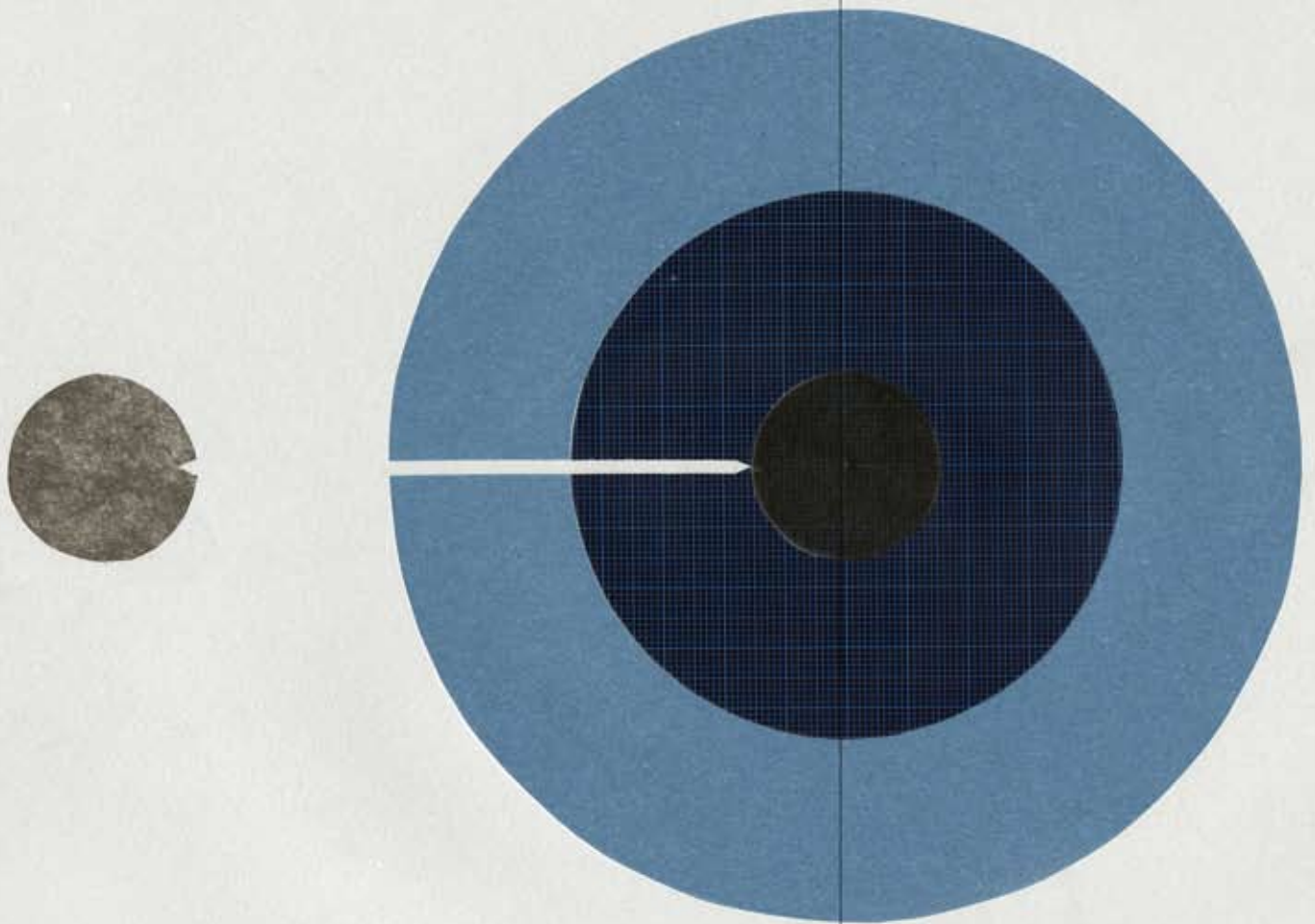# AESTHETIC SEPARATION

AND THE REFLECTION OF LIFE IN ART

Robert Waters

Aesthetic Separation and the Reflection of Life in Art

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September 2019.

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ABSTRACT[1] – Aesthetic Separation and the Reflection of Life in Art

This thesis aims to define the practice of art, which is understood as the creation and appreciation of artworks, in terms of separation. It further attempts to determine how the concept of separation can be used to relate biological and cognitive aspects of human life with the aesthetic experience and understanding of artworks. It accomplishes this by establishing correlations between biological and artistic functionality, while showing how separation limits a purely biological conception of artistic practice. The theoretical research focuses on important aesthetic theories of the past two centuries, and recent studies into human cognition. The practical research incorporates two postconceptual social art projects that implicate the theoretical research. The results demonstrate two principal separations that define artworks and people in relation to tradition and society respectively. The first involves an internal division of object and subject, or material and form. The second distinguishes internal from external, integral from relational, or the individual from the group. The oppositions that are generated by these separations play vital roles in the reflexive identification of self—the foundation of aesthetic theory—and the recognition of human products as artworks. Nonetheless, this thesis finds that the distinct sources of internal and external meaning during aesthetic experience impede a direct correlation between artistic cause and biological effect, and vice versa. Artworks do reflect human life, but their capacity to produce meaning is influenced by social and conceptual relations that escape biological determinism. The practice of art distinguishes its autonomy and tradition on its own terms.

Keywords: aesthetics; art; artwork; biology; cognition; life; postconceptual; separation; tradition.

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[1] Ve a **APÉNDICE 1** en página 399 para el RESUMEN en castellano.

"Separation is the Alpha and Omega of the Spectacle."

– Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, Thesis 25.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction to the Introduction

This thesis employs the concept of separation to determine how the practice of art relates to biological and philosophical conceptions of life. It explores the observation and function of separation in both artworks and people through an exploration of autopoietic theory, human cognition and aesthetic experience. It expands upon Jacques Rancière's conception of 'aesthetic separation,' which involves two distinct divisions that consider artworks in relation to sensory interaction leading to signification, and cultural tradition in relation to social transformation. Artworks are thus contemplated in my research in terms of artistic practice—the creation and appreciation of art—and in relation to collective systems of cultural communication and preservation.

This thesis explores the practice of art from many angles, providing a holistic approach to understanding the creation of artworks and their reception through aesthetic experience at the beginning of the twenty-first century. In order to better understand the connection between art and life, the practice of art is considered in terms of a systems-theoretical approach to biological operation, and a cognitive embodiment approach of human thought. To better understand the relationship between singular artworks and the general concept of art—as well as the social tradition through which art exists—the theory of art is considered in relation to its ontological and art historical roots. For my practical research, the ideas encountered in the scientific and philosophical research are integrated into an social artwork that explores how context influences artistic significance, and how spectators participate to help create artworks.

My research questions the procedure of identifying contemporary artworks given that they are unlimited in terms of their material composition and subject matter, and increasingly

moving into non-art territories. My belief is that artworks are distinguished from non-natural materials and non-art products based on the observation of their compositions and contextual states, which must incorporate some artistic convention that will distinguish them as art. This research also questions the ways that artworks affect observers, and how the practice of art can have a political effect. This relates to Rancière's concept of aesthetic separation, which he uses to explore the potential and limits of the political efficacy of aesthetic experience.

This thesis finds that the concept of separation is a valuable way to appreciate the practice of art and relate it to human life. Our biological state of being separated in terms of physiological lack and psychological ipseity can be recognized as an impetus for the acts of communication and connection that artistic practice implies. The observational act of distinction, which is required during aesthetic experience, is also an act of separation in which the transformations inherent in artistic composition are internalized and understood in relation to preconceptions of the concept and tradition of art. In the end, there are numerous separations that are shared by both human beings and artworks, which makes the practice of art an excellent opportunity to reflect upon the capacities and limits that we inherently have.

1.2. Thesis Topic and Intentions

The main topic of this thesis is the aesthetic experience of artworks, which is facilitated by the cognitive and experiential abilities of human beings within a context of social tradition. While a biological approach to understanding the practice of art is based upon the sensory and cognitive requisites for recognizing and appreciating artworks, the social and cultural traditions upon which we base our concept of art escape the reach of biological validity. One of the aims of this thesis is to better appreciate the separation between the fields of science and philosophy that influence the practice of art. While biology is understood as the scientific study of life, our philosophical understanding of life in existential terms is

equally essential to determine the true significance of artistic practice. This thesis attempts to establish how the practice of art is just as important for understanding and appreciating life by providing individuals with unique opportunities and perspectives to realize the conditions and contradictions that naturally constitute their lives.

This research into aesthetic experience focuses on the state and act of separation as a principal theme. As a concept that is applicable to scientific, philosophic and artistic realms of thought, my intention is to use separation in order to define artistic practice in association with and distinction from science and philosophy. As an autonomous field that utilizes scientific and philosophic truths in order to function, the autonomy of art will be further reflected in the autonomy of the artwork, which must be distinguished from other beings in order to function as art. Separation thus becomes a key concept in helping to establish the nature of artworks and the nature of our observation, both of which are constituted in terms of form. Rancière's concept of aesthetic separation establishes two instances of separation at the heart of contemporary art practices. One is the cognitive division between physical sensation and the conceptual or metaphoric meaning that it invokes. Another is the division of artworks from the society and tradition that establish them. These two distinct separations—one based within subjective aesthetic experience and the other based on objective social conceptions— unite this thesis as the practice of art is explored in relation to life.

With this theoretical research in mind, one final aim of this thesis is to explore how the creation of contemporary artworks can help to identify the ontological and operational boundaries that define aesthetic experience. Rancière's concept of aesthetic separation was developed in relation to the political ambitions of contemporary artists who are increasingly escaping institutional contexts and operating within non-art practices, utilizing 'everyday life' as a context and raw material for their artworks.[2] As an artist who fits within this

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[2] Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, (London, UK: Verso, 2011), 53.

methodological description, my practical research for this thesis focuses on the development of a socially engaged art project. Both the subject matter of the project and its procedure reflect the theoretical research into aesthetic separation and the reflection of life in art.

1.3. Literature Review

The three main books that have influenced this thesis focus on the theory of art. The unifying theme of the thesis comes from Rancière's article "Aesthetic Separation, Aesthetic Community," which was published in *The Emancipated Spectator*. In addition to considering the cognitive and social conditions of contemporary artistic practice, it establishes a space for the practical research of this thesis to explore the political efficacy of artworks. The second book, Alva Nöe's *Strange Tools*, develops an organizational theory of art that considers biological and evolutionary approaches to the practice of art while criticizing the legitimacy of current research in neuroaesthetics. His organizational theory of art functions remarkably well in relation to the themes of autopoiesis, context, language and technology, all of which play an important part of this thesis. The third book is Peter Osborne's *Anywhere or Not at All*, which ontologically positions contemporary art practices as 'postconceptual' in relation to a broad consideration of post-enlightenment artistic and philosophical traditions. Aside from providing a thorough overview of the cultural period that is the focus of Rancière's research—'the aesthetic regime'—Osborne also analyses the contemporary art scene with noteworthy clarity while carefully distinguishing art from aesthetics. These three books represent the three relational pillars at the heart of this thesis: art and sociology, art and science, and art and philosophy.

To more fully explore the relationship between art and sociology, there are several other key books to note. Niklas Luhmann's *Art as a Social System* places the practice of art within a systems-theoretical approach to communication theory, and is useful in considering

the observation of artworks and the autopoietic functioning of art. Two other important sources of inspiration are Jacques Derrida's *The Animal That Therefore I am* and Giorgio Agamben's *The Open*, both of which consider the relationship between human beings and other animals, and greatly deepened my understanding of reflexive thought. By showing how human beings are distinct, or at least how we *think* we are distinct, our use of language and technology become important factors in considering our use of art to define ourselves as a species.

From a scientific perspective, Humberto Maturana & Antonio Varela's concept of *autopoiesis* is perhaps the most important influence on this thesis. Establishing a systems-theoretical approach to understanding all forms of life, autopoiesis provides a model for determining an operational approach to artistic practice—the creation of artworks and their aesthetic experience—and the various conditions, considerations and complications that such an approach might entail. This is accompanied by Antonio Damasio's book *Descartes' Error*, which is a neurological guide to human thought and the intrinsic connection between body and mind. Providing an accessible conception of how 'self' is formed within individuals, and how human consciousness might function, Damasio's book is complimentary to understanding Gabrielle Starr's *Feeling Beauty*, which is a neurological approach to the functioning of aesthetic thought, and an introduction to the complex interconnectivity that the human nervous system is capable of.

Finally, better understanding the relationship between art and philosophy is perhaps the most important personal development that this thesis has permitted. To begin, Immanuel Kant's *The Critique of Judgement* was explored in great depth, establishing a firm foundation from which the practice of art can be considered as a philosophical practice. The legacy of Kant's conception of aesthetic thought can be found in all of the books mentioned above, but the three other main sources of inspiration were Friedrich Schiller's *On the Aesthetic*

Education of Man, which beautifully considers the political potential of artistic practice; John Dewey's *Art as Experience*, which eloquently explores the cognitive and social nuances of the experience of artworks; and finally, Martin Heidegger's *The Origin of the Work of Art*, which innovatively considers the ways in which artworks function as part of our individual and collective thought. From this diverse group of books, my research into a holistic understanding of aesthetic experience and aesthetic separation has largely developed.

1.4. Terms and Scope of the Thesis Topic

The topic of this thesis, aesthetic separation, implicates a broad range of relevant fields of study, from art to philosophy to science. There are many relevant terms that form the foundation of this thesis. Since its main theme is the aesthetic experience of artworks, I will begin by clarifying what I consider aesthetics to mean by using a definition of Rancière's:

> I do not consider aesthetics to be the name of the science or discipline that deals with art. In my view it designates a mode of thought that develops with respect to things of art and that is concerned to show them to be things of thought. More fundamentally, aesthetics is a particular historical regime of thinking about art and an idea of thought according to which things or art are things of thought.[3]

A number of terms that are used in this description beg further definition. 'Art', for example, is a universal term used to describe artworks in general and the human culture and tradition within which artworks are created and appreciated. An 'artwork' is a specific, singular exemplification of art, while 'art' is a concept that places artworks in reference to a culture and tradition that is defined by artistic conventions and practice. The terms 'art' and 'artwork' are co-dependent, and while I have explored the cluster-criteria definition of art in my

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[3] Jacques Rancière, *The Aesthetic Unconscious*, (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2009), p. 5.

previous work in search of the limits of artworks[4], the state of reciprocal dependency of 'art' and 'artwork' will be further explored in this thesis.

In the quote above, Rancière describes aesthetics as a particular historical regime of thinking about art, and the aesthetic regime needs to be clarified. The term, in general, refers to the post-enlightenment practice of art, which can be considered to have begun in the late 18th Century with the publication of Kant's *The Critique of Judgement*, in which our current conception of 'aesthetics' originates, and continues to this day in the early 21st Century.[5] In his article "Aesthetic Separation, Aesthetic Community," Rancière distinguishes the aesthetic regime from its predecessor, which he calls the "mimetic regime", or the "regime of representation." The aesthetic regime exemplifies the reason and freedom of thought that the Enlightenment advocated for. In the aesthetic regime of art, the subjective interpretation and understanding of artworks takes priority over predetermined notions of their significance, which will be further explored in the thesis. For a visualizaiton of the periodizaiton of the aesthetic regime in relation to relevant artistic movements and the principal source material of this thesis, please consult Appendix 2.

A more specific ideology that needs to be defined within the aesthetic regime of art is 'postconceptual art', which Peter Osborne uses to replace the temporally ambiguous term 'contemporary art.'[6] One of the problems Osborne has with the Modern/Post-modern opposition is that he doesn't consider Modernism to be over. Osborne positions postconceptual art as continuing movement of the Modern epoch of art, which can be subdivided into various kinds of modernisms. More importantly, the term postconceptual recognizes the important influence that conceptual art of the late 1960's and early 1970's has

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[4] Robert Waters, "Sweat, Feel, Think, Art: Investigating The Biological Foundation and Cognitive Conditions of Aesthetic Experience and Art," abstract (Master's thesis, University of the Basque Country, 2012), 98-107.

[5] Joseph J. Tanke, "What is the Aesthetic Regime?", *PARRHESIA*, No. 12 (2011): 72.

[6] Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, (London, UK: Verso, 2013), 37.

had on current art practices, which will be further explored in the thesis. As a practicing artist who employs conceptual strategies in the production of my artworks, the term postconceptual effectively contextualizes my multi-faceted art practice, and the two artworks that are included as practical research for this thesis.

Rancière uses the term aesthetic separation, in his text "Aesthetic Separation, Aesthetic Community" to describe two distinct processes of separation at the heart of aesthetic experience. The first relates to the biology and psychology of aesthetic experience, describing the separation that occurs when an external source of sensory data—an artwork, for example—is internalized and transformed into conceptual and/or metaphoric meaning by the observer. Rancière describes this separation as the transformation of 'sense to sense', taking advantage of the ambiguity of meaning that 'sense' has as both a physical sensation achieved through the five senses, and a feeling of reason or logic that a thought evokes.[7] From this second meaning of sense we derive the term 'common sense.' The second instance of separation at the heart of aesthetic separation is the division implied in the transformation of artistic practice and tradition as human cultural changes over time. This leaves artworks perpetually out of context, and has implications on their interpretation in relation to social influence, which is perpetually changing.

When I speak of 'the practice of art' I am referring to the creation and the appreciation of artworks. These two specific practices can be understood in a very broad way, with the creation of artworks being associated with their production, and their appreciation being associated with their aesthetic experience and their integration within larger institutional and economic systems of art. As an artist, it is important to point out that the appreciation of an artwork is implicit in its process of creation. One of the important things that I have learned

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[7] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 57-58.

during my research is that the opposite is also true; that the aesthetic judgement of an artwork implies its creation by the observing subject, at least in terms of generating significance.

Another phrase that I repeatedly refer to in this thesis is the state of 'being apart together', which Rancière uses in "Aesthetic Separation, Aesthetic Community" as a foundation for explaining our social relations and the condition of aesthetic separation. The phrase is taken from a Mallarme poem titled "The White Water Lily," and describes a situation where a potential suitor on a river boat silently approaches the woman he desires. As he hears her footsteps on the land, he prefers to remain undisclosed behind the flora in her assumed presence. "Apart, we are together,"[8] is the direct quote that Rancière uses, but I have shortened it for practical purposes, and use it repeatedly to refer to the paradoxical and metaphorical situation of being simultaneously separated and connected.

These are the main terms that are used within this thesis and form the structure upon which the concept of aesthetic separation will be investigated, associated and expanded. There are many other important terms that will be defined as they appear in the thesis.

1.5. Thesis Positioning and Literature Evaluation

Rancière is a very well known and respected philosopher of art and aesthetics, and there are numerous books and articles written about his work in relation with art theory, art history and the philosophy of art. This thesis is distinctive in that positions the work of Rancière in relation to a biological conception of artistic practice, and more fully develops the ways in which separation defines the aesthetic experience of artworks and the transformative tradition that establishes it. Furthermore, it relates the work of Rancière to two postconceptual art projects in an attempt to elucidate his theoretical proposals in practical terms and processes. The focus of my research has primarily been on the philosophy and psychology of

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[8] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 51.

aesthetics, which relate the experience of artworks with the functioning of human thought. The cognitive operation that is implicitly involved points towards the biology of aesthetic experience and the more specific field of neuroaesthetics, which is a relatively young area of research within the field of psychology. Nonetheless, I am a visual artist and my primary concern is to better comprehend my artistic practice in terms of the social and historical context within which I am working. The field of aesthetics, which relies heavily upon artworks, has few practicing artists who contribute to the literature on the subject. Within the field of neuroaesthetics, very few visual artists would be qualified to engage in conversations on the topic, I suspect, let alone contribute to the research. I consider this to be one of neuraesthetic research's principal weaknesses, and I have conceived of this thesis as a point of connection between biological, psychological, and philosophical practices related to art.

During my research, a book was published that played an influential role in diverting the focus of my study from the psychological to the philosophical aspects of the practice of art. Alva Nöe's *Strange Tools: Art and Human Nature* is a great combination of art, philosophy and science that positions the practice of art in relation to our organizational disposition and evolution as humans. While being adept at navigating the psychology of neuroaesthetics, Nöe is critical of its shortcomings while trying to remain positive in his attempt to relate the practice of art with biological and evolutionary theories. Nöe's approach to the practice of art and aesthetics is holistic, accessible and generous in its consideration of various influences and perspectives.

Two articles that relate conceptual art with neuroaesthetics were also inspirational in my research. Gregory Minisalle's "Conceptual Art: A Blind Spot for Neuroaesthetics?", which was published in *Leonardo* magazine in 2012, and Alexander Kranjec's "Conceptual art made simple for neuroaesthetics.", published in *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* in 2015, are both very articulate examples of the work that remains to be done in the field of

neuroaesthetics in order to become more valid and relevant to the practice of art. There is a lot of work to be done in order to properly conceive of art and the experience of artworks in the laboratory setting, and this thesis attempts to make the conditions of artistic practice more clear so that art can be more easily studied and appreciated from a scientific perspective.

1.6. Importance and Contribution of the Thesis

As a mid-career artist, I am somewhat ashamed to admit that my understanding and use of the word 'aesthetic' has been remarkably underdeveloped for the majority of my professional life. This research is important to me because I can now fully appreciate the processes involved in aesthetic experience, which still connotes the idea of beauty that I originally associated to it, although it's much more complicated than that in its cognitive and philosophical functioning. I hope this thesis will contribute to the education of other artists who are interested in appreciating the philosophical and biological implications that aesthetic experience brings to the practice of art. Using Rancière's concept of aesthetic separation is a perfect way to incorporate these often-disparate fields of study. By demonstrating the compatibility of his work with biological research I hope to extend its relevance for use in future philosophical, psychology or neuroaesthetic research.

The problem with most neuroaesthetic research is its inability to properly conceive of the relational factors that influence our understanding of art and our appreciation of artworks. The aesthetic experience of digital images of artworks is *not* the same as interacting with the actual artworks, and the current conception of art moves well beyond the constraints of two-dimensional media. Context has far more influence on the production of aesthetic meaning than is being considered in neuroaesthetic research, both in relation to the situation in which artworks are displayed and the tradition of art within which they are being evaluated. There are countless processes that happen during aesthetic experience, and my research shows how

the human body in movement and thought facilitates these operations over time in relation to external and internal sensory input. My research demonstrates how the scope of sensation is related to the idea of self and the subjectivity of the observer, and results in an aesthetic judgement that disrupts the foundation upon which our subjectivity is established. While our human consciousness enables powerful cognitive capacities, it is shown in this thesis to be fallible and limited as well, which has implications on our relationship with artworks. Autopoietic theory supports the notion that our human cognition is constrained and guided by a persistent condition of lack. What my research shows, in the end, is that the practice of art allows us to perceive and appreciate our situation as biological organisms with free will and unlimited imagination in combination with a constrained existence and explicit imperfections. As beings with infinite potential within finite bodies, artworks mirror our paradoxical nature by showing us the pleasure and strife that human life implies.

1.7. Epistemological and Ontological Position

My epistemological position is that of a constructivist. Aesthetics is an epistemologically subjective field of study since it requires human consciousness in order to exist, as will be further studied in Chapter 2.2.2.2. To Respond. An aesthetic judgement is a subjective claim that is not objective because it is based on the feelings and thought of an individual subject.

My ontological position is that of a materialist. The reality of the world that we know is a human dependent reality, as will be explored in greater depth in Chapter 3.4.2. Umwelt. Aesthetic experience is ontologically subjective because it is unique to human beings as a result of our species-specific cognitive abilities and the culture within which we develop as subjective individuals. While art objects do exist as ontologically objective objects, their value as art is purely ontologically subjective.

1.8. Research Questions

The research questions I'm addressing with this thesis are as follows:

1. How is the practice of art connected to life, and is the practice of art biologically determined? Life in this question should be understood as both the general condition that distinguishes living beings from non-living matter, and the specific existence of an individual living being. I am interested to connect the practice of art with both life as a biological operation, and life as a subjective existential conception.

2. How does separation influence the operation and functionality of life, cognition, aesthetic experience, and artworks? Can the concept of separation demonstrate the ways that art reflects life? I want to find out if the separation that is inherent to the functioning of biological and cognitive life can be understood as a foundation for the separations or distinctions that make art function.

3. How does human thought facilitate aesthetic thought, and how is it separate or distinct from other thought? Why are human beings the only animal species that practices art? I would like to explore how the cognitive capacities that make us unique influence the functioning of artistic practice. This is the topic of aesthetics, and this thesis is largely an exploration of the functioning of human thought in relation to the practice of art.

4. What is an artwork? How are artworks distinct from other human products? The answer to this question is largely based upon the findings of the last question, although it does introduce the existence of the physical art object as a problem in relation to function, use-value and intentionality.

5. How do artworks exist in relation to concepts and traditions of art, and to what extent are artworks autonomous from the artistic tradition? This question brings us back to aesthetic theory and capacities of human beings to transform particular thought into universal thought, and relate subjective thought with objective thought. Furthermore, it

places the artworks within a temporal logic of social practice and tradition, and raises questions about the importance of the contextualization and accessibility of artworks.

1.9. Hypothesis

My hypothesis is that the practice of art can be defined in terms of separation, which directly relates art to human life in terms of biological function and existential conception. The requisite components that define the practice of art—artworks, people and contexts—all demonstrate inherent separations that can be traced to human action and thought, which are bound by the conditions of life. Nonetheless, I anticipate that the separations inherent in the practice of art negate its possibility of being determined in purely biological ways due to the important influence of social factors on the function and significance of artistic practice.

1.10. Thesis Limitations

This thesis is very large in scope—perhaps too large—and each research question or theoretical chapter could easily become its own separate thesis. Nonetheless, my goal is to achieve a comprehensive, holistic understanding of the functioning of artistic practice in relation to human life. One limitation of this thesis is that I am not an expert in the fields that I am researching. I am an artist with an interest in philosophy and biology, but I am not a philosopher or biologist. Nonetheless, I intend to bring my philosophical and biological research into the realm of art in an attempt to create a point of entry for better collaboration between these separate fields of study.

Before reading Rancière's "Aesthetic Separation, Aesthetic Community," I was already compiling various instances of separation that I encountered during my research into the biological and philosophical conceptions of aesthetic experience. The concept of *aesthetic separation* thus became a catalyst to expand upon the far-reaching social and psychological

research that Rancière had begun into the political implications of artistic practice as it moves into the sphere of everyday life. Several parallels became apparent as I began to compare the various divisions in my research. The separation of the concept of life into physical and experiential notions parallels the separation of artworks in terms of form and content, and the separation of human life in terms of body and mind. These separations are all related, and the result is a thesis with a very broad perspective that calls for further examination in detail.

1.11. Methodology

My methodological approach is largely based upon Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's article "What is Philosophy?" which Rancière references in his text "Aesthetic Separation, Aesthetic Community," to describe acts of artistic creation. In the original article, Deleuze and Guattari separate human thought into its three great forms—art, science and philosophy— and describe them in terms of sensations, functions and concepts, respectively. This combination of ways of thinking perfectly reflects my research into aesthetic experience, acknowledging the separation of the distinct forms and processes of human thought while recognizing the interactivity and interdependence between them.

