal articulates a practice to bring audience and works of art into dialogue, to externalize viewers’ experiences of art in the social space of the museum. Postulating that interaction between works of art and persons becomes, by definition, a dialogue between them, Bal draws from the word-concept of ‘exposition’, to explain that an exhibit is an event where someone renders something public, including the opinion and judgments of the exposing subject (the museum/curator):139

> [...] an exposition is also an argumentation whose enunciative situation, in which two voices alternate, is worth restoring. Moreover, exposition is also self- exposure. The expository gesture is doubly deictic. By showing the object one shows oneself, for the finger that points is attached to a body, a person.140

Simply stated, Bal understands the perlocutionary act or speech-act of showing, as ‘second-personhood’.141 For Bal, the performance through which the exhibiting subject becomes an ‘expository agent’ is perlocutionary: it is addressed to a receiver, the grammatical ‘second person’. Drawing on the semiotics of Émile Benveniste,142 Bal acknowledges that language demonstrates that a person is not autonomous. The first person, the one who speaks (curator), must be affirmed in her authority to speak by the second person, the *you*, who speaks in turn, so the dialogue can happen.143 If exhibiting is about communicating, Bal argues, the object is not autonomous. The expository act as a speech act, is effective and performative; the performative aspect of the gesture executes its perlocutionary aspect, that is, its effect on the second person. Yet,

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140 Bal, “Exposing the Public,” 529.
142 Bal, “Exposing the Public,” 529.
143 Bal, “Exposing the Public,” 529.
the expository agent of the art museum is not always directly available to take up her or his position as second person. The consequence, Bal contends, of the expository agent’s invisibility is that the dialogue is truncated, broken off, thus precluding the performance of different speech acts such as the affirmative, interrogative, and obligatory. This has the effect of disguising the expository discourse as “affirmative-only, as constative, and informative, thus obscuring the way in which it solicits for the agent an authority that does not go without saying.” Bal is suggesting that the museum makes public a certain discourse on and about works of art rather than making public the works of art themselves. This is a discourse ruled by conventions, principally historical, aesthetic and monographic, Bal suggests. Among the elements this discourse defends most keenly in the material arrangement of the exhibit is, however, the “illusionary transparency of the discourse of realism,” which Bal characterises as a dictatorial and monologic structure.

The insights of Bal’s critical analysis of art museum discourses and practices brings into view power relations that delimit the agency of both the work of art and its viewer. Bal’s account understands that “art too thinks: it is thought. Not the thought about it, or the thought expressed in it, but visual thought.” This conceptual understanding is underpinned by the work that works of art do; that is to say, art’s interactive liveliness and presentation entices us to work with it.

Bal takes an interventionist approach to renegotiate museum framing and transform curatorial practice modalities, where the presence of the first person expository agent, proposes visibility without imposing, so that viewers can participate in the work of art’s performative field and decide for themselves what they think, what they feel and what they can say. In her own curatorial experiment, a small but significant exhibition entitled Lady Killers! (1998–99), at the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam, Bal interrogates museological practices to re-educate the public, to entice them to look without the museum prejudging or determining the manner in which the activity of looking is performed. Bal’s curatorial approach breaks with the centralising of knowledge, the curator as the site of knowledge, and challenges the notion that an exhibition must be organized on the basis of a unifying concept. In the exhibition Lady Killers! Bal brought to public attention the museum’s newly

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144 Bal, “Exposing the Public,” 529.
146 Bal, “Exposing the Public,” 529.
147 Bal, “Exposing the Public,” 529.
150 Bal, “Exposing the Public,” 530.
151 Bal, “Exposing the Public,” 533.
acquired work by Dutch artist Gerrit Pietersz Sweelink. Bal’s exposition of Sweelink’s *Judith Shows the Head of Holofernes*, painted in 1605, investigated the ways we might understand the multiple and contradictory connections between ‘the work of art’ and the way we (can) frame it.\(^{152}\) Her approach to exhibiting the painting became a deconstruction of the painting’s framings. What Bal’s analysis does, analogous to Rancière’s metaphor of intellectual emancipation in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, is to look to the other side of the art museum, to its publics. In doing so Bal recognises the need to challenge, renegotiate and change the inured habits of a public acculturated through substantial training of viewing monologic exhibitions. Bal writes the museum public:

> [...] no longer believes in the value, her abilities, or even the propriety of her own initiatives. The anaesthetized public: addicted to wall labels and fearful of artworks — how to refocus their attention? Might museums allow people for reasons of their own, who want to engage with art works – how to speak about, communicate with it, and convey their ideas and emotions about it.\(^{153}\)

In the integrated domain of cognition and affect there are no limits to what an exhibition can suggest to its publics. In recent art historical discussion the work of art is understood as being active; it does produce its own range of social effects upon the field that surrounds it. The art of the past exists undeniably in the present, Bal argues, it is constructed to travel away from its maker and its original context to different places and times.\(^{154}\) Each posterior viewer brings his or her own cultural freight through viewing codes brought to bear on the work in the new situation in which it is seen and interpreted.\(^{155}\) Even in its original context viewers would have responded to the work in varying ways.\(^{156}\) As Bal contends, the meaning of a work of art does not lie in the work itself, but rather in the particular performances that take place in the work’s ‘field’; rather than a property the work has. Analogous to both Gadamer and Dewey’s notion of active participative inquiry of a work of art, for Bal too, meaning is an event, it is an action carried out by an I in relation to what that work takes as you.\(^{157}\)

What Bal’s analysis does is bring into view important insights for rethinking curatorial and pedagogical processes in the museum; how to bring into play the occlusions and repressions occurring in the visual field when the latter is centred on the third person?\(^{158}\)

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\(^{155}\) Bryson, “Introduction,” 3.

\(^{156}\) Bryson, “Introduction,” 3.


\(^{158}\) Bryson, “Introduction,” 3.
viewer to take the position I, to answer back to the museological narrative? Her theoretical insights and practical curatorial experiments elucidate important considerations for a revitalised praxis that aims to reposition the silenced you (viewer) to make it an I through a new discourse that avoids the third person. In this way the I and you are (in the spaces of the museum) the work of art and the viewer in an I and you transaction. Bal’s analysis of the organisation of visual events in contemporary art museum settings gives us an unparalleled understanding of the institution’s power relations. Embracing Bal’s insights, museologist Helen Illeris has conceived and implemented alternative practices in Danish art museums by introducing what she terms the friendly eye, a practice of looking where both viewers and works of art are conceived as ‘second persons’ in a dialogical relationship. Illeris acknowledges that while the cultural authority and the institutional framing of the museum holds the ‘first-personhood’, there is a certain pedagogical autonomy to experiment with different viewing positions. Bal considers that the viewing position of second-personhood is characterised as a position of friendship. Drawing on this idea, Illeris structures practices of looking defined by dialogically based forms of vision, the friendly eye. Illeris’s friendly eye conditions a structural context that ideally allows museum viewers, museum practitioners, and the work of art, to take up positions of ‘second-personhood’ in dialogical and sympathetic interactions with each other. Illeris describes a form of participation characterised by a notion of looking from a perspective of friendship:

 [...] the friendly eye differs from the disciplined eye, which unconditionally accepts the first personhood of the expository agency; from the aesthetic eye, that seeks absorption from assigning a silent first personhood to the work of art; and from the desiring eye, which encourages viewers to consider themselves as ‘first persons’ in the supposed individualized project of self-formation.

Illeris’s conception of the friendly eye recognises that friendship emerges from, and is realised in, dialogue as a form of inter-subjectivity.

The pedagogical address of the public art museum is pivotal in constructing viewer subject positions; in the nineteenth century the museum’s audience was

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159 Helene Illeris, “Visual Events and the Friendly Eye: Modes of Educating Vision in New Educational Setting in Danish Art Galleries”, Museum and Society, 7:1: 2009:19. Note: Illeris argues that the role of art museum education, historically speaking, becomes more and more detached from the museum setting. Educational settings have, until recently been considered as niches, which are not really part of the museum and its policies.


conceived of as an undifferentiated mass,\textsuperscript{163} educated through a didactic practice which Illeris defines as the ‘disciplined eye’.\textsuperscript{164} This eye looks at works of art from a rationalised distance, establishing a relationship between a reflective subject and a distanced object.\textsuperscript{165} Emergent in late nineteenth century museum discourse of self-discipline, the ‘aesthetic eye’ delineated the (exclusive) experienced, self-motivated viewing subject who pursued knowledge undisturbed and contemplatively.\textsuperscript{166} Audience positions that historically objectified the viewing subject can be linked to the idea of the consonant ‘general public’; a term commonly used to describe museum audiences. Bal’s second-personhood extrapolated in Illeris’s notion of the friendly eye opens up alternative perspectives on the relationship between the museum, works of art, and audience. Bal’s reconfiguration of the positionality of museum visitors in relation to encounters with works of art offers a theoretical and practical provocation that leans in the direction of more nuanced practices that parallel Rancière’s conception of emancipatory education.

The late-modern pedagogical address the art museum makes to its publics will ideally aspire to enfold the socially transformative potential of emancipatory education, as a broader social imaginary held in common in the cultural material it mediates by revising subject positions of museum audiences and museum practitioners. Ideally, it will entail participatory practices symmetrically constructed wherein ‘viewing subjects’ and ‘artistic objects’ are permitted to ‘speak’ and ‘perform’, so that all partake in and share what is seen, what is thought and what is said. It will imply a radical renegotiation of received and inured behaviours of (seemingly) passive listening and looking that have been acculturated in audiences by the monologic tradition of the art museum’s expository and transmissive educational practices. While objects are not cognisant, Bal argues, they can be given attention with enough respect for their complexity and surrendering mystery to “allow them to check the trust of an interpretation, to divert, [and] to complicate it.”\textsuperscript{167}

Contemporary art practice reconfigures the conditions for the possibility of subjectivity and viewer positionality; extending the limits of what can be seen, what can be said and what is experienced, which Rancière suggests is simultaneously an experiment with new ways of living. Or, as Tanke submits, seeing art as a way of doing and making that teaches that everything can be


\textsuperscript{165} Illeris,”Museums and Galleries as Performative,”19.

\textsuperscript{166} Duncan, \textit{Civilizing Rituals}, 6.

\textsuperscript{167} Bal, \textit{Looking In}, 261.
undone and remade. A prominent example of this trend is evident in the multifaceted installation work of Danish-Icelandic artist Olafur Eliasson and the reshaping of time and space that take place therein. Viewed through the lens of Rancière, it can be argued that these altered experiences remind us that the possible emerges by means of the slightest intervention. In Eliasson’s installations we see the possibility for more dynamic forms of interaction between the spectator and works of art, the potential of redistributing experience along different spatial and temporal dimensions, and alternative notions of audience participation and positionality. Perception is envisioned as an action in Eliasson’s installations, thereby casting the perceiver in a principal interactive role in the aesthetic production of the work by “creating the space for a social dimension, a space for plural human activities, encounters and communicative pleasures.” Eliasson’s installations call the viewer to agency. Curator, Madeleine Grynsztejn describes Eliasson’s approach as “pointing to a more expansive model for being in the world [...] one that will return viewers to themselves as less docile members of society.” In Eliasson’s work, Grynsztejn writes “wonder is an ethical imperative, it is the quality of experience that prompts us toward an intensive engagement with world, that continually awakens us to fresh considerations of the everyday and the lives we choose in it.” Similarly, curator Daniel Birnbaum defines Eliasson’s approach as a reciprocal creation process, which insists on a first-person perspective that makes the active viewer apparent. Titles Eliasson gives to his works are suggestive of our participation, for example, Your Strange Certainty Still Kept (1996), Your Spiral View (2002), Your Activity Horizon (2004) indicate that his work is “part of, even a product of, the beholder’s conscious life.” Eliasson’s works evoke an introspective awareness in the viewer of experiencing himself experiencing, Birnbaum suggests, while also being about an inter-subjective communicative experience, about sharing. Every artistic articulation involves a distribution of shared experience and is therefore a marker of sociability or community. Like Rancière’s conception of ‘the distribution of the sensible,’ Eliasson’s work takes an approach to politics and aesthetics that brings to the fore “the manner in which art can be perceived and thought of as forms that inscribe a sense of community.” Aesthetics here, Birnbaum notes, should be

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172 Birnbaum, “Heliotrope,” 141.
understood in Kantian terms as “a priori forms of determining what presents itself to sense experience [...] as the system of delimitations of time and space articulating that which members of a community share.”

Mieke Bal’s analysis of the exhibitory practices of the art museum foregrounds works of art as events in the present; the present life of images continues to generate powerful social effects as part of their ongoing history. Each later viewer brings to a work of art his or her specific cultural freight through viewing codes directly brought to bear on the work in its new situation in which it is seen and interpreted. In this way the work of art is a performance of the field of its meaning — though no single performance is capable of actualising the work’s semantic potential. However coherent or convincing a particular interpretation is, there will inexorably be an excess of meaning not acted upon. Indirect traits of Gadamer, Dewey, and Rancière’s thinking are echoed in Bal’s conception of art’s performativity. Bal critiques those aspects of art history that hold to positivist views of knowledge. Making problematic the historical contextualising of art, in harmony with Gadamer and Dewey, Bal holds it to be imperative that a work of art is considered both as effect of past social practices and affect of our own interaction with in our own time. She posits semiotic tools that can further historical analysis of works of art. For Bal, art’s semiotic communicability is an event that occurs in a historically and socially specific situation.