> The three thoughts intersect and intertwine but without synthesis or identification. With its concepts, philosophy brings forth events. Art erects monuments with its sensations. Science constructs states of affairs with its functions. A rich tissue of correspondences can be established between the planes. But the network has its culminating points, where sensation itself becomes sensation of concept or function, where the concept becomes concept of function or of sensation, and where the function becomes function of sensation or concept. And none of these elements can appear without the other being still to come, still indeterminate or unknown.[9]

My methodology implements scientific and philosophic thought to help define the practice of art and the aesthetic experience of artworks. The separations I am dealing with are as much

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[9] Giles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, (New York, USA, Columbia University Press, 1996), 199.

external as they are internal. My research methodology was largely qualitative and primarily involved a lot of reading of scientific and philosophic texts related to art theory and aesthetics. This was accompanied by practical research in the form of artistic creation, where various art projects were developed in tandem with my research in order to help interpret, contextualize and integrate the scientific functions and philosophic concepts that inform my thesis.

My primary research consisted in reading existing published material with aesthetic thought as the overarching focus of my source material selection. The sources of my research into the theory of contemporary art were informed by my professional art practice, with a focus on conceptual art, the avant-garde, and socially engaged art practices. This was supported by research into the philosophy of aesthetics, which began with a combination of classic texts (Kant, Schiller), modern texts (Dewey, Heidegger) and contemporary texts (Derrida, Rancière). This was related with scientific texts related to neuroaesthetics, cognition, autopoiesis, embodiment, and technology. As I read all of these varied texts, my focus was to identify the ways in which separation is involved in the practice of art, aesthetic experience and human biology and cognition.

My theoretical research was accompanied by practical experimentation in the development of artworks, which were designed as a progression of my art practice in relation to the four chapters of my theoretical research. While originally consisting of two new art projects and two new series, I have revised the practical research of this thesis to more accurately reflect the kind of socially engaged artworks that Rancière speaks of in "Aesthetic Separation, Aesthetic Community." One of these projects, "*uncover RECOVER*," was already completed when I began my research, but I have revisited this project in relation to Rancière's concept of aesthetic separation in order to explore the political efficacy of artworks. The second project, *Cover Your Tracks*, which was created specifically for this thesis, further

explores the conditions of aesthetic experience and the relation of human observation, action and thought with artworks.

As an artist, my research into the philosophy and science of aesthetics was largely an effort to increase my knowledge base in tangential fields of study. My intended result is to establish a firm foundation upon which I can develop my teaching methodologies and artistic production in line with the topic of aesthetic separation and the reflection of life in art. While it is difficult to translate theoretical information into the creation of an artwork, it is equally as difficult to convey theoretical information through the experience of an artwork. Furthermore, creating artworks to convey theoretical intention is a way of predetermining artistic limitation, which is antithetical to artistic integrity in my opinion. Nonetheless, I believe that my methodology and contribution are appropriate. While there are obvious limitations to my capacity to provide expert knowledge in fields of study where I am not an expert (i.e. philosophy and science), I do believe that I have established key arguments through my organization and comparisons that should be taken into account and further explored in artistic, scientific and philosophic fields of study. I also think that my integration of philosophic and scientific information into the realm of art and aesthetic experience will be very beneficial to artists who are interested in understanding the practice of art from beyond the confines of the field of art.

1.12. Main Findings

This thesis finds that the concept of separation is a valuable way to define and consider the practice of art in relation to human cognition and experience. Two key separations inform artworks and people; an internal division (between subject/object or matter/form), and an external division that defines individuality in relation to a group. Artworks embody the material/form opposition, but are further defined by a distinction

between their fundamental composition and the context in which they are evaluated. Artworks are inevitably related to the tradition and concept of art that is applied to them during their evaluation, and the artistic conventions that this tradition and concept entail, which implies that the distinction of artworks is socially influenced. People, on the other hand, demonstrate an internal modality of object and subject, which is reflected in the distinction of molecular function (physiology) and molar perception (psychology), respectively. We are further defined in relation to nature and culture, and the separation between an individual person and society reflects the distinction between subjective and objective determinations. There are many other separations that influence aesthetic experience, but these two separations establish the foundation upon which correlations can be made between art, philosophy and science.

My most important findings in relation to artworks relate to the vital influence of external contextual relations. Artworks are recognized through a subjective association with the concept of art, which places artworks in perpetual relation with artistic tradition. Artworks are recognized through their incorporation and use of artistic conventions, which adhere to that tradition while also challenging it. Artworks are formally differentiated from other human products through their subversive application of intentionality, functionality, and use-value. As such, the evaluation of artworks involves aesthetic and conceptual considerations, demonstrating an influence of external contextual reference on the meaning associated to the integral forms that artworks embody.

Another important finding relates to the motivation for artistic originality. Novelty not only establishes the individuality of an artwork but it also enables it to produce meaning, which is generated through the recognition of difference. The distinction of an artwork as a particular being allows it to become a proxy for a subject—the Other—and opens the door for aesthetic interpretation. As such, artistic originality helps to ensure the contemplative use-value that is associated with artistic practice. The perpetual innovation of artistic creation,

nonetheless, inevitably transforms the practice and conception of art. Artistic experimentation moves into non-art realms by crossing boundaries, surpassing limits, and engaging with the unknown in a tireless effort to sustain the capacity to produce meaning.

One final finding is the vulnerability that artworks reflect through their inherent states of lack and incompleteness, which reflects our human condition. Our individual survival largely depends on our abilities to integrate aspects of the world and contribute to society, which are actions that involve internal and external necessities and are as relevant to artworks as they are to humans. Artworks require humans to validate them, which they achieve through the production of significance that they evoke through their singularity. Human perception is incomplete and supported by consciousness, which itself functions transparently and evades showing its supplementary manipulations. Artworks demonstrate lack through their reliance on *parerga*, which supplement them structurally and aesthetically. The correspondence between human and artistic weakness supports the existence of an empathic connection during aesthetic experience, and consolidates the notion that artworks function as subjects.

1.13. Thesis Layout

This thesis is organized according to a simple collage (Appendix 3) that I made in an attempt to separate the various essential elements of aesthetic experience; artwork, context, subject, thought, and art. The result is four chapters that explore the ways in which contexts, people, thought and artworks function in relation to aesthetic experience with the intention of better understanding the notion of aesthetic separation and the practice of art in the early 21st Century. These theoretical chapters are accompanied by a chapter of practical research that considers two art projects in relation to the conditions of aesthetic experience.

Chapter 2. Life / Context focuses on the theory of autopoiesis and the ways in which living organisms fundamentally separate themselves from non-organic matter in order to live.

A secondary separation of autopoiesis involves the distinction between the molecular level of structural function of living organisms and the molar level of cognitive function within an environment. These two separations inform the intentionality of living beings and the observational capacities that enable aesthetic experience in humans. They are compared with Rancière's notions of 'being apart together' and aesthetic separation in order to describe the basic functioning of aesthetic experience, and to establish a point of connection between the practice of art and the functioning of human life.

Chapter 3. Thought / Self looks at the various cognitive functions that facilitate aesthetic experience. It begins by demonstrating how the body and mind work together to determine the conception of self in human subjects, before moving on to examine the ways in which our perception and action enable our ability to experience the world. This is followed by an exploration of how human consciousness forms our distinct understanding of reality. All of these ideas are related back to the theory of autopoiesis to examine how our perceived separation of external and internal being determines the thought processes that facilitate aesthetic experience.

Chapter 4. The Human / Intention explores the topics of language and technology as the two main characteristics and methods that we use to separate our species from other animals. Both language and technology are explored in relation to the construction of human thought and the practice of art. While language is examined in terms of establishing the human subject and our capacity for symbolic thought, which are essential for aesthetic experience, technology is explored in terms of function and intentionality in order to provide a counterpoint to the indetermination of artworks.

Chapter 5. Artworks / Art focuses on two concepts that inform the process of contextualizing artworks. The *parergon* is a concept that Derrida isolates from Kant's aesthetic theory in order to explore the limits between artwork and context, while

deconstructing the formal imposition of aesthetic theory on the experience of works of art. The second idea, 'the fragment,' is a philosophical form that Osborne locates in the work of Friedrich Schlegel and the Jena Romantics, and utilizes to explore aesthetic experience and the ontology of postconceptual art practices. 'The fragment' further helps to consider artworks as autonomous beings in relation to artistic tradition, which positions artworks in relation to historical and social influence.

Chapter 6. Practical Research presents my art practice through two art projects; *uncover RECOVER*, and *Cover Your Tracks*. The former project is explored in relation to the concept of aesthetic separation as proposed by Rancière, and the organizational theory of art as proposed by Nöe. For the project, I cultivated medicinal plants using soil obtained from recently exhumed mass graves of the Spanish Civil War. Aside from showcasing the diverse ways in which I develop my art projects in relation to materials, meaning, people and transformation, the exploration of the artwork provides a practical introduction to Rancière's work and, in particular, his affirmation of the political potential of experiencing artworks. The second project, *Cover Your Tracks,* was developed in relation to my theoretical research into aesthetic separation and the reflection of life in art. The project began development in 2017 and was exhibited in 2018 in the Botanical Gardens of Barcelona. The artwork was comprised of three Japanese *karesansui* (dry mountain) gardens located on walking paths throughout the grounds of the gardens. Visitors were invited to participate in the symbolic creation and erasure of marks, providing an unexpected encounter that highlighted the cognitive capacities that distinguish human beings from other animals.

Chapter 7. Conclusion closes the thesis by looking at the answers to my main research questions, recommendations for future research, and demonstrating the knowledge that I have contributed in this thesis.

1.14. Acknowledgements

I would like to begin by thanking the people I cherish most, including the remarkable Julio Martínez Tobar; my wonderful parents, sisters, brother, nieces and extended family; and my amazing assortment of friends, near and far, and young and old. I would also like to thank my creative and scholarly collaborators Renee Jackson, Suzanne McCullagh, and Txaro Arrazola, who make me think, feel and contribute in a superior way. My professional friends and colleagues are worthy of many thanks as well, including Ignacio Somovilla, el Jardí Botànic de Barcelona, Josep Maria Montserrat, Associació d'Amics de Jardí Botànic de Barcelona, Pere Vives, Artium, Enrique Goikeoetxea, Skatesónico, Iker Martínez de Aramayona Aguinaco, The Container Art Gallery Tokyo, Shai Ohayon, pm Gallery, Powell MacDougall, Edward Madrid Gomez, Bill Clarke, Bilbao Arte, Vicente Arretxea Calabia, and the marvellous members, past and present, of the artist collective ARMAR. I would also like to thank Jon Baturin at York University and James Patten at Western University for their enthusiastic efforts to assist me in my intellectual program in Canada. Finally, I would like to give *muchas gracias* to my thesis director, Concepción (Koncha) Elorza Ibañez de Gauna, who has given me the perfect balance of support and space to succeed with this consumptive endeavour, and the Faculty of Fine Arts at the University of the Basque Country, in particular; Adolfo (Fito) Ramírez-Escudero Prado, Arantzazu Lauzirika Morea, Inmaculada Jimenez Huertas, and Juan Manuel (Jon) Barredo Cahue, for your continued assistance. This wouldn't have been possible without you. Thank you, *gracias*, and *eskerrik asko*.

CHAPTER 2. LIFE / CONTEXT

2.1.1. Introduction to Life / Context

Rancière's notion of aesthetic separation proposes that two principal divisions define aesthetic experience. One is a division inherent in the process of aesthetic evaluation, where an external stimulus is translated into internal thought. The other is a practical separation within the social tradition of art that informs our understanding of artworks—what Rancière calls the aesthetic break—where transformations of artistic practice have resulted in our current artistic cultures, which exists in constant relation to precedent artistic traditions. These two distinct yet united separations are the foundation that Rancière uses to base his claim that artworks are capable of affecting people subjectively, which makes the practice of art inherently political. To properly explore this proposal we need to better understand how artworks, art, people and society are interrelated. This points towards an operational exploration of aesthetic experience, which is conditional on biological organisms— specifically speaking, human beings—with cognitive abilities in specific situations. If this premise is true, then the practice of art is defined by capacities and limitations that are determined in biological, cognitive and contextual terms. All of these fields imply that aesthetic experience can be distinguished, or separated, from other types of human experience, just as artistic products are distinguished from other kinds of human goods.

To explore the foundation of the biological, cognitive and contextual capacities that we as human beings possess, the theory of autopoiesis is remarkably useful. The words *auto* and *poiesis* are Greek in origin and combined mean "self-producing" or "self-creation."[10] It illuminates the basic processes and conditions that all life entails, and its implications in terms of reflexivity, human cognition and the generation of significance can help us to understand

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[10] Merriam-Webster, "Autopoiesis | Definition of Autopoiesis by Merriam-Webster," *Miriam-Webster*, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/autopoiesis (accessed September 10, 2019).

how separation is a basic condition of both the processes of life and aesthetic experience. While I have previously explored autopoiesis, my intention here is to review the most important aspects of autopoietic theory in order to distinguish the principal processes that relate the functioning of life to the practice of art. If you are already familiar with autopoietic theory, I suggest moving directly to Chapter 2.3. Autopoietic and Aesthetic Operation, where I will compare the processes involved in the autopoietic operation of life to various aspects of aesthetic experience, using Rancière's notion of aesthetic separation as a guiding concept throughout the comparative endeavour. It becomes obvious through the various processes and concepts explored that the biological foundation and operation of human life is the basis of aesthetic experience and the practice of art. While there are many human capacities that the practice of art demonstrates, autopoiesis also helps to demonstrate how human imperfection is reflected in artworks and the paradoxes that they evoke during aesthetic experience.

2.2. Autopoiesis

2.2.1. Introduction to Autopoiesis

Since autopoiesis proposes to define the basic operational nature of all living systems, it is an important theory to help consider how art is connected to life. The word autopoiesis was originally used in 1972 by the Chilean biologists Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela to establish a theory that defines the basic nature of all living systems.[11] Their theory attempts to explain a bio-logic[12] of life and thus the fundamental conditions and processes of the field of biology, the scientific study of life. Their approach relates biological function to systems theory and often sounds more philosophical or computational than biological.

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[11] Merriam-Webster, "Autopoiesis | Definition of Autopoiesis by Merriam-Webster." https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/autopoiesis (accessed Sept. 10, 2019).

[12] Francisco Varela, *Autopoiesis and a Biology of Intentionality*, PDF document, (Paris, France: CREA, CNRS, Ecole Polytechnique, 1991), 2, ftp://ftp.eeng.dcu.ie/pub/autonomy/bmcm9401/varela.ps.Z (accessed May 28, 2012).

Nonetheless, it is a versatile tool for exploring how art functions, especially in relation to human thought and context, since the main operational concepts that autopoiesis utilizes can be applied to other fields of study. The two main principles of autopoiesis demonstrate reflexivity as a fundamental process of life that allows biological organisms to conserve and adapt themselves within their environments. Reflexivity enables subjectivity, which is necessary to make aesthetic judgements, so considering its biological foundation can help to broaden our perspectives of aesthetic experience. In terms of Rancière's theory of aesthetic separation, autopoietic reflexivity positions the social condition of 'being apart together' as a fundamentally biological state. The theory of autopoiesis also describes the basis of cognition in living beings, which gives rise to perceptual capacities as organisms connect with their surroundings. To explain the importance of cognition and sensation in aesthetic experience is redundant, but autopoiesis offers a fresh perspective by distinguishing between the operation of life on the molecular level and the observation of life on the molar level. This separation between levels of operation and observation has many significant implications that affect our understanding of the processes of interpretation that observation enables. The explanatory notions of time and intentionality are of particular importance as we deal with expanding our grasp of aesthetic separation. Finally, autopoiesis helps us to see how organisms generate significance through their constant negotiation with their immediate environment. Difference and lack are two instances that facilitate the production of meaning as organisms relate to their environments, pointing towards the foundation of desire, which is a key concept to understanding aesthetic experience. Knowing how and why significance is produced is paramount to understanding the practice of art, especially to ascertain the limits between normal products and artistic products. Despite of its scientific origin, the theory of autopoiesis provides a new understanding of human life and thus has implications external to scientific study. In addition to helping to consider our thought and behaviour, the theory of autopoiesis

is utilized as a model for autonomous systems in other fields of study, including an autopoietic system of art, which will be explored more profoundly in Chapter 5.3.3. Autonomy. For now, though, let's begin by examining the processes of autopoietic theory.

2.2.2. The Two Laws of Autopoiesis

Autopoiesis is essentially concerned with the biological functioning of living beings so that they can perpetuate their own lives. Autopoiesis, as such, looks at separate parts in relation to a whole organism and implies various possible operational perspectives. The theory of autopoiesis is quite simple in principle; it has two laws and two operational conditions. The results of these laws and conditions together, however, are quite complicated and lead to concepts that can be difficult to grasp because they go against our observational conception of our selves and the world in which we live. The goal of autopoiesis is ambitious, though, as it tries to settle the way in which non-living molecules combine to form life. Various individual concepts and processes of autopoiesis are relevant to the practice of art in some way or another, but as a whole, autopoiesis inspires new perspectives from which we can think about art and understand aesthetic experience in terms of systems theory. I will begin by looking at the rules and considerations that make autopoiesis work so that they can be later compared with the practice of art and aesthetics.

There are two fundamental processes that all living beings must constantly perform in order to live, both of which have to do with systems of organization. They are the law of conservation of autopoiesis, and the law of adaptation of autopoiesis. Varela's definition of an autopoietic system puts these two basic regulatory rules into context:

> An autopoietic system—the minimal living organization—is one that continuously produces the components that specify it, while at the same time realizing it (the system) as a concrete unity in space and time, which makes the network of production of components possible. More precisely defined: An autopoietic system is organized (defined as unity) as a network of processes of production (synthesis and destruction) of components such that these components:

> (i) continuously regenerate and realize the network that produces them, and
> (ii) constitute the system as a distinguishable unity in the domain in which they exist.
>
> Thus, autopoiesis attempts to capture the mechanism or process that generates the *identity* of the living, and thus to serve as a categorical distinction of living from non-living. This identity amounts to self-produced coherence: the autopoietic mechanism will maintain itself as a distinct unity as long as its basic concatenation of processes is kept intact in the face of perturbations, and will disappear when confronted with perturbations that go beyond a certain viable range which depends on the specific system considered.[13]

As Varela describes the two conditions for autopoietic functioning, one of the first things to note is his use of the words *system* and *organization* as synonyms; two nouns that refer to structures that connect separate parts. Regarding the first condition—that a living organism produces the components that specify it—it seems obvious that an organism cannot be considered living without being capable of producing and maintaining itself physically. Our daily routines as humans are full of basic maintenance activities that ensure that our bodies get what they need to stay healthy, most notably eating, drinking and breathing. This is what Maturana defines as the law of conservation of autopoiesis[14], which stipulates that an organism must be capable of establishing and conserving itself in its environment. In addition to physical maintenance, the first condition insists that an organism create the network that produces itself, which implies the communication of separate components within living beings. All networks involve some kind of organization that functions beyond a purely physical understanding, meaning that a living organism is not simply the sum of its physical parts but rather the system of production and communication of its parts. This system of production can be thought both in terms of the life of an individual organism (ontogenetic development) doing what it must to survive, and a species of organisms (phylogenetic

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[13] Varela, *Autopoiesis*, 5.

[14] Humberto Maturana Romesin, "Autopoiesis, Structural Coupling and Cognition", *Cybernetics & Human Knowing,* Vol.9, No.3-4, (2002): 10, https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Autopoiesis%2C-Structural-Coupling-and-Cognition%3A-A-Romes%C3%ADn/7881d48deaffe4c8dc07200b9b5932a7ef74d783 (accessed May 28, 2012).

development) that survives through the reproduction of individual beings. The cyclical nature of autopoiesis ensures that the production of the organism is also a *re*production, and its maintenance includes processes of destruction and elimination that ensure the separation of undesirable or non-essential elements. When an organism's processes of maintenance and reproduction cease, it stops functioning as an autopoietic system. The failure of the first condition of autopoiesis thus results in the death of the organism if it is not met.

The second law, which Varela describes as "constituting the system as a distinguishable unity," refers to the process of a living organism distinguishing itself from its non-living environment. This is important as it establishes a boundary—interior/exterior, you/not you—that creates an identity for each organism. This unity must be distinguishable, which means that the union of the components and systems that constitute the organism is discernible in one way or anther; that there is a recognizable difference between the two. Maturana defines this as the law of adaptation of autopoiesis,[15] drawing attention to the fluctuating and malleable relationship that is implicit between an organism and its environment. Positioning an autopoietic system in constant relationship with its environment, this second condition also places every living organism within a perpetual context, always in an exact place at a precise moment. This act of identification is simultaneously an act of adjustment, a constant process of separating a living being from its environment. Varela states that the identity of the organism is a self-produced coherence, which accentuates the reflexive nature of the process of adaptation. It is not the environment that separates the organism, but rather the being itself must create its own unity and consistency in relation to its environment. The organism must realize itself as separate, as distinct, and this realization is the identity the organism creates for itself.

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[15] Maturana, "Autopoiesis…", 10-11.

2.2.3. The Two Conditions of Autopoiesis

The two fundamental laws of autopoiesis establish the processes of conservation and adaptation as the imperatives of life, not only in terms of producing and maintaining an organism physically, but also with regards to organizing itself in relation to, and distinction from, its environment. In order to better conceptualize the nature of this boundary that an autopoietic system must maintain between itself and its surroundings, let's look at two important parameters that facilitate understanding of how organisms incorporate their environment to maintain themselves. One consideration is that autopoiesis is operational— that it needs to always be considered in terms of process—and the other is that autopoiesis functions at the molecular level.

> Accordingly, and I repeat, living systems are not the molecules that compose and realize them moment by moment, they are closed networks of molecular productions that exist as singularities in a continuous flow of molecules through them. Indeed, the condition of being closed molecular dynamics is what constitutes them as separable entities that float in the molecular domain in which they exist. It is this manner of constitution of living systems as molecular systems that I denote when I say "it is not the molecules that compose a living system that make it a living system."[16]

The operational and molecular conditions are paramount to understanding the theory of autopoiesis, especially when reflecting on the threshold between living and non-living. Considered altogether, life at the molecular level is not something that simply *is,* but rather is a network of processes that *occur*, or molecular interactions that *happen*. When determining the identity of an autopoietic system, or the boundary between an organism and its environment, we must do so on a molecular scale in terms of molecular reactions. We are *not* looking at the big picture, but rather the smallest possible picture of how life is structured. This is important to remember because the physical structure of all things, living and non-living, is determined by the stability and instability of bonds between adjacent atoms at the molecular level. Maturana states:

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[16] Maturana, "Autopoiesis…", 7.

> [A]utopoietic systems exist only in the molecular domain, because the molecular domain is the only domain in which the interactions between the elements that compose it produce elements of the same kind as a spontaneous result of their structural dynamics.[17]

This molecular level is where biochemical reactions transpire, and there is equity on this level where the producer (or components of production) *and* the products of bio-molecular interactions are the same; molecules produce molecules. This equality is important as it allows us to understand how *any* molecule can be incorporated or released from an autopoietic system. Furthermore, it lays the foundation of how significance is produced, which will be explored more thoroughly in Chapter 2.3.7. Difference. One of the key distinctions that Maturana makes here is that "living systems are not the molecules that compose and realize them moment by moment," meaning that autopoietic systems cannot be defined by static or purely physical elements. The molecules that constitute an organism come and go, but they are never *really* living by themselves. They can only be considered *alive* in relation to the biological system that they form a part of. The organizational systems of conservation and adaptation are what ultimately constitute an organism as living, and if a molecule is brought into an autopoietic system it becomes part of a living being in relation to biochemical processes. This is the operational and processual condition of autopoiesis.

Looking more closely at the relationship between a living system and it's medium, Varela speaks of the "intriguing paradoxicality proper to an autonomous identity," noting that "the living system must distinguish itself from its environment, while *at the same time* maintaining its coupling; this linkage cannot be detached since it is against this very environment from which the organism arises."[18] Referring to the apparent irrationality of the autopoietic system being "closed" while being "open" to the flow of molecules, Keith Ansell Pearson states: "[s]uch systems are closed simply in the sense that the product of their

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[17] Maturana, "Autopoiesis…", 13-14.
[18] VARELA, *Autopoiesis*, 7.

organization is the organization itself."[19] As such, organized and unorganized can be understood as a general description of living and non-living respectively, with the caveat that the organization of life is a *reflective* organization. It organizes itself. As we explore the ideas of organization and reorganization in relation to art in Chapter 2.3.3. Organization, and Chapter 4.2.2. Reorganization, this fundamental processes of life can be easily linked to the practice of art. It also helps to appreciate the idea of 'being apart together' that Rancière establishes as a fundamental condition of aesthetic separation. The incessant negotiation between organism and environment on the molecular level, which involves conservation of adaptation, ultimately define and delimit an organism as a distinguishable unity. This "closed yet open" relationship that describes the threshold between an organism and its environment is paradoxical because it insists on a molecular functionality for separating life from non-life while denying molecules the possible status of *living*. An autopoietic system is defined by the ways in which it organizes itself in order to maintain itself. The stipulation that these autopoietic processes happen on the molecular level, however, complicates our ways of thinking about ourselves and other organisms as beings in the world. We as people don't consciously function on this molecular level, so the consequences of autopoiesis on our level of understanding need to be further determined.

2.2.4. Molecular and Molar Domains

Life is far more complicated than we can possibly perceive, especially as we begin to understand the difference between our functioning bodies on the molecular level and our conscious perception of our selves as individuals. This separation between two distinct functional levels is one of the most important innovations of autopoietic theory because it has

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[19] PEARSON, Kieth Ansell. "Viroid Life: On Machines, Technics and Evolution", *Deleuze and Philosophy: The Difference Engineer*, London, Routledge, 1997, p. 195.

many repercussions in terms our basis for understanding our selves and our world. Maturana states:

> Systems as composite entities have a dual existence, namely, they exist as singularities that operate as simple unities' in the domain in which they arise as totalities, and at the same time they exist as composite entities in the domain of the operation of their components. The relation between these two domains is not causal; these two domains do not intersect, nor do the phenomena which pertain to one occur in the other.[20]

To fully understand autopoiesis, it is important to differentiate between these two parallel platforms for understanding biological organisms; as we *perceive* them as organisms, and as they *operate* on the molecular level. The separation of these concurrent modes of biological life differentiates the operation of life from our experience of it, offering the perfect model of how our conscious being as people operates in tandem with our unconscious or nonconscious being as biological organisms. Our bodies do most of their work to survive without us needing to be aware of it, thanks in large part to our autonomic nervous system. The big question is not how these micro and macro modes of being are separate, but rather how do they connect, and how do they influence each other?