Conclusion

Historically, the art museum has operated between two poles: on the one hand, one positions the work of art as transmitting an address to the primarily passive and introspective spectator who pursues aesthetic enjoyment and learning. On the other hand, there is the perceiver who in relation to the functions of education and more socially interactive agency assumes a position as an active participator. However, we need to go further. Rancière’s exemplum of emancipatory education raises critical educational and ethical concerns pertinent to museum pedagogy and the relationship it constructs between viewers and works of art. Works of art invite attention to something with the assumption that the other can look at it, think about it, and speak about it, as Goele Cornlissen explains:

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178 Bryson, Key Writers on Art: The Twentieth Century, 16.
181 Rancière, The Ignorant Schoolmaster, 6.
The [artist] speaks about something, no longer in order to teach a lesson, but in order to bring it under attention, to make something present, and to offer the other the opportunity to look at it, to listen to it. The [artist] makes something into a thing in common, something that is inter-resting, something that lies between and has not been appropriated.\textsuperscript{182}

Emancipation is not a change in terms of knowledge, but in terms of positioning bodies; it reconfigures the territory of the sayable, seeable, thinkable, and possible. It rearranges the positionality and dialogicality of who gets to see, gets to speak, to think. Thinking itself has no ‘proper’ place and no privilege, everybody thinks, or can think.\textsuperscript{183}

In the contemporary context Jacques Rancière’s conception of aesthetic egalitarianism has important implications for art and education in reconnecting art, aesthetics and politics.\textsuperscript{184} Rancière’s conception of the ‘distribution of the sensible’ understands that systems of inclusion and exclusion operate on the cognitive and the sensory level. The idea of the distribution of the sensible apprehends the way the world is divided according to sensations and the political implications of this. He holds that in communities there is a dimension of the sensible that is held in common, but that this is partitioned, allotting different community members to different levels of participation and nonparticipation. The distribution of the sensible concerns the way things are held to be meaningful on a sensory level in various contexts which then affects what can be meaningfully thought, seen and said, made or done, in those contexts. A key idea in Rancière’s aesthetics is that art can be understood to be directly political on the level of the sensible, rather than simply representing ideas about social and political concerns. Rancière’s three ‘regimes of the arts’ show ways that art is thought to be significant and the ways it functions in (not strictly historical) categories that can be operative at a single time. Each regime has its own internal reasoning: the ethical, the representative, and the aesthetic.

The aesthetic regime of art collapses institutional organisations and hierarchies maintained in the previous regimes. Aesthetic egalitarianism, as Rancière defines it in this regime, has an analogous relationship to social and political democracy in that it offers the possibility for thinking through political and artistic forms of democracy.\textsuperscript{185} Philosopher of education, Tyson Lewis refers to a democratic ‘pedagogical unconscious’ that characterises images in the aesthetic regime to


\textsuperscript{183} Simons and Masschelein, \textit{Rancière, Public Education}, 5.


indicate that they teach that everything is equal and thus they are radically ignorant of all forms of inequality. By contrast, the ethical regime of art reduces art to a utilitarian function, while the representational regime restricts what counts as political to particular genres of art with their own modes of representation, and of course these divisions are not hard and fast.

By Rancière’s account, in the aesthetic regime, certain things are no longer out of bounds; the aesthetic regime of art embodies equality and resists the notion of fixed hierarchical boundaries. This aesthetic equality is for Rancière linked to a special kind of sensorial democracy. He rejects the ‘edifying pedagogical model’ of art that embodies the knowledge/intent of the artist; that assumes the audience is passive, denying that they are always already actively translating what they experience and thus enacting a freedom, an intelligence, and equality that they supposedly do not have, and need to be given, by the artist. Reliance on transmission of artistic authorial intent denies that images in the aesthetic regime of art offer up a ‘mute speech’, or the ‘unsaid’, that is to say the expressivity of a work of art is ambiguous and indeterminate and reveals dialectically that no one ‘authoritative’ meaning is possible. This carries similarities to Kant’s idea that there is always an excess of meaning in art, always more than can be said and always more than what can be equated to linguistic expression, ideas that are discussed in detail in Chapter Six. For Rancière ‘mute speech’ guarantees that no interpretation is exhaustive. The image demands we look and look again, the mute speech of the image is desubjectifying, calling us to become other than what we are, in turn demanding we become indifferent to who we were. According to Rancière a curious subject is a contingent subject and “mute speech […] ruptures hierarchical divisions, and opens up contingent field for new sensations, new affective intensities, and new relations to become possible.”

While the aesthetic regime of art predominates in the highly pluralistic art world of contemporary society Rancière contends that all three regimes are still applicable to some extent. I draw on Lewis’s educational exploration of Rancière’s theory of the aesthetic regime of art and his notion of ‘pedagogical unconscious’ of images in this regime to conceptually bridge to Rancière’s work on aesthetics in The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation. Central to Lewis’s analysis is his connecting Rancière’s concern with curiosity in The Emancipated Spectator with his reflections on education in

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The Ignorant Schoolmaster. Lewis convincingly argues that curiosity is precisely the affective hinge that calls us to repartition the disciplinary boundaries between art and education. The positive indeterminacy of the meaning of the image, or as Lewis states it “the ignorant pedagogy of the aesthetic regime of art ignites curiosity as both an (indeterminate) educational outcome and aesthetic pleasure. For Rancière, curiosity is a peculiar capacity that indicates a faltering in our understanding, akin to Gadamer and Dewey’s conception of art’s address that asks for our transactive engagement with the work of art through the (productive) disequilibrium of unfamiliarity. Where, as Rancière submits, "the eye does not know in advance what is sees and thought does not know what it should make of it." For Rancière, curiosity is first and foremost aesthetic, "blur[ring] the false obviousness of strategic schemata." In this sense, Lewis writes,

curiosity is both the passive sensual affliction of an anomalous detail that resists identification (and thus classification of this type of object, subject or action) and an active capacity for searching out such details in the first place [...] The curious gaze does not penetrate below illusion to an obscure reality [...] it reorients the field of the perceptible itself.

It produces what Lewis refers to as a kind of ‘encircling’, not an unveiling, and a presentation from another advantage point. In other words, for Rancière curiosity is a turning away from an intentionally directed gaze toward a glance; if the gaze attempts to oversee from a standpoint of superior knowledge, skill, or methodological rigor, the glance remains ignorant, and thus perpetually curious. This aspect of Rancière’s understanding of curiosity’s aesthetic capacity has parallels with Georges Didier-Huberman’s distinction between the visible and the visual, discussed in Chapter Three. As Lewis maintains, for Rancière, curiosity is a turn away from the given order of things to circle around the muteness of speech from another perspective. Curiosity, by Rancière’s account, Lewis writes, is the moment when we fall into that which we do not understand and thus;

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191 Rancière, The Emancipated Spectator, 122.
194 Rancière, Aesthetics and its Discontents, 104.
glance at the void that exists in surplus of the categories, narratives, and principles of experts and professionals. The void [...] is not a lack but rather a fissure between (common or consensual) sense and (aesthetic) sense opened by a strange call that is pensive yet ignorant of what it itself is or what its destination might be [...] [the fall] is beyond the time to explain (to make sense, to be judged as true or false) [...] [it] is the exploratory time to ‘see for oneself” [...] it does not call for epistemological reflection so much as aesthetic dis- and reorientation around a detail that speaks a language that is unfamiliar yet alluring.¹⁹⁹

This account of Rancière’s understanding of the aesthetic capacity of curiosity has an affinity with Kant’s aesthetic reflective judgement and sensus communis. As highlighted, although working in different philosophical and critical traditions, the philosophers whose work I have explored have a relational connection to the aesthetic theory of Kant. Due to this important connection to the theories discussed Kant’s seminal contribution to aesthetic theory will be discussed in the following chapter. Additionally, aspects of Gadamer, Dewey, Bal, and Rancière’s work discussed thus far can be seen as hinged by a critical relation to Hegel’s historical systematisation of art’s development.

Chapter Six

Recovering aesthetics: making room for sensible intuition and discursive cognition

As Kant saw it, art is active attention to the process of venturing, not of arriving, of exploring, not leering at the spoils.

Didier Maleuvre

The reason why art is so commonly misunderstood is because it is naively taken to represent the answer to something that only its maker really knows, when in fact artworks are questions posed, and adequations mooted, soliciting engagement.

Donald Preziosi

Immanuel Kant’s conception of the meaningfulness of art provides a valuable framework for the re-appreciation of the role of art and the ways it contributes to our lives. Kant’s thoughts on art bring into view what is distinctive about it, holding open the potential for new forms of knowledge, experience and communication. The preceding three chapters explored the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer, John Dewey and Jacques Rancière in order to bring into view a perceived deficit of pedagogical thinking in current art museum practice. These theorists shed light on the complex and pertinent processes that are involved in coming to understand a work of art and the forms of knowing that art potentially gives rise to; that is, arts productive dimension. This chapter draws out aspects of Kantian aesthetic theory in order to highlight the value of his views on art and its communicability as a foundation for understanding the ontology of art. I argue that a deeper understanding of Kant’s philosophical aesthetics is crucial to enact museum pedagogy that acknowledges art’s significant role in human experience. Attention to the philosophical engagements with art that this thesis draws out contribute insights pivotal the museum realising the greater potentiality of the performative field between the work of art and the viewer.

This thesis probes ways we might reconfigure museum learning placing emphasis on human agency, personal and social empowerment, and what art offers as a sensory and cognitive communicative modality. Gadamer shows that an encounter with a work of art suggests an alternative paradigm of understanding, and knowledge. His philosophical hermeneutics challenge epistemological tensions of art’s disciplinary framing, and his articulation of the historicity of the work of art and the interpreter are taken into account in a

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2 Donald Preziosi, Brain of the Earth’s Body: Art, Museums, and the Phantasms of Modernity, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 147.
dialogical encounter that results in transformation and self-understanding for
the interpreter. Dewey’s strategies of construction, reconstruction, and
‘deconstruction’ provide valuable tools for more complex forms of engagement
and reflection in the experience of encountering works of art, including forms of
meta-reflection. A pedagogy as praxis enacted in the late modern museum needs
to be seen as situated and as a participatory event taking place in the
performative field of a work of art. As Rancière’s work has shown through the
lessons of Joseph Jacocot, questioning power in the position of the educator is
crucial, in order to resist reproducing existing divisions of power relations in the
educational situation. The thinking of each of these philosophers represents a
perspective of education that reflects learning, not only as an individual venture,
but also as a social process that brings to fruition capacities for active
participation in cultural and social processes of benefit to individuals and the
wider society. As Helen Illeris notes, “to ‘empower’ is to give all participants -
including the educator - possibilities of informed choices by exposing, discussing
and trying different positionings and possibilities.”3 This entails the museum
providing a contextual situation or structure that fosters sustaining experiences
with works of art. A substantial encounter with a work of art involves ‘seeing’,
‘perceiving’, ‘understanding’, and ‘experiencing’ — entailing perceptual,
cognitive, and affective processes.