In mechanics, molar properties are those of a mass of matter as opposed to its parts, either atoms or molecules. The French philosopher Giles Deleuze uses this molar/molecular opposition in various ways in his writing, with molarity referring to wholes, generalities and totalities and molecularity referring to parts, specificities and singularities.[21] In relation to perception, Deleuze uses molar and molecular to describe: "its range from 'macro' or totalising process to 'micro' or keen detection of infinitesimal differences in the physical and biological world."[22] In his collaborations with Felix Guattari, the terms *molecular* and *molar*

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[20] Maturana, "Autopoiesis…", 12.
[21] Christian Hubert, "molar/molecular," *Christian Hubert Studio*, http://www.christianhubert.com/writings/molar___molecular.html (accessed February 13, 2019).
[22] Tom Conley, "molar," *The Deleuze Dictionary*, http://deleuze.enacademic.com/110/molar (retrieved February 13, 2019).

are used in their quest to understand sources of human desire and freedom, looking beyond a psychology that is determined exclusively on a social level. They refer to the ideas proposed by Maturana and Varela to speak of life as both vitalistic and mechanistic, proposing that biology be considered in terms of mechanics, with the psychology of desire being rooted in molecular functionalism.

> [T]he real difference is not between the living and the machine, vitalism and mechanism, but between two states of the machine that are two states of the living as well… on the one hand the molar machines—whether social, technical, or organic—and on the other the desiring-machines, which are of a molecular order.[23]

This idea will be further explored in Chapter 4.2.3. Progression, where technology is considered in relation to the practice of art as a biological principle. For now, it is important to appreciate their attempt to connect psychology on the molar level—human desire in particular—to biochemical processes of life on the molecular level, which helps to determine a "molecular unconscious" of living beings. The question remains, how might a functionalism on the molecular level connect to the cognition of an organism on the molar level? As we proceed to explore autopoiesis and cognition, I will expand upon these ideas of Deleuze and Guattari and the molecular unconscious in Chapter 2.2.8. Lack, Desire & Intentionality.

2.2.5. Cognition

The idea of cognition is used in autopoiesis to describe an organism's capacity for knowledge in relation to itself and its environment. Cognition functions on both the molecular and molar levels of autopoiesis, where organisms operate in terms of molecular biology and observe the world as whole beings. To convey the importance of an organism's coupling with its environment on both molecular and molar levels, Maturana further explains his definition of cognition:

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[23] Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, (Minneapolis, U.S.A.: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 285-86.

> That which we human beings call cognition is the capacity that a living system exhibits of operating in dynamic structural congruence with the medium in which it exists. It does not matter if the living system observed is an insect or a human being. We may ask ourselves whether the knowledge that the living system exhibits is learned or instinctive, but our assessment is the same: namely, if we see a living system behaving according to what we consider is adequate behaviour in the circumstances in which we observe it, we claim that it knows.[24]

Looking at the etymology of the word "cognition", it refers to the Latin word *cognoscere*, which means "to get to know."[25] Digging deeper, the verb *to know* is Germanic in origin and comes from the Old English word *cnāwan,* which means "to recognize or to identify."[26] As such, knowing something is the ability to recognize or to identify it. We can understand the verb "to *re*cognize" as meaning "to cognize again", which suggests a repeated cognition of something, and as we have just seen, identification is the process of differentiation at the centre of autopoiesis. After identifying ourselves as distinct from our environment we can begin to identify our surroundings, which demonstrates the reflexive nature of cognition. Some positive considerations occur as a result of the autopoietic definition of cognition. For one, cognition moves from being a purely cerebral activity to a corporal one, which addresses Antonio Damasio's assertion that we think with our bodies, not only our brains.[27] Another positive point is that cognition becomes something that can be applied to *all* living organisms, not just humans. In this way, single cell organisms and plants have cognition. "To cognite is to live, and to live is to cognite. We as observers exist in a domain of descriptions, and this domain as a consensual domain is a cognitive domain."[28] As humans we usually use language to demonstrate that we know something, but it isn't the only way and it certainly doesn't

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[24] Maturana, "Autopoiesis…", 26.

[25] Lexico Dictionaries, "cognition | Definition of cognition in English by Lexico Dictionaries," *Lexico Dictionaries*, https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/cognition (accessed July 19, 2019).

[26] Merriam-Webster, "Know | Definition of Know by Merriam-Webster," *Miriam-Webster*, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/know (accessed July 19, 2019).

[27] Antonio Damasio, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain*, (London, U.K.: Vintage, 2006), 224

[28] Humberto Maturana, "Cognition," *Maturana (1978b): Cognition*, PDF document, 10, http://www.enolagaia.com/M78bCog.html (accessed May 28, 2012).

mean that all living things must demonstrate knowledge in the same way. Plants *know* how to convert sunlight into energy, for example, or we know how to breathe. For autopoieisis, cognition and *re*cognition are about knowing the environment, whether it's conscious or not. As we move forward to explore the functioning of thought in Chapter 3.2.3. Thought, this autopoietic basis of cognition will become more obviously relevant to aesthetic experience, in which a distinction between determinate and reflective thought must be made.

2.2.6. Observation

The concept of observation is obviously important for understanding the functioning of aesthetics, since it is through observation that we connect with works of art. Furthermore, we use observation to connect with other people—to communicate—and this social aspect of observation is also relevant to our understanding of art and how we relate with artworks. In autopoietic terms, observation occurs in the molar domain of life, where organisms live as individual entities within their environment. There are as many ways of interacting with the environment as there are species, but for most animals this interaction involves connecting with their surrounding through sense. Our human senses allow us to observe other people and organisms interacting within their environments. This is how Maturana and Varela define *behaviour*, as the observed condition of an organism existing within its environment.

> As a system is constituted as a totality, a new domain arises, the domain in which the system exists as that totality. … [T]he behavior [sic] that an observer sees as appearing in the relational space in which he or she distinguishes it is not a feature of the organism, but a relational dynamics that arises with the participation of the medium as the organism interacts in it as a totality: behavior as a relational dynamics involves both the organism and the medium in which it exists as a totality.[29]

My previous understanding would have restricted the idea of behaviour to the conscious actions of an individual. Maturana, however, highlights the relational dynamics that are

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[29] Maturana, "Autopoiesis…", 13.

inherent in the idea of behaviour, in which an organism is evaluated within a specific situation. For example, your behaviour in a museum is probably different from your behaviour in a forest, and when you think about people behaving badly or well, there is always a context that situates this description. One constant is that behaviour is established through the evaluation of one organism in its totality based on the observation of another organism in its totality. Understanding behaviour as the relation of an organism and its context once again gives us a very broad range for observing and describing the actions of life in context. Behaviour is always relational and is dependent on both an organism and its environment, and we will explore this concept more in relation to art in Chapter 2.3.4. Context.

Observation always has a specific point of view. Someone or something observes from a position within an environment, and this forms an individual's sense of identity, context and reality. Maturana states: "my central theme as a biologist (and philosopher) became the explanation of the experience of cognition rather than reality, because reality is an explanatory notion invented to explain the experience of cognition."[30] This disavowal of the term *reality* is based upon the conditions and limitations of our biological perception on the molar level. The neurologist Antonio Damasio supports this rejection in reference to the biological limits of our senses and nervous system: "[w]e do not know, and it is improbable that we will ever know, what "absolute" reality is like."[31] What we observe as humans is real to us, but we can't deny that we all have individual perspectives of the world. Our observations, though limited, make *sense* to us because they are consistent to us as individuals and amongst society. We can compare our perceptions with previous experience, and we can share and compare our perceptions with others through communication. Nonetheless, it's a hard fact to face that our human reality is not absolute; it's not *the only* reality. The

[30] Maturana, "Autopoiesis…", 32.
[31] Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, 97.

philosopher John R. Searle contends that this is one of the great challenges of contemporary thought: "[to] square this self-conception of ourselves as mindful, meaning-creating, free, rational, etc., agents with a universe that consists entirely of mindless, meaningless, unfree, nonrational, brute physical particles."[32] As Maturana and Varela contend, our reality is a series of explanatory notions that we create to explain our experience.

One of the most ubiquitous explanatory notions that humans have is time, which is especially relevant when thinking about autopoietic systems in operational terms. Process, after all, implies the passage of time. Or does it? The concept of time demonstrates yet another difference between the two domains of molecular function and molar observation. Maturana asserts that on the molecular level: "[b]iological phenomena take place in a dynamics that occurs in the present without any operational relation to the past or the future. Past and future are explanatory notions introduced by the observer."[33] As observers on the molar level we perceive only the results or effects of biochemical reactions on the molecular level, and our notion of time is nothing more than an interpretation generated by our ability to observe, to think, and then to apply this understanding to perceived phenomenon. Time is something that we as humans create on the molar level based on the perceived successions of events and our ability to recall (think of the past) and to project (think of the future). Molecules don't do this, can't do this, and as such the molecular level is only ever operational in the present. "A living system as a molecular system is a structure determined system, thus everything that happens in it or to it, happens in each moment as determined by its structure at that moment."[34] Time only exists for us on the molar level of observation thanks to our cognitive capacities as humans to imagine. We will explore the relevance of time to contemporary art in chapter 2.3.6. Time.

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[32] John R. Searle, *Freedom & Neurobiology: Reflections on Free Will, Language and Political Power*, (New York, U.S.A.: Columbia University Press, 2007), 5.
[33] Maturana, "Autopoiesis…," 9.
[34] Ibid., 12.

Molar observation is influenced by molecular processes, and to consider this influence Maturana gives context to his idea of adaptation, or *coupling*: "An organism is never outside a history, and necessarily always finds itself in a particular state and position as a result of its previous states and positions."[35] It sounds obvious, but this idea demonstrates how the physical structure of an organism in its context relates directly between molecular and molar levels. It also connects the molecular level of operation that only exists in the present to the molar level where our perception of time *does* exist. The negation of an absolute reality and the conception of time as a cognitive fabrication were difficult for me to fathom at first, as it is requisite to admitting to a perpetually faulty molar perspective of the world. It is especially ironic considering that our nervous systems that generate the thought processes of past and future are nothing more than networks of biochemical reactions that *only* occur in the present. As it becomes apparent, though, our observation and explanation of the world are not necessarily the way in which the universe actually operates.

When thinking about the shift from molecular operation to molar perspective, there remain a lot of questions as to how one might affect the other, especially as we move towards understanding how biology relates to art and aesthetics. Varela describes one limitation of molar perception, stating that: "The components of any system exist as local entities only in relations of contiguity with other components, and any relation of the parts to the whole established by the observer as a metaphor for his or her understanding has no operational presence."[36] According to Varela, then, parts are only ever operational with other parts— molecules with molecules, proteins with nucleic acids—and we shouldn't blindly trust our observation or the explanatory notions that result; they are simply perceived conceptions that are separate from biological functionalism. Deleuze and Guattari confirm this sentiment:

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[35] Maturana, "Cogntion," 8.
[36] Ibid., 9.

> It is only at the submicroscopic level of desiring-machines that there exists a functionalism—machinic arrangements, an engineering of desire; for it is only there that functioning and formation, use and assembly, product and production merge. All molar functionalism is false, since the organic or social machines are not formed in the same way they function, and the technical machines are not assembled in the same way they are used, but imply precisely the specific conditions that separate their own production from their distinct product.[37]

This reaffirms the importance of having a molecular foundation for autopoiesis, where the components of production—molecules—are the same as their products—molecules. The fact that this is not the case on the molar level has implications that will be explored in Chapter 2.3.7. Difference, which focuses on the generation of meaning. In relation to aesthetics, it is becoming clear that our capacity to observe needs to be moderated in relation to the inherent limits and fabrications of our cognition.

2.2.7. Perspective & Difference

The distinction between the molecular and molar levels of autopoietic systems generates a lot of uncertainty. While our perspective as individuals is stable and consistent on the molar level, the sub-levels of biological operation have the majority of influence and control over our lives as people. The perspective that we have as observers plays a crucial part in creating and understanding our reality of the world, as singular and incomplete as it might be. Since autopoietic cognition functions on both levels it can be understood as a bridge between the molecular and molar realms. As knowledgeable objects, our bodies know how to breath, digest food and heal cuts, for example, while we as knowledgeable subjects know how to ride a bike, draw a picture and read English.

> [T]he term cognitive has two constitutive dimensions: first its *coupling* dimension, that is, a link with its environment allowing for its continuity as individual entity; second… its *imaginary* dimension, that is, the surplus of significance a physical interaction acquires due to the perspective provided by the global action of the organism.[38]

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[37] Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 288.
[38] Varela, *Autopoiesis*, 5.

Varela reiterates that while cognition occurs on both levels, adaptation with the environment only occurs on the molecular level and observation of our environment only happens on the molar level. The latter is the level of thought and imagination, where we observe the world around us and reflect on our sensations, connecting concepts to things and actions. According to Varela, our ability to think imparts a "surplus of significance" to the actions we witness. Deleuze and Guattari reflect the same idea about the surplus of significance, which is nonexistent on the molecular level:

> Only what is not produced in the same way it functions has meaning, and also a purpose, an intention. The desiring-machines on the contrary represent nothing, signify nothing, mean nothing, and are exactly what one makes of them, what is made with them, what they make in themselves.[39]

Understanding "desiring-machines" as our bodies, Deleuze and Guattari affirm the necessity of a basic operation on the molecular level, where producer and product are one and the same. When molecules make molecules, there is no meaning. It is a simple biochemical reaction on the molecular level where significance doesn't exist. Unless, of course, we *observe* the biochemical reaction from the molar level, think about it and attribute meaning to the transformation we have witnessed in the process. Deleuze and Guattari state that something only attains meaning when it is produced in a *different* way than it functions. Since molar observation inherently produces difference through thought, observation can be understood as a condition of significance. We will explore the relationship between difference and meaning more thoroughly in Chapter 2.3.7. Difference, which also has relevance to the mechanism of observation, which we will explore in Chapter 2.3.5. Observation.

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[39] Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 288.

2.2.8. Lack, Desire & Intentionality

As observers, it is inevitable that we consign meaning to the behaviour and actions of other beings. Simply answering *why* someone or something does anything attributes meaning. For example, why are you reading this? Any answer you give is an attribution of significance to explain the action of your eyes scanning this sentence and your thought converting letters and words into some kind of value. The answer to the question "why?" in relation to human action is inevitably concerned with intention. When thinking about justifying our behaviour, it's important to remember that behaviour in autopoiesis is always considered in relation to an organism's environment. Connecting cognition to the idea of purpose or intentionality, Varela states: "[c]ognition is action about what is *missing*, filling the fault from the perspective of a cognitive self."[40] As a general default, organisms act to survive, and if nothing is perceived as wrong or missing from a molar perspective—if there is no fault—then action is not necessary. When action happens and it is observed, purpose or intention can always be attributed in relation to what is wrong or missing.

Maturana and Varela highlight the inseparable link between the specific components of an organism and its entity as a whole, stating that significance is determined by an organism at the molar level in relation to its organization as a distributed process in a specific situation. The coordination between the parts (molecules, cells, organs) and the whole (molar observation) assures that an organism can deal with its necessities and emergencies itself.[41] Its control is internal and self-sufficient. For example, you feel hungry. What do you do? You eat something. Why? Because you were hungry. You can deal with the situation of lack yourself through a series of communications between parts and the whole in your search for balance within your environment. Further explaining the impetus of interaction with our environment and how it is perceived, Varela continues to describe the attribution of meaning:

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[40] Varela, *Autopoiesis*, 13.
[41] Ibid., 7-8.

> The constant bringing forth of signification is what we may describe as a permanent lack in the living: it is constantly bringing forth a signification that is missing, not pre-given or pre-existent. Relevance must be provided *ex nihilo*… There is an inevitable contretemps between an autonomous system and its environment: there is always something which the system must furnish from its perspective as a functioning whole. In fact, a molecular encounter acquires significance in the context of the *entire* operating system and of many simultaneous interactions.[42]

This permanent lack in the living can be understood as a form of perpetual appetite that stimulates action and generates meaning on the molar level of operation of the organism. As significance doesn't exist for molecules, it is brought forth when organisms observe and consider themselves as singular beings behaving within their environment. Needless to say that as molecular beings, there are countless operations happening within our bodies at one particular time, yet we perceive the state of our bodies in context as a whole. Varela continues:

> The source for this world-making is always the breakdowns in autopoiesis, be they minor, like changes in concentration of some metabolite, or major, like disruption of the boundary. Due to the nature of autopoiesis itself… every breakdown can be seen as the initiation of an action on what is missing on the part of the system so that identity might be maintained… In brief, this permanent, relentless action on what is lacking becomes, from the observer side, the ongoing *cognitive* activity of the system, which is the basis for the incommensurable difference between the environment within which the system is observed, and the world within which the system operates. This cognitive activity is paradoxical at the very root. On the one hand the action that brings forth a world is an attempt to re-establish a coupling with an environment which defies the internal coherence through encounters and perturbations. But such actions, at the same time, demarcate and separate the system from that environment, giving rise to a distinct world.[43]

Here Varela returns to muse on the paradox of an organism being distinct yet inseparable from its environment, relating *cognition* to the insistent action to satiate what is lacking in order for an organism to maintain its life. Living organisms are in perpetual need of exterior elements to continue living, and they engage with their environment through cognition to

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[42] Varela, *Autopoiesis*, 8.
[43] Ibid., 8.

obtain what they need to survive. To further explore this instinct to survive, let's look at the conatus, a relevant point of reference found in the work of Benedict de Spinoza.

2.2.9. The Conatus

In 1677, over one hundred years before Kant wrote *The Critique of Judgement*, and ten years before Sir Isaac Newton 'discovered' gravity, the philosopher Benedict de Spinoza's described the inherent survival instinct of beings as the *conatus*, which is Latin for: "striving, endeavour and tendency".[44] In Spinoza's words: "[e]ach thing, as far as it can by its own power, strives to persevere in its being."[45] The neuroscientist Antonio Damasio describes the *conatus* as it influences the action of organisms, which are in constant search for balance, stating that: "[f]luid life states are naturally preferred by our *conatus*. We gravitate toward them. Strained life states are naturally avoided by our *conatus*. We stay away."[46] The idea of autopoiesis runs parallel with the *conatus*, despite being written three hundred years beforehand. In his book on Spinoza, Deleuze demonstrates the relevance of Spinoza's ideas to those of Maturana and Varela, specifically as they relate with desire and judgement.

> Spinoza sometimes defines desire as 'appetite together with consciousness of the appetite.' But he specifies that this is only a nominal definition of desire, and that consciousness adds nothing to appetite ('we neither strive for, nor will, neither want, nor desire anything because we judge it to be good; on the contrary, we judge something to be good because we strive for it, will it, want it, and desire it')… [T]he appetite is nothing else but the effort by which each thing strives to persevere in its being, each body in extension, each mind or each idea in thought (*conatus*).[47]

This sounds remarkably similar to the original law of conservation, although by extending it to *things* and to thought, Deleuze proposes it to be an existential inertia of sorts. He also shows how desire is related to observation and judgement, demonstrating once again the

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[44] Antonio Damasio, *Searching for Spinoza*, (London, U.K.: Vintage, 2004), 36.
[45] Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, (London: Penguin Classics, 1996), 6,7,8.
[46] Damasio, *Searching for Spinoza*, 79.
[47] Giles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, (San Francisco, U.S.A.: City Lights Books, 1988), 21.

fallibility of the explanatory notions we attribute to our actions in the world. We consider things to be good because we desire them, and not the other way around. Considering the foundation of aesthetics as described by Immanuel Kant in *The Critique of Judgement*, the relation of desire and judgement will be more thoroughly explored in Chapter 5.2.2. Summary – The Critique of Judgement, Analytic of the Beautiful. The important thing to note at this point is how both of these cognitive concepts can be related back to biological functionality, which involves a living system's drive towards balance through its active interaction with its environment.

One final point of interest to explore is how the idea of the *conatus* can be used to shift the selfish nature of autopoiesis to a more social or ethical ground. As Searle points out, human beings and other social animals are capable of a special kind of intentionality that is collective and gives rise to cooperation and sharing, which shifts the intent of an individual subject to a plural intention or desire.[48] Damasio addresses the social extension of the conatus by highlighting the way in which Spinoza connects the idea of virtue to the happiness found in self-preservation.[49] Damasio describes that in Latin, virtue has its common moral meaning, but it also refers to power and the ability to act. In his work to determine the fundamental truth that is the foundation of humanity, Spinoza relies on biological facts to explain how virtue is based on self-concern, which in turn shifts a singular self to a group of selves, to a community. Damasio explains further:

> The biological reality of self-preservation leads to virtue because in our inalienable need to maintain ourselves we must, of necessity, help preserve *other* selves. If we fail to do so we perish and are thus violating the foundational principle, and relinquishing the virtue that lies in self-preservation. The secondary foundation of virtue then is the reality of a social structure and the presence of other living organisms in a complex system of interdependence with our own organism.[50]

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[48] Searle, *Freedom and Neurobiology*, 7.
[49] Damasio, *Searching for Spinoza*. p. 170.
[50] Ibid., 171.

Understanding how biological principles play a role in our actions and thought processes is essential if we are to determine how artworks are capable of affecting individuals and society. The great extent to which our biology influences our actions and behaviour in our environment is obvious, and the idea of the *conatus* affirms the impetus of our behaviour while further connecting social well-being with the fulfilment of the self. This will become paramount as we explore the social context within which the practice of art operates in Chapter 5.3. 'The Fragment.'

2.2.10. Conclusion to Autopoiesis

In conclusion, the molecular theory of autopoiesis demonstrates how life organizes itself in order to perpetuate itself in constant negotiation with its environment. The two main principles of conservation and adaptation demonstrate reflexivity as a fundamental process of life, helping biological organisms to maintain themselves while relating with their environments. Autopoiesis shows how life is programmed to separate itself from its environment, maintaining a closed-yet-open relationship between an organism and its immediate surroundings to ensure the survival of the organism. The threshold created by this autopoietic distinction between living and non-living is operational, which means that organisms are not defined by *what* they are made of (molecules) but rather by *how* they are made (systems). Life is a process of reflexive organization in relation to environment. This process of organization is structured on the molecular level, which is distinct from the molar level of observation of organisms as complete entities. Cognition, which is an organism's ability *to know* within its environment, occurs on the molecular and molar realms of life. Observation only happens on the molar level of the whole organism, and behaviour is the perceived relationship of an organism with its immediate environment. Human cognition and observation on the molar level enable the generation of explanatory notions to understand the

perceived world, although this doesn't equate to absolute reality on the molecular level. Time, for example, doesn't exist on the molecular level, and the present is the only possible time for biochemical reactions to occur. Human cognition on the molar level, on the other hand, allows us to remember the past and imagine the future, but these processes only occur in the present in operational terms. Explanatory notions are often used to address behaviour, which relates intention to an organism's interaction with its environment by an observer. The result of this observation is the generation of significance, which is created through cognition in relation to perceived objects or events. Signification is based on difference, which can be seen as originating in the distinction between the molecular and molar levels of life. Significance doesn't exist on the molecular level, where the producers and products of interactions are the same. On the molar level, however, meaning is cognized through observation where differences within the components and functionality of interactions produce significance. Lack within organisms is the general catalyst for cognition, which stimulates intentionality and interaction with the environment to secure what is needed to survive. The conatus is an organism's drive to maintain a constant movement towards equilibrium, which ensures that an organism's lacks and excesses are managed appropriately. Lack is generally associated with signification, especially as it relates with desire, and organisms coordinate from the molecular to the molar levels to act in their environment to satiate what is missing or deal with what is wrong. This happens within individual organisms but also within species themselves, as the conservation of independence is facilitated through interdependence. Collective intentionality shows how social species of individual organisms operate as a collective group, which demonstrates how autopoiesis can be applied as an operating system for higher-function aspects of life. One very big question remains, though. How does this establish or inform the operating system for art?

Art functions through human practices, namely the creation and appreciation of artworks, which have a broad system of operation that involves processes of transformation, communication and evaluation, amongst other things. All of these processes take place within specific contexts in relation to people, and the operations that define autopoiesis are reflected in the practice of art. Artworks must conserve their distinguishable identity within their context to be recognizable by people as artworks, who use perception to evaluate the external sensory input that artworks provide. While autopoiesis distinguishes two levels of operation, so too does the system of art. This can be found in the separation of the individual (organism or artwork) from its environment (surrounding space or context), and in relation to other artworks (as a concept), which mirrors the separation of an individual human subject from society. These separaitons form the basis of the paradoxical situation of 'being apart together' that Rancière uses to contextualize aesthetic separation. Just as autopoiesis is broad in its operational approach to understanding life, so can it be extended to reflect an operating system for art. Context, subjects and thought combine to create a complex system in which the practice of art flourishes in human culture. As we explore in the following chapters, the system-theoretical operation of autopoiesis provides a solid foundation for understanding aesthetic separation and the reflection of life in art.

2.3. Autopoieitic & Aesthetic Operation

2.3.1. Introduction to Autopoieitic & Aesthetic Operation

The processes and conditions that autopoietic theory entails can be used to establish connections and comparisons between the functioning of life and the practice of art. A system-theoretical approach to understanding life establishes a perfect methodology for connecting the experience of artworks with the processes of living since many of the operations that are used to define autopoietic systems are equally useful in defining the ways

in which the aesthetic experience of artworks functions. Art only works through human interaction, and as we explore the practice of art in relation to the autopoietic conceptions of transformation, organization, context, observation, time, difference, lack and coordination, the interdependence of art and human life becomes clear. Artworks and humans form a mutually nourishing relationship in which moments of transformative potential are enabled through interaction. At the root of this relationship, however, innate divisions determine aesthetic procedure and functionality. Comparing aesthetic separations with autopoietic separations, the practice of art can be more easily understood in relation to the functioning of human life. The paradoxes that arise in the process are testament to the eternal search for meaning that we attribute to individual lives and to artworks, and demonstrate our affinities with the multifaceted functionality of art.

2.3.2. Transformation

The processual stipulation for understanding autopoiesis is a perfect example for the understanding of art. It is too easy to think of artworks as static, inert objects that exhibit a past metamorphosis, and yet all aspects of recognizing and considering objects as artworks entail transformative processes of sensing, feeling and thinking. This is why the philosophy of aesthetics is an important tool for unlocking the functioning of artworks. Aesthetics recognizes that artworks are always experienced procedurally, over time, which places the practice of art—its creation and enjoyment—in constant relation with human activity. Rancière elaborates on various aspects of aesthetic experience that demonstrate artistic practice as a series of processes. Referencing Deleuze and Guattari, Rancière elaborates on the transformation of raw material into art, after which he muses on the transformation of 'sense into sense,' or sensation into reason. While the first process of transformation reflects the autopoietic process of identification of an artwork in relation to its environment, the

second reflects the shift from physical foundation to cognitive conception. Transformation is also explored by Rancière in relation to its connection with the community through 'the sensory fabric,' and through the alteration of people who participate in aesthetic experience. This transformative potential is how the experience of artworks is political in nature, as we will see in the coming paragraphs.

Rancière begins his text "Aesthetic Separation, Aesthetic Community" by speaking of two important ways in which transformation is inherent to the experience of art: through the production of artworks, and through their enjoyment. In reference to contemporary artistic strategies, he speaks of the recent trend of artists who are moving from institutional exhibition spaces and into the real world in order to transform it and create new relations.[51] This connotes the process of transformation that is inherent when creating an artwork, but it also implies the transformation of artistic practice over time as creative processes and practices shift in relation to society and artistic tradition. To expound upon the creation of artworks, Rancière refers to Deleuze and Guattari's text *What is Philosophy?*, which elaborates upon the distinct methodologies of artistic, scientific and philosophic thought. Rancière focuses on the verbs that are used by Deleuze and Guattari in order to describe the connections and disconnections that result from sensory transformation.

> [W]hat was traditionally described as a 'modelling' of raw materials becomes a dialectic of 'seizing' and 'rending.' The result of this dialectic is a 'vibration' whose power is transmitted to the human community - that is, to a community of human beings whose activity is itself defined in terms of seizing and rending: suffering, resistance, cries. However, in order for the complex of sensations to communicate its vibration, it has to be solidified in the form of a monument. Now, the monument in turn assumes the identity of a person who speaks to the 'ear of the future'.[52]

Rancière describes artworks in relation to their process of creation by establishing that all works of art demonstrate a combination of before and after, which includes evidence of their

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[51] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 53.
[52] Ibid., 56.

material substance before artistic intervention, and evidence of the intervention of the artist in the transformed material. The action of the artist becomes solidified as a trace within the material acted upon, the artwork.[53] This process of artistic creation and its potential recognition relates to the formation of identity in autopoiesis, which involves the simultaneous coupling and separation of a being from its surroundings. In autopoiesis this being is a living organism, but an artwork equally demonstrates its attachment and distinction from its context. In a similar way that organisms are defined by the incorporation of molecules into their autopoiestic system, artworks incorporate and transform materials from the earth as they are made. As Rancière states: "there is no longer any boundary separating what belongs to the realm of art from what belongs to the realm of everyday life."[54] This malleable material boundary implies that—similar to autopoietic organisms—artworks are not defined by their physical components but rather by the system within which their material and form are manifested. The process of identifying an artwork is an act of distinguishing it from its context, which includes the distinction of an artwork from the situation in which it is experienced (i.e. from its non-art environment) as well as its distinction in relation to social context (i.e. through subjective relation to tradition). Artworks, as such, self-identify by reflexively incorporating recognizable attributes that are collectively understood as artistic conventions.[55] The boundary that Rancière speaks of between the realms of art and the everyday, then, is a conceptual boundary, and the distinction of an artwork from other types of human products must be made through aesthetic processes of evaluation. This means connecting, sensing and considering the sensory fabric of the world in relation to our selves.

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[53] This idea is reflected in the philosophy of Heidegger, who uses the concepts of earth and world to differentiate between the raw material and the formed artwork, and will be further explored in Chapter 4.3.4. Function.

[54] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 69.

[55] For a more thorough exploration of artistic conventions, see Chapter 2.3.4. Context.

Another main process of transformation that Rancière explores in "Aesthetic Separation, Aesthetic Community" is related to perception, which unites an aesthetic community as a community of sense. Rancière refers to 'aesthetic community' in an effort to show the connection, or coupling, that is involved in appreciating artworks, which he divides into three steps. The first step involves a basic level of sensory input, or the achievement of a "certain combination of sense data."[56] The second step is the transition of this data from "sense to sense", which can be understood as representational recognition, or the transformation of a physical sensation (i.e. the vision of an artwork with the sense of sight) into a conceptual sense (i.e. as something that *makes sense*, is reasonable or logical). The third and final step is the association of potential meaning (metaphoric, poetic or symbolic) or extended significance that results from the conceptualization achieved in step two. Now, as we explore the cognitive process of conceptualization in relation to aesthetics, it's important to distinguish between beauty and art, which are not the same thing. As Rancière states: "Art entails the employment of a set of concepts, while the beautiful possesses no concepts. What is offered to the free play of art is free appearance."[57] While artworks definitely contain elements of the unknown, which call upon aesthetic judgement and thought, they also embody concepts so we can understand an artwork in terms of materials and traditions, and can compare and contrast the unknown of an artwork in relation to the world around us and our experience. As we perceptively move from step one to step three in Rancière's conception of aesthetic procedure, it becomes easy to see how collective understanding begins to separate amongst individuals as sense data transforms into concepts or metaphors. Arguments about sense data—what we see or hear—are far less common and intense as disagreements about the meaning and significance of metaphoric sense data. Rancière uses the concept of

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[56] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 57.
[57] Ibid., 64.

dissensus (as opposed to consensus) to describe the foundation of aesthetic community.[58] As he states: "an aesthetic community is a community structured by disconnection."[59] While the basic level of sensory input utilizes sensory capacities that are relatively equal amongst human beings, the secondary level of conceptual recognition and the potential for extended meaning through metaphor exist in relation to both context and a broader community, since they are dependent on experience and learned social constructs. As the philosopher Niclas Luhmann states:

> The artwork itself engages the observer via the products of perceptions, and these are elusive enough to avoid the bifurcation of "yes" or "no." We see what we see and hear what we hear, and when others observe us engaged in perception it would be silly to deny that we perceive. In this way, a type of sociability is generated that cannot be negated.[60]

We are united in our sensory and cognitive capacities, yet we are easily divided in terms of understanding what the sensations that we feel as individuals signify. This transformation of "sense to sense" is the basis of Rancière's concept of aesthetic separation, and while it will be explored more thoroughly in relation to human physiology and neurology in Chapter 3. Thought / Self, it is important to appreciate how the processes involved in perception connect a subjective individual to a community through contextual and social associations.

The third process of transformation that Rancière engages with in "Aesthetic Separation, Aesthetic Community" is the transformation of individuals that results from experiencing artworks. We can all be affected by artworks, and Rancière states that: "[t]he link between the solitude of the artwork and human community is a matter of transformed 'sensation'."[61] The capacity that artworks have for subjective transformation largely concerns the way that aesthetic experience provides the opportunity for a subject to think reflexively—

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[58] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 58.
[59] Ibid., 59.
[60] Niclas Luhmann, *Art as a Social System*, (Stanford, USA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 20.
[61] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 55-56.

to feel themselves feeling, or think themselves thinking—which consequently has the power to transform the nature of a subject. As Nöe points out: "Art aims at the disclosure of ourselves to ourselves and so it aims at giving us opportunities to catch ourselves in the act of achieving perceptual consciousness—including aesthetic consciousness—of the world around us."[62] Aesthetic experience is a process of self-transformation—at the very least on biological and experiential levels—and the essence of Rancière's article is the search for the political mechanisms of artistic experience. The basis of politically transformative potential lies in the possibility of subjective renovation through the experience of artworks, which Rancière attributes to the processes of separation and connection that aesthetic experience entails:

> [Aesthetic experience produces] a multiplication of connections and disconnections that reframe the relation between bodies, the world they live in and the way in which they are 'equipped' to adapt to it. It is a multiplicity of folds and gaps in the fabric of common experience that change the cartography of the perceptible, the thinkable and the feasible. As such, it allows for new modes of political construction of common objects and new possibilities of collective enunciation.[63]

Here we can begin to see the power of the concept of aesthetic separation, which implies processes of separation and conjunction on various levels. As Suzanne McCullagh notes, Rancière's politics of aesthetics is related to a double break between the artwork and the world, and artistic depiction and its effect on bodies.[64] These processes are instigated in the recognition and appreciation of an artwork, which implies the identification of some transformed material and the recognition of some form of subjective evaluation, which places everything within a specific context. McCullagh notes that the political possibility of this experience arises from: "a dismantling that would enable new forms of collectivity and

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[62] Alva Nöe, *Strange Tools*, (New York, U.S.A.: Hill and Wang, 2015), 70-71.
[63] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 72-73.
[64] Suzanne McCullagh and Casey Ford, "The Desert Below: The Labyrinth of Sensibility between Rancière, Deleuze, and Weil," *Journal of Aesthetics and Phenomenology* 5:2, (2018): 160.

political subjectivity to emerge."[65] From the unique perspective that every artwork offers comes an opportunity to reflect on who we are and how we are. This is what Nöe refers to when he states that: "one of art's tasks is to afford us just this sort of opportunity to catch ourselves in the act of encountering the world, and so to let us encounter ourselves in a way that we otherwise never can."[66] As we saw in Chapter 2.2.7. Perspective & Difference, observation of difference is what generates meaning, which entails that self-observation during aesthetic experience enables the association of significance to our selves as we feel and sense singular moments of awareness distinctly.

While the mechanics of the political effects of aesthetic experience will be explored in further depth as we progress, the importance of the transformative nature of the practice of art is clear. As simple as an artwork may appear, the processes involved in its creation and appreciation encompass complexities that extend in all directions of human culture, whether artistic, scientific or philosophic. When artworks are created, materials from the earth are incorporated into artworks and transformed into forms, establishing one of the fundamental oppositions of aesthetic theory between the natural material and the 'artificial' composition of the artwork. As the identity of an organism must be established as distinct from its environment, so too must an artwork distinguish itself from its context, and it does this by manifesting the 'seizing' and 'rending' processes of its creation. Having said that, the identity of an artwork is also determined through external factors, in relation to an artistic tradition that came before it, which situates it within the context of a social practice. As artworks are evaluated aesthetically, another transformation occurs within the observer that translates sense into sense—external sensory data into internal cognitive thought. Rancière conceives of this process of internalization as having three-steps that include input, association and projection. While the first and possibly second stages may be similar amongst individuals, the projection

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[65] McCullagh and Ford, "The Desert Below", 159.
[66] Nöe, *Strange Tools*, 80.

of associations into metaphor is a largely subjective attribution of meaning that defines aesthetic separation, where aesthetic interpretation is infinite. The reliance upon learned tradition and subjective evaluation make aesthetic experiences singular, which leads to the final transformation explored in this chapter, the subjective dis-identification of the observer. The potential transformation of self that aesthetic experience entails is largely due to the reliance on subjective thought, which enables observers to become reflexively aware of their position in relation to an unknown (i.e. without concept) external stimuli. Every aesthetic experience is a unique opportunity to reflect upon your self in the moment, and the potentially distinct self the aesthetic experience with catalyse. Art works through people and their experience of artworks. Thinking about art as a practice and as a process allows us to identify the myriad influences that contribute to the possibility of art, especially in terms of its foundation within the systems of human life that make it possible. When we think about art as a kind of experience that necessitates processes of interaction and reflection, we can begin to appreciate the ways in which it is distinct from other kinds of experience. The result is a better understanding of its functionality through processes of human transformation, and becoming more aware of our transformative selves through aesthetic experience.

2.3.3. Organization

Perhaps the strongest correlation between art and life is through the concept of organization. The two laws of autopoiesis demonstrate how life is defined in operative terms through systems of reflexive organization. The essential organization of life can be compared to the basic conception of artworks as organized materials in terms of creation and recognition. Alva Nöe's organizational theory of art helps to demonstrate the ways that the raw materials and subject matter of artworks can be considered in relation to our imperative as human beings to organize, while evoking the two-tiered autopoietic structure of molecular

and molar levels of reflexive operation. The organizational foundation of artworks can be extended to establish the metaphor of the art world as an autopoietic system, and we will look at the many ways in which artworks are ordered within society. This prompts a consideration of how artistic tradition relates with social organization, which Rancière's notion of the aesthetic regime addresses in terms of the connection of art and everyday life. Both life and art depend upon organization by definition, and as a result the concept of organization is the best way to explore the ways in which life and art are tied together. While this is easier to fathom in terms of the operational functioning of biological organisms and artistic creation, extending the connecting principle of organization to cognitive and social aspects of artistic practice is more difficult. Nonetheless, the basic tenet of organization underlies this thesis as it moves to connect life, human beings, and human thought to art.

To begin with, the basic unit of art—the artwork—must be understood in terms of its organization to be understood as art. As Deleuze and Guattari state: "Composition, composition is the sole definition of art. Composition is aesthetic, and what is not composed is not a work of art."[67] In terms of creating artworks, every operation involved can be considered in terms of organization, as disorganized or spontaneous as these processes might be. In order to be evaluated as art, artworks must be displayed and accessed as well, which exposes an inherent organizational aspect in their requisite communication to others.[68] As Luhman states: "A first-order observer must first identify a work of art as an object in contradistinction to all other objects or processes."[69] We distinguish an artwork from nature and other non-art products by recognizing some minimal form of human transformation upon a raw material (be it natural or man-made), which in essence is its organization. Rancière positions the artwork as the coincidence between the raw material of nature and the actions of

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[67] Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 191-192.
[68] Waters, *Sweat, Feel, Think, Art*, 155-156.
[69] Luhmann, *Art as a Social System*, 71.

man that the material demonstrates. It is through the artist's composition of material that an artwork stores and transmits vibrations of emotion during aesthetic experience. In this way, artworks are defined by their structure in much the same way that organisms are structurally defined in terms of their molecular functioning. While the recognition of structural or formal organization of an artwork is possible through the sensory capacities of individuals, the inference of referential associations largely results from our collective social organization, through which cultural and artistic traditions are learned, practised and extended.

Alva Nöe's recent theory of art uses organization to connect the basic and natural activities of our lives with the productive activities involved in making artwork. Nöe argues that organization is a biological concept that not only organizes our bodies but also our psychological and social selves.[70] "To be alive is to be organized, and insofar as we are not only organisms but are also persons, we find ourselves organized, or integrated, in a still larger range of ways that tie us to the environment, each other, and our social worlds."[71] Nöe uses the term 'organized activity' to establish the foundation of his conception of art. An organized activity has six characteristics:

1. It is primitive, basic, biological and natural.
2. It requires the exercise of cognitive skills.
3. It has a structure and is organized in time.
4. The demands of the activity as a whole control the behaviour of the individuals involved.
5. The activity has a function.
6. It is a potential source of pleasure.[72]

Another important point that Nöe makes is that organized activities are habitual, and in this way they are usually things that can be improved with practice and don't always require our full cognitive attention.[73] The best example that Nöe provides to relate organized activities to artistic creation is with dancing. In order to do this, Nöe separates the basic organized

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[70] Nöe, *Strange Tools*, 6.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid., 4-5.
[73] Ibid., 8.

activity—dancing—from a higher form of organized activity—choreography—which he terms first and second order organized activities respectively.

> When a choreographer stages a dance, he is representing dancing. That is, he puts dancing itself on display. Choreography shows us dancing, and so, really, it displays us, we human beings, as dancers; choreography shows us dancing; choreography exhibits the place dancing has, or can have, in our lives. Choreography puts the fact that we are organized by dancing on display.[74]

With this description, Nöe intends to connect the artistic act of choreographing to the natural act of dancing through organizational relationships, both in terms of how we organize dance but also how dance organizes us.[75] Choreography can thus be understood in relation to the nature of human organization, which provides a link between the perceived divisions of nature and culture.[76] Nöe states:

> This idea that life is tied to autopoiesis, to use Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela's apt term, points back to Kant. Kant appreciated that although Newtonian mechanics gives you the principles you need to describe and predict the movements of the smallest particles as well as the whole planets, physics as such can make no sense of life. Living processes—metabolism, growth, death—are not *merely* physical processes even if, of course, they are physical processes. Living beings are physical systems whose life consists in the distinctive manner of their organization; it consists, as Kant appreciated, in the fact of their self-organization.[77]

The key point that Nöe makes is that artistic practices extract and expose the innumerable ways in which we find ourselves organized as people. Art is not only organizational but also reorganizational, and its value is largely established in relation to the significance of organization in shaping human life.[78] "Art—and philosophy, too—are practices for investigating the modes of our organization, or rather, the manner of our embedding in different modes of organization. Art is not just more organization."[79] Art is reflective

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[74] Nöe, *Strange Tools*, 13.
[75] Ibid., 15.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Ibid., 15-16.
[78] Ibid., 16.
[79] Ibid., 28.

organization, and this idea of Nöe will be further explored in relation to technology in Chapter 4.2.2. Reorganization.

Organization can be easily seen as an integral aspect of the institutional system of art, commonly known as 'the art world,' where artworks enter into public circulation through exhibition and conceptualization. As spectators, we distinguish between art institutions, exhibitions and artworks in terms of recognizing and comparing the ways that they organize and the ways in which they are organized. The system of art is not only operated by institutions—galleries, museums, universities, governments—but through society in general, and the tradition of art that communities of people have nurtured and reproduced over millennia. When we think about the system of art, then, we need to consider distinct levels of operation, from the singular elements of artworks and individuals to a more general network of movement and relations. When we speak about artworks, we understand specific entities that exist within specific contexts. When we talk about art, we understand a generalization of various artworks that exist and operate within an implied system. The structures that are interrelated within the system of art are vast, ranging from educational structures that are implemented in art class curricula, to material structures that artists consider when making artworks, to personnel networks as curators develop group exhibitions for biennales, to logistical structures as collectors buy and ship artworks internationally. There are a lot of moving parts in the art world and artworks are but one fundamental element. This complex system, at both the level of the artwork and the level of the art world, is comparable to autopoiesis because its internal organization forms the fundamental structure of its autonomy, which will be explored further in Chapter 5.3.3. Autonomy. If we think about autopoiesis as a metaphor for the system of art, we can imagine how artworks are a form of currency that connect various practices together and facilitate a conceptualization of art. If we compare artworks to molecules, the art institutions as systems clearly demonstrate processes of

conservation and adaptation, with artworks flowing to and fro, in and out, of the art world. Similar to autopoiesis, the system of art demonstrates two levels of operation; the molecular and the molar. Singular artworks constitute the basic level of operation, while art as a general concept makes up the singular conceptual totality of art. Autopoiesis helps us to appreciate art's autonomy in relation to other non-art practices and components (its law of conservation) and its sovereignty as an internally reflexive and transformative force (its law of adaptation), once again demonstrating the fundamental aspect of its organization. Nonetheless, it is important to point out that the functionality of an artwork is not the same as the functionality of the art system, once again reflecting the difference between molecular operation and molar observation of autopoietic systems. The unique functionality of artworks, which differs greatly from the intention and purpose of the art world, will be more fully explored in relation to technology in Chapter 4.3.4. Function. As a point of connection, though, organization can be understood as the cognition of the art system by establishing a basic operational union between separate levels.

For Rancière, who is investigating the political efficacy of artistic practices, the concept of aesthetic separation is most relevant in terms of social organization. This involves how people relate with each other, but also how they relate with artworks, which he claims "assume the identity of a person."[80] To this effect, artworks act as proxies for human beings, in part because of the communicative implication that artworks embody. Artworks do no intrinsically have meaning, but rather we are taught that they have meaning, and we learn how to access and interpret that meaning. As we are socialized to be individuals, we learn how artworks are organized not only in terms of materials but also in terms of experience and tradition. One of the most influential factors in Rancière's definition of aesthetic separation is the distancing of art current practices during the aesthetic regime of art from originary

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[80] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 56-57.

contexts of artistic purpose and function. While art was traditionally associated with civic festivals, religious ceremonies and monarchic decorum, it is no longer organized in terms of these functions and destinations.[81] "What is lost, along with the harmony between *poiesis* and *aisthesis*, is the dependence of artistic productions on a distribution of social places and functions."[82] The disjunction that Rancière refers to between *poiesis* and *aisthesis* reflects the separation of artistic practice into two isolated acts—creation and enjoyment—and this organizational format of artistic practice reflects the debt that art has to Greek theatre. While there was an established separation between the actors on stage and the audience, there was a concordance between artistic cause and emotional effect.[83] With the freedom of subjective interpretation that arose as a result of aesthetic theory—in combination with other social developments, no doubt—this concordance dissipated in the wake of a more individuated reflection on artistic significance. This situation is the 'aesthetic break,' a concept that Rancière uses to describe the cultural shift away from the mimetic regime of art and the awakening possibility of a political effect through the aesthetic experience of artworks.[84] As Joseph J. Tanke describes, the mimetic or representational regime held different assumptions about artistic practice than the current aesthetic regime of art.[85] The mimetic regime viewed artworks as simple representations of life, at the same time placing limits on subject matter, depictions and expected reactions, while the aesthetic regime confuses the definite boundary between art and life by dismantling the purely representational function of artworks. This opens the door for subjective understanding when experiencing and evaluating artworks.

> What aesthetics advances, then, is an idea of art according to which art is at once informed by the products and practices of the everyday, *and* in some significant way different from it. Aesthetic art is that which cannot but call into question the

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[81] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 70.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid., 60.
[84] Ibid., 60.
[85] Tanke, "What is the Aesthetic Regime?", 73.

meanings assigned to roles, practices, and capacities because it is what questions the process of assigning meaning as such.[86]

The requisite subjectivity of the aesthetic regime has helped to dismantle any hierarchies of high and low that might have traditionally existed, and established a more democratic basis upon which artworks can be enjoyed and discussed within society. Through this transition from the mimetic to the aesthetic tradition of art, we can begin to appreciate the political relevance that culture plays within society, which demonstrates very clearly how social organization is affected by the practice of art, and vice versa. As we continue, the topic of the political efficacy of artworks will be developed.

Organization is a unifying concept that connects our biological operation as living beings and our artistic tendencies as people within society. As we have seen, artworks must be organized to some extent, and it is through their organization that we can recognize them as artworks. As Nöe has proposed, the foundation of an organizational theory of art relates organized activities of the first and second order in terms of reflexive transformation, which demonstrates how human beings organize and are organized by the world in which they live. His division of organized activities into first and second orders reflects the autopoietic separation of molecular operation and molar observation, and establishes a reflexive connection between natural and composed elements within artworks. Extending the concept of organization into the institutional world of art, we can begin to understand the relevance of an autopoietic comparison in terms of internal self-sufficiency, where artworks are organized in terms of conservation and adaptation in order to sustain the social system of art. While this system functions largely in experiential, educational and economic terms, it is important to differentiate between the intentionality of the social art system and artworks, which act as the basic unit of the art system with their own internal logic. This distinction between molecular and molar functionality reflects the autopoietic division that we exhibit as living systems,

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[86] Tanke, "What is the Aesthetic Regime?", 73.

where our structural components operate on a separate level from our self-conception as a whole. As we look at a broader perspective of the art world in terms of tradition and social organization, we can appreciate the role that experience and education have in the appreciation and enjoyment of artworks. Rancière's conception of the aesthetic regime highlights the connection between social and cultural transformation over the past two hundred and thirty years, since the groundbreaking examination of aesthetic thought by Kant during the enlightenment. Rancière's description of the aesthetic break helps to demonstrate how the confined and limited forms of artistic appreciation during previous epochs gave way to a more subjective and open artistic practice. Through the social constructs that tradition implies, we can more readily understand how the concept of art can be related to everyday life, as well as biological life. Organization defines us in many ways, and through our organizational proclivities we can appreciate how art and life are united.

2.3.4. Context

Artworks, just like organisms, exist in relation to their environment. This is the case on a physical level, but it goes further than that if we consider the conceptual realm of art, which necessitates shifting from environmental considerations into contextual ones. The concepts of "environment" and "context" are similar, although the former implies a more neutral, non-human connotation, and the latter connotes the attribution of meaning to an environment. While our environment can exist without us and thus be thought of as inert or natural, we as observers necessarily establish context, which associates a source of perception to an environment. As such, context not only associates information or significance in relation to the elements involved in an event or interaction, but it also assumes that there is a perspective from which a context is established in relation to time. Since autopoiesis deals with the concepts of environment, meaning and time, it is extremely relevant to our

exploration of aesthetic separation and the practice of art. Here we will begin to compare autopoiesis and art by looking at how artworks exist in relation to their physical surroundings, institutional context and a personal artistic practice. The idea of context will be further examined in terms of an artwork's relationship to the conventions of art, specifically looking at the context of the 'white cube' exhibition space. Finally, we will return to Nöe's organizational theory of art to explore how artworks function in part by being out of context. Just like in autopoiesis, where an organism's identity is determined through its persistent differentiation from its environment, context can never be escaped when dealing with artworks and art. More than a simple environment, every artwork needs a context in order to exist as a singular being, and the significance of an artwork is conditional on processes of contextualization.

There are many ways to contextualize an artwork. The relationship of artworks to their immediate environment on a molecular level is similar to autopoietic organisms, and as structural entities, artworks are constantly negotiating and changing because of this relationship. The connection between an artwork and its environment is entropic in nature and assures the global necessity of art restorers and conservationists. Chemical reactions cause pigments to change colour and structural components to weaken on a perpetual basis, as protracted as these processes might be. This is one reason why every specific experience of an artwork is different, since artworks transform just as we do, as corporeal beings and through relations. On the molecular level, the institutions of art attend to the degenerative coupling of artworks within their environments by establishing their protection and preservation as a principal virtue, and the people who work within the art system do whatever they can to prevent or delay artworks from changing, as impossible as this might be. On the molar level, the context of an artwork is paramount to its understanding. This refers to the physical context of an artwork, which attains significance based on its locational, institutional and cultural

association. Furthermore, temporal and traditional context play a role in artistic meaning, as the development of artistic practices and understanding ensures that the same artwork can mean different things to diverse people in distinct epochs. This leads us back to 'the aesthetic break,' which Rancière describes as the contextual dislocation that occurred as artistic practices transformed in relation to social changes over time. As mentioned earlier, while artworks traditionally entered the common realm of aesthetic experience through festivals, ceremonies and decoration, the aesthetic regime separated them from these specific functions and destinations.[87] As artistic creation faded from being defined by its purpose in relation to particular social spaces and functions, it gained independence from authoritative standards. Its understood purpose as decoration or iconography began to dissolve, and through the dispersal of set intentions, artworks started to disrupt expectation and interrupt assured meaning.

> Aesthetic experience has a political effect to the extent that the loss of destination it presupposes disrupts the way in which bodies fit their functions and destination. What it produces is not rhetorical persuasion about what must be done. Nor is it the framing of a collective body. It is a multiplication of connections and disconnections that reframe the relation between bodies, the world they live in and the way in which they are 'equipped' to adapt to it. It is a multiplicity of folds and gaps in the fabric of common experience that change the cartography of the perceptible, the thinkable and the feasible. As such, it allows for new modes of political construction of common objects and new possibilities of collective enunciation.[88]

In effect, artworks started to defy expectations through the loss of purpose and intention that they traditionally embodied. Rancière attributes the disruptive political potential of artworks in part to their loss of contextually defined meaning, demonstrating how cultural tradition develops in relation to the collective understanding of the society that upholds it. As such, the context in which an artwork is accessed and evaluated changes not only in terms of physical location but also in terms of ideological position, which is established by the culture of the

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[87] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 69.
[88] Ibid., 72.

individual and society that engages it. This assures that the value associated with an artwork is always malleable and transitive, depending on the context of its evaluation.

Another way that artworks are contextualized is in relation to an artist's personal practice, and in relation to their history of exhibition and ownership. This may be secondary to aesthetic contextualization in the moment of experiencing an artwork, but it nonetheless contributes to the economic value of an artwork and thus influences its position within the social realm of art historical consideration. Take a look at any contemporary art auction catalogue and you will see how historic and relational information are key elements for establishing and justifying monetary value and artistic significance. By comparing an artwork to other artworks by the same artist, details regarding techniques and subject matter can be identified and explored more easily, especially as an artist's body of work is contextualized in terms of progression. The provenance of an artwork lists its exhibition and ownership history—a kind of metadata that is attached to an artwork. This extends the more constitutional information contained on the label that accompanies an artwork during exhibition, which lists the artist's name, the artwork name, the year of its creation, the materials it is composed of, and its dimensions—not to mention it's price. The practice of labelling artworks is at least 2500 years old[89], which demonstrates that the contextualization of artworks through the association of supplementary information is a fundamental convention of art. With the ubiquitous use of digital technologies nowadays, the registration of an artwork in art institutions involves the recording of an astonishing amount of metadata. As tangential as these practices may be, they certainly demonstrate contextualization to be an integral aspect of the art world.