Experience and interpretation, Shusterman avows, should be complementary
rather than erected as a dichotomy, which requires choosing one against the
other. If we are to ensure a secure place for experience in encounters with works
of art we need to show the limits of interpretation.4 An example of poetic
expression of the collaborative connections of experience and interpretation,
Shusterman points to in the third poem in T. S. Eliot’s, Four Quartets, The Dry
Salvages:

We had the experience but missed the meaning  
And approach to the meaning restores the experience  
In a different form, beyond any meaning  
We can assign to happiness. I have said before  
That the past experience revived in the meaning  
Is not the experience of one life only

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But of many generations — not forgetting

Something that is probably quite ineffable

Eliot evokes Shusterman’s understanding of interpretative experience as an interactive process of making sense of a work of art in which the interpreter’s understanding and interpretation are shaped by her or his own personal experience, interests, knowledge, methods and habits. But also, to a greater extent, by the traditional understandings, interests, meanings and values that she has inherited from her cultural and social conditions and that are embodied significantly in the object she interprets.⁵

Rancière makes the point, often overlooked as Toni Ross has suggested, that what modernist painting made visible has from the beginning required the mediation of words.⁶ In his ‘experiment in art writing’, The Sight of Death, T.J. Clark reflects on what it means to translate the personal experience of looking at a work of art into the public realm of historical language. As noted in Chapter Two, Clark’s writing presents abstract thoughts, meditations, and occasional poems that emerge in response to his sustained viewing of Poussin’s Landscape With a Man Killed by a Snake with a Calm. Clark’s project, art theorist Francis Halsall suggests, seems to run counter to a received art historical method ensuring epistemological certainty.⁷ His project disrupts notions of art historical scholarship allowing aesthetics into the writing of art. As Halsall observes, it is Clark’s claim that a poetics of the image would contribute to our knowledge.⁸ Yet, as already noted above, a genealogical investigation into the foundations of institutional art history, and its appropriation into museum mediatic practices, reveals that art history has a troubled relationship with aesthetics.⁹ As discussed previously in Chapter One, modern art history was systematised in German art discourse as a scientific method: reflecting a positivistic concern with the possibility that judgments on art could be verified on objective and scientistic criteria. It was, therefore, as Richard Woodfield has noted, “based on a rejection of philosophical aesthetics.”¹⁰

Halsall makes the important point that at the heart of questions of the validity of judgments made about art is the relationship between discourse and the world that discourse re-describes. He posits that if art history is essentially a literary endeavour, different criteria are required to assess its validity of judgement than

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⁶ Ross, “Image, Montage,” 159.
those of a scientific study. Halsall goes on to argue that art historians are involved in a process that attempts to reconcile two things: “on the one hand a mode of writing and on the other the art which that writing negotiates.” Halsall moves to suggest that aesthetic judgments do play a central role in this negotiation, and thus in the genesis of art historical discourse. Halsall is here raising important questions concerning the validity claims of art historians — he asks what is the legitimacy of the claims that one makes about art? How do we choose one account over another? What makes one way of talking about art more appropriate than another? Halsall suggests that the subsumption of the pictorial or visual under the linguistic demonstrates that the art historian’s practice is an activity of *ekphrasis*; the translation of pictures into words. As such the experience of the artistic phenomena looses something in translation. Likewise, art historian Michael Baxandall gives consideration to the uneasy relationship between pictures and the words that negotiate them, which he describes in the following way:

We do not explain pictures: we explain remarks about pictures — or rather we explain pictures only in so far as we have considered them under some verbal description or specification [...] Every evolved explanation of a picture includes or implies an elaborate description of that picture. The explanation of the picture then in turn becomes part of the larger description of the picture, a way of describing things about it that would be difficult to describe in another way. But though ‘description’ and ‘explanation’ interpenetrate each other, this should not distract us from the fact that description is the mediating object of explanation. The description consists of words and concepts in relation with the picture, and this relation is complex and sometimes problematic [...] In fact language is not very well equipped to offer a notation of a particular picture. It is a generalising tool.

Baxandall directs our attention to another often overlooked point in the practice of looking at art, that is that art history, as the study of objects predominantly in terms of the visual, as Halsall has observed, often takes “as a given condition of its practice the transparency of its operations.” Thus, we might say that a fundamental paradox at the core of art historical method is principally, the incommensurability between works of art, and to use the words of James Elkins, “the words that fail them.” Halsall properly points out that there is dissonance between words and images, “that our choice of interpretive, textual and discursive strategies is not given, but flexible. This choice, Halsall writes:

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14 Michael Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention*, (Yale: Yale University Press, 1987), 3
[I]s motivated by a attempt to negotiate this mismatch; [...] between art objects and their descriptions. There is a construction at work when visual phenomena are represented in discourse. 17

Art, like literature and music, can deepen our sense of what it is to be human. In engaging with art we cultivate our facility not only to communicate with others but to communicate complicated and complex ideas. 18 As Anthony Cascardi observes:

Art is a domain of meaningful, sensuous particulars in a world that otherwise continues to believe that rationality is something other than, indeed higher than, whatever meaning is created by art. What is particular about art is that its meaning is borne by sensuous particulars, it makes sense while resisting full and complete rendering in any language that adheres to the sovereignty of abstract concepts. 19

**Kant's move to the viewing subject**

For Kant, the fundamental philosophical question is not 'What is there?' but 'What can I know?' Hence, he replaces metaphysics with epistemology as first philosophy. Kant's philosophical task is to set necessary limits on what finite human reason can do. A key aspect of Kant's aesthetics as explicated in the *Critique of Judgment* is the shift of focus from the beautiful object (i.e. art) to the viewing subject as the locus of aesthetic judgment.

Kant's conception of the meaningfulness of art, explicated in his *Critique of Judgment* (1790), has been a focus of recent Kantian and aesthetics scholarship.20 The work of Thierry de Duve21 and Diarmuid Costello22 are significant studies in contemporary scholarship on the role of Kantian aesthetics in modernism and postmodernism. Art theory in the latter part of the twentieth century rejected Kant's aesthetics as a viable discourse about art after modernism on the basis of art critic Clement Greenberg’s mis-reading of Kant. As Costello notes, Greenberg’s account of the history of the best modern art as a reduction to the essence of each art, the specificity of its own medium, underpinned Greenberg’s activity as an art critic.23 Greenberg’s formalism, Costello writes, suffers from his

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23 Costello, “Greenberg's Kant and the Fate of Aesthetics in Contemporary Art Theory,” 221.
“failure to distinguish between ‘free’ and ‘dependent’ beauty in the third Critique.” Greenberg attempts to apply Kant’s account of pure aesthetic judgment, a judgement about the aesthetic feeling aroused by ‘free’ (or conceptually unconstrained) beauty, to works of art, thereby ignoring, in a way that has since become the norm, Kant’s more apposite remarks on fine art, genius, and aesthetic ideas. Mis-reading Kant, Greenberg’s account takes natural beauty and decorative motifs (“designs à la grecque, the foliage on borders or on wallpaper”) as its paradigm. (§ CJ 16:229:72.)

For Kant there is such a thing as aesthetic experience. When we view a work of art we are not necessarily concerned with cognising the work of art and presenting it to ourselves as analysed; rather, our sensory perception of the work is pleasurable in itself and not simply as a way of acquiring knowledge about the work or the world. Kant’s aesthetic theory and his account of art creates a middle path between practical and rational knowledge; the aesthetic is not a property of the work of art itself but rather is the process that takes place in the viewing subject when contemplating the object, and it is this process that forms the basis for judging the object beautiful.

Kant claims that we cannot know things in themselves, as our knowledge is subject to the conditions of our experience of objects; there are features of experience the mind brings to objects rather than those given by objects to the mind. The kind of subjective-universality that ensues from an aesthetic judgment cannot be proven by a rule; it follows that everyone should agree with my judgment because the free play of the faculties arouses in me a communicable state, and because all humans share the same faculties, I therefore assume it will be the same for everyone.

Kant’s Critique of Judgment is of value for a discussion of current cultural and aesthetic education as well as education in general, it is expedient for the task of recalibrating art museum pedagogy. Although he does not discuss education in detail in the third Critique, Kant can help us think about the pedagogical possibilities of art. In particular, Kant closely associates (beautiful) art with our communicative and expressive capacity. To an extent, Kant defines beautiful art by its facility to cultivate expression through the presentation of what he calls ‘aesthetic ideas’. In a word, the aesthetic idea is a representation of the imagination, annexed to a given concept, with which, in the free deployment of imagination, such a multiplicity of partial representations are bound up,

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24 Costello, “Greenberg’s Kant and the Fate of Aesthetics in Contemporary Art Theory,” 221.
25 Costello, “Greenberg’s Kant and the Fate of Aesthetics in Contemporary Art Theory,” 221.
that no expression indicating a definite concept can be found for it – one which on that account allows a concept to be supplemented in thought by much that is indefinable in words, and the feeling of which quickens the cognitive faculties, and with language, as a mere thing of the letter, binds up the spirit (soul) also.  

This account of beautiful art suggests that aesthetic ideas cannot equate to determinate concepts; ideas are in excess of our capacity for determinate expression. Kant claims that aesthetic ideas present a surfeit of content and thus necessitate ‘a multiplicity of partial representations’ produced by the imagination. Such representations conjoin with a concept, which they also succeed in expanding, so the effect of beautiful art adds to the viewer’s ability to express herself or himself in language: art augments a person’s communicative capacity. The surfeit of content of the multiple representations in art – which cannot equate to determinate concepts – “quickens the cognitive faculties, and with language, as a mere thing of the letter, binds up the spirit (soul) also.” Kant explains that our concepts are enlarged through the experience of beautiful art, that beautiful art induces “such a wealth of thought as would never admit of comprehension in a definite concept, and, as a consequence, giving aesthetically an unbounded expansion to the concept itself.”

In beautiful art, a concept is expanded not through one intuition but through dispersal across “a multiplicity of representations”, which, “animating the mind by opening out for it a prospect into a field of kindred representations stretching beyond its ken.” Kant writes:

Art expands the mind by giving freedom to the imagination and by offering, from among the boundless multiplicity of possible forms accordant with a given concept, to whose bounds it is restricted, that one which couples with the presentation of the concept a wealth of thought to which no verbal expression is completely adequate.

Here, Kant seems to imply that there is always an excess of meaning in art, always more than can be said and always more than what can be equated to linguistic expression. In a metacognitive process concepts can be linked up with multiple representations, and by way of these, other concepts. Art is educationally significant in Kant’s terms because it connects concepts with each other in a new and original way. Other scholars have focused on this important aspect of Kant’s aesthetics, Jean-François Lyotard, for example, gives it consideration it in his emphasis on “production that exceeds simple reproduction,” while Rudolf Makkreel considers Kant’s aesthetics is the process


of interpretation.\textsuperscript{34} I argue that Kant’s philosophical thought establishes aesthetic learning as an important modality to disperse through experiential interaction with works of art in the spaces the art museum.

I move the discussion at this point to a brief account of Kantian ideas that have purportedly structured the museum’s presentation and ostensive audience reception of works of art at different moments of the institutions historical trajectory. I then move to a discussion of the Kant’s concept of ‘aesthetic ideas’ that bears on the ontological conception of art in the pedagogical practices of the museum.

**The art museum and post-Kantian aesthetics**

It has been argued that the aesthetic tropes of the modernist art museum were adapted from Kantian aesthetics,\textsuperscript{35} and that the extrapolation of certain terms from Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*, such as ‘aesthetic contemplation’ and ‘disinterestedness’, obliquely informed nineteenth-century art museum viewing practices.\textsuperscript{36} Kant’s notion of ‘disinterestedness’, for example, was arrogated into museum theory and practice as a contemplative code of viewing behaviour, paradoxically parallel to the cognitively privileging pedagogy of an ‘object lesson’ in art and history. The idea of *aesthetic contemplation* came to be embodied in art museum protocols as a contemplative ideal whereby the pleasure of a work of art required the observer adopt a special attitude.\textsuperscript{37} The notion of *disinterestedness*, appropriated into museological theory, is drawn from the First Moment (§ 1) of Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*. It implies disinterest in the context or purpose of a work of art. The display principles of late eighteenth and early nineteenth century European art museums exhibit a new interest in visual experience that were related to the newly emergent ideas of aesthetic philosophy, ideas derivative of so-called Kantian *aesthetic contemplation*. The art museum enacted some of the newly formulated aspects of visual experience explored in post-Kantian aesthetic philosophy. Specifically, museum display technologies and historical narratives that were deployed to mediate art were informed by a belief in the aesthetic and moral power of art objects.\textsuperscript{38} The temple-like architecture of the nineteenth-century art museum, for example encouraged ritualistic visitor behaviour and a cult of the aesthetic that embraced taste, perceptions of beauty, and the *cognitive* role of the senses and the


imagination.\textsuperscript{39} Comparably, modernist curatorial theory draws on a quasi-Kantian construct of a \textit{disinterested contemplative} aesthetic in order to construct the viewer as an educated, autonomous individual with resources to exercise aesthetic judgement in an encounter with works of art.\textsuperscript{40} An encounter with a work of art in the nineteenth century museum was regarded as private; it required no additional interpretive resource and was both an exercise in \textit{disinterestedness} and art historical elucidation, it was explicitly (directly) instructive.\textsuperscript{41} A derivative notion of \textit{disinterestedness} was construed as being concerned with maintaining aesthetic distance between persons and objects, suggesting a tacit experience of art’s aesthetic dimension, operative in conjunction with art’s didactic classification according to the chronology of its production.\textsuperscript{42} Kant’s view that pleasure in the beautiful is disinterested entail indifference to the existence of the object, while pleasure in beauty is inherently disinterested, this pleasure can give rise to an interest in art.\textsuperscript{43} Kant explains that:

\begin{quote}
A judgment upon an object of our delight may be wholly \textit{disinterested} but withal very \textit{interesting}, i.e. it relies on no interest, but it produces one.\textsuperscript{44}
\end{quote}

References to Kant’s aesthetic philosophy and its influence on art historiography are peppered through the literature of art history. For instance, a recent work by Karen Lang examines Kant’s aesthetics in relation to the conceptual foundations of art history.\textsuperscript{45} However, there is little Kantian scholarship in museological literature. This may be attributed to the youth of the discipline, limited historical documentation, Romanticism’s misconstrual of Kant’s aesthetic philosophy, or the pervasiveness of what Shusterman has referred to as “the end of aesthetic experience”.\textsuperscript{46} Nevertheless, Kant’s writings on aesthetics, which historically have been both mis-read and unjustly overlooked in the context of art museum historiography, are important tools for understanding art and the importance of aesthetics in the educational process.