Artworks are unavoidably experienced within an artistic tradition that is structured in terms of pre-existing artistic conventions. These principles establish the artwork within the

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[89] Sir Leonard Wooley, *Excavations at Ur: A Record of Twelve Years' Work*, (London, U.K.: Kegan Paul Limited, 2006), 238.

realm and tradition of art, while simultaneously being challenged by the innovation that the artwork inevitably demonstrates. While I have previously focused on artistic conventions in relation to evolutionary theories and a 'cluster criteria' definition of art,[90] I would like to focus on the convention of the 'white cube' that describes the ubiquitous spatial context for the display of artworks during the Modern epoch.[91] Providing a veil of neutrality, the convention of a blank exhibition space assures that artworks are seen as well-lit, independent entities with as little distraction as possible. Despite the supposed vacuity of the white cube, every exhibition space exists within various contexts—institutional, economic, national, cultural, etc.—and these encompassing conceptions of context are inevitably associated to artworks when they are exhibited, experienced or remembered. Escaping these contextual associations may be the impetus for artists wanting to: "get out of the museum and induce alterations in the space of everyday life, generating new forms of relations."[92] The space of everyday life offers fewer predefined links for the contextualization of artworks by avoiding the direct relations that art institutions embody through their inherent economic existence and ideological positions. Nonetheless, while many artists with relational practices are escaping the conventions of the traditional exhibition space, their artworks simply become dependent on other conventions of art. As Osborne states: "art can transform all kinds of place into art-space (that is, art non-place), by bringing it into relation with gallery conventions."[93] While artworks may incorporate or appropriate elements from the real world, they nonetheless need to be recognized as an artwork in order to be understood as art, and this is especially true when the context doesn't convey any artistic significance. This relates to the autonomy that an artwork must convey in order to exist in relation to tradition as art, which we will look at in chapter 4.7. Autonomy. As postconceptual artists move away from the purely technical

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[90] Waters, *Sweat, Feel, Think, Art*, 98-107.
[91] Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, 139.
[92] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 53.
[93] Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, 140.

mediations of art, such as sculpture or painting, their artworks nonetheless embody some formal convention that allows them to be known as art. In autopoietic terms, if an artwork can't differentiate itself as a unique identity in relation to its environment, it will never be contextualized as art. Artistic conventions ensure that artworks can always be contextualized as such. "Whatever counts as art is marked by an inevitable historical relativity, even at the most elemental level of operation."[94] This is yet another way that context becomes an important factor that ascribes significance to an artwork. The white cube makes it possible for anything to become an artwork by simply being exhibited within a conventional gallery space, and highlights the importance of the act of display for establishing artistic significance. At the heart of artistic practice, the act of display—art's defining communicative convention—marks an important separation between the creation and the experience of an artwork.

Acts of observation and perception ensure that every aesthetic experience brings context to an artwork. This is because artworks are always perceived and evaluated in relation to the cognition and memory of an observer. Try as one might, artworks are never isolated. "Art is always relational and contextual."[95] The cognitive processes of relating and contextualizing are how we engage to understand artworks, comparing them with feelings and concepts that we have achieved through experience. In contradistinction to artworks, Nöe uses the concept of tools to explore how context provides purpose and meaning. He contends that if you take a tool out of its context it is just an object without purpose. He believes that artworks place things out of context on purpose as a way of calling attention to them and examining their collocation in the world.[96] As such, he defines artworks as *strange tools*, which reflects the impracticality that has become a standard through which artworks are defined. Within the fine arts there are many divisions, but the separation of design and art

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[94] Luhmann, *Art as a Social System*, 18.
[95] Nöe, *Strange Tools*, 73-74.
[96] Ibid., 30.

demonstrates Nöe's theory of *strange tools* well by pointing out the importance of context on how we understand things in general. For example, the pictures that we see in the newspaper or on your parent's shelves at home are natural—they are not out of place because we are accustomed and not surprised to see pictures there. Nöe contends that pictures are like words of our mother tongue, a familiar way of communicating, and it is recognition and familiarity that makes pictures in these places seem natural.[97] Good design works in the same way, according to Nöe, because when design works well we don't notice it; it's doing its job of organizing and enabling. Art, on the other hand, subverts, which contradicts the practical purpose and methodology of design.[98] Good design fits in with its context, standing out only when it is novel or improves upon expectations. The purpose behind design always connects it to intelligibility and places it in parallel functionality with technology, which we will explore more closely in chapter 2.8. Function. Nöe defines art as "bad design on purpose," stating that the absence of defined use and contextual shifts ensure that artworks call attention to themselves.[99] By being out of place, or out of context, artworks stand out. While design solves problems, art produces questions that bring individual subjectivity into play in the reflective judgement of an artwork. As Nöe states: "When we ask of a work of art *what is this? What is this for?* we need to come up with our own answer. And so we need to take a stand critically, on our relation to the background, on our relation to that which we normally take for granted."[100] Design, on the other hand, relies on determinant judgements that relate their evaluation to universal principles of rationality, reason and use. We will further explore Nöe's consideration of artworks as a *strange tool* in chapter 2.6. Reorganization, but the general idea is relevant to point out here as we explore the importance of context to the practice of art. Needless to say, the observer brings their personal understanding of the world

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[97] Nöe, *Strange Tools*, 100.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Ibid., 101.
[100] Ibid.

to aesthetic experience, where the questions that artworks inherently evoke call forth processes of contextualization in an effort to establish meaning.

While autopoiesis highlights the structural coupling between organism and its environment, an operational understanding of aesthetic experience demonstrates how artworks are equally dependent upon their context. Artworks exist within the cognitive realm of observers. While the concept of 'environment' implies neutrality, it changes into 'context' through the attribution of meaning that observation entails. Acts of contextualization not only attribute significance to interactions within an environment, but they also demonstrate a unique perspective from which context is established. Artworks exist in relation to their immediate physical environment as well as their conceptual context in terms of social associations such as tradition, personal practice and ownership. This idea of context can be expanded to reflect an artwork's relationship to the institutions in which it is displayed, and the conventions of art that help to define its ideological contextualization. By functioning out of context, artworks call attention to themselves and the subversive way that they operate as art in counterpoint to other fields of culture. Rancière's exploration of the aesthetic break helps us to understand the transformation of artistic tradition over time, and the disconnection of artworks from specific functions and spaces. In the aesthetic regime, predetermined conceptions of meaning have dissipated, and aesthetic experience has become a subjective process of contextualization to determine the meaning and value of artworks. This facilitates a greater appreciation of the importance of temporal and social considerations when associating meaning and value to artworks. As contexts change, so do the artworks, people and traditions that inhabit them, demonstrating how the concept and practice of art continually evolve.

2.3.5. Observation

Observation is a key element of aesthetic experience, and autopoiesis helps us to more fully understand the operative foundation that makes observation possible. Here I will focus on the ways that observation is tied to communication in an attempt to clarify intention, and the ways in which observation functions in relation artworks. First I will examine how the intentionality and explanatory notions that arise from molar autopoeitic observation relate to artworks. Secondly I will explore observation in relation to Luhmann's systems theory of art, where observation is divided into first and second orders of communication and is examined in relation to distinction and form. Of specific interest is his concept of the 'observation of observation,' which occurs when perceiving artworks and once again reflects a two-tiered reflexive system of separate yet interconnected levels. These various observational perspectives ultimately demonstrate that our capacity as human beings to perceive—as developed and sharp as it might seem—has an unstable foundation that leads to uncertainty, interaction and paradox in the process of experiencing and evaluating artworks.

As explored in chapter 1.1 Autopoiesis, attempts to describe the intentionality of observed behaviour result in explanatory notions, which clarify or speculate on the purpose of observed interactions. The generation of thought and language provides meaning to observations and leads to a sense of understanding the world around us. Artists may have a specific reason for making an artwork or not—something that they want to communicate or evoke with a viewer in mind—but in the aesthetic regime, the exact understanding of what an artist wishes to communicate through their artwork can in no way be guaranteed to be understood. The 'aesthetic break' is important because it destabilizes any certain connections between the creation of an artwork and the perception of its meaning. Any determinate link between cause and effect is disrupted because of the separation of the experience and possible

metaphoric significance that sensory data may convey.[101] The aesthetic break ensured that artworks began to speak for themselves, demonstrating how aesthetics is emancipatory in effect through its reliance on the free thought of subjective individuals to establish meaning. Rancière calls the 'aesthetic effect' an effect of dis-identification, where viewers are forced to reassess (and re-establish) their position, whether it's political or emotional.[102] The disconnections inherent in aesthetic separation and the transition from 'sense to sense' mean that no exact message can ever by guaranteed. "The very same thing that makes the aesthetic 'political' stands in the way of all strategies for 'politicizing art'."[103] As such, the intentions that artists provide in the form of explanatory notions must be interpreted as tangential to the original aesthetic experience of an artwork. In fact, listening to what artists have to say about their own artworks can often be misleading. As Luhmann states: "Most of the time, artists are in no position to provide a satisfactory account of their intentions."[104] This is in part because artworks communicate beyond the scope of any explanation of intention provided by their author. While explanatory notions have no power in the molecular functioning of organisms, neither should the explanation of intentions provided by artists be taken too seriously. They may give us insight into creative processes, but artworks ultimately speak for themselves. The British collective Art & Language undermine the validity of artistic intention perfectly as they describe the contemporary trend of "de-skilling" in contemporary art: "The bare bones are simple: if you can use some form of readymade you don't need to learn to draw. At the same

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[101] We explored this in the Chapter 2.3.2. Transformation, and will more thoroughly examine it in Chapter 3. Thought / Self.

[102] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 72.

[103] Ibid., 74.

[104] Luhmann, *Art as a Social System*, 24.

time you need to learn to theorize and to 'think' – to devise strategies and entrepreneurial skills – in short, to bullshit."[105]

As aesthetic experience implies, observation is far from being a passive operation. We *make* observations, and there are many important implications to this generative process when it comes to creating and observing artworks. Luhmann explores the functioning of observation in relation to aesthetic experience in order to demonstrate art as a social system of communication. In general, every time an observer observes they create a distinction that results in two separations: one between a marked space and an unmarked space, and another between the observer and the thing that is being distinguished.[106] Luhmann defines the observation of artworks as second order observation, which is an observation of an observation. Since artworks embody distinctions that were created by other observers— artists—for the purpose of observation, they in turn should be understood as observations. The result of this distinction between first (direct) and second (indirect) observation assures that aesthetic experience is conditional on a paradox, which Rancière acknowledges in part in his exploration of 'being apart together'. Luhmann describes the paradox as follows:

> [T]he activity of observing occurs in the world and can be observed in turn. It presupposes the drawing of a boundary across which the observer can observe something (or himself as an other), and it accounts for the incompleteness of observations by virtue of the fact that the act of observing, along with the difference of the observation that constitutes it, escapes observation. Observation therefore relies on a blind spot that enables it to see something (but not everything).[107]

This seeing (or marking) one thing by not seeing (or not marking) something else is the paradox that is presupposed by all observation. When something is distinguished, it is always done so in reference to what is left out or not distinguished, which Luhmann illustrates

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[105] Art & Language, "Feeling Good: The Aesthetics of Corporate Art," in *Aesthetics and Contemporary Art*, edited by Armen Avanessian and Luke Skrebowski, (Norhaven, Denmark: Sternberg Press, 2011), 170.
[106] Luhmann, *Art as a Social System*, 54.
[107] Ibid., 56-57.

linguistically as "this-and-not-something-else," or "this-and-not-that."[108] In this way, observation must be understood in the same way as the autopoietic definition of behaviour, which is always established as an inseparable interaction between an organism and its environment. An observed distinction always has a two-sided form that demonstrates what is distinguished on one side and what is not distinguished on the other side. In difference to mere behaviour, however—which can be understood as a simple operation within an environment—Luhmann states that observation involves experience and action, which depend on capacities of distinguishing and indicating. While distinguishing can be understood as an act of differentiation, indicating is the transmission of a distinction to other observers. When something is observed, distinction and indication are executed simultaneously according to Luhmann. The significance is that form can be identified in both the thing that is being observed (artworks exist as form) and in the formal structure of the observation itself (the operational form).[109] Luhmann uses the idea of form to connect the act of observing to works of art, where a formal procedure (aesthetic experience) is used to understand a specific kind of form (an artwork). Derrida makes a similar comparison in relation to Kant's *Analytic of the Beautiful*, where formal structures inform the observation of form, which we will explore more thoroughly in Chapter 5.2.6. Form. Nonetheless, the active and transformative nature of observation in terms of its use of distinction and indication is becoming clearer.

Luhmann claims that artworks are *only* produced for the purpose of generating the observation of an observation.[110] His goal in describing the practice of art in terms of second-order observation is to effectively correlate the functioning of individuals with social systems, both of which demonstrate autopoiesis through their operative closure (i.e. self-sufficiency) and reproductive capacities (i.e. self-perpetuation). To make this correlation, he utilizes the

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[108] Luhmann, *Art as a Social System*, 59.
[109] Ibid., 61.
[110] Ibid., 69.

concepts of form, distinction and observation to describe the practice of art. For artists, which are first-order observers during creation, a work of art must be identified as distinct from all other objects and processes, which we explored in Chapter 2.3.2. Transformation. Luhmann states that one of the key elements of an artwork is its artificiality—its condition as being man-made—which offers a recognizable signal that allows second-order observation to begin in observers. This is what Rancière, borrowing from Deleuze, describes as the vibrations of "seizing and rending" that are transmitted to human beings through the *form* of a monument. As Luhman describes, a second-order observer:

> searches the work for clues to guide further observation and only when these observations succeed will [they] be ready to identify the work as art. In order to do so, [they] must follow the forms embedded in the work. All of these are forms of difference; they fixate something on one side, which eliminates, or at least constrains, the arbitrariness of the other side.[111]

Here Luhmann reiterates the paradoxical form of "this-and-not-that" that artworks embody in their use of distinction. Second-order observers become aware of multiple distinctions as they evaluate an artwork over the course of time, creating a complex nexus of forms that simultaneously indicate what is distinguished and what this distinction excludes. The boundary between what is present and what is absent in every distinction is an open border that must be tested in order to conceive of a unity that begins to define the artwork.[112] Differentiating between the creation of an artwork and its appreciation, Luhman describes how paradox is experienced by first-order observers (artists) and second-order observers (spectators). For artists, a temporal paradox is experienced through the simultaneity of distinction and observation, which stimulate consecutive operations until the artwork is complete. For spectators, paradox exists in the apprehension of a unity that can only be observed as a multiplicity, which can never be fully conceived.[113] Through his use of separate

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[111] Luhmann, *Art as a Social System*, 73.
[112] Ibid., 72.
[113] Ibid., 73.

levels of observation, Luhmann demonstrates the problem of unity that all artworks embody in the form of a paradox.

> Art makes visible possibilities of order that would otherwise remain invisible. It alters the conditions of visibility/invisibility in the world by keeping invisibility constant and making visibility subject to variation. In short, art generates forms that would never exist without it."[114]

While attesting to the unique generosity of art, Luhmann's two-tiered theory of artistic observation is yet another example of separation at the heart of aesthetic experience. Considering artworks as observations, and their aesthetic experience as the observation of observations, the reflexive operation of the enjoyment of art is based on the navigation and negotiation of these implicit separations, which are ultimately observed by the observer in the observer, connecting the practice of art to the processes of life.

In conclusion, the process of observation not only enables the practice of art but, furthermore, operates to define what it is and what it isn't. Rancière's notion of the aesthetic break, where the congruency of meaning in artistic practice became separated into two facets—*poiesis* from *aisthesis*, or creation from enjoyment—helps us to appreciate the newly found uncertainty of artistic experience in the aesthetic regime. Notions of artistic intention are no longer sufficient or authoritative. While Rancière demonstrates how the experience of artworks has a political effect through the process of dis-identification that it stimulates, it is important to note that the political effect cannot be guided nor guaranteed within the aesthetic regime. The semiotic process of observation reflects this internal-external division since it is defined by two implicit oppositions; one that separates the observer from the observed, and another that separates the distinguished from the 'not-distinguished.' In the case of observing artworks, the process moves from first-order to second-order observation in which artworks— as indirect forms of communication—are considered as observations in themselves, thus making aesthetic experience the observation of observations. This process, which involves

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[114] Luhmann, *Art as a Social System*, 96.

both action and experience, has a formal structure that is paradoxical in nature since it inherently connects the 'not-distinguished' with the distinguished. The action of observation involves both distinction (which separates the object or being of interest) and indication (which conveys the distinction externally to other observers). Since an artwork must be recognized first to be observed as an observation, the concept of art is presupposed and contingent on the experience of the observer. This demonstrates the recognition of artificiality as a condition of aesthetic experience, which establishes an observational stipulation on both the creation and enjoyment of artworks. Observers not only distinguish the oppositions that are inherent in artworks, but they must test them in order to successfully identify the work's boundaries, which ultimately exist as paradoxes in terms of temporal and apprehensive unities. As sources of unlimited observation, artworks demonstrate a unique generosity and infinite interpretive potential. As formal beings, artworks provoke the inherently formal operation of human observation, demonstrating how our biological capacities inherently inform the practice of art.

2.3.6. Time

Autopoiesis demonstrates time to be one of the most paradoxical yet omnipresent explanatory notions that our cognition affords us. As explored in Chapter 2.2.6. Observation, the only time that exists on the molecular level of autopoietic operation is the present; the past and the future are simply concepts that we as observers have developed to help explain the succession of events that we experience on the molar level of conscious thought. This is difficult to accept knowing that we are older than we were five years ago, and that we have plans for the weekend that we're looking forward to. That's because our cognition makes the past and future seem real thanks to our ability to remember and to imagine. As the neurologist Antonio Damasio explains:

> Images of something that has not yet happened and that may in fact never come to pass are no different in nature from the images you hold of something that already has happened. They constitute the memory of a possible future rather than of the past that was. These various images—perceptual, recalled from real past, and recalled from plans of the future—are constructions of your organism's brain. All that you can know for certain is that they are real to your self, and that other beings make comparable images.[115]

While this neurological description of time in relation to cognition will be more thoroughly explored in Chapter 3.3.4. Experience, it is important to point out that time during aesthetic experience is always the experience of oneself in the present in relation to an artwork, which makes it congruent with time on the molecular level of autopoiesis. As Luhmann states: "What is at stake, operatively speaking, in the production and observation of a work of art is always a temporal unity that is either no longer or not yet observed."[116] In this chapter we will explore time in relation to artworks and aesthetic experience by looking at three key ideas. First we will explore time in relation to tradition, especially as conceived by Rancière in his text "Aesthetic Separation, Aesthetic Community." Then we will look at Osborne's exploration of time in terms of memory, attention and expectation, which considers aesthetic experience in the expanded present by comparing states of attention and distraction. Finally we will look at Husserl's notion of the 'horizon of expectation' in order to consider art and knowledge in relation to both the promise of the future and limitation. In the end, the paradoxical notion of time that we encounter in autopoiesis becomes clearer as we consider it in relation to the creation and experience of artworks.

The idea of tradition, which is paramount to Rancière's text, demonstrates the transformation of a recurring practice over time. The tradition of art began, it is surmised, when our ancestors began creating images of elements from their environments on the walls of caves, and while it may not have been considered as art in that moment of time, our current tradition of art most certainly claims early cave paintings as an integral part of its history. In

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[115] Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, 97.
[116] Luhmann, *Art as a Social System*, 72.

his exploration of aesthetic separation, Rancière focuses on the difference between the ancient and traditional practice of art—at the very least, pre-enlightenment art—and the aesthetic separation that is present in the practise of contemporary art. As noted earlier, the place and purpose that artworks once had in human culture has since transformed or disappeared. The distancing from a common understanding that artistic meaning is dependent on place or function means that artistic significance is no longer fixed nor presumed, despite the fact that some artistic conventions have been upheld and continue to define art. Luhmann places the originary oppositions of our current tradition of art between *physis* and *techne*, which he equates to *natura* and *ars*. As he states: "A theory of art that negates traditional patterns of differentiation without ridding itself of these models runs straight into paradox."[117] It is this very paradox at the root of contemporary art that Rancière explores as he develops his idea of aesthetic separation. Aside from demonstrating the importance of the separation of artworks from traditional function and purpose, he also points out the transformation of the convention of the artist (creator) being separated from the audience (spectator). This set of disjunctions has come to define aesthetic experience in contemporary life, helping to ensure the subjective production of meaning during aesthetic experience. It also shows, however, how artworks continue to be dependent on precedent artworks and the tradition of art in general, through their perpetuation of artistic conventions over time. After all, it is only through conventional association with tradition that an artwork can be identified under the universal concept of art, as distinct from nature. This is the original opposition to which the tradition of art continues to abide, with which cave paintings and conceptual art can be connected. Heidegger refers to the distinction between nature and art as the difference between earth and world, both of which are present in the artwork and function in opposition to each other to generate the truth of the work. As he states:

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[117] Luhmann, *Art as a Social System*, 23.

> Art is historical and, as historical, is the creative preservation of truth in the work. … This does not just mean that art has a history, a history in the external sense that, in the passage of time, art appears together with many other things, and in the process changes and passes away, and offers changing aspects to the study of history. Art is history in the essential sense: it is the ground of history.[118]

Heidegger asserts that art as a concept and as a tradition is the origin of the artwork, and because of this, art becomes historical through the distinctive way that it comes into being as truth in the artwork. While this idea will be more fully explored in Chapter 5.3.3. Autonomy, the dependence of artworks on prior tradition is undeniable. And yet, while every artwork exists as a singularity in reference to art, every artwork also transforms the notion of art as it is incorporated into its comprehensive concept and tradition.

Exploring the philosophy of time in relation to contemporary art, Osborne references the 'time of the soul' as described by Saint Augustine, in which the past, present and future are conceptualized in terms of memory, attention and expectation, respectively.[119] For being written over one thousand six hundred years ago, this personal understanding of time correlates perfectly with Damasio's neurological explanation, which respects the autopoietic idea of the present being the only actual time. According to Osborne, it is through this personal projection of time as memory, attention and expectation that the concept of history becomes inseparable from subjectivity and politics. History, after all, is a cultural creation that exists through people and their work, and as such it is never truly neutral. Osborne spends great energies exploring the notion of the time inherent to the idea of 'the contemporary,' especially in relation to contemporary art, which will be further explored in Chapter 4.8. Contemporary / Postconceptual Art. One of the biggest implications is that every contemporary artwork *must* be new, and Luhmann agrees. He argues that every artwork is inevitably created with an orientation towards time since it must distinguish itself in relation

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[118] Martin Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 49.

[119] Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All*, 175.

to everything that has been done before it.[120] Focussing on the present, Osborne explores the aesthetic experience of artworks in terms of attention and distraction, which produce the occurrence of time on a subjective level. "Its temporal aspect is a dialectic of duration, of continuity and interruption, of rhythm. As such, it is a particular inflection of the process of temporization—the production of time—itself."[121] Through the idea of duration, Saint Augustine's threefold present gives rise to an *expanded* present, where memory and expectation push an observer's attention in opposite temporal directions.[122] This can be felt in the way that artworks generate the sensation of time through their enduring coupling with spectators, whose attention is held until distraction breaks the spell. In a museum or gallery setting, the rhythm of viewing works of art is undeniable.

Extending the idea further, the power of an artwork to captivate in the moment of aesthetic experience can also be understood on a larger temporal scale, in terms of generations and epochs. Rancière focuses on the idea of expectation in relation to artistic creation. Describing the connection of an aesthetic community through its shared 'sensory fabric,' Rancière illustrates how the transformation of raw materials reverberates through humanity in terms of suffering and resistance, paralleling Heidegger's notion of strife that results from the opposition of earth and world within an artwork. For the vibrations to communicate through material, though, they must be solidified in the form of a monument—the artwork—which assumes the identity of a person "who speaks to the ear of the future."[123] Every artwork waits in anticipation of its subsequent reception, and in this way artworks embody promise. This idea of hope is reflected in Husserl's 'horizon of expectation,' which considers the "intentional constitution of meaning in perception."[124] Husserl uses this idea to explore the

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[120] Luhmann, *Art as a Social System*, 44.
[121] Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All*, 186.
[122] Ibid., 186.
[123] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 56.
[124] Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All*, 202.

paradoxical union of "determinable indeterminateness" that every horizon embodies, and Osborne relates this to a boundary-concept that "registers and articulates the bounds of knowledge."[125] The indefiniteness of this limit can be understood in two ways, according to Osborne. First, through its continuity as a boundary in spite of movement, meaning that you can change your position or perspective and the horizon is always there, in the distance. Secondly, indefiniteness is demonstrated by the fact that there is nothing on the other side of a horizon, meaning that the boundary is perceptual. Osborne differentiates Husserl's 'horizon of expectation' from Kantian concepts of transcendental limits by using it to position a subject within the scope of a *moving* boundary. While the limit of the horizon is perpetually inaccessible, the location of the current horizon is potentially knowable if you go there. What was once beyond the horizon can be known, despite the fact that the horizon will move and the new limit will remain out of reach.[126] This concept of limited yet accessible subjective knowledge can be found effortlessly in the appreciation of artworks, which act like 'horizons of expectation' in their provision and retention of comprehension. An artwork always has more to offer, but this is nothing compared to the greater limit of endurance as a spectator becomes distracted and moves on, or even worse, as the spectator comes to take an artwork for granted. These natural occurrences relate the horizon of expectation to our understanding of art and demonstrate how time—despite being an explanatory notion—is not only significant to artistic practice but is also produced by it. It also demonstrates how artworks, which speak to the ear of the future, function in relation to hope.

While the act of viewing artworks is isolated to the present moment, it is inevitably linked with our cognition of time in terms of memory, history and projection into the future. In relation to artistic tradition, Rancière demonstrates the transformation of artistic understanding over time, which shifts the way in which place and function determine meaning

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[125] Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All*, 203.
[126] Ibid.

for artworks. Freed from the prescribed purpose and assumed intention of the mimetic regime, artworks inevitably embody contextual disjunctions that reverberate through spectators during aesthetic experience. While this provides artworks with the power to destabilize understanding in viewers—to provide the unexpected—artworks nonetheless require some adherence to artistic tradition, which is demonstrated through the use of convention that pertains to the concept of art. Osborne shows how history is always conceived subjectively through a temporal understanding of memory, attention and expectation, which reflects the autopoietic conception of time. Artworks always exist in relation to their antecedents, to tradition, and this conditions that artworks that have yet to be created must be novel and unusual. Exploring an artwork in the moment, we can see how attention and distraction come to define aesthetic experience in terms of duration, which demonstrates an artwork's ability to generate time for a viewer. The vibrations an artwork transmits determine the rhythms of its aesthetic exploration—how we move to engage with artworks—as well as our cycles of attention and distraction when we view artworks within an exhibition. Artworks, after all, captivate us in part through their promise and their imminent potential. They embody hope in their tireless patience as they wait for viewers to come, which is facilitated through their indetermination, which we will expand upon in Chapter 4.3.4. Function. This nature of artworks demonstrates a 'horizon of expectation', where an artwork's potential for communication and knowledge is paradoxical. As we move to explore and clarify one horizon or limit, another one forms as a new horizon in the distance, infinite possibility within finite form. This indefiniteness that artworks embody demonstrates the limits of art to be limits of people, a constraint most easily understood through our conception and limited existence in time. The artwork is the people to come, and a monument to that expectation.[127]

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[127] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 58.

2.3.7. Difference

Interactions acquire significance thanks to the perspective provided by the cognition of the observer. As explored in autopoietic theory, significance is not generated on the molecular level because the components of production and their products are the same. There is no difference between them so there is no meaning. On the molar level of observation, however, significance is generated due to the difference between the mechanisms of operation and its results. In this way, autopoietic theory shows how difference can be understood as a condition of significance. As we explored in Chapter 2.3.3. Observation, perception itself is an act of distinguishing, which inevitably separates the object or concept being focused upon from what is excluded from view. In this chapter we will review the autopoietic foundation that differentiates an organism from its environment, and then expand upon this idea of difference to explore two important notions that Rancière speaks of in "Aesthetic Separation, Aesthetic Community." The first is his differentiation of 'sense and sense,' and the second is his paradox of 'being apart together'. Exploring these concepts in terms of difference helps to demonstrate how meaning is created during aesthetic experience, and how that meaning is unique. Generating difference is the same as producing meaning, and whether you are making artworks or appreciating them, artistic practise demonstrates the creation of significance through acts of differentiation.

The creation of difference is a founding principle of autopoiesis, which stipulates that an organism must continually undergo a reflexive operation of identification in order to distinguish itself from its environment, all the while maintaining its coupling with its environment. This fundamental act creates a threshold between the integral organism and its peripheral surrounding, and this difference between internal and external plays a crucial role in *all* aspects of the lives of people. While artworks stimulate our perception of the external world, it is the internal perception of our bodies that defines the reflective loop of aesthetic

experience as we sense how the external perception makes us feel inside. This will be explored more thoroughly in terms of thought in Chapter 3.3.4. Experience, and in terms of Kantian aesthetics in Chapter 5.2.2. Summary – The Critique of Judgement, Analytic of the Beautiful. In any case, the process of sensing operates through an individual organism that distinguishes itself from its environment, and this fundamental creation and maintenance of difference—of identity—is one of the two principle laws of autopoiesis.

Identifying ourselves as human beings implies that we are the fundamentally the same biologically, with an acceptable range of variations, of course, within our species. As individual human beings, we embody a fundamental framework—a physiology—that we have inherited from our parents and is unique as a result of its genetic combination, contextual development and resultant distinguishing elements. This simultaneous embodiment of commonality and difference is paramount to Rancière's concept of aesthetic separation. One clever way in which he explores this is through the journey from 'sense to sense,' which we began to explore in Chapter 2.3.2. Transformation. The first conception of sense relates to the sensory capacities of a body to engage with its environment, and the second relates to the capacity of a person to know and to reason, demonstrating a transition from physiology to psychology. Rancière relates this latter conception to ideas of 'common sense,' which he uses to counterpoint the concept of a *dissensus* within the aesthetic community. As Tanke points out, *dissensus* is described by Rancière as a "separation [*écart*] of the sensible from itself," where an assumed or pre-given understanding dissolves through the journey of aesthetic experience from 'sense to sense.'[128] To briefly review, Rancière divides the operation of sensing into three phases: the communication of sensory data through the senses; the perception or recognition of content within that data; and, the extrapolation of meaning. While it is reasonable to assume that we all sense the same thing in the first phase of sensory

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[128] Tanke, "What is the Aesthetic Regime?", 73.

input, the content or meaning of what we sense is highly dependent on what we know—our cognition and *recognition*. The second and third phases described by Rancière obviously rely on the memory of past experience, which ties our individual perception to our personal history and our changing contextual awareness. The first phase of observation demonstrates the internalization of external sensory data, the second phase associates it to past experience, and the third phase extends or augments the signification of the object or event sensed. The result is a connection of associated subjective meaning onto the memory of the object or event being observed, which we later externalize or project through thought or communication. This process of sensation translating into meaning during aesthetic experience ensures that the interpretation of external stimuli is subjective. "Aesthetic art is a rejection of the idea that things have a single and definitive meaning. It is therefore one of the means by which the meanings of an object, a body, a policy or a group of people can be contested."[129] Aesthetic art is political to the extent that our experience of it has the potential to change us, to make us different from before, through the processes of *dissensus* or dis-identification.[130] If we consider this as the reversal of autopoietic identification, then we can imagine the suspension of the distinction or boundary between an organism and its environment, or the lapse of the unifying force that differentiates the being from its surroundings. While aesthetic experience might begin under similar sensory conditions for all individuals, the translation of 'sense to sense' shows how the association and attribution of meaning is ultimately a personal operation. The potential self-transformation that results moves beyond the personal through our communication of experience. Through communicative acts of individuals, subjective judgements once again enter into the realm of the universal, which we will look at in Chapter 2.3.9. Coordination. Moving from the common to the individual and back again to the universal during the apprehension and appreciation of artworks demonstrates how processes

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[129] Tanke, "What is the Aesthetic Regime?", 73.
[130] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 74.

of sensory and cognitive differentiation power the generation and attribution of aesthetic signification.

Moving from the individual to the social, and looking to distinguish the political power of art, Rancière uses the paradoxical condition of 'being apart together' as a basis for aesthetic separation. Taken from a Mallarme poem, where a potential suitor prefers to remain hidden in the assumed presence of the woman he desires, the concept of 'being apart together' could just as easily have come from autopoietic theory, as unromantic as it might be. The law of adaptation is exactly that—being apart together—although the organism's other in this scenario is its environment. As Rancière's purpose is more socially and politically motivated, it makes sense that he chose poetry over systems theory. Nonetheless, the difference that is implied in the simultaneous autopoietic coupling/separation has social and political implications. On my first reading, the romantic story of being apart together seemed to imply our condition as unique individuals within the same community, or as part of the same species. My second reading reversed this conception to entail that we are all together in the same situation because we are all distinct and isolated individuals. Recognizing oneself as separate while being socially connected is common to everyone. In his exploration of the concept of aesthetic separation, however, Rancière states: "an aesthetic community is a community structured by disconnection."[131] In part, this relates to our subjectivity—while we as humans sense the same material, object or environment, our individual perspectives assure that the results of our perception is more *dissensual* than consensual. The second aspect of aesthetic separation that Rancière proposes is the separation of artistic production from artistic appreciation, with the artist being distanced from the artwork and the aesthetic experience of subsequent observers. The point of connection—that which unites the being together and apart in this situation—is the artwork, which acts as a link between two people in spite of the

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[131] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 58.

distance between them. In this way, the observational format of aesthetic experience ensures that artworks are infused with difference from the beginning. This, in turn, establishes the shift from first to second order observation, which assures that artworks are experienced differently from other objects and events, as a form of communication. In this way, the paradox of 'being apart together' becomes the perfect metaphor for exploring the political potential of aesthetic experience, where individuals can relate on various levels to the operations involved as meaning becomes associated to artworks as they are distinguished from what they are not.

All acts of separation and distinction imply processes of differentiation. Recognizing difference is, in essence, the generation of significance. This becomes obvious by exploring the autopoietic law of adaptation that distinguishes an organism from its environment, which essentially creates the boundary between interior and exterior upon which we as individuals differentiate ourselves in relation to the world around us. Identifying ourselves as individuals implies differentiating ourselves from everything else, a process that establishes our human methodology for relating to the world around us. As we sense the world, the translation of external sensory data into known concepts and metaphoric meaning ensures that significance is largely subjective. Individual memories and associations assure that the meaning generated through observation is far from standard. Furthermore, the *dissensus* that is inherent in aesthetic experience guarantees that the identity of individuals is temporarily suspended and formed anew, different from before the experience. This not only generates meaning for the encounter, but it demonstrates the political mechanisms of aesthetic experience. While meaning originates within the thought of individuals, it can be shared and communicated through its externalization, be it directly through language or indirectly through works of art. This communicative process helps us to understand our paradoxical situation of 'being apart together,' where we share commonalities despite our uniqueness. Difference divides us,

making us singular individuals, but difference also unites us since our autopoietic condition is shared by everyone. The absence of meaning on our molecular level of existence is the opposite on our molar level of observation and engagement. While autopoiesis demonstrates how the fundamental oppositions of molecular/molar and internal/external are inherent to life, there are countless other oppositions that operate within aesthetics—differences that we recognize and use to create and distinguish objects, situations and ideas. All of these oppositions offer methods for organizing and ordering, but they also provide a dynamism that activates thought, knowledge and, eventually, understanding. Amongst others, the practice of art relies on these oppositions—subject/object, *natura/ars*, visible/invisible—since difference must be observed to generate significance.

2.3.8. Lack

The idea of lack is an important aspect of aesthetics that relates to the basic functioning of human life that autopoietic theory endeavours to establish. More than anything, lack is a recurring state of living beings that incites the impetus for intentionality in the world. In order to maintain their systemic functionality, autopoietic organisms are in constant cycles of interaction with their environment to attain what they need to survive. Advanced cognitive operations facilitate an organism's survival by helping it to recognize what is missing or at fault and stimulating appropriate actions to resolve the situation. As we observe the actions of organisms in their environment, the significance of their actions can usually be connected to some kind of lack as they fulfil the autopoietic laws of conservation and adaptation. Our general condition as human beings is thus a state of need, which fuels our consumptive predisposition and establishes our basic routines as people. This is easy to understand in terms of nutrition, sleep and other physiological requirements, but it is also relevant for more psychological aspects of humans, especially regarding the significance we attribute to other

beings in the world, living or non-living. In this chapter we will further explore this idea of absence and fault in relation to Rancière's concept of aesthetic separation, which explores lack in relation to human nature and the Kantian theory of aesthetics. These two realms demonstrate how lack is not only a fundamental condition of life, but also a crucial element of aesthetic experience, which assists us to establish a connection between life and art.

The concept of lack is an important aspect of aesthetic theory, and the ideas of deficiency that Rancière explores—especially 'being apart together' and the loss of tradition in the 'aesthetic break'—are largely extrapolated from Kantian aesthetics. From Kant's point of view, an aesthetic experience (of beauty) lacks determinant concepts in principle, which are always used to position a particular under a universal *a priori* concept.

> Judgement in general is the faculty of thinking the particular as contained under the universal. If the universal (the rule, principle, or law,) is given, then the judgement which subsumes the particular under it *is determinant*. … If, however, only the particular is given and the universal has to be found for it, then the judgement is simply *reflective.*[132]

This obligatory lack of determinant concepts to experience beauty forces a subject to rely on their own reflective perception in order to realize how an artwork makes them feel, which results in the generation of aesthetic meaning. A lack of determinant concepts, or prescribed general meaning, calls on the observer to speculate and produce it themselves. This initial lack of determinant concepts during aesthetic experience, however, is compounded by the obligatory lack of desire towards the artwork (or beautiful object) being viewed. According to Kant: "the judgement of taste is simply contemplative, i.e. it is a judgement which is indifferent as to the existence of an object, and only decides how its character stands with the feeling of pleasure and displeasure."[133] This lack of desire, or indifference, that must be demonstrated towards the observed object ensures that a subjective aesthetic judgement can be projected to universal validity, and as such it is an extremely important element of Kant's

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[132] Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, 18.
[133] Ibid., 48.

aesthetic structure. Without desire for the object being perceived, its judgement is impartial or unbiased, which changes how the subject understands their feelings when evaluating the object in question. If we look closer at the state or feeling of 'indifference,' which is the opposite of 'difference,' we can see how Kant's requisite lack of predetermined meaning is twofold. If meaning is conditional on difference—as we explored in Chapter 2.3.7. Difference—then indifference assures that there is no *a priori* meaning associated with the object in question. Through this double negation of predetermined meaning, its absence becomes the precondition for aesthetic experience. Through these impositions of lack, Kant ensures that aesthetic experience focuses on subjective reflection in the moment to generate meaning in the presence of artworks. It also provides a legitimate reason for both Luhmann and Osborne to state that contemporary artworks *must* be new, which we will further explore in Chapter 5.3. 'The Fragment.' Nonetheless, Rancière makes an important caveat to the imposed lack of determinant concepts during aesthetic experience, stating: "Art entails the employment of a set of concepts, while the beautiful possesses no concepts."[134] Expanding well beyond the beautiful, Rancière want to show how 'art' is a tradition and a concept, and that artworks can and do employ concepts in their creation and evaluation. By shifting or negating the traditional collocation and function of art in the aesthetic regime, concepts associated with art become counterpoints against which 'the known' elements—that which is recognized or identified—are considered in relation to 'the unknown' that is implicit in artworks. Osborne agrees, and is critical of a *purely* aesthetic form of judgement because art relies on concepts and is logically conditioned, which is not the case when judging something as 'beautiful'.[135] This results in a rift between the concepts of 'art' and 'aesthetics,' which we will explore more thoroughly in Chapter 6.2.2. Summary – The Critique of Judgement, Analytic of The Beautiful. Osborne believes that aesthetic purity misses the point of art,

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[134] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 64.
[135] Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, 42.

which is distinct from nature through its operation in "metaphysical, cognitive, and politico-ideological functions."[136] Despite the incorporation of concepts into artworks, the aesthetic experience of them continues to embody a condition of lack that is inherent in the unknown that every artwork represents. While the lack of an artwork can be understood in relation to its uniqueness, which obviates the use of purely determinant concepts in its judgement, the lack of aesthetic experience is associated with the indifference, or absence of *a priori* meaning that the spectator must embody. While this idea of lack in artworks and aesthetics will be further explored in Chapter 5.2. *Parergon*, we can appreciate how the lack of predetermined meaning in aesthetic experience results in the origination of subjective significance.

Reflecting on the creative process and the role of art within an aesthetic community, Rancière addresses creative intentionality and recognizes a motivating aim of artistic production. "The operations of twisting, seizing and rending that define the way in which art weaves a community together are made *en vue de*—with a view to and in the hope of—a people which is still lacking."[137] This idea of a 'still-lacking' people can be understood in two ways; in terms of people who continue to be missing something, and in terms of people who are not yet present. In relation to the former idea, Rancière suggests that artworks are made to provide what can't be found by other means, a unique chance that is presented to people as the promise of meaning in the form of art. In autopoiesis, the lack of meaning at the molecular level provides the opportunity for the attribution of meaning on the molar level. Is it possible that artworks offer the same kind of opportunity, calling for the generation of meaning because of its implicit absence? In part yes, but there's more to it than that. The practice of art fills a void by offering unique moments of personal reflection, using communicative models that are unusual because they subvert common modes of functionality.[138] The second

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[136] Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, 43.
[137] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 57.
[138] See Chapter 4.3.4. Function.

suggested meaning of Rancière's idea of "a people which is still lacking" points towards the temporally extended nature of artworks, which we explored in part in chapter 1.7. Time. As part of tradition, artworks are positioned within a social continuum since they have been experienced in the past and are yet to be experienced by a people to come in the future. Artworks require people to be activated, and this quote by Rancière demonstrates how artworks are perpetually lacking too, in need of people to observe them and provide them with meaning. The survival of an artwork depends on aesthetic interaction, for without the attribution of meaning from people, an artwork is just another *thing* lacking purpose. This idea of inadequacy relates to the suspended state of indetermination, which we will further explore in relation to people and technology in Chapter 4.2.3. Progression. In his search for the essential nature of art, Heidegger highlights the role of 'the preservers of art' as being equally important as the role of the creators of artworks.[139] Art can only happen if artworks are accessible, after all, which establishes an important bond between the creators and preservers of artworks, who conserve them and the tradition of art as though following the autopoietic law of conservation. Considering artworks as an autonomous tradition that is fuelled by people to survive, we can begin to understand Luhmann's claim for the autonomy of art and the autopoiesis of artworks. Just like an orchid uses a separate living being—the wasp—to reproduce and guarantee its specie's survival, artworks can be understood to utilize human beings to do the same. Deleuze and Guattari describe a heterogeneous relationship of this type as a rhizome, where more than simple imitation occurs as two distinct beings adopt facets of the other: "something else entirely is going on: not imitation at all but a capture of code, surplus value of code, an increase in valence, a veritable becoming, a becoming-wasp of the orchid and a becoming-orchid of the wasp."[140] The ideas of deterritorialization and

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[139] Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, 44.
[140] Giles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, (Minnesota, U.S.A.: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 10.

reterritorialization that Deleuze and Guattari associate with this interaction evoke the process of dis-identification that Rancière describes as the result of aesthetic experience, a process through which political subjectivication proceeds.[141] Artworks need people to exist, but perhaps we need artworks to exist as humans as well—to experience the truth of being human. This proposal of inter-dependence will recur as we explore the ways in which we distinguish ourselves from other animals in Chapter 2. Human Beings / Intention. As you will see, language and technology—and by extension, art—are practices and methods that define us as a species, and in their absence we simply wouldn't be human. As a people which is lacking, the practice of art brings meaning to our lives in addition to defining us as human.

Through an exploration of lack in relation to autopoiesis, aesthetic experience and human nature, we can appreciate how the necessities of life give rise to our intentionality in the world and establish the practice of art as a fundamentally nourishing tradition. There are two principal occurrences of lack that Kant establishes as conditional for aesthetic experience to function. The first is the absence of determinant concepts when judging an artwork or an object as beautiful, which ensures that the judgement is reflective and established through subjective understanding as opposed to universal *a priori* knowledge. The second instance of lack is the indifference that the observer must demonstrate towards the artwork or object being evaluated, which allows an aesthetic judgement to transcend from the purely subjective to universal validity. These two impositions of lack compound Kant's rejection of preconceived meaning when judging an artwork or something as beautiful, and help us to appreciate the requisite innovation and novelty of contemporary art practices. By creating or presenting the unknown, artworks ensure that aesthetic operations can result. Having said that, it is important to note that art and aesthetics is not the same thing, and that the concept and tradition of art—upon which artworks depend—are determinant concepts and function

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[141] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 74.

through the use of *a priori* knowledge. This doesn't negate the fact that beauty exists, as does the unknown, within elements and aspects of artworks, and it is through this persistent lack of determination—their incompleteness—that artworks continue to enthral us and engage us as spectators. We, as humans, are indeterminate as well. Rancière claims that artworks are created for 'a people which is still lacking', which can be understood as a community in need, and as generations of people yet to come. In the first case, the people are in need because of the inherent strife that living entails, and it is their knowledge of hardship that enables them to connect with the "seizing and rending" that all artworks embody. Artworks provide people with a unique opportunity, a chance to engage in order to disconnect and reengage, which fulfils a lack that may not be known. People who are yet to be will continue to benefit from the inimitable opportunities that the practice of art offers, demonstrating the temporal extensiveness of artistic practice as a transformative tradition. This reveals a reciprocal relationship between artworks and people, and the important role of the preservers of art to maintain the accessibility of artworks through the conservation of artistic tradition. Echoing the law of conservation of autopoiesis, acts of artistic conservation and preservation lead us to appreciate the symbiotic relationship between artworks and people. The example of the orchid and the wasp demonstrate the constructive potential of such interdependencies, where possibilities are expanded and perpetuated through nurturing interaction. In relation to the tradition of art, artworks are sustained so that people can be continually replenished. The relationship of mutual necessity between people and artworks shows how art is part of humanity, and how art comes to define us as human. As a people who are lacking, art reinforces us by defining us as a species and refining us as individuals.

2.3.9. Coordination

The concept of coordination that is evident in autopoiesis provides a counterpoint to the many instances of separation in aesthetics, and reveals many useful relationships to further explore aesthetic experience and the practice of art. One of the most important ideas that autopoiesis presents is the coordination of separate elements into a whole, independent being. As we have seen, this independence is somewhat false since every organism originates from another organism and is inherently lacking in elements that must perpetually be obtained from the environment. Little is explained in autopoietic theory as to how this happens in terms of biochemistry, apart from the caveat that the structure of an organism within its context determines everything.[142] The coordination of molecules and the communication between separate parts of an autopoietic system is obviously a vital condition of life. If part of the organism's structure is lacking something it needs to survive—oxygen, for example—then there must be systems in place to provide it or the autopoieic system—the life of the organism—will fail. If an action at the molar level needs to happen in order to supply oxygen, some form of communication must occur between the molecular and molar levels in order for the organism cognite with its environment to resolve the problem. While systems of corporal communication will be further explored in Chapter 3.2.2. Parallelism, it is appropriate here to explore the ways that autopoietic coordination, or orchestration, relates to the practice of art and aesthetic experience. As we have seen in relation to Kantian aesthetics, the relationship between the particular and the universal and the transition from the subjective to the objective are important examples of unification that play out during aesthetic experience, and we will explore these connections more thoroughly here in relation to the idea of 'common sense.' Aesthetic experiences give rise to speech and lead to conversation, which in turn connects individuals together. This interpersonal communion is a way of further stimulating individual

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[142] Maturana, "Autopoiesis…," 12.

potential, and highlights the discursive nature of aesthetics. This relates this with Rancière's concept of 'being apart together,' which describes the relationship of the individual within society. Moving into more artistic terrain, the idea of coordination is becoming increasingly relevant to describe the expansive nature of contemporary artworks. We will explore how current creative strategies are reflecting architectural practices in terms of extension and multiplicity, where artworks avert contained media-based definitions by relating parts with wholes to provide new opportunities for collective understanding. While separation implies the division of something, the state of being separate provides the opportunity for coordination, which is an underlying impetus for the creative impulse. While the majority of this thesis focuses on acts and states of separation, it is important to demonstrate how processes of coordination provide movement, balance and meaning to the inherent divisions of aesthetic experience.

Understanding how our thoughts are coordinated individually and in relation to society is important for understanding aesthetic experience. As we saw in Chapter 2.3.8. Lack, Kant defines how specific concepts are assembled together to create universal generalizations, which are relevant to the ways in which we interpret and understand the world around us. The experience of beauty is reflective because the observing subject must determine their own feelings of pleasure or displeasure to make a judgement in the absence of *a priori* determinant concepts. These are individual thoughts about unique things we are talking about. Kant's *Analytic of the Beautiful* uses the lack of desire to transcend the subjective judgment of a particular thing into a collective, universal judgement. "[T]he judgement of taste, with its attendant consciousness of detachment from all interest, must involve a claim to validity for all men, and must do so apart from universality attached to Objects, i.e. there must be coupled with it a claim to subjective universality."[143] This is one of

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[143] Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, 51.

the most interesting paradoxes of aesthetic theory, where an singular thought transcends to a universal position. This movement from an individual subject to the universal is the "conflict" that makes aesthetics work, according to Derrida, and what makes Kant theory so clever.[144] Indifference sets the judgment free, where the subject's uninhibited thought follows nothing more than the subjective pleasure or displeasure that their feelings provide. Deconstructing the pleasure that is felt during pure aesthetic judgement, Derrida points out that it is not simply pleasure that results from perceiving a beautiful object. This happens, but it is simply the first instance of aesthetic pleasure. More important is the second instance, where the subject becomes conscious of feeling pleasure for feeling pleasure. This is a reflexive pleasure, a pleasure that is given to oneself.[145] In Derrida's terms, the pleasure received is the pleasure given, which perfectly reflects Spinoza's assertion that the power to affect is the power to be affected, which we will explore further in Chapter 4.2.3. Progression. The catalyst for such a pleasure is beauty, but the source of the pleasure is the individual. While subjective universality is assumed in the judgement of beauty, a subjective judgement achieves universality through language—through the *sharing* of a judgement of taste. This "impossible" objective pleasure is what gives rise to speech, according to Derrida.[146] It's impossible because pleasure can only ever be felt subjectively, yet through disinterest it becomes theoretically objective. This happens through a simple declaration; "This is beautiful." Aesthetics is thus a discursive practice, and the assent from the subjective to the universal escalates in importance since it presupposes the existence of a common sense.[147] An aesthetic judgement based on subjective feeling moves to represent an objective feeling of collectivity through the assumption that everyone *should* feel the same.

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[144] Derrida, "The Parergon," 13.
[145] Ibid., 14.
[146] Ibid.
[147] Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, 83.

This points towards the importance of language use in artistic practice, which is ubiquitous in relation to the shared enjoyment of artworks, and perhaps the most important result of aesthetic experience. Nöe's idea of *strange tools* helps to elaborate the strong relation that the experience of artworks has with communication.

> Aesthetic responses are not fixed data points, but are more like positions staked out in an ongoing conversation, ongoing in our day, in our lives, and also in the historical time in our culture. Aesthetic responses are cultivated and nourished and they are also challenged. Aesthetic responses are themselves the question art throws up for us, not something we can take for granted in making sense of art itself.[148]

In his critique of neuroaesthetic research, Nöe points out that an aesthetic judgement is not a termination but rather a *beginning*, and that the question that needs to be answered is not *if* you like an artwork, but *why* you like it.[149] The answer to this question is always a subjective opinion—an explanatory notion—that connects the practice of art to language. Luhmann agrees with Nöe:

> "What matters is that in art, just as in all other types of communication, the difference between information [hetero-reference] and utterance [self-reference] serves both as a starting point and as a link for further artistic or verbal communication."[150]

In this description of communication, Lunmann relates information with hetero-reference, which is external, and utterance with self-reference, which is internal. While this division between internal and external will be more thoroughly explored in Chapter 3.4.3. Umwelt, it is important to note the combination of internal and external that is implicit in aesthetic experience. Whatever purpose an artist may have for transforming an internal intention or creative desire into an external expression, the result always promotes further conversation and influences potential creativity. The cyclical form of observation, where an internalization provokes an externalization, is how Luhmann defines the system of art as autopoietic in terms

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[148] Nöe, *Strange Tools*, 132.
[149] Ibid., 132.
[150] Luhmann, *Art as a Social System*, 24.

of self-generation and communication. Statements of beauty are transmitted with language, which has an undeniable influence on human thought and will be explored in relation to art in Chapter 4.2. Language.

Community is an grounding idea for Rancière as he examines the idea of common sense with his notion of the 'sensory fabric' that unites humanity. "What is common is 'sensation'. Human beings are tied together by a certain sensory fabric, a certain distribution of the sensible, which defines their way of being together; and politics is about the transformation of the sensory fabric of 'being together'."[151] While aesthetic experience presupposes common sense, it equally functions through operations of *dissensus* that Rancière identifies in the conflict between the two levels of sense (i.e. sensation and reason). This is what makes the paradox of 'being apart together' a perfect basis for Rancière's theory of aesthetic community, which provides a conceptual framework for understanding the tension between sensory realms of conjunction and disjunction. For Rancière, it is this conflict that makes aesthetic experience political in nature, as cycles of disconnection and connection lead to processes of subjective dis-identification and re-identification.[152] Demonstrating perceptual shifts between subjective and objective positions, aesthetic experience reveals not only our capacity for subjective universality but also our fluctuating identity as we transform while remaining the same person. Aesthetics thus represents a renewal of self, and this act of restitution is compounded by the social connection at the heart of aesthetic experience. As I explored in *Sweat, Feel, Think, Art*, artworks require being communicated to observers to be conceived as art, which makes artistic practice conditional on communication. The roots of this can be explored in the creative impetus that has developed through human evolution—specifically sexual selection—in relation to the display and discernment inherent in sexual

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[151] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 56.
[152] Ibid., 69.

attraction and selection.[153] Usoa Fullaondo emphasizes the affectability of human beings to extend this idea even further, stating that the social relations that are implicit in the practice of art result from a general need to connect with other people: "in such a way that suspends self-absorption."[154] For Fullaondo, the desire to bond and to relate with others is the impetus behind creative acts in general, which she relates to collective ritual, celebration and play. Not only does the practice of art provide an opportunity for subjective growth through the processes of individual reflexivity—feeling yourself feeling—but also by connecting with other people in such a way that participants' processes of self-awareness become receptive to unforeseen potentialities while their selfhood remains open to *becoming* during the bonding process.[155] The social connection that results from aesthetic endeavours thus reinforces the process of subjective affection that artistic practices imply; a shared opportunity to extend, reposition and be conscious of one's self. This idea of becoming will be more thoroughly explored in Chapter 3.2.4. Self.