Writing about aesthetic encounters with art and, more broadly, the environment, Arnold Berleant asks, “how do things demand our recognition and merit our

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{39} Duncan, \textit{Civilizing Rituals}, 14.
\bibitem{40} Dewdney, Dibosa and Walsh, \textit{Post-Critical Museology}, 173.
\bibitem{41} Dewdney, Dibosa and Walsh, \textit{Post-Critical Museology}, 173.
\bibitem{45} Lang, \textit{Chaos and Cosmos}.
\end{thebibliography}
This is an important question for the art museum. While it has long been acknowledged that Kant’s aesthetic philosophy influenced art historical theory and practice (although Kant’s influence is under-estimated in comparison to Hegel), less attention has been given to its educational scope and dispersal. Kant’s aesthetic theory is a reception theory of aesthetics, and the position of art in this context is complex. Because his theory does not account for the aesthetic phenomena of art nor respond to artistic practice or aesthetic experiences, it could be assumed to be irrelevant to the experience of art in the museum. Kant gives scant attention to the production of art, and his conception of the aesthetic is oriented towards natural beauty. However, I argue that aspects of Kantian aesthetic theory are critically relevant to the museum, in particular, his notion of meaningfulness that runs as a motif through the Critique of Judgment. Meaningfulness goes beyond determinate discursive meaning; it is an understanding of meaning (and knowing) beyond objective rational knowledge. Philosopher Jay Bernstein defines Kant’s theme of meaningfulness in the Critique of Judgment as, “not secured in independence of the material world, but in conjunction with it”.

Kant, in the Critique of Judgment defines as ‘aesthetic’ those judgments that take their bearings from the subject’s particular pleasure or pain and that refuse to yield to the knowledge of any ‘thing’. This way of thinking does not subordinate particulars to universal categories. Kant’s theory of aesthetic reflective judgment takes as its starting point the affects; aesthetic reflection originates in ‘pleasure’ or ‘pain’. For Kant, it is not the object that determines the pleasure, but rather the form of engagement with the object that is registered by the subject as feeling. In aesthetic judgment, aesthetic feeling plays the same role that recognition of a concept plays in cognitive judgment: the art object occasions pleasure (or pain) which is elicited by the free play of the imagination and understanding in apprehending the object. Kant seeks to delimit the cognitive and moral spheres over which reason has jurisdiction, in order to establish ‘fact’ as distinct from ‘value’ and to preserve a realm of absolute value or moral freedom not constrained by the contingencies of any fact. As Cascardi explains, Kant wishes to secure the validity of cognitive claims by establishing their independence from desire and will, so that what we claim to know (as fact)

47 Berleant, Aesthetics Beyond the Arts, 48.
49 Berleant, Aesthetics Beyond the Arts, 155.
52 Cascardi, Consequences of the Enlightenment, 9.
53 Cascardi, Consequences of the Enlightenment, 10.
54 Cascardi, Consequences of the Enlightenment, 13.
should be independent of what we might want or desire to be true. Additionally, Cascardi points to Kant’s desire to preserve a realm of moral freedom that would not be constrained by the contingencies of fact.55 Aesthetic judgment is brought forth as Kant reflects upon or justifies the differentiation that divides cognitive understanding of nature (the first Critique) from the work of practical reason or morality, explicated in the second Critique — realising that the pleasure and pain cannot be accommodated.56 Kant writes in the “Introduction” to the Third Critique, in, “the division of a rational science the difference between objects that require different principles for their cognition is the difference on which everything turns.”57 Associatively, Cascardi points to Kant’s principle of reflective judgment as modelling a form of reason that does not proceed according to concepts. Rather, it begins,

from a process of reflection on those relations that resist, escape, or are otherwise lost to conceptual thought, including the ‘primary’ aesthetic experience of pleasure and pain.58

The Critique of Judgment sets its course of discovery around the specific element of subjectivity that is “incapable of becoming an element of cognition,” Cascardi continues,

to argue that experience of pleasure and pain escape conceptual thinking is not to suggest that one cannot have thoughts about or make statements about pleasurable or painful experiences (although, particularly in the case of pain, such thoughts are notoriously difficult to put into words). Rather, it suggests that immediacy of pleasure and pain is lost with any attempt to represent them discursively.59

In Kant’s account of aesthetic experience, the pleasure that escapes cognition provides special access to human purposiveness.60 The human purposiveness to which aesthetic experience gives entry, is by Cascardi’s account, in need of rehabilitation, he writes, “aesthetics is itself the forgotten discourse of the world, forgotten to the extent that our confidence in the validity of affective modes of apprehension has been weakened.”61 Paradoxically, in the case of the art museum, arguably a dedicated site for aesthetic encounters, this seems to be correct. However, it is apparent that contemporary practitioners and scholars are evolving practices that position the experience of the visitor at centre stage of the museum’s public responsibilities and statement of purpose. A dispersal of the philosophical insights drawn from the theorists I discuss in this thesis could provide theoretical ground for a pedagogical practice far-reaching in its

55 Cascardi, Consequences of the Enlightenment, 13.
56 Cascardi, Consequences of the Enlightenment, 14.
57 Kant, The Critique of Judgment, 9.
58 Cascardi, Consequences of the Enlightenment, 17.
59 Cascardi, Consequences of the Enlightenment, 17.
60 Cascardi, Consequences of the Enlightenment, 17.
61 Cascardi, Consequences of the Enlightenment, 3.
redefinition. Enfolding aesthetic experience in situated encounters with art in the educational processes of the museum provokes persons to enter multiple realms of meaning, to make sense and create interpretive perspectives through their own engagement in cultural practices and symbolic meaning. Aesthetic encounters with art are, Maxine Greene writes:

[S]ituated encounters. That means that the perceivers of a given work of art apprehend that work in the light of their backgrounds, biographies, and experiences. We have to assume a multiplicity of perspectives, a plurality of interpretations. Clearly, this opens aesthetic educators to the likelihood of more than one interpretation of a poem, a dance, a play, [a work of at].

In the preface to the Critique of Judgment Kant states that while the aesthetic estimate of objects do not contribute “a whit to the knowledge of things, they still belong wholly to the faculty of knowledge”. Kant always presupposes that the conditions for the aesthetic estimate of things represent only those subjective conditions necessary for knowledge in general; and furthermore, the pleasure attendant on aesthetic estimates arises because such estimates fulfil the general and overriding goal of cognition, understanding. The grounds for attributing universal validity to aesthetic judgments, and the pleasure that results from aesthetic reflection, derive from sources that do not belong exclusively to the faculty of rational knowledge.

The apparent differentiation of cognition and aesthesis, of knowing and feeling, became a focal issue for eighteenth-century aesthetic philosophy. Aesthetics was less concerned with the experience of art than questions of taste, the perception of beauty, and the cognitive roles of the senses and the imagination. Eighteenth and nineteenth century aesthetic philosophy mark out in some ways new philosophical thinking on which disciplinary structures like the philosophy of art, art history, and the art museum could flourish. The eccentricity of the paths of cognition and aesthetics have, philosopher Gregg Horowitz suggests, “since the eighteenth century [meant] the respective disciplines - philosophy and art - necessarily have progressively less to do with one another, both historically and conceptually.” Horowitz argues that the breakdown of academic, (religious) and aristocratic control of artistic creation and reception meant that the straightforward connection of art’s traditional social bases were lost. Consequently, in the eighteenth century a gap opened between the practice of art and its functions; that is to say, between the work of art and its meaning. Horowitz suggests that this created an instability; for the first time the practice

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64 Duncan, Civilizing Rituals, 14.
65 Horowitz, Sustaining Loss, 3.
of art floats free of contexts in which its meaning could be normatively determined and therefore became unable to sustain proper standards of judgment. Horowitz attributes the loss of art’s social mooring to both the birth of artistic modernism and the emergent problem of the judgment of taste, judgment of beauty that cannot be grounded in given social norms. Within the realm of aesthetics, the absence of art’s social context now meant that the judgment of taste necessitated theoretical reflection in order to lay claim to its extra-subjective validity. Horowitz’s account of the emergence of aesthetic theorising bears a resemblance to Rancière’s notion of ‘the aesthetic regime’ wherein the specificities of the arts are blurred by the occurrence of a certain displacement in the perception of what art signifies. Art, Rancière writes has a new subject – the people, and, a new place, history:

[It] exists in the very difference between the common form of life that it was for those who made the works and the object of free contemplation and free appreciation that is for us. It exists for us in the divide between the power of art and the power of beauty, between the rules of its production, and the modes of its sensible appreciation, between the figures that regulate and the ones it produces.

Historically, the art museum developed in association with these disciplines. As argued in Chapter One and Two, by the late eighteenth century, especially in Germany, the theoretical basis for the fine arts and aesthetics achieved the status of separate disciplines. Kant’s Critique of Judgment came to occupy a distinct and integral place within a philosophical system that considered the nature and significance of art. Kant attempted to identify, in the third Critique, what is distinctive about art. Stimulated by beauty, Kant regarded the free play of the imagination and understanding as irreducible to our ordinary mode of experience because it has a self-reflexive character. It facilitates enlarged reflective thought, characterised as a ‘distinctive mode of receptiveness’. For instance, through an encounter with (beautiful) art (and indeed other content) we are not only experiencing the world, but also our mode of experiencing the world.

Art’s incongruity with cognition-only knowledge, an ostensible contradiction for the museum in some measure, since its late eighteenth century inception, is a central concern of Kant’s Critique of Judgment. While engagement with art in the museum requires the viewing subject to be positioned to absorb historical-
theoretical knowledge, it equally requires that the viewer seek a stance from which to reflect upon perceptual experience.

**Kant’s ‘aesthetic ideas’, reflective judgment and imperfect communication**

For Kant, beauty is the expression of ‘aesthetic ideas’ — a representation of the imagination that occasions much thinking that cannot be equal to determinate thought; no concept is adequate to it. (CJ §49: 314) For Kant, aesthetic ideas are a counterpoint to rational ideas; that is representations, which cannot be exemplified in experience or by means of the imagination. In the experience of beautiful art the role of aesthetic ideas is one of mediation between rational ideas and sensibility and imagination. A work of art expresses aesthetic ideas in so much as it presents sensible form to a rational idea. The experience of art is one wherein our bonding with the world is much more intimate than the usual subject–object relation. Kant’s aesthetic theory of mind ascribes a metacognitive role to the harmony of the faculties of imagination and understanding when stimulated by (beautiful) art. This theory is educationally valuable in that it allows for the cultivation of experiential dispositions associated with imaginative speculation and non-propositional ways of knowing. According to Kant, beautiful art is purposeful but without a goal, for “it provokes our active attention to the process of venturing, of exploring, with no interest in the booty.” The aesthetic experience of (beautiful) art centres on a unique embodiment of cognitive freedom. Jay Bernstein and Anthony Cascardi clarify in different ways Kant’s theme of meaningfulness in its association with aesthetic judgments and my argument is indebted to their insights.

A central preoccupation of the *Critique of Judgement* is a concern with what is unaccounted for in the categorical operations of cognition and morality. Kant’s discussion of fine art builds on and enriches his general theory of an aesthetic response outlined in the *Analytic of the Beautiful*. By following Bernstein’s strategy of reading the section on the aesthetic in the *Critique of Judgment* backwards, starting from § 51, the account of the division of the fine arts, we can gain a sense of what Kant sees as the communicability of art.

Beauty (whether it be of nature or of art) may in general be termed the expression of aesthetic ideas [...] if we wish to make a division of fine arts we can choose for that purpose, tentatively at least, no more convenient

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74 Cascardi, “Prolegomena to Any Future Aesthetics.”
75 Bernstein, *The Fate of Art*, 56.
principle than the analogy which art bears to the mode of expression of which men avail themselves in speech, with a view to communicating themselves to one another as completely as possible, i.e. not merely in respect of their concepts but in respect of their sensations also. (CJ §, 51:320:185)

Kant describes that what ‘perfect communication’ would be is complete communication of everything one is thinking and feeling and experiencing to another person, he writes:

Such expression consists in word, gesture, and tone (articulation, gesticulation, and modulation). It is the combination of these three modes of expression which alone constitute a complete communication of the speaker. For thought, intuition, and sensation are in this way conveyed to others simultaneously and in conjunction. (CJ §, 52:320: 185)

Bernstein is interested in Kant’s idea of complete communication as it goes against all of the usual divisions Kant makes between mind and body and between reason and intuition. Kant seems to be saying that if communication is to be fully successful and complete, something would have to unify all of these expressive modalities and do so simultaneously.  

For Kant, there are only three kinds of fine art: the art of speech (literature); formative or visual art, which makes up the notion of gesture; and the art of the play of sensations (or external sense impressions). Kant is interested in the differentiation of the arts, in their essential division, and suggests that they should not be unified because the plurality of the arts bears a relation to our communicative interest (need) that requires there be such a plurality. According to Bernstein, Kant believes that “perfect or complete communication is giving normative force, and normative authority, to what necessarily remains unarticulated or unspoken within abstract concepts.”

If complete communication involves concept, intuition, and sensation, if this is Kant’s idea of complete communication, Bernstein goes on to argue that the idea of complete communication assumes there is more to be communicated than what gets communicated by concepts themselves. So the idea of complete communication is already itself a kind of normative or abstract ideal that licenses us to take seriously what gets unsaid, unspoken, in ordinary conceptual determination.