One final way that coordination works in relation to contemporary artworks is through a more open conception of the artwork itself. To address the kind of artworks that Rancière describes in his article "Aesthetic Separation, Aesthetic Community," and the artworks I am presenting as practical research for this thesis, it is important to appreciate the expansive nature that has come to define postconceptual art practices. As the classical practice of categorizing artworks purely by media loses traction during the practice of contemporary art, artworks are increasingly defined in terms of associations and procedures. Osborne has noted that contemporary artworks progressively function like architectural practices, which demonstrate a broad understanding of relationships between people, practices, materials,

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[153] Waters, *Sweat, Feel, Think, Art*, 75-85.

[154] Usoa Fullaondo, "What can a process do? A passage from ritual to rituality," *Journal for Artistic Research*, 18 (2019),
https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/352239/352240/0/0 [accessed 14/07/2019].

[155] Usoa Fullaondo, "What can a process do?"

methodologies, and time.[156] This can be seen on one hand through the plurality of materializations of contemporary artworks, where one single artwork can exist across a multiplicity of possible forms; as research, plans, objects, actions, language, or relations.[157] This will be more fully explored in Chapter 6. Practical Research in relation to two art projects of mine. Osborne notes how this tendency towards a plurality of materializations of one artwork mimics the diversity of processes that architectural projects incorporate, and opens an artwork both spatially and temporally, enabling it to exist simultaneously in various places and times. This problematizes a cohesive conception of the borders of the artwork, shifting it from a question of external boundary to an integral unity of the work.[158] Taking autopoietic theory as an example, we must begin to understand artworks in terms of organizational imperative—the law of conservation—which prioritizes relational systems instead of physical composition to determine identity. As well, as artworks become more extensive and disperse in terms of their physicality, organizational strategies must be implemented to maintain the unity of the work, and this more often than not becomes the responsibility of art institutions. As artworks move out into the world of everyday life, eschewing the conventional setting of aesthetic experience, they increasingly rely on organizational conventions that define artistic practice in terms of methodology. This association with architecture leads to contemporary art's increasing approach to urbanism, which Rancière recognizes when he describes artist's desire to escape institutions and engage with the real world.[159] I think this trend relates in part to artists' desires to interact with spectators differently in spaces with fewer preconditions and prejudices that predetermine what an artwork can be. I also believe that moving artworks into the *real world* helps to make the complex sets of social and ideological structures that artworks are dependent upon more

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[156] Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All*, 142.
[157] Ibid.
[158] Ibid., 144.
[159] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 53.

visible. Without the protection of the hermetic 'white cube' of a gallery space, artworks can more easily come into contact with unexpected elements and become contaminated with associations that wouldn't be possible otherwise. This increase in unexpected reactions and interactions instils artworks with exciting potential, at least from the perspective of the artist. From an institutional perspective this implies increased risk, which makes artistic projects in the 'real world' a matter of careful study and negotiation in order to eliminate unwanted negative consequences. While this negotiation between artist and institution inevitably affects the final outcome of site-specific artworks, a dialogic process that revolves around problem solving is a creative challenge that can potentially favour innovation and unexpected results. Nonetheless, artworks that escape the convention of the 'white cube' exhibition space must continue to exhibit some convention that allows it to be recognized as an artwork, as explored in Chapter 2.3.4. Context.

While acts of separation divide and establishes oppositions, coordination functions by connecting and combining various elements together as one. In this chapter we have seen how Kant's description of aesthetic judgement coordinates the particular with the universal and the subjective with the objective. This helps us to determine whether a concept is reflective or determinant, which in turn determines whether a judgement is aesthetic or not. Once a judgement is determined through subjective reflection, it ascends to an objective (or subjective universal) position providing it was made under the conditions of indifference and is communicated to others through language. In the absence of predetermined personal meaning or bias, an aesthetic judgement can be understood as a communal judgement, one that everyone would make. This leads to the notion of common sense, which Rancière addresses through his idea of the 'sensory fabric' that unites people through physical and cognitive sense. While the concept of cognition spans both the molecular and molar levels of autopoietic systems, sense provides a similar connectivity for aesthetic experience by bonding

the subjective individual with society at large. This is perfectly described by Rancière's paradox of 'being together apart,' which involves a simultaneity of separation and connection. Through this human condition, Rancière demonstrates the *dissensus* that inevitably makes the practice of art political, through the destabilizing effect of aesthetic experience on both personal and social levels of self-awareness. Resulting artistic discussion unites individuals and provides the opportunity to activate potential subjectivities for its participants. The social coordination that is inspired by aesthetic experience is echoed in the increasing extension and multiplicity of artworks, which are adopting architectural methodologies to include research, plans, models and documentation as potential elements of singular art projects. Artworks that exist as unities of distinct parts expand the definition of art both physically and temporally, since they can be experienced in different locations at different times. This ensures that a conception of a whole artwork as a network of relations is constructed in the mind of the viewer, who combines various aesthetic moments into one, demonstrating the creative act of observing and experiencing. As contemporary art increasingly moves into the sphere of quotidian life by escaping traditional art spaces, its relation to the urban environment compounds its relation to architecture. This transforms the once solitary act of creation into a negotiation between artist and institutions as artworks are developed collaboratively in relation to more volatile 'real world' environments. Escaping the convention of the white cube, contemporary artworks must amplify their autonomy as art in order to be recognized as such, which simply means relying on other artistic conventions. While the structure of an artwork must contain and convey its artistic essence, its recognition as part of the social tradition of art presupposes our collective capacity to categorize it as such. As subjective as the practice of art might be, it relies on coordination to establish its unique significance.

2.3.10. Conclusion to Autopoieitic & Aesthetic Operation

In this chapter we have established points of comparison between life and art by comparing autopoietic theory with aesthetic theory, using processes (transformation, organization, coordination), abilities (observation, contextualization, coordination) and qualifications (time, difference, lack) that are relevant to both the functioning of life and the practice of art. The autopoietic perspective focuses on the operation of life from a systems-theoretical approach, which prioritizes dynamic processes of interaction to define life. This conclusion reflects these comparisons, processes and relationships in terms of the research questions that I posed in Chapter 1. Introduction, with the following themes; the relation between art and life; the concept of separation; human cognition and aesthetic thought; the functionality of artworks; and, the relation between art, society and tradition. There are many interesting comparisons that demonstrate how life and art are united through human practice and thought. Many of the ideas that are discussed in the following paragraphs will be further developed as this thesis progresses.

Life and Art

Life and art inherently demonstrate processes of organized transformation, which distinguish themselves from non-living materials and non-art practices respectively. Organization thus becomes one of the best ways to connect the practice of art with life—both as a biological condition of living beings on a molecular level, and a reflexive comprehension of individual existence on a molar level. The opposition of material and form, which can be understood as the foundation for all aesthetic theory, reflects the autopoietic condition of life, where molecular level functioning enables molar level capacities of observation and signification, through which form is recognized. The contrast between material and form also reflects Rancière's metaphor of 'being apart together,' which further relates to the human

conditions of being an object and subject simultaneously, and being an individual in relation to society. As living beings we encompass the molecular and the molar concurrently, despite the radical separation between our microscopic physical structure and our sophisticated cognition. The practice of art functions on the molar level of consciousness and communication, although its essential use of material and form parallels the inherent conflict between nature and culture that defines humanity. While we are natural creatures, the word "artificial" is synonymous with "man-made."[160] The practice of art mirrors the tension between the natural and the artificial and provides an opportunity for people to observe and contemplate the contradictions that inform their lives. One example of this artifice is our invention of time, which only exists in the present moment according to autopoietic theory. Osborne shows how history is always conceived subjectively through a temporal understanding of memory, attention and expectation.[161] Just like people, artworks always exist in relation to their antecedents, demonstrating how aesthetic experience of artworks are socially influenced through the use of predetermined concepts. Another temporal way that artworks and people are similar is through their indetermination, or incompleteness, which demonstrates the limits of aesthetics to be a limitation of life and our finite existence in time. This presents another paradox that affects artworks and individuals, which is the promise of infinite potential within a finite form. For humans, the fixed structure is the self, but it is continuously open to possibility as we develop as people. Artworks, on the other hand, must be complete and unified by physical or conceptual definition, while being open to interpretation for as long as they are accessible to interaction. In the end, our unique individuality unites us with artworks, once again demonstrating the condition of 'being apart

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[160] Miriam-Webster, "Man-made | Definition of Man-made by Merriam-Webster," https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/man-made (accessed Sept. 11, 2019).

[161] Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All*, 175.

together.' In our individual specificity, we attain equality in our common states of isolation. Human life connects with and is captivated by art in these various ways.

<u>Separation</u>

Rancière distinguishes aesthetic separation as two combined divisions at the heart of aesthetic experience.[162] The first is the separation between 'sense and sense' that involves the apprehension of external sensory stimuli and transforms it into significant thought, and will be further explored in the following paragraph. The second is the distinction between the artwork and the tradition of art that precedes it, which positions artworks in opposition to the concept of art that is used to identify them. This will be further explored in the final paragraph of this conclusion, which will focus on the tradition of art. Both of these aesthetic separations imply other separations, most notably the distinction between individual people and society, which relates to the separation of subjectivity and objectivity. The two principal separations and the heart of autopoietic theory are reflected in two theories of art that are based upon two distinct but related levels of operation. Autopoiesis defines the separation of the organism from its environment as an integral process of all living organisms, and this definition of a boundary between interior and exterior plays a major role in the cognitive processing of aesthetic operations. The autopoietic separation of the molecular level of structure and function from the molar realm of observation and understanding compounds the separation of interior and exterior that informs human life. The two-tiered system of molecular and molar function is paralleled in the organizational theory of art provided by Nöe and the observational theory of art provided by Luhmann. In both of these cases, a basic level of functionality is moved to a second power to describe the more complex and reflexive organization and observation of artworks. As Nöe has proposed, the foundation of an organizational theory of art relates

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[162] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 69.

organized activities of the first and second order in terms of reflexive transformation through use, which demonstrates how human beings organize and are organized by the world in which they live.[163] His division of organized activities into first and second orders reflects autopoietic separation of molecular operation and molar observation while establishing a reflexive connection between natural and composed elements within artworks. Since organization can be used to distinguish living beings from non-living things, Nöe's organization theory of art is a valid attempt to connect the complex theoretical practice of art with our basic biological truths. Luhmann's observational theory of art reflects the internal-external division generated by the autopoietic law of adaptation and is defined by two implicit oppositions; one that separates the observer from the observed during acts of observation, and another that separates an observed distinction from the not-distinguished aspect of the observation.[164] In the case of observing artworks, the process of observation changes from first-order to second-order because artworks must be considered as forms of communication in themselves, which converts the aesthetic experience of an artwork into the observation of an observation. This reflexive operation mirrors the communicative foundation of artistic practice, which is based upon the cognitive capacities that autopoiesis facilitates in the molar realm of human life. Luhmann's observational theory of art is especially useful for connecting the practice of art with life because it takes into account the 'blind spot' that is inherent in human observation, which acknowledges our cognitive limitations as outlined by autopoiesis.[165] It further demonstrates the reflexivity of artistic practice by demonstrating how the concept of form establishes both the methodology of observational thought and the composition of the artwork that is being observed. While the modality between first and second levels provides both Nöe's and Luhmann's theories of art with dynamic and reflective

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[163] Nöe, *Strange Tools*, 6.
[164] Luhmann, *Art as a Social System*, 54.
[165] Ibid., 56-57.

potentiality between levels, it is important to remember that they both operate within autopoietic observation, which is informed and constrained by biological functionality at the molecular level. The inherent fallacy and limitation of our cognitive capacities is what undoubtedly gives rise to the paradoxes that artworks elicit, which we will explore more thoroughly as this investigation continues and at the end of these conclusions.

<u>Human Cognition / Aesthetic Thought</u>

Kant's aesthetic theory is defined by several principal separations as well, which can also be related to the basic divisions that are stipulated by autopoiesis. The law of adaptation requires the process of identification to distinguish an organism from its environment, which is the basis of autonomy of all living beings. This not only establishes individuals as distinct from their surroundings but also as different from other beings within their species, and the reflexive recognition of this forms the counterpoint of subjectivity and objectivity.[166] The transition between these two modes of particular (subjective) and universal (objective) understanding are what make aesthetics function as a theory, demonstrating how we as individuals are simultaneously capable of being subjects and objects at the same time.[167] This coexistence of parallel modes of being is reflected in autopoietic theory, where molecular functionalism enables molar cognition, two interconnected yet distinct modalities of life. Aesthetic experience is largely about becoming aware of and navigating this inherent object-subject duality of human life, by experiencing the intrinsic separations of thought and feeling during artistic interaction. Determinant and reflective judgements are defined in terms of having or not having predetermined meaning, and the requirement of indifference towards the object of aesthetic judgement is a second condition placed on having unbiased preconceptions about the object in question. This ensures that the judgement of the object will be based upon

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[166] Varela, *Autopoiesis*, 5.
[167] Derrida, "The Parergon," 13.

the subjective feelings of the viewer that the observation of material and form instigate. The pleasure or displeasure felt in aesthetic experience as a result of external stimuli is compounded by the reflexive pleasure felt for feeling pleasure—an internal feeling based on an external source of interest. The reflexivity that this operation demonstrates is yet another essential element of autopoietic theory and aesthetic experience.

Rancière conceives of this process of internalization that initiates aesthetic experience as having three-steps that include input, association and projection.[168] While the first and possibly second stages may be similar amongst individuals, the projection of associations into metaphor is a largely subjective attribution of meaning that defines aesthetic separation, where aesthetic interpretation is infinite. The potential transformation of self that aesthetic experience entails is largely due to the reliance on subjective thought, which enables observers to become reflexively aware of their position in the moment in relation to unknown (i.e. without concept) external stimuli. Every aesthetic experience is a unique opportunity to reflect upon the self in the moment, and the potentially distinct self the aesthetic experience will catalyse. Rancière's conception of the aesthetic regime highlights the connection between social and cultural transformation over the past two hundred and thirty years, since the groundbreaking examination of aesthetic thought by Kant during the enlightenment. Rancière's description of the 'aesthetic break' helps to demonstrate how the confined and limited forms of artistic appreciation during previous epochs gave way to a more subjective and open artistic practice.[169] Rancière's description of the 'aesthetic break' helps us to appreciate the transformation of artistic tradition over time, and the disconnection of artworks from specific functions and spaces. Unlike the mimetic regime, where predetermined conceptions of artistic meaning are assumed, the aesthetic regime promotes and aesthetic experience where a subjective process of de/re/contextualization is required in order to

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[168] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 57.
[169] Tanke, "What is the Aesthetic Regime?", 73.

determine the meaning and value of artworks.[170] Freed from prescribed purpose, artworks inevitably embody contextual disjunctions that reverberate through spectators during aesthetic experience. The dissensus that is inherent in aesthetic experience ensures that the identity of individuals is temporarily suspended and formed anew, different from before the experience. Artworks thus provide people with a unique opportunity for self-discovery, a chance to disengage in order to re-engage anew. Rancière demonstrates how this *dissensus* inevitably makes the practice of art a political practice, through the destabilizing effect on both the personal and social levels of self-awareness.[171]

Artworks

Since an artwork must first be recognized to be observed as an observation—an indirect form of communication—the concept of art is presupposed and contingent on the experience of the observer.[172] This demonstrates the recognition of artificiality as a condition of aesthetic experience, which establishes an observational stipulation on both the creation and enjoyment of artworks.[173] This relates in part to an artwork's relationship with the institutions in which it is displayed, but more importantly to the conventions of art that help to define its ideological contextualization. By functioning out of context, artworks call attention to themselves and the way that they operate in counterpoint to other fields of culture.[174] While contextual disjunction provides artworks with the power to destabilize understanding in viewers—to provide the unexpected—artworks nonetheless require some adherence to artistic tradition to be recognized as art, and is facilitated through the use of convention that pertains to the concept of art. Artworks always exist in relation to their antecedents, and this

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[170] Tanke, "What is the Aesthetic Regime?", 73.
[171] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 72.
[172] Luhmann, *Art as a Social System*, 69.
[173] Ibid., 73.
[174] Nöe, *Strange Tools*, 30.

conditions that artworks must be different in order to generate meaning. The two instances of lack imposed by Kant's aesthetic theory stipulate the absence of preconceived meaning when judging an artwork or something as beautiful, and help us to appreciate the requisite innovation and novelty of contemporary art practices. By presenting the unknown and evading determinant concepts, original artworks ensure that aesthetic operations result.

Art, Society & Tradition

Relating autopoietic and aesthetic theory with society, Rancière claims that artworks are created for "a people which is still lacking."[175] This can be understood as a community in need, but also as a people yet to come. In the first case, the people are in need because of the inherent strife that living entails, and it is their knowledge of hardship that enables them to connect with the "seizing and rending" that all artworks embody. In the second case, future generations will continue to benefit from the inimitable opportunities that the practice of art offers, demonstrating the temporal extensiveness of art as a transformative tradition. This displays the reciprocal relationship between artworks and people, and the important act of maintaining accessibility of artworks through the conservation of art. Relating to the law of conservation of autopoiesis, acts of artistic conservation and preservation lead us to appreciate the symbiotic relationship between artworks and people. The example of the orchid and the wasp demonstrates the constructive potential of interdependence, where possibilities are expanded and perpetuated through nurturing interaction.[176] In relation to the tradition of art, artworks are sustained so that people can be continually nurtured through social communion. The relationship of mutual necessity between people and artworks shows how art is part of humanity, and how art comes to define us as human. As a people who are lacking, art replenishes us as individuals and a society. We are united by common sense, which Rancière

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[175] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 57.
[176] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 10.

addresses through his idea of the sensory fabric that connects people through physical sensation and collective logic.[177] While the concept of cognition spans both the molecular and molar levels of autopoietic systems,[178] sense provides a similar connectivity for aesthetic experience by bonding the subjective individual with objectivity of society at large. Through this human situation of potential union, Rancière demonstrates the *dissensus* that inevitably makes the practice of art a political practice, through a destabilizing effect on both the social and personal levels of self-awareness.[179] This connects the practice of art to communication, which unites individuals in absence and provides the opportunity to activate potential subjectivities for its participants.

In these various summaries, the connection between life and art is easily identified as autopoietic theory is compared with the practice of art. The processes and relations that define life systems in terms of autopoietic functionality can be logically applied to the processes and relations that define the practice of art. The result is a dynamic portrayal of the various aspects that inform artistic practice, from the cognitive mechanisms of aesthetic experience to the social framework that supports the tradition of art. The resultant comparisons demonstrate how life and art are intertwines through human thought, which is established in relation to biological function and philosophical comprehension.

2.4. Conclusion to Life / Context

As autopoietic beings, humans have the same fundamental operational conditions as all living being, which establish both capacities and limitations for our cognitive interaction within our environment. We are made of molecules, but the organizational system that constitutes these molecules as an autopoietic organism—as a living being—is a system that

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[177] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 57.
[178] Varela, *Autopoiesis*, 5.
[179] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 69.

both influences and reflects the operations at the heart of artistic practice. Life is fundamentally constitutive, reflexive, and differential, and these three concepts can be found in the formal, subjective and observational nature of aesthetic experience. While art and artworks can be conceived as concepts, their experience is just as procedural as living. The constant and indispensable relationship between an organism and its environment, which is implicit to autopoiesis, parallels the implicit relationship that artworks have with their contexts, both physically and conceptually. While the significance of artworks depends on their ability to be distinguished from other beings, their relationship to the artistic tradition they emerge from is simultaneously compliant and antagonistic. Transcending from the conception of a specific artwork to the conception of art in general connects the practice of art on a personal level to the social tradition of art that exists as a communal, universal abstraction. It is here where art becomes more difficult to align with a bio-logic, despite its continued existence in the minds of people. Nonetheless, the theory of autopoiesis is remarkably useful for exploring the biological, cognitive and contextual capacities that we as human beings possess, which give rise to the creation and enjoyment of artworks. It becomes obvious through the various processes and concepts explored here that the biological foundation and operation of human life is the basis of aesthetic experience and artistic practice. A more thoroughly exploration remains into human cognition, the influence of language and technology on our culture, and the aesthetic tradition of art, all of which influence the practice of art and aesthetic experience. Through these topics we will discover the importance of subjectivity, functionality and contextual relations on the significance of artworks, and be able to more fully appreciate the function of separation in defining the practice of art and its relationship with life.

CHAPTER 3. THOUGHT / SELF

3.1. Introduction to Thought / Self

In this chapter we will focus on how thought functions and enables us to distinguish ourselves as separate beings from our environment. Our ability to think sets us apart from other species, and while recent research has greatly advanced our understanding of cerebral functionality, our philosophical conception of thought has been explored for thousands of years. In response to Kant's groundbreaking exploration of aesthetic thought, Freidrich Schiller wrote a series of letters regarding "the aesthetic education of man" in which he describes the necessity of placing limits or boundaries in order to think. According to Schiller, the human spirit is in a state of pure freedom before receiving stimulation from its environment through the senses.[180] This unlimited space and time is made possible by the imagination, where indetermination allows for infinite possibility. After being stimulated externally, a representation surges forth in the mind. What before was a passive state of possibility changes to an active state of determination. Yet to achieve reality, infinity must be lost. As content is received through the senses (or achieved in the mind), a limit is placed on what was previously unlimited. To describe a figure in space, we must limit infinite space. To represent a modification in time, we must divide the totality of time. Our reality is achieved only through limitation, and a true position or affirmation only through an exclusion or negation. We distinguish and determine through the suppression of our free disposition.[181]

While the previous chapter explored how the theory of autopoiesis establishes a foundation for cognition through separation, which enables us to *know* when we interact with our environment, this chapter will focus on the corporal mechanisms that enable thought and knowledge to function within humans. We will begin by looking at how the body and mind

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[180] Freidrich Schiller, *The Aesthetic Education of Man*, (St. Ives, U.K.: Penguin Random House, 2016), 67.

[181] Ibid., 67.

work together to establish the idea of self within individuals. To do so we will examine the approach established through embodied cognition, which disputes the Cartesian division of body and mind in favour of a psychophysical parallelism. This will illuminate the processes of thought, memory and learning, which facilitate the development of subjectivity and the establishment of self. In the second chapter we will look at perception, enaction and experience. This involves examining the duality of internal and external perception, which demonstrates how action within a context is always coupled with reception in the form of feeling. Then we will explore the idea of enaction, which reveals how our perception is contingent on our active engagement with our environment and compensates some inherent perceptual inadequacies, which become evident when attempting to study perception and consciousness. This leads us to the third chapter, which explores how human consciousness enables us to conceive of ourselves as separate from our environment. This is largely based upon our perceived division of inner self and outer world, and the concept of *umwelt* helps to reveal how species-specific perception implies a distinct reality for every type of being. For humans, our consciousness allows us to understand our environment and ourselves in a special way, and this will be further examined through the related ideas of *Dasein* and 'the open.' These concepts help to demonstrate how human consciousness allows us to move beyond mere captivation within our environment, towards a freedom and openness made possible through our ability to separate. As a prerequisite for establishing subjectivity, the ability to separate our selves from our context—or at least to consider ourselves as separate— has vital ramifications when it comes to understanding the functioning of aesthetic thought.

3.2. The Self

3.2.1. Introduction to The Self

To better understand how we are capable of considering ourselves as separate from our environment, we will begin by looking at the interconnected systems of communication within our bodies. Our ability to consider anything at all is dependent on our nervous system—specifically our brains—and we will continue by exploring how the brain enables thought by generating neural representations. These neural images play an important role in our ability to remember and learn, which ultimately result in establishing mind and consciousness. We will consider these neural images in relation to sensory and aesthetic thought, which share components of cerebral architecture in order to function. We'll continue by looking at how memory helps to establish our idea of self by offering a consistent perspective that we can perpetually refer to. Self is further established through inter-objectivity, which is reflected in language and allows human beings to conceive of themselves as subject and object simultaneously. Finally, we'll look at the idea of *becoming*, which posits a processual conception of self through our incessant relation with our environment over time. This conception of being highlights the parallel functioning of body and mind as individuals develop within the world, where our potential to act is equal to our potential to be affected. These cognitive mechanisms and processes help to illustrate how the division that our consciousness makes between internal and external grounds the very idea of human individuality and agency in the world. Understanding how we relate with and think about the world around us is crucial to understanding how thought and consciousness both capacitate and limit our conception of art.

3.2.2. Parallelism

The theory of parallelism contends that the body and mind are inseparable and function simultaneously in the absence of causal interaction between them.[182] Separating the human body and mind in terms of structure and function is completely erroneous, according to Damasio, despite its ubiquitous acceptance as fact.[183] It's easy to think that our bodies alone interact with the environment and then send information to our minds to control the situation from a position of command. Damasio negates this idea, stating that every time we interact with our environment—every time we use our senses—our bodies *and* brains participate in the interaction. Nöe concurs and thinks that the separation of mind and body in one of the key faults of neuroaesthetics, which aims to uncover the neurological mechanisms of aesthetic experience.

> We need finally to break with the dogma that you are something inside of you—whether we think of this as the brain or an immaterial soul—and we need finally to take seriously the possibility that the conscious mind is achieved by persons and other animals thanks to their dynamic exchange with the world around them (a dynamic exchange that no doubt depends on the brain, *among other things*).[184]

The fact of the matter is that our body and brain are inseparably incorporated in two ways: biochemically and neurally.[185] The nervous system is usually the only corporal aspect that people think about, where sensory and motor peripheral nerves transmit signals from all areas of the body back and forth to the brain. Nonetheless, Damasio describes how the body also employs biochemical communication, which uses the bloodstream to transmit hormones, modulators and neurotransmitters, and is much older than communication via the nervous system. This is called the endocrine system, and its regulation of the body is necessary for

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[182] Miriam-Webster, "Parallelism | Definition of Parallelism by Merriam-Webster," https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/parallelism (accessed Sept. 13, 2019).

[183] Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, 224.

[184] Nöe, *Strange Tools*, 95.

[185] Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, 87.

sustaining metabolic function and defending the body against viruses and bacteria.[186] In this system, chemical signals stimulate neural signals, and vice versa, as hormones act on the gland that secreted them as well as stimulating various parts of the brain, specifically the pituitary and hypothalamus.[187] Chemical signals can modify the role of many cells and tissues, which in turn can change the functioning of a particular system itself.[188] The endocrine system works in specific regions and through the body as a whole so that the components of the organism—from molecules to organs—function in the appropriate conditions for life to thrive.[189] Damasio explains the complexity of the intercommunication of the various systems within the body, especially as the body interrelates with its environment. When a person interacts with their environment, not only does their brain receive signals through the nervous system and the endocrine system, but also from other sectors of their brain.[190] Damasio distinguishes human interaction within an environment from other organisms because our interaction is *more* than just impulsive or automatic response to a given situation. We are able to generate internal cognitive reactions based on our interaction with the world that call forth sensory (or somatosensory) images,[191] which we will look at more closely in Chapter 5.2.3. Thought. Damasio considers these neural representations to be the foundation of the human mind.

The integrated relationship between body and mind was expressed in a similar manner by Spinoza in his philosophical treatise *Ethics*, which was published posthumously in 1677. Examining the philosophy of Spinoza, Deleuze explains the idea of parallelism as follows:

> [W]hat is an action in the mind is necessarily an action in the body as well, and what is a passion in the body is necessarily a passion in the mind. There is no primacy of one series over the other… It is a matter of showing that the body

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[186] Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, 87.
[187] Ibid., 119.
[188] Ibid.
[189] Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, 119.
[190] Ibid., 88-89
[191] Ibid.

> surpasses the knowledge that we have of it, *and that thought likewise surpasses the consciousness we have of it…* So it is by one and the same movement that we shall manage, if possible, to capture the power of the body beyond the given conditions of our knowledge, and to capture the power of the mind beyond the given conditions of our consciousness.[192]

The idea of parallelism was revolutionary in its time because it opposed the conventional religious idea that founded morality; that passions of the body could and should be dominated by the conscious mind.[193] In addition to its groundbreaking social influence, the parallelism that Spinoza proposed is even more significant as it points towards the existence of unconscious thought, over two hundred years before the work of Sigmund Freud.[194] For our purposes, parallelism grounds the idea that there is a condition of concurrent separation and conjunction at the root of human cognition. While the 'together apart' paradox of autopoiesis was between an organism and its environment, another 'together apart' paradox is at the root of human consciousness.

3.2.3. Thought

To understand how body and mind work together to constitute the self, we must distinguish between the brain—which is understood and studied in terms of anatomy and neurology—and the mind—which is understood and studied in terms of psychology.[195] Many organisms have brains but that doesn't mean that they have minds. Damasio believes that the mind is only possible through the ability to generate internal neural images and to organize those images in a procedure called thought.[196] He claims that the capacity to manipulate neural representations, which are modelled and arranged through thought, is what influences action on the molar scale of an organism's interaction with the environment. These neural

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[192] Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, 18.
[193] Ibid.
[194] Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, 19.
[195] Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, 40.
[196] Ibid., 89.

images in thought impact human behaviour in part by assisting to anticipate the future, to make plans and to act accordingly.[197] The ability to manipulate neural images in terms of derivation and classification—moving from general rules and concepts to specific examples, and vice versa—is the capacity of abstract thought.[198]

While many organisms survive perfectly well without a mind—or even a brain, for that matter—the function of the human mind is certainly linked to ensuring our survival within our environment. The ability to form and reform neural images establishes our ability to learn, which in turn influences our behaviour and decision-making.[199] Learning, according to Damasio, is the establishment of neural pathways that can be used to generate thought—the processing of neural representations—and the complexity of our neural architecture is what allows these images to form. Thanks to these neural constructions we can understand signals that are introduced in the early sensory cortices and arrange them as concepts, and we can accumulate approaches for reasoning and decision-making in relation to these concepts.[200] Damasio contends that this affords us the capacity to select motor responses that are already established and accessible in our mind, or to calculate new reactions depending on the situation. As we interact with our environment in our efforts to survive, the ability to learn from others and from our own experience provides an obvious survival advantage by facilitating our abilities to acquire what we need and to avoid potentially dangerous situations. Expanding upon the technicalities of our nervous system and the thought that these neural images impart, Damasio theorizes on how these images might function within the brain.

> In between the brain's five main sensory input sectors and three main output sectors lie the association cortices, the basal ganglia, the thalamus, the limbic system cortices and limbic nuclei, and the brain stem and cerebellum. Together, this "organ" of information and government, this great collection of systems, holds both innate and acquired knowledge about the body proper, the outside

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[197] Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, 90.
[198] Ibid., 191.
[199] Ibid., 90.
[200] Ibid., 93-94.

> world, and the brain itself as it interacts with body proper and outside world. This knowledge is used to deploy and manipulate motor outputs and mental outputs, the images that constitute our thought. I believe that this repository of facts and strategies for their manipulation is stored, dormantly and abeyantly, in the form of "dispositional representations" ("dispositions," for short) in the inbetween brain sectors. Biological regulation, memory of previous states, and planning of future actions result from cooperative activity not just in early sensory and motor coritces but also in the inbetween sectors. [201]

The communication and cooperation of components within the brain are thus key factors in the functioning of learning and memory.

This interconnected cerebral coordination is especially important for aesthetic experience, as outlined by Gabrielle Starr in her book *Feeling Beauty*, where she defines the "Default Mode Network" in relation to neuroaesthetic research. The Default Mode Network is an important part of the distributed neural architecture that connects and coordinates the specific brain areas involved in aesthetic experience, including emotion, perception, neural imagery, memory and language, in conjunction with systems for pleasure and reward.[202] While admitting that the neural events involved in aesthetic experience need to be further developed experimentally, her research suggests that: "powerful aesthetic experience calls on the brain to integrate external perceptions with the inner senses, and ultimately, that [mental] imagery may be a key component of powerful aesthetic response."[203] Starr says that both short and long term memory support mental imagery, which equally depends on external propositions from the world.[204] As some of the cerebral architecture for perception and mental imagery is shared, areas of the brain involved in external perception are activated across sensory modes for *imagined* perception as well.[205] Neural representations work to model existing knowledge but also to indicate potential possibilities since they can combine diverse

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[201] Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, 93-94.

[202] Gabrielle Starr, *Feeling Beauty: The Neuroscience of Aesthetic Experience*, (Cambridge, U.S.A.: MIT Press, 2013), xv.

[203] Ibid., 23.

[204] Ibid., 73.

[205] Ibid., 75.

types of information that augment our modes of knowledge.[206] Another overlapping aspect of perception and neural representations is that sensory images of the individual senses are inherently multisensory. For example, mental images related to touch use representations of texture, temperature, motion, and vision.[207] All of our senses involve multiple modes, some of which are shared. For example, visual imagery incorporates motor imagery as well, which helps to facilitate and imagine potential action in our environment.[208] Starr believes that this connection has important implications for perceiving artworks since our ability to imagine action is considered as necessary for recognizing both mimesis and empathy. Starr underlines the importance of mental images by arguing that: "the connection of imagery processes to aesthetic experience has broad repercussions, for the network of brain areas that produces imagery is to a significant extent coextensive with the default mode network."[209] While Starr's work is advancing our understanding of neurology, Nöe is sceptical about its importance in terms of advancing our understanding of art. One of the biggest problems is neuroaesthetic's insufficient consideration of the artwork, which is often reduced to a picture. "At root, this inability to bring the artwork into focus stems from the doctrine that the artwork's significance is its effect on our perceptual (or emotional) systems."[210] One of the main purposes of this thesis is to discover to what extent art is biologically determined through its dependence on human experience.

Neural imagery is perhaps most significant because it is the foundation of memory, and Damasio emphasizes the magnitude of personal experience and its collection and storage for creating and understanding self.[211] As we exercise our own memory or remember the images of our dreams, the functioning of neural representations can be felt as both personal

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[206] Starr, *Feeling Beauty*, 77-78.
[207] Ibid., 79.
[208] Ibid.
[209] Ibid., 97.
[210] Nöe, *Strange Tools*, 129.
[211] Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, 99.

and real. Referring back to autopoiesis, memory demonstrates how *cognition*—the ability of an organism *to know* within its environment—becomes *recognition* through the use of established neural pathways or representations. If an organism with memory doesn't know something, it can learn by creating new neural pathways that can be accessed through memory in the future. Damasio states that dispositional representations are a potential pattern of neural activity within a tiny cluster of neurons.[212] These convergence zones are composed of a set of possible dispositions, and the recallable dispositions acquired through learning constitute memory. In spite of this capacity to recall past thoughts and experiences, memory is entropic in nature and is nothing like time travelling into the past in your mind. A memory is the reproduction of an interpretation of an original situation, object or face in the present, which is always reconstructive.[213] This not only references Damasio's description of the self as a perpetually re-created neurobiological state, but also the persistence of the biological present. A dispositional representation is not a real picture, but rather a biological way of reconstructing a picture in your mind. When you remember an artwork, its image is never an exact visual replica but rather the activation of neural patterns in early visual cortices that stimulate a temporary reconstitution of an *estimated* representation of the artwork.[214] Damasio stresses that the dispositional representation of an artwork is distributed in various sites of your brain, and when you summon a memory these parts coordinate to bring the memory forth in various early sensory cortices, for as long as you focus to construct some meaning of the artwork. Memory as such is unstable and fleeting.

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[212] Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, 102-103.
[213] Ibid., 100.
[214] Ibid., 102-103.

3.2.4. Ipseity

While the generation and manipulation of neural representations is essential for thought, it is our capacity to reuse these neural patterns through memory that facilitates subjectivity and the self. The consistent perspective of our experience provides a sensation of propriety for the contents of our memories, which Damasio attributes to our reasonably constant and repetitive biological state.[215] While the consistent biological structure and function of an organism provide part of this stability, he states that the production and recall of autobiographical memory provides the rest. It is this production and reproduction of dispositional images about identity that Damasio purports to be the foundation of the state of self. Referring once again to autopoiesis, the process of establishing identity is that of distinguishing oneself from their environment. As such, self can be understood as the consistent and persistent cognitive distinction of oneself in relation to their context.

Damasio proposes that the psychological basis of subjectivity emerges from an objective understanding oneself.[216] This happens, he claims, when people produce neural images not just of an object or of themselves, but of themselves in the process of sensing and interacting with an object. The content of this third kind of disconnected perception of self in context establishes the subjective perspective.[217] As such, subjectivity arises when the organism becomes reflexively conscious, or self-aware. This subjectivity, or self-awareness, is reflected in our language, which provides us with narrative capacities and can generate verbal descriptions of nonverbal events. Damasio states that the "I" of language helps to consolidate our understanding of self as subject, the achiever and controller of action. Maturana explores this same thought:

> The body, and its parts […] arise in language in the same manner as any other entity arises in the flow of languaging [sic] as a manner of doing things together.

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[215] Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, 238-39.
[216] Ibid., 242-243.
[217] Ibid.

> The observer sees that the operation of self-consciousness is the reflexive distinction of a self in language that takes place as an operation that constitutes our body and our being as an object in inter-objectivity, yet the person in the flow of his or her living in languaging lives the self distinction in the paradox of distinguishing an independent entity that feels as being the doing of the distinction.[218]

This relates to the autopoietic process of identification, but transfers it from the molecular to the molar level with our ability to perceive ourselves interacting with the environment, and to confirm it with language. Damasio affirms the continual perception we have of our bodies acting and as the source of self. He states that the neural representations of our bodies in action provide a hub for the self, which becomes our internal and external reference.[219] The hub of self, Damasio posits, is anchored in a successive process where multiple organism states are concurrently and persistently reproduced in the mind. Our capacity for inter-objectivity—to transfer from subject to object, or to simultaneously be subject and object—plays in important role in aesthetic thought, as we will explore in Chapter 5. Artworks & Art.

The idea that self as an ongoing process of reconstruction in the minds of individuals is reflected in Deleuze and Guattari's use of the world *becoming* in their philosophic discourse. As opposed to simply *being*, they state: "[w]e are not in the world, we become with the world; we become by contemplating it."[220] This manner of thinking respects the operational functioning of the molecular domain as described by Maturana and Varela, and the description of self as a perpetually re-created neurobiological state as defined by Damasio. It acknowledges the indeterminate state of human life, as well, which will be compared with the indetermination of the artwork in Chapter 5.3.5. Series & Projects. The idea of becoming reflects the fact that life is never static, and affirms the ongoing interaction of an organism with its environment as it develops. Cameron Duff describes the impact of such an idea:

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[218] Maturana, "Autopoiesis," 29.
[219] Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, 235.
[220] Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 169.

> Deleuze's work highlights the relationality of all developmental processes, including the affective and material engagement that grounds the person in context. Taken from a Deleuzean perspective, human development is a discontinuous record of affective encounters; of the creation and suspension of relations between diverse bodies and the affects these relations support. Deleuze's work establishes a means of studying these discontinuous becomings and the developmental transitions they entail. [221]

As we develop as selves, the idea of becoming affirms that our unique relationships with our environment and other people play a fundamental role in creating and understanding who we are as individuals. "The body is not a singular ontological essence deserving of some a priori regard; instead the body *emerges* in a series of affective and relational 'becomings', each of which shapes a body's distinctive 'capacities' or 'powers'." [222] Our phylogenetic existence as humans may be defined by genetics and evolution, but our ontogenetic development as individuals is definitely determined by experience. Discussing the philosophy of Spinoza and Deleuze, Duff reflects the idea of parallelism to explain how our ability to be affected by the world mirrors our capacity to affect it:

> Spinoza insists that a body's 'power of action (is) the same as (its) capacity to be affected' (cited in Deleuze, 1992: 225). This finally reveals something of the nature of affect in terms of its transitions and effects. Spinoza understands affect as a modulation or quantum of a body's power of action; or its capacity to affect the diverse bodies, both human and non-human, that it encounters. This power determines a body's capacity to affect the world, to manipulate the circumstances or conditions of its environment and to shape the behaviour and/or intentions of other bodies. [223]

Our capacity to be affected is particularly prescient during aesthetic experience, and Spinoza's equivalence between the powers of being affected and affecting suggests that responsiveness and vulnerability are important counterpoints for influencing the world. As we explore the vulnerability of artworks in Chapter 5.2.3. Description - The *Parergon*, this equivalence of affective power should be kept in mind. Processes of affection and action

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[221] Cameron Duff, "Towards a developmental ethology: Exploring Deleuze's contribution to the study of health and human development," *Health* 14, no. 6 (2010): 629.

[222] Duff, "Towards a developmental ethology," 625.

[223] Ibid., 626.

inevitably involve both the body and mind of a subject, who interacts in relation to their environment to establish a reflexive understanding of self. Aesthetic experience depends upon these reflexive capacities, which enable subjective perspective and experience in relation to a distinction of internal and external.

3.2.5. Conclusion to The Self

The body and mind work together to create our idea of self, which is consolidated in an individual's reflexive distinction of themselves from their environment. Communication within our bodies is achieved through the cooperation of the endocrine and nervous systems, which work together internally in order to facilitate our understanding of our external world. The intercommunicated architecture of the human brain enables creation and recognition of neural representations, mental images which are called forth and manipulated through thought. These representations are neural pathways that are created to form new thoughts or reused to generate recognition, both of which are key processes involved in the formation of memory. Thoughts combine a variety of neural images simultaneously, from internal and external sources, suggesting that each human sense is actually multi-sensory, with neural representations often being shared between senses. Despite the entropy of human memory, it provides a consistent perspective that enables learning and the establishment of individual identity amongst humans. Our reflexive idea of self is further strengthened by our ability to recognize ourselves as both subjects and objects at the same time, which is reinforced in language. The neural images that form self provide a core that allows us to compare our current state in relation to internal/external and past/present associations. The inherent relational nature of our individual development as human beings demonstrates self as a process of becoming in relation to context, where our changing bodies and minds inform our self-conception as we interact with the world around us. The influence of these cognitive

mechanisms is undeniably important in understanding the processes of creation and reflection as they relate to the practice and experience of art. The subjective self is the experiential foundation that establishes the operation of aesthetic thought.

3.3. Perception & Experience

3.3.1. Introduction to Perception & Experience

When considering aesthetic experience, the perception of artworks is an extremely important factor to consider. To better understand how our perception enables us to experience the world, we will explore the mechanisms of sense in the human body externally and internally. We will see how perception is achieved through active engagement with the world, not simply passive reception of it. Action is inextricably combined with the reception of external percepts, which are in turn combined with internal feeling. We will then look at enaction, a conception that helps to engage with the paradox of perceptual transparency. Enaction focuses on the temporal, active and conditioned nature of experience in a way that facilitates a more accurate study of perception and experience. It once again highlights the connection of individual and their environment, focusing on sensorimotor contingencies as a means of demonstrating perception to be an activity based on skill. Enaction also shows how experience is a creative process. A particular experience is established in memory through its unity, which implies a sequential separation of before and after, and the association of emotion, which marks experience with a quality and finality. The distinction between sensory (external) and cognitive (internal) experience—both of which occur during aesthetic experience—reveal once again the duality that enables our conception as separate beings from our context. It also implies that perception and experience are inevitably imbued with a colour of emotion and meaning. Despite the seamlessness of consciousness, the body and mind are

both involved in conditioning our perception, experience, and hence understanding of ourselves and the world.

3.3.2. Perception

Perception is not simply the passive operation of the brain receiving signals from a stimulus in the environment, but rather the active operation of an organism connecting with its environment so that an interaction with a stimulus can happen in the first place.[224] The action of interacting with the environment (or "interfacing" as Damasio puts it) usually results from an organism's drive to maintain homeostasis, which we explored as Spinoza's *conatus* in Chapter 2.2.9. Conatus. When we feel satiated and don't need anything, we relax, but when problems arise or we lack something, we need to do something to resolve the imbalance. Organisms continuously act on their environments in order to achieve what they need to survive, but survival is not simply concerned with attaining food and water. It is also the capacity to evade dangerous situations, find shelter for protection and encounter other individuals for socialization and procreation. In order to successfully realize these endeavours an organism must be capable of sensing their environment, amongst other things. Perception enables organisms to cognite with their surroundings more efficiently, which implies actively interacting with the world as much as it is the passive reception of signals to the brain.[225] We exist in a state of continual relation with our immediate surroundings, and we are constantly adapting our situation and adapting *to* our situation in order to survive. Perception helps these operations significantly.

John Dewey points out the dualistic nature of perception by defining it as "an activity of doing and undergoing, a transaction with the world around us."[226] As Dewey insightfully

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[224] Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, 225.
[225] Ibid.
[226] Nöe, *Strange Tools*, 101.

explains common patterns of experience, he points out the union of action and reception that results as organisms perceive the world around them. These two aspects of experience happen simultaneously and exist in relationship with each other. "The action and its consequence must be joined in perception. This relationship is what gives meaning; to grasp it is the objective of all intelligence."[227] Thinking back to the generation of meaning as discussed in autopoiesis in Chapter 2.2.7. Perspective & Difference, we once again can see how the simultaneous development of an event on two separate levels generates meaning through the generation of difference, which establishes an inherent relational quality to any one aspect of thought. It also evokes the subject-object opposition that establishes the self (see Chapter 3.2.4. Self) and generates aesthetic movement (see Chapter 5.2.5. Position). Perception, as such, is action and reception combined. Cause and effect are one and the same. Furthermore, Dewey is sure to distinguish that receptivity is not the same as passivity. In perception, receptivity is a succession of responsive acts that join together to provide objective fulfilment.[228] He attributes passivity, on the other hand, to recognition since it halts perception in its open process of exploration. Recognition happens through the association of determinate concepts, which negate aesthetic experience in Kantian terms. The point being that perception is something that we *do* in conjunction with the world around us, and not some passive, isolated, interior reaction.

This doesn't mean that we don't have internal perception. While our perception is usually focused on external interactions, it exists internally as well. Damasio believes that as our senses evolved, our attention to the external world through the five senses increased in turn with conscious thought, leaving the perception of the internal body in the background of our attention, where it functions best.[229] The autonomic nervous system exists outside of our

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[227] John Dewey, *Art as Experience*, (New York, U.S.A.: Perigee, 2005), p. 46.
[228] Dewey *Art as Experience*, 54.
[229] Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, 233.

conscious control and functions within us imperceptibly, allowing us to focus our *conscious* attention on more specified forms of perception—that of the five senses. Nonetheless, the perception that we have of our body proper is of the utmost importance. Your body continually monitors itself through neural and chemical signals, and the experience that you have of your body in relation to particular thoughts is Damasio's definition of feeling. The thought could be associated with either external or imagined stimuli, but the key aspect of feeling an emotion is the juxtaposition of perceived changes in body state in conjunction with the mental images that started the experience.[230] The changes you perceive in your body when you feel an emotion are measured against the "neutral" background feelings of your body state between emotions, when your body is in a state of homeostasis.[231] On top of this, the process of feeling must be processed and reflected upon by the brain, which Damasio states in a more scientific manner:

> A feeling about a particular object is based on the subjectivity of the perception of the object, the perception of the body state it engenders, and the perception of modified style and efficiency of the thought process as all of the above happens."[232]

Internal perception, or feeling, is especially important to our external perception of the world because it modifies our comprehensive notions of things and situations, according to Damasio. Through juxtaposition, feelings help to imbue external stimuli with qualities such as good or bad, safe or dangerous, or pleasurable or painful, as we will see in Chapter 3.3.4. Experience. Because of their integral nature, feelings become frames of reference that quietly mediate our cognitive lives.[233]

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[230] Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, 145-146.
[231] Ibid., 152.
[232] Ibid., 145-146.
[233] Ibid., 159-60.

3.3.3. Enaction

Perception is natural to us, but it is also something that we learn and adapt over time. Nöe states that our perception is automatic most of the time, mediated by learned patterns of movement and behaviour, and carried out on the embodiment level of cognitive function. The embodiment level establishes a level of operation between the subpersonal and the personal levels of cognition.[234] It is not the molecular or cellular level where biochemical reactions take place during autopoiesis, and neither is it the level of consciousness where a person intentionally decides their actions. The embodiment level involves action without conscious thought.[235] For example, when you finish reading the page or a book or a thesis you do not pause and *decide* to turn the page, but you turn it successfully nonetheless to continue reading. It's a learned behaviour that has become habit. Nöe contends that our perception of the world is also learned over time, allowing us to establish recognizable patterns that help us to masterfully grasp and manoeuvre within the environment around us.[236] He claims that sensory changes are produced every time we move our eyes or hands, even though we're not usually conscious of it, and when we want to contemplate the world around us we do so actively. We move around our environment, adjusting our position, tilting our heads and straining our eyes. As Nöe states, we bring and maintain the world in focus.[237] By showing how perception is learned to the point of habit and thus influenced by a variety of principles, seeing can be considered an organized activity. In relation to Nöe's organizational theory of art that we explored in Chapter 2.3.3. Organization, this positions the act of seeing as a possible foundation for artistic expression. Despite the fact that we do not *consciously* move and adjust our eyes in most situations, seeing is a fundamental yet cognitively complex way of accessing the world. "Seeing isn't something that happens in us. It is something we do.

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[234] Nöe, *Strange Tools*, 8.
[235] Ibid.
[236] Ibid., 9.
[237] Ibid.

And like everything else we do, it depends on where we are, whom we're with, what we know, what we want, and what there is."[238] Seeing, as such, is never neutral, and always has a source. Both body and context simultaneously exert control upon the received content of perception. The relevance of this cognitive capacity will become increasingly relevant as we explore the internal/external oppositions that help to form consciousness (Chapter 3.4.2. Consciousness) and establish a relational ontology of art (Chapter 5.3.2. 'The Fragment').

In his essay titled *Art as Enaction*, Noë asks: "Can there be a science of consciousness, then, if the object of consciousness itself is too slippery or transparent or vague to be captured in thought? Is phenomenology possible?"[239] The problem is that perceptual experience is a difficult object to clearly determine and observe, since most attempts to ascertain or isolate perception as an object of study usually miss the target by focusing on *objects* that are experienced and not the perception of experience itself.[240] "We encounter what is seen, not the qualities of the seeing itself."[241] This reflects Maturana's reflections on the reflexive and paradoxical investigation of cognition, where no other option exists but to use cognition to examine itself (see Chapter 2.2.5. Cognition). The philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty questions the pragmatism of a purely scientific understanding of the body and visual perception as well. He believes that something important is lost when the subjective perspective of the individual is removed from the equation, which is necessary to achieve the universal, objective perspective that science demands.[242] He maintains the priority of individual human sensation, which modifies the world in order to interact and understand it, instead of a possible, general human body that science puts forward in its quest to explain

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[238] Nöe, *Strange Tools*, 151.

[239] Alva Nöe, *Art as Enaction*, (2002), 1. PDF document, http://www.scribd.com/doc/51703258/Alva-Noe-Art-as-enaction (accessed June 12, 2012).

[240] Nöe, *Art as Enaction*, 1.

[241] Ibid.

[242] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," *Merleau-Ponty's Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*, (Chicago, U.S.A.: Northwestern University Press, 1961), 122.

experience.[243] To help correct the problem of examining perceptual experience, Noë demonstrates the benefits of an enactive conception of experience. Borrowed from a phrase used by Varela and his collaborator Evan Thompson, Nöe's idea of enaction helps to explore the process of experiencing more thoroughly.[244] This is accomplished by taking three important aspects into account when defining experience; first, experience is an activity of encounter with the world; second, it is temporally extended; and third, it is fixed by laws of sensorimotor contingency. This definition of enactive conception aligns with the operational nature of autopoiesis as described by Maturana and Varela, and is further affirmed by Damasio's interactive definition of perception. Nöe thinks that part of the problem with examining perceptual experience is that it is always interpreted in relation to knowledge.[245] Perception is always associative and relational, working in conjunction with our memory of past experience in order to help complete the limited or partial sensory experience we have of our surroundings. For example, when we see one side of a three-dimensional object, we understand that there are other sides even though we don't perceive them.[246] "We don't really experience the objects as wholes; we infer their wholeness."[247] As we explore the idea of the *parergon* in Chapter 5.2. *Parergon*, this function of supplementing lack will be explored in relation to artworks, which are necessarily indeterminate. Nelson Goodman affirms this same quality of perception and states: "[o]ur capacity for overlooking is virtually unlimited, and what we do take in usually consists of significant fragments and clues that need massive supplementation."[248] Goodman further addresses the conditions that body and memory place on perception. He contends that: "the visual system drives toward uniformity and continuity,

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[243] Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," 122.
[244] Nöe, *Art as Enaction*, 1.
[245] Ibid., 2.
[246] Ibid.
[247] Ibid., 3.
[248] Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*, (Indianapolis, U.S.A.: Hackett Publishing Company Inc., 1978), 14.

constrained by its anatomy and physiology, and influenced by what it has seen and done before, but improvising along the way." [249] Our ability to improvise ensures that appropriate actions can be made in the absence of known or recognized situations. Nonetheless, it is becoming clear how the corporal mechanisms that enable perception also involve flaws and impose limitations.

Noë identifies two problematic aspects of visual perception due to the influence of our body and knowledge on our perception. [250] The first is that we experience our environment as complete and instantaneous without the subjective experience of perceiving ourselves perceiving our environment. This isn't really a problem of perception—it's like a built-in editor that automatically corrects mistakes—but it does make it exceedingly difficult to identify the manipulations of the mind in perception. We can't hear or feel the cerebral