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Bernstein points out that Kant’s system of classifying the arts is differentiated by the notion of complete communication, he draws attention to sensation as distinct from thought and concept, indicating, “that the idea of complete communication is not to be thought of as the clarification of all possible mental contents, by means of [...] more capacious concepts.”82 Bernstein makes it clear that by complete communication Kant does not intend to mean the making explicit by conceptual means the contents of communication; complete communication communicates contents that are of import in their residual sensational aspects, that is to say, “in their non-identity to the concepts they colour or inflect.”83 Kant’s account suggests that communication is perfect when it also conveys what is not mediated by concepts; for Kant, conceptual determinacy is the goal of science.84 Kant opens up the possibility here for a communicative form of expression and meaning other than which is perfectly rational with a conceptually determinate meaning. So perhaps art is the ideal of communication, for as Bernstein puts it, “making oneself completely understood socially, requires the social acknowledgment of what cannot be made explicit in ordinary communication.”85 Bernstein argues, in agreement with Kant, that we have art because our ordinary communication fails to communicate. For Bernstein, art communicates what is most important to us. Complete communication is a motivation for art, and art is an acknowledgement of what remains ‘unspoken’, or incomplete, even if conceptual communication is perfectly explicit and ideal. Kant’s idea of complete communication suggests that the meanings we have are always less than the meanings we need, and the meanings we need cannot be made fully explicit; art is the repository of the unspoken. Kant’s incomplete communication is a critical impetus or incentive against pure conceptuality. It is the expression of the failures of communication; even in the most explicit communication, it generates an ideal of perfect communication.86

With any ideal there is a critical impetus even though the ideal can never be attained. Art is the site of disclosure of the uncommunicated elements of social communication. I agree with Bernstein that Kant’s opening up of the possibility of a form of communicability that is expressive and meaningful other than the rational and objective, allows for recognition of the complexity between cognition and affect in art. Because displaced and unacknowledged meanings are given form, and are meaningful ‘sensations’ (for example gestures of paintings),

Bernstein argues they cannot be regarded as anything but undischarged demands on understanding. They demand, Bernstein suggests,

[A]cknowledgement by the understanding, so the desire to distinguish affect from concept, in order to quarantine affect in the domain of the presentational impact of art, may seem to be in service of the significance of affect in art, but in practice it functions as the abstract concept’s last line of defence against the confrontation with its own communicative weakness, which is to say its normative ethical and social weakness.87

Bernstein’s reading of Kant may be interpreted as a requirement to think of affect as the aspect of the concept itself that the determinate concept fails to communicate in its own right. This is reflected in Kant’s account that holds that our judgments that a work is beautiful, that is, our aesthetic reflective judgments, do not derive exclusively from rational knowledge but still belong to the faculty of knowledge.88 In his idea of complete communication, Kant offers the possibility of a form of communicability (across the plurality of the arts), expressive and meaningful (other than rational), which importantly allows for the recognition of the complex relationship between cognition (knowledge) and affect (feeling) in art. Meanings that have been missed in social communication are given in art form as “gestures and sensations that are undischarged demands on understanding.”89

Kant is interested in a demand that puts pressure on our existing means of communication. Art’s meanings demand response, a response to the provision of contingencies that abstraction aims to leave behind. As Bernstein argues, there is not, and cannot be, for Kant a unified system of the arts because the plurality of the specific arts derives from the logical connection between the communicative deficit of the abstract concept and the immeasurable field of displaced meanings. In other words, there is no concept that will permit us to cognise the totality of the arts.90 Kant seems to be suggesting that our experience of a work of art communicates to us meanings of things we cannot know in another way.

Bernstein interprets Kant’s notion of art as the site of an idiolect, a distinct and unique mode of communication that can’t be further translated. Art does not communicate just any meaning. The meaning the creation of a work of art communicates makes an address to us; it bears the burden of human significance. This account of art’s communicability is an important aspect of its presentation, it requires that we assume the idiolect; the distinctive and unique

88 Kant, The Critique of Judgment, 6.
meaning that art works convey. Bernstein has described this as what makes art address us, expecting our response, wanting to communicate meanings missed in ordinary social discourse. What this means in the context of the museum is that this understanding of art’s communicative complexities, uncertainties and profundities needs to be acknowledged. I reiterate here the value of Gadamer’s aesthetic hermeneutic philosophy discussed in Chapter Three for museums’ working toward aesthetic education (as defined above). Gadamer’s approach to interpretive practice integrates aesthetics into the interpretive process, which takes a phenomenological perspective in regard to the works reception and production, thus bringing into focus the generative tension between sight and insight in works of art. Such a contextual situation in the museum structured to bring people and a work of art to a meaningful encounter can, I suggest, move toward a more nuanced understanding of art’s communicability as a crucial aspect of its presentation; accessing the distinctive and unique meaning that works of art convey. Gadamer’s hermeneutic philosophy claims that for art to open our eyes to world it has to do something other than remain in the purely sensible. As Davey writes, “it has to borrow a hermeneutic metaphor to speak and it can only do so if it successfully enables us to understand that there is something more to be seen than what is immediately before the eye.”

In Kant’s account of the plurality of arts, the burden of human significance is articulated by the idea of uncommunicated meanings and is given generality in his notion of aesthetic ideas. Kant’s concept of aesthetic ideas gives positive value to the work of art: art not only permits the human mind to leap beyond what empirical perception and conceptual knowledge can grasp, but it does so in a way that is communicable from one human being (the artist) to another. As Kant indicates, this requires cultivation and training. It is Kant’s claim that all beauty, even natural beauty, is an ‘expression’ of ‘aesthetic ideas’. He introduces the concept of aesthetic ideas to characterise the thematic, ideational (non-sensible) ‘content’ of fine art. The aesthetic idea achieves expression in the work of art; it is what the artist wants us to understand she or he is communicating about the work. In §49, Kant says that a work of art can be formally fine, but fails nevertheless. It fails because it lacks spirit; animation, self-sustaining play, harmony of the imagination and understanding:

[...] spirit (Geist) in an aesthetical sense, signifies the animating principle in the mind. But that whereby this principle animates the psychic

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substance- the material which it employs for that purpose – is that which sets the mental powers into a swing that is final, i.e. into a play that is self-maintaining and which strengthens those powers for such activity. [...] my proposition is that this principle is nothing less than the faculty of presenting aesthetic ideas. ⁹⁵ (§CJ 49: 313:175)

Aesthetic ideas are those that spirit or genius contributes to the work of art. They intellectually and emotionally animate the appreciator of the work, and give the work significance beyond its beautiful form. An aesthetic attribute assists the task of genius: it takes a concept and associates with it other concepts in an aesthetic relationship, and this corresponds to aesthetic ideas. Kant defines aesthetic ideas this way,

I mean that representation of the imagination which induces much thought, yet without the possibility of any definite thought whatever, i.e. concept, being adequate to it, and which language, consequently can never get quite on level terms with or render completely intelligible. It is easily seen, that an aesthetic idea is the counterpart (pendant) of a rational idea, which, conversely, is a concept, to which no intuition (representation of the imagination) can be adequate. ⁹⁶ (§ CJ 49: 313:175-6)

So, an aesthetic idea is an intuition, an intuition that is the bearer of meanings. However, it is not awaiting conceptual determination; rather, it is a source of meanings which no concepts can adequately describe nor are capable of fully exposing. Likewise, rational ideas – ideas of reason – are ideas for which it is impossible to provide a determinate intuition. An aesthetic idea as a presentation cannot itself be made conceptually determinate or explicit. ⁹⁷ For Bernstein, the entire Critique of Judgment is an attempt to say that the notion of intuition has more complexity, more meaningfulness, than accounted for by the notion of concept. Kant’s first elaboration of this is the notion of reflective judgment. Aesthetic ideas give us further elaboration of that idea of reflective judgment, because aesthetic ideas are themselves intuitions of a certain kind, presentations that are suggestive of thoughts, ideas, feelings; which is to say, they seek comprehension, not mere sensation. ⁹⁸ Art aims at cognition, but cognition that no determinate concepts can be on a level footing with; therefore, that cognition extends beyond the powers of discursivity. ⁹⁹ It is Kant’s claim that originality is a key trait of genius: “genius [...] is the exemplary form of the natural endowments of the individual in the free employment of his cognitive

Genius is exemplary, not in determining a rule, but much like the exemplary necessity of aesthetic judgment, it is exemplary in the free, self-contained disinterested pleasure arising from the beautiful form (and content) that in a broader cultural sense can galvanise alertness of our aesthetic faculties. Likewise, for Kant:

Originality is an example, not for imitation (for that would mean the loss of the element of genius, and just the very soul of the work), but to be followed by another genius – one in whom it arouses to a sense of his own originality in putting freedom from the constraint of rules so into force in his art, that for art itself a new rule is won – which is what shows a talent to be exemplary. (CJ §49: 318:181)

As part of the broader culture, genius and originality ‘educate’ via the route of the in commons, the publicly shared field of objects (exemplars), practices and institutions, like museums, that as exemplars arouse our aesthetic dispositions and talents. Genius is the exemplary expression of human freedom, which in art is a complex and exemplary way of thinking about our freedom. The originality of art encourages and provokes us to make sense of things in new ways that follow no extant rules of sense making. Bernstein puts forward the idea that the fascination for the cult of genius and originality is partly because of the possibilities of transgression and the coming forth of new meanings, through art we glimpse our capacity to shape the world.

Kant takes it as evident that meaning exists that is independent of, or not wholly absorbable by, conceptual meaning. It is helpful to employ Kant’s ideas about art’s meaningfulness and the reception of aesthetic objects to reconsider how we might scaffold encounters with art. For Kant, the creative imagination, which he calls productive imagination, “is a powerful agent for the creating, as it were, a second nature out of the material supplied to it by actual nature. It affords us entertainment where experience proves too commonplace.” Here, we can see that on one level his notion of second nature relates to the way a given intuition inspires us to think about something entirely differently from what we might usually think of when faced with an intuition of that kind. Bernstein demonstrates this with Georgia O’Keefe’s flower painting, Black Iris (1926), now in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum, New York.

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In a representation of a flower there are usually associations of plants and ecology but an encounter with *Black Iris* inspires us to think not about plant ecology but about the most intimate aspects of human sexuality. O’Keeffe’s painting of a flower is an intuition that makes us associate with that image another set of associations, another set of ideas, which inspire us to think about the painting in a new way. We might say that by looking at O’Keeffe’s painting we think of flowers in ways we haven’t previously. However, the painting might also make us think of human sexuality and the female form in unprecedented ways. Associations are established that prompt us to give the natural subject new associations and meanings. As Bernstein notes,

> [...] it is supervened upon by meanings that are not intrinsic to it, and because it is, there is no exact boundary to these things; there is no full or determinate statement of what Georgia O’Keeffe’s flower is meant to say – in saying the obvious you are leaving just about everything that is significant unsaid.\(^{106}\)

Gadamer writes, seeing something and thinking something are a kind of motion, when someone is looking at something, this is when he or she truly sees it, and when one is directing one’s thinking at something, this is when one is truly pondering it which allows a new perception of something to open up.\(^{107}\) In a similar manner, Kant considers *aesthetic ideas* as representations of the imagination:

> [...] that give expression to things of which examples occur in experience, e.g. death, envy, and all vices, as also love, fame, and the like, transgressing the limits of experience he [the artist] attempts with the aid of an imagination which emulates the display of reason in its attainment


of a maximum, to body them forth to sense with a completeness of which nature affords no parallel.\textsuperscript{108} (§CJ 49:314:176)

This goes some way to explain what works of art do. What works of art reveal is that thing of the (art’s) presentation. This seems to resonate with Gadamer’s understanding that the spectator is a condition of what is held within a work of art coming forth. Furthermore, it implies a distinction between an artistic representation and an artistic presentation, which gestures toward that which a work of art presents, or offers up.\textsuperscript{109} Kant’s account suggests that art arises out of the deficit of communication in everyday life. As Bernstein notes, art answers those needs that arise in the absence of an articulateness we seek. Each work of art tries to bear the burden of human significance; ideas in works of art cannot be judged as true or false, as certainties, in the ordinary way, they do not give essential definitions because art does not proclaim things that way. In this way art is philosophical. We need to be open, as Cascardi asserts, to the way in which “works of art help reveal what is incomplete in any form of knowledge that limits itself to concepts alone.”\textsuperscript{110} Kant’s notion of aesthetic ideas are the thinkable content of a work of art, what we might think of as its ‘theme’ or the spirit of the work that makes it a work of art. In a word, Kant writes:

\textquote{[...]} the aesthetic idea is a representation of the imagination, annexed to a given concept, with which, in the free employment of the imagination, such a multiplicity of partial representations are bound up, that no expression indicating a definite concept can be found for it – one which on that account allows a concept to be supplemented in thought by much that is indefinable in words, and the feeling of which quickens the cognitive faculties.\textsuperscript{111} (§CJ 49: 316: 179.)

The aesthetic idea is linked to both a rational idea, which it strives to present, and to the sensible concept of the object’s purpose, but cannot be determinate because there is no object to which the ideas correspond. Aesthetic ideas integrate the work of art’s intellectual and sensible dimension, while genius expresses the purposive mental activity in the work. Aesthetic ideas are a way of disclosing how a range of experiences that coalesce in particular phenomena come to bear the burden of meaningfulness for us; when we are in touch with art, as Bernstein suggests, it gets closer to us than our own lives.\textsuperscript{112} We have art because there is a deficit; art answers a need for communication.

Kant asks what it means for one thing to be beautiful and another not. He replies that the beautiful thing or object has a perceptual form (and content) that is the object of a communicable – that is, universal and necessary – pleasure. It has the

\textsuperscript{109}Davey, Unfinished Worlds, 19.
\textsuperscript{110}Cascardi, Art and Aesthetics after Adorno, 10.
\textsuperscript{111}Kant, The Critique of Judgment, § 49: 316: 179.
form of finality. The perception of objects or events having such forms enables us as human beings to realise our perceptual powers with pleasure. Contemplating such a beautiful thing will realise our perceptual powers as human beings, and because such an object or event is expressive of aesthetic ideas, it will also realise our cognitive powers. As Mary McCloskey claims, in being expressive of aesthetic ideas, a perceptual form that extends our perceptual powers also extends our powers of thought. The contemplation of such things is of value because it extends our cognitive powers; it extends thought by extending our perceptual (and imaginative) powers. The alignment of sensory perception and conception by means of structural concepts create links between intuition, imagination and understanding. When the three are operating in accord, through the experience of the beautiful we become conscious of the harmonious operation of our cognitive faculties; we feel our congruity with the world. The mental state of pleasure that aesthetic judgment induces can be communicated; it is subjective and has claims to universal validity. Apart from concept, the beautiful is that which is universally pleasing to every person who is so constituted to judge by means of understanding. Kant’s concept of sensus communis installs the notion of an epistemic community that breaks with claims of methodological subjectivity. This permits a re-inscription of sensibility – a reflective self-awareness, ‘seeing that we see’ – through inner-sense, an as if kind of inter-subjectivity. Aesthetic experience is not radically subjective, rather, like sense making it is shared (by faculties that we as human beings have in common) and in Kant’s terms provides the basis for human community.

A subjective judgment of a work of art may be, as if in common. In § 20 Kant claims that the judgment of taste depends on the ‘presumption’ of a ‘common sense’, which is essentially different from common understanding and in §21 he attempts to demonstrate that we do in fact have good reason for presuming the existence of common sense. Kant begins by claiming that judgments and the propositional attitudes we take towards those judgments must admit of being universally communicable. He states that “the beautiful is the symbol of the morally good, and only in this light does it give pleasure with a claim to the agreement of every one else.” Kant consistently contends that judgments of taste ‘demand’ or ‘exact’ agreement from everyone; and that everyone ‘ought’ to give the object in question their approval and pronounce it beautiful.

As Bernstein notes, Kant is claiming we ‘demand’ agreement, not merely count on agreement. In his epistemological reading of the claims of taste, Kant deduces that we have a priori good reasons for expecting that others will agree, given that

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113 Mary A. McCloskey, Kant’s Aesthetic, (Macmillan Press, 1987), 158-159.
114 Kant, The Critique of Judgment, § 9: 219: 60
116 Bernstein, The Fate of Art, 22.
we all must have the same cognitive equipment. What Kant calls a demand, philosopher Paul Guyer defines as "a prediction, but an ideal prediction which presupposes ideal knowledge of one's own responses and ideal circumstances of response for others." The circumstantial ideality of response for others must include their capacity and willingness to judge disinterestedly. Kant’s notion of sensus communis is that the communicability of something, a feeling, a thought, means that, in principle, others could think what I think, feel what I feel. That is to say that there is not something particular to me, all humans have the conditions for such feelings and thoughts; sensus communis is built into the very notion of aesthetic reflective judgments. However, such judgments are not questions of private feeling but of an assumed public sense. It is Kant’s claim:

In all judgments by which we describe anything as beautiful we tolerate no one else being of a different opinion [...] we do not rest our judgment upon concepts, but only on our feeling [...] we introduce feeling not as a private feeling but as a public sense. (C) §22: 239:84)

For Kant, aesthetics is that which calls into being the shareability of our sensory attunement to the world, of our relatedness to everyone. Our disinterested pleasure means that we care whether we agree with each other. As Bernstein notes, what is at stake is the shareability of our subjective life, our inter-subjectivity, whether or not we share a world; aesthetics is a way to re-attune us to our sensory connectedness. In addition, there is a role for real public communication. The Critique of Judgment is an attempt to account for the notion that intuition has a more complex character, that is to say, reflective or aesthetic judgment, suggests other than rational ways of engaging with objects. Intuition has more meaningfulness than is accounted for in the notion of concept, an idea elaborated in Kant’s notion of reflective judgment. Kant encouraged the cultivation of our sensory nature and its capacities, but not for its own sake.

We could read the Critique of Judgment as an exploration of the educative possibilities of art, and several commentators draw attention to Kant’s treatment of art in the Critique of Judgment as heuristic. Kant gives account of art’s ability to enable and provoke viewing audiences to reflect on how freedom ought to be used in a just society. Genius and originality serve in Kant’s system to further reinforce the image of beautiful art that exemplifies balance of freedom and restraint; taste tempers the freedom of genius. While Kant does not refer to ‘aesthetic education’ in the Critique of Judgment, the work has import for the role

118 Bernstein, The Fate of Art, 22-23.  
123 Bernstein, The Fate of Art, 22.
of education in the art museum. In particular, it offers a penetrating account of the interdependence of the intuitive and cognitive in the experience of works of art, both rational and affective modalities of knowing. Aesthetics is a domain of experience: art’s value is linked to its aesthetic and other phenomena as work, and the experiences it affords when encountered.

Without ideas of perfection we would have no general vision of education, no hope for a better future. While ideas can be viewed as standards of judgment, they can also be treated as ideals to be attained in the future. Kant almost seems to believe that the articulation of ideals can actually serve as a motivation to bring them about. In this respect, ideas have force and are brought into play by our ability to imagine and project our dreams onto an impossible future situation. In Kant’s pedagogy, persons are moral agents rather than objects of study; they are insiders and participants in common everyday life. Kant’s version of critical pedagogy is based on a transcendental reflection; even so, it comes close to the life problems that ordinary people can recognise as their own.

In the Critique of Judgment Kant understands art as a kind of cultivation of the forces of the mind:

The propaedeutic to all fine art, so far as the highest degree of perception is what is in view, appears to lie, not in precepts, but in the culture of the mental powers produced by a sound preparatory education in what are called humaniora – so called, presumably, because humanity signifies, on the one hand, the universal feeling of sympathy, and, on the other hand the faculty of being able to communicate universally one’s inmost self – properties constituting in conjunction the befitting social spirit of mankind, in contradistinction to the narrow life of the lower animals. (CJ § 60: 355:226)

Because the history of art developed symbiotically with the universal survey museum in the nineteenth century, art history became inseparable from the museum. Despite this, few museums today would claim that their principal mission is to narrate the history or geography of art; indeed, they would likely acknowledge their limitations in attempting to do so. Of course, historical context is critically important in understanding and appreciating art; as museum mission statements frequently acknowledge, the art museum is “a cultural and educational resource that enriches the minds and lives of our community”. However, of equal importance to the museum as a site that narrates art’s historical development is access to art’s distinctive capacity to communicate

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125 Løvlie, “Kant’s Invitation to Educational Thinking,” 109.
beyond conceptual determinate knowledge “that must suppress those things that are particular and embodied about our engagement with the world”, 128

**Conclusion**

Immanuel Kant and George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel have been highly influential in the ensuing discussion of art and aesthetics since the early nineteenth century. In significant, but divergent ways, their philosophical ideas have impacted the theoretical and practical discourse of the public art museum, since its inception. To the present, Kant’s *Third Critique of Judgement* has particular relevance to art museum discourse in its marking out of aesthetics; first, as a discreet domain of human experience, and second, the capacity of aesthetic reflective judgment to augment our communicability and sociability. A central thread through this thesis is that Kant’s conception of aesthetic reflective judgment provides the framework for a conception of art that continues to be pertinent in the present. By Kant’s account, the ethical dimension of art is not literal or direct, rather, its significance lies in its capacity to raise consciousness of attitudes embedded in our concepts, providing an occasion for reflection, critique, and revision of them. 129 Kant’s aesthetics can be seen to offer not only an important way of understanding the distinctive characteristics of our pleasure in (beautiful) art but also a framework for understanding the deeper significance of art and beauty in relation to other domains of human experience. 130 For Kant, art is the occasion for attuning our subjectivities inter-subjectively. In this aspect of Kant’s aesthetic philosophy, John Dewey’s twentieth century pragmatist philosophy demonstrates a Kantian legacy. Yet, contrary to Kant’s notion of disinterestedness, Dewey argues against pure aesthetic qualities of form, insisting that responses to line and shape in works of art are conditioned by experience of physical reality. 131 That aside, as philosopher Jennifer McMahon observes, Dewey’s theory of community of inquiry is developed within the parameters of Kant’s conception of sensus communis explicated in the *Third Critique*; making Kant’s aesthetic reflective judgment a precursor to pragmatist aesthetics. 132 For both Kant and Dewey aesthetic reflective judgments exemplify the responsiveness of our thinking to continually evolving norms. McMahon goes on to explain:

> Aesthetic reflective judgments [...] offer a structure through which to further, usually unwittingly, our evaluative concepts for the purpose of

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furthering the conditions of sociability and community [...] The feeling with which art is concerned is public, not private [...] This feeling is embedded in concepts which, when alluded to through art, evoke an experience and associated attitudes, images, constructs, and configurations that engage our cognition.133

In contrast to Kant, Hegel turns his attention to the meaning and content of works of art themselves. Identifying the sensuous or material character of art as its distinguishing feature, Hegel understood the visual arts as the means by which a culture’s essential ideas were expressed and communicated.

My exploration of Kant’s Critique of Judgement determines its relevance for a far-reaching redefinition of art museum pedagogy in the contemporary setting. This means evolving praxis that prioritises visitor engagement in the perceptual experience of works of art, recognising the peculiar power of art to develop and enhance perceptual, cognitive, and aesthetic capacities.134

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133 McMahon, Art and Ethics in a Material World, 78. McMahon notes: "We do not need to avoid this conclusion because, unlike Kant we have [...] the resources of various philosophical theories of meaning, language and perception to show how cognition contributes to how and what we feel."

134 Maleuvre, The Religion of Reality, 38.
Conclusion

*Art moves, understanding moves.*

Nicholas Davey.1

*The development of attention and concern away from curatorial achievement – the authority and coherence of the collection – to the visitor’s experience – the authority and coherence of the person – transforms the context of representation and interpretation.*

Sharon MacDonald and Roger Silverstone. 2

*As people begin to use a different language to describe what they do, they tend to change what they see and do.*

Mark H. Moore 3

Philosopher Martha Nussbaum claims that it is the faculties of thought and imagination that make us human, and turn our relationships into rich human relationships, rather than those of mere use and manipulation.4 Nussbaum goes on to claim the arts and humanities as crucial in cultivating the capacities to think critically, the ability to transcend local loyalties, and to imagine sympathetically the predicament of another person.5 This thesis brings into view questions concerning the kind of contribution art offers to human experience and how we might better understand how to approach the facilitation of existentially significant interactions with art in the spaces of the museum. The theorists on whose work I have drawn I believe address critical perspectives of what art means and does in human experience, the processes involved in coming to understand it, which I consider imperative in setting contours for calibrating the address the museum makes to its public on art’s behalf. The philosophical perspectives discussed make available a kind of backstory for art, an understanding of art as touchstone to our lives. They bring into view important understandings affecting how we might apprise and formulate an encounter with art in the museum. For example, Kant's concept of aesthetic reflective judgment recognises art’s capacity to communicate feelings and attitudes, the process whereby our subjectivity is cultivated inter-subjectively.6 Kant's concept

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of community and aesthetics are significant to the art museum, which through its understanding of the work art enacts, brings to consciousness our attitudes and understandings that motivate reflection and revision of those understandings. Dewey’s community of enquiry, developed within parameters recognisable as key terms in Kant’s Critique of Judgment, is both a philosophy and a method of shared experiences where museum practitioners and visitors are inquirers; bridging the private reflective world of the individual and the shared public world of wider society. The implication of Gadamer’s conception of hermeneutic experience requires that museum practitioners take into account what transpires dialogically between the phenomena of a work of art and a viewer as integral to understanding, engaging the subjective and the objective as realms of interest. Rejecting pedagogical practice defined as transmission Rancière’s conception of aesthetic and educational egalitarianism requires the art museum recognise the agency of works of art and viewers, engaged in active translation of what they experience, thus enacting their equality and intelligence.

At different historical moments the institutional framing of art has performed and enacted different ideological conceptions of art’s epistemology and ontology. This thesis has drawn on cognate philosophical ideas to reorient museum pedagogical praxeology, to redefine understandings of the relations between works of art and what they occasion in human experience. A principal contention of the thesis is that epistemological and ontological tensions in the museum’s public pedagogy, in different measure, have at different times conjoined to limit the experiential value of art. It has been claimed that the power of art’s aesthetic phenomena resists our desire to know an objective ‘truth’ or meaning. It has been argued that theoretical insights drawn from cognate philosophical discourses foreground pathways for radically reorienting art museum pedagogy.

As noted in the Introduction of the thesis it has not been the intention of this project to describe a prescriptive model for reoriented museum pedagogy. More exactly, the purpose of this project has been to investigate: Firstly, the intellectual, socio-political, and historical context circumscribing the inception and reception of ‘art’ and the art museum, including aspects of its trajectory from the eighteenth century to the present, and the discourses that have informed practices that order the relations the museum brokers between works of art and a viewing public. This has informed the discussion of Chapters One and Two. Secondly, the thesis engaged with germane philosophical perspectives drawn from the major works of Hans-Georg Gadamer, John Dewey, Jacques Rancière and Immanuel Kant, selected for the significant contributions they bring to a deeper understanding of the value of art in human experience and the processes involved in our engagement with it, and our coming to appreciate it. Chapter Three drew out aspects of Gadamer’s phenomenological hermeneutic
philosophy, which give attention to what comes into being within our experience of art. For Gadamer, hermeneutics is not just a method of interpretation but is a model of human understanding involving dialogue between a work of art and a viewer. Chapter Four drew out the implications of Dewey's theory of inquiry which understands the experience of art as an event that constructs, reconstructs, and externalises ideas for critique and reflection, that occasion further insight and in commons understanding. Chapter Five scoped the implications of Rancière’s conception of aesthetic egalitarianism for art and education. A key idea in Rancière's aesthetics is that art can be understood to be directly political on the level of the sensible, rather than simply representing ideas about social and political concerns. The theme of the concluding Chapter Six, explored Kant’s aesthetic theory which can be seen to offer not only an important way of understanding the distinctive characteristics of our pleasure in (beautiful) art but it also provides a framework for understanding the deeper significance of art and beauty in relation to other domains of human experience.

The investigation in the preceding chapters of philosophical ideas pertaining to the experience of art has sought to establish theoretical frameworks for an ongoing research that seeks deeper understanding of art's experiential offer; how and what people learn when they encounter works of art in the museum. The purpose of this exegetical engagement with pertinent philosophical reflections aimed to draw out questions that are crucial for investigating new understandings that might ultimately offer a far-reaching redefinition of art museum pedagogy. I have argued that in establishing new approaches to museum pedagogy we need to rethink art's ontology in the light of its experiential offer, how it is interacted with, spoken about, and who speaks about it, to more deeply understand what constitutes the conditions for knowing and understanding art.

The original contribution of this project is its investigation of philosophical thinking for the purpose of expanding the intellectual ground of museum pedagogy and to advance research that bears directly on problems I have alluded to in extant practice methodologies. The philosophical theories explored in my research orient the ideas and principles for steps toward a critical pedagogy, conceived as a form of artistic practice, a creative process. The key purpose of this thesis has been to map new alignments with philosophical ideas in order to rearticulate claims for the value of art in, and beyond, the educational spaces of the museum, by embracing an expanded epistemological framework for the knowledge that the experience of art funds. I have argued that productive relationships between art and philosophy should be strengthened to redefine the pedagogy of the public art museum. I have located the theoretical stance of my
educational perspective in the philosophical framework of experiential reflective education. I have positioned my argument in the context of the contemporary conception of education where experience is distinct from the transmission of codified information and is elevated to a central position in the enterprise of learning.

The thesis has argued that an encounter with artistic material in the museum represents a performative, situated event that externalises and shares experience. That there is need for a far-reaching redefinition of museum pedagogy to facilitate interactionist practices performed between people and works of art. Where the ideological and structural aspects of theory and practice are mutually informed in the location between agent and structure of an educational praxis, the dialectical nexus between the ‘theoretical’ or thinking dimension of human being and the ‘practicing’ or doing. Where the conditions for knowledge are not predetermined and the museum does not simply transmit authoritative knowledge. Rather, people are invited to contribute to a hermeneutic ‘community’ through inquiry processes and conversation that become the raw material from which response to the work of art and meaning is collaboratively produced, externalised and shared.

It must be recognised that in the international context public art museums are intent on evolving practice strategies that centralise the experience of the visitor. Many art museums already enact pedagogies that bring into play the active agency of visitors through their own experiential inquiry of works of art. However, in order to calibrate a far-reaching pedagogy that insists on integrating different knowledges — the life world of the viewer and the object world — and the participation of cognitive, emotional, and embodied sources of knowing, we need to establish apposite theoretical ground. Commenting on practice, museum educator and academic, Claire Robins evaluates the current situation this way:

The museum’s pedagogic role [is] predicated [...] on the deceptively simple egalitarian principle of extending access to learning from the collections and exhibitions beyond a professional or elite minority, [which] continues to divide opinion and fuel debate [...] [as does] the issue of how knowledge might be extracted and constituted from the examination and interpretation of exhibited materials.8

While curation of exhibitions has moved away from what Robins describes as the “assuredly defined, disciplinary-based exhibition, where the specialist provides

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an authoritative account, and towards a more interdisciplinary and thematic approaches,” she notes that artists’ interventions have been sanctioned by museums precisely because they break with orthodox interpretation practices. Artist’s methods of intervention critique both the forms of knowledge that are privileged by the museum and the display decisions that embed and narrate particular meaning. These interventions might then be seen as part of the museological development that seeks to provide an alternative interpretive paradigm for experiencing and understanding works of art. Such interventions, which frequently involve a confluence of voices, open up the possibilities of meaning-making to provide alternative interpretation in contrast to the ‘authoritative’ historical account offered to audiences. Such interventionist events point to the importance of ‘affect’ in learning now recognised in contemporary educational research, which extends to emotional and phenomenological encounters with works of art for museum visitors. Robins observes that, “affect has come to be substantively re-theorized into learning theory [so that] the separation of the realms of embodied, experiential and aesthetic learning from detached and academic pursuits has started to be problematised.” The dispersal of philosophical ideas with which the thesis has engaged inform theoretical framing for a homologous alignment of embodied, experiential, and aesthetic knowledge of art with the rational objectives of art’s academic historical analysis.

Chapter summaries
Chapter One investigated the historical inception of the public art museum in late eighteenth-century Western Europe and its progressive elaboration in the nineteenth century. It probed the dominant disciplines of art museum interpretive practice to provide historical background. In particular, it explored the way a relationship between art and audience is understood and brokered through the institution’s traditional epistemological paradigm and hermeneutic practices, how encounters with works of art have been historically determined and produced. I claimed that discord in the museum’s disciplinary discourses, explicit and tacit, diminish the experiential yield of transactional ‘dialogicality’ between a work of art and a viewer. I focused on the coextensive emergence of

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14 Robins, Curious Lessons in the Museum, 164.
art history and museology to better understand the implications of these nascent disciplines for the epistemological foundation of the art museum. My purpose has been to give historical nuance to new branches of knowledge formed by modern 'disciplines,' re-ordered from pre-existing domains, which produced new forms of knowledge pertaining to art in order to enlighten and educate an incipient public. The formative epistemological framework of the art museum situated works of art as 'knowable' objects of disciplinary analysis structured by classificatory systems that narrate art's historical context and progression.

Chapter Two focused on 'Art' as an autonomous field and its subsequent institutional demarcation. The first section of the chapter addressed the development of aesthetic philosophy and its uneasy relationship with art history. It discussed the intersection of these distinct discourses and how they construct viewing subject positions in relation to the presentation of art. The foundational orthodoxies of educational practice – the way the art museum constructs new forms of the viewing subject and the observed object – transforms the way people attend to things, and how things address and act in relation to us. My contention has been that epistemological tensions inherent in the co-development of the institution and the modern conception of education, in the context of the emergence of aesthetic philosophy, and the modernist discipline of art history, remain under-examined and unresolved. Consequently, art's educative potential for museum constituents is impeded. A second section of the chapter drew attention to the governmentality of the art museum. It identified the late eighteenth and nineteenth century art museum as a site in which new forces and realities were constructed and organised into social programs, it argued that the museum connects specific forms of expertise to programs of social management that operate in registers that are simultaneously epistemological and civic. Development of new approaches to art history and art theory, and their expanded understanding of the experience of art, is the focus in the third section of the chapter. I drew on the work of art historians T. J. Clark and Georges Didi-Huberman as exemplars of alternative art historical method that embrace hermeneutic and experimental inquiry processes. The final section of Chapter Two contextualised late twentieth century critical discourse with debate and scholarly reflection that has effected change in the conditions and relations for the presentation and reception of art. It explored Michel Foucault's notion of 'effective' history that challenges historical continuity and coherence, a shift away from 'totalising history' to reveal the contingency of historical events. Foucault's philosophy of effective history points to the criticality of audience agency in relation to works of art in the museum. The discussion undertaken in this chapter identified that traditional art museum pedagogy provides little

opportunity for museum visitors to scope personal and cultural experiences relevant to them when they participate in visitor education programs.

Seeking to reconcile identified dissonance between a systematic art historical frame and more direct, affecting encounters with works of art, my research takes a trans-disciplinary exploration of philosophical thinking that positively elucidates art’s educative processes and value. My essential aim has been to determine a more liberal theoretical ground on which to articulate a pedagogical praxis that enfold aesthetic perception, hermeneutic critique, and processes of active experimental inquiry that accommodate spectator agency and the exigencies of art-historical knowledge. I argue that what is needed is a praxis that views pedagogy emergently rather than a prescriptive methodology, and in the context of mutable values, which can be adapted or rejected in the actual concrete pedagogical situation. This implies finding ways to cultivate situations in the public learning spaces of the museum in which creative active inquiry can develop as an interactive relational and social project. I argue for a Deweyan experiential perspective that maintains that knowing and understanding art emerges from interactivity with it, and that meaning is created through active inquiry, opening up opportunities for dialogue and collaborative production of knowledge.

Chapter Three focused on Gadamer’s account of philosophical hermeneutics in his major work *Truth and Method* (1960), the title of which gestures toward the contrast between ‘methods’ of natural science and the understanding of the truth of meaningful human activity in art, history, and everyday life. Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics challenges epistemological tensions of art’s disciplinary framing. It claims that we cannot understand human affairs from a standpoint external to them. Contrary to objectivist discourses, of science for example, or traditional art history, Gadamer understands that to interpret human actions, like the production of art, we need to do so from a standpoint within our own cultural tradition, whether this is the same as the tradition being interpreted, or not. Gadamer takes aesthetics as the paradigm for our understanding of human history and human communication. He understands the comprehension of culture to be like a sense: a sense that requires refinement and development through lifelong processes of learning. Gadamer employs experience in his discussion of the phenomena of art as an analogy of how hermeneutics is not simply a method of interpretation. Accordingly, meaning in a work of art is actualised in the dialogic activity of experience and understanding.

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A central point of Gadamer’s hermeneutic philosophy and critique of subjectivist accounts of human understanding is that understanding is percolated by the ‘historicity of existence,’ our understanding is always local and contingent. Our understanding of art is always an event circumscribed and conditioned by history and the cultural situation in which it occurs; understanding is always finite. This finitude entails the fact that what we try to understand is irreducible to concepts and categories our situation makes available – tradition is always in excess of our capacity to appropriate it so we can never understand the other purely and simply in terms of ourselves or remaining fixed in what seems to us a self-evident determination of how things are. Gadamer’s hermeneutical aesthetics gives fertile ground for a museum pedagogical praxis that strives for complexity, where meaning is a property of behaviour, behaviour as complex, intersubjective, and embodied phenomenon. The key elements of Gadamer’s hermeneutic philosophy that contribute beneficial insights to a theoretically nuanced and efficacious museum pedagogy include: firstly, emphasis placed on the experience of art, or the event of art, when art asks something of us, makes a claim on us, and seeks our attentiveness. Secondly, recognition that different kinds of knowledge are conditioned by the experience of art’s presentness; art has a dialogical capacity to induce change in the spectator’s sphere of understanding, to effect transformative engagement. The implications of Gadamer’s thinking for pedagogical praxeology radically refigures the museum as a setting for sustained deep learning with art that acknowledges and values complexity in experience. Gadamer shifts aesthetics’ philosophical work to a consideration of the horizon of meanings that are disclosed in the experience of art on the ground that traditional aesthetics cannot support an acceptable account of art’s claim to truth, the absence of which, Gadamer claims, diminishes art’s cognitive significance in society.\textsuperscript{19} The issue of understanding is, for Gadamer, dialectical: understanding is occasioned by the mutually transforming fusion of different cultural horizons. The phenomenological character of Gadamer’s aesthetics invites the viewer’s openness to the work’s unfolding, meaning is formed through the viewer’s reflective interaction with it.

Gadamer and Dewey in their respective development of a philosophy of experience seek to overcome the epistemological framework of the subject/object dualism and each aims to phenomenologically shift the grounds of inquiry into the concrete existential phenomenon of understanding from epistemology to ontology. For Gadamer, art is knowledge; an encounter with art suggests an alternative paradigm of understanding, and knowledge. In Art as Experience, Dewey submits that knowledge is “instrumental to the enrichment of

\textsuperscript{19} Davey, Unfinished Worlds, 176.
immediate experience through the control over action that it exercises.”

Correspondingly, in Dewey’s account, knowledge arises from the field of experience in respect of both art and science. For Dewey, the performativity and communicative integrity of works of art best exemplifies what “having an experience” is.

Chapter Four focused on the contribution of Dewey’s work for reorienting museum pedagogy. Dewey does not intend to be prescriptive about how inquiry takes place, but describes the generic features by which inquiry might emerge. In the flow of actual lived experience inquiry is neither linear nor prescribed. A critical tenet in Dewey’s theory of inquiry is that the starting of an experiential problem is the immediate non-cognitive, temporal, and transactional relationship between a person and world. The objective of a pedagogical practice shaped by Dewey’s concept of creative social agency is to enable museum audiences to become open to what is concealed within a work of art, what is not immediately apparent or explicated through historical analysis. His metaphysics of experience seeks to unify the traditionally separated philosophical categories of metaphysics, ontology, and epistemology by grounding them in action in the environment. For Dewey, knowing and learning are not just causally dependent responses to the surrounding conditions: they are co-constructed as a result of the emergent relationship between persons (all organic beings) and the environment. He defines environment as the way a person transactively and imaginatively inhabits space, both physically and psychically. Dewey understands the experience of art to be valuable only insofar as it resists the passive notion of spectatorship in favour of engagement. Engagement involves responding productively to what is given, with the work of art being allowed to direct the viewer in the exercise of his or her knowledge. For Dewey an experience of art is full and embodied, and not something that can be expressed solely in the narratives of art history. Dewey’s account of an experience denotes a particular class; those experiences that are particularly meaningful, important and aesthetic that induce an expansion of perceptual acuity, an expansion of meaning and value. Learning through art by Dewey’s account is a creative process, where creativity is not just the quality of thinking of an individual person but is an interactive, relational, and social project. Because meaning arises from active transaction (or use) rather than being the property of the art object, or thing-in-itself, intelligence is a social capacity that emerges from and is enacted in the social and intersubjective world. The work of social intelligence becomes creative action, which is publicly reconstructive and transactional. Social intelligence implies a shift from the recollection of facts or information to the capacity to act, which always and already takes place in the

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20 Dewey, Art as Experience, 290.
For Dewey, knowledge and learning are transactional and emergent properties of active inquiry that involve the continuous reconstruction of experience; prior experience is brought forth to modify experience that follows. This continuity and interaction represent the educative significance and value of experience: the educational concern results in the construction of situations in which interactions occur. Knowing is not an act of an outside spectator, but that of a participant in the social scene, in the commons. Significantly, for Dewey the material of art belongs to the common world: his aesthetic and experiential philosophy seek to restore art to the commons, particularly in the art museum, where art is seen as separated from the community in which it exists. Dewey’s working philosophy of experiential inquiry rehearses an apposite theoretical approach to museum pedagogy, where knowledge of art is an emergent property of active inquiry that involves intuitive and reflective, ideational and conceptual modes of knowing. Dewey understands knowledge as emerging from the lived experience of human beings in the world. In order for the substance that art communicates – which we might express as art’s distilled expression – to be made manifest through experience, museum pedagogy must be rooted in the actual experience of visitors as they transact physically and psychically with the institution’s artistic material. Dewey’s idea that knowledge of the object, the known work of art, is not ontologically separated from the knower, has major implications for how the museum engages its publics with art.

The late-modern educational address of the public art museum will ideally aspire to recognise and enfold socially transformative education praxis, evincing a broader in commons in the cultural material it mediates. Achieving this will entail alteration of subject positions for both museum audiences and museum professionals in order for all to partake in and share what is seen, what is thought and what is said. Rancière’s exemplar of emancipatory education, the focus of Chapter Five, raises critical educational concerns pertinent to the articulation of a re-envisioned museum pedagogy and the relationship it constructs between viewers and works of art. Rancière’s theory of emancipatory education, founded on the presumed equality of the intelligence of all human beings, positively formulates how equality is an educational concern. For Rancière, emancipation is not a change in terms of knowledge, but in terms of positioning bodies. It reconfigures the territory of what can be said, seen and thought and by whom, of what is possible. Rancière marks emancipation as the purpose of education. Applied to the art museum, Rancière’s theory of emancipatory education ideally shifts the public role of the museum professional away from their disciplinary

21 Stoller, Knowing and Learning as Creative Action, 48.
knowledge domain and towards their capacity to share their engagement with a thing *in common*, inviting viewers to do the same.

For cultural theorist Mieke Bal, the important work of museum interpretive practice lies in constructing meaning at the ground level, from which independent thinking and action are possible. Bal discloses the power relations of art museum expository discourses that delimit the agency of both the art object and its viewer. Her concept of *working* art makes a case for art’s live presence for us today: art’s interactive liveliness entices us to *work* with it. Bal’s analysis of discourses aims to re-educate the public, to entice people to look without the museum prejudging or determining the manner in which the activity is performed. For Bal, the performance through which the exhibiting subject becomes an ‘expository agent’ is perlocutionary: it is addressed to a receiver, the grammatical ‘second person’. Bal acknowledges that language demonstrates that a person is not autonomous, the first person, the one who speaks, must be affirmed in her authority to speak by the second person, the *you*, who speaks in turn so that the dialogue can occur. Bal contends that if exhibiting is about communicating, the image or object is not autonomous. She understands the expository act as a speech act, effective and performative, that has an effect on the second person. Yet, the expository agent of the art museum is not always directly available to take up her or his position as second person. The result of the expository agent’s invisibility is that the dialogue is curtailed; performance of different speech acts such as the affirmative or interrogative is precluded. The contribution of Bal’s analysis to this thesis is her idea that the meaning of a work of art lies in the particular performance that takes place in the work’s ‘field’, rather than an intrinsic property the work has. The meaning is an *event*, an action carried out as an *I* in relation to what the work takes as a *you*.

Chapter Six argued that if art can be described as a designated field of objects that is meaningful, sensuous and particular, historical and concrete, it is also a form of knowing. Art presents us with insights that are not reducible to their conceptual equivalents. In Kant’s conception of *aesthetic ideas*, art cultivates our aptitude for communication and expression by enlivening our faculties. Art (beautiful art) is significant in Kant’s terms because it connects concepts in new and original ways through the association of concepts with multiple representations in art that cannot be contained by any one concept. The excess or overflow of content of multiple representations in art ‘animates the cognitive faculties’, by which Kant means that our concepts are enlarged. Because art’s sensible presentation of aesthetic ideas exceeds our determinate expression, we express them aesthetically. Kant associates art with expression and defines it by
its ability to promote communication and augment our thinking by drawing on concepts we may not have previously thought to express. Kant writes:

The aptitude of men for communicating their thoughts requires, also, a relation between the imagination and the understanding, in order to connect intuitions with concepts, and concepts, in turn, with intuitions, which both unite in cognition.\(^\text{22}\) (CP§40:295:153)

Viewing art and engaging in dialogue with others about what we experience relieves us from our prejudices. It augments our faculty of sensibility. It encourages a broader perspective fostered by our efforts to ourselves, and to others, of expression, of being understood. The importance of Kant's aesthetic philosophy to education involves the cultivation of our facility with language and our ability to communicate complex ideas. Kant’s notion of reflective judgment, exercised through an engagement with art (and other domains) acculturates us to take a more expansive point of view on what we encounter in the world around us. It develops our capacity to move from a solipsistic standpoint to one that is communal or universal, a \textit{sensus communis}.

By \textit{sensus communis} is to be understood the idea of a public sense, i.e. a critical faculty that in its reflective act takes account (a priori) of the mode of representation of everyone else, in order, as it were, to weigh its judgment with the collective reason of mankind.\(^\text{23}\) (CP§40:15:293)

As Kristi Sweet observes, Kant claims that when we make an aesthetic judgment we do so with an implied stance; “from a position that everyone could indwell.”\(^\text{24}\) The implication of this is that the reflective perspective from which we judge art has resonance with “the standpoint of universality from which we must judge our own times and measure them against the principle of justice.”\(^\text{25}\) The aesthetic experience of art encourages an ‘enlarged mentality’ which, as Kant infers, has a socialising aptitude; the criteria for aesthetic judgment is communicability, the measure for deciding whether our judgments are communicable is to see if they match the \textit{sensus communis} of others. Kant intends that engaging with art can develop our perspective beyond our private and subjective concerns; \textit{sensus communis} means taking another individual’s position. Kant’s ontology of art, as expressed in his conception of aesthetic ideas, is the perceptual and conceptual recognition that art has distinctive value in human life and society as a unique mode of knowledge. Art’s meaning is borne by sensuous particulars and it resists

Theoretical insights drawn from my research

An analysis of the philosophical ideas of Kant, Gadamer, Dewey, and Rancière bring to light questions to drive future research and mark out possible theoretical contours for an ambitious museum pedagogy that prioritises human agency and radically re-conceptualises what stands for knowledge in an encounter with works of art. Museums must recognise knowledge as a process, not a thing; the need for structure and authoritative information are not ends in themselves, but a means by which to establish the contextual situation for open and supportive inquiry. A key theme of the thesis positions art as a source of knowledge that includes but exceeds the framework of its historical contextuality, it conceives of knowledge as concrete, embodied, aesthetic, incorporated and lived, thereby replacing the logo-centric educational perspectives. The analysis of philosophical reflections that the thesis has engaged with provides contours for articulating and identifying some of the most fundamental questions concerning a redefinition of art museum pedagogy. A desired consequence of this research is for art museum practitioners to persuasively understand how meaningful experiences with works of art potentially affect peoples’ lives. Art museum practitioners working in the field need to develop a significant understanding of the impact of experiential inquiry of works of art on visitor knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours to assess art’s value and the work the museum undertakes. What is required to reorient the pedagogy of the art museum dispersed with the theoretical insights I have brought to light is a conceptually consistent systematic research agenda driven by situated museum practitioners and questions that ask: how does art enrich the lives of visitors? Under what conditions are personal connections with works of art facilitated, under what conditions are personal connections and prior experiences of art inhibited? What can we understand through philosophical reflections of the processes involved in coming to understand a work of art? How does the knowledge that is occasioned by an experiential inquiry of a work of art connect to wider cultural experiences? The questions that this thesis has given rise to help to identify fundamental issues and questions for a structural overhaul of art pedagogy. The ramifications for a radically redefined pedagogy imply institutional disruptions that will require institution-wide support and commitment. While a far-reaching recalibration of art museum pedagogy will make demands on the institution in providing resources, spaces, and structures, in conjunction with systematic research and training agendas for practitioners, a radical overhaul of museum pedagogy is not insurmountable.

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26 Cascardi, Prolegomena to Any Future Aesthetics, 10.
Future directions and ramifications for praxis

Museum pedagogy that radically redefines the positionality of the viewer as an engaged participant in a multivalent interaction with a work of art has profound ramifications for program typologies, schedules, and structures and the brokering of relational dynamics between museum practitioners and visitors, more broadly, the museum itself. Creating conducive conditions for an emergent museum pedagogy as praxis has practical ramifications not traditionally part of the institution’s educational dimension. An experientially redefined museum pedagogy necessitates practitioners construct situations in which interactions take place that entail changed power relations and subject positions for both museum audiences and museum practitioners to enact active participation in art’s reception and productive dimension. The ramifications of what I am ambitiously advocating essentially requires deepened theoretical and expanded disciplinary and intellectual frameworks on which to structure and enact a pedagogical praxis that emerges from the situatedness and specificities of practitioners, visiting participants, the objects encountered, and the spatial environment of the museum. It necessitates the institution to commit to a conceptually consistent research agenda; a crucial and long overdue constituent in realising the greater potentiality of the educational and social value of the art museum. Research is a component of the work programs of many museum professionals. An education practitioner inevitably shapes the context the guides the visitor engagement with works of art, however, research it is not a dedicated responsibility of education practitioners who are frequently research poor and entrapped by a demanding delivery interface with visitors of recycled and rehearsed content. Additionally, the art museum must make external its purpose motivated my engagement with its communities of users, to support visitors to make connection with works of art that involves them in value creating processes such as community, shared and active participative engagement, and co-creation. This implies active and participating communities of museum visitors.

Art museum public pedagogy can no longer see its purpose as primarily the mediation of art-historical content of specific works of art. This approach invites little, if any, audience agency in questions, observations, and impressions of what is being viewed. Positively, international research and practice has increasingly changed this paradigm. Pedagogical praxis in many museums now entails an approach to engagement with art that acknowledges socialised, historicised individuals while recognising a conception of knowledge as a process of production (not reproduction) within socio-cultural contexts. This approach insists that interpretation of objects or events of the past can only be constructed
in the present. It is evident that such issues are attracting the critical interest of researchers, but there is much more to be done to radically redefine pedagogical practice through grounded theories that enact processes by which knowledge and understanding of works of art is attained and valued by viewing audiences. Museum pedagogy cannot be a rehearsed form of telling and listening; pedagogy is an act of co-making, which has potential to result in shared processes and creative construction from which something new emerges. A democratic approach to museum pedagogy is an approach that respects every person’s perspective and where individual perspectives are considered valuable to collective understanding.

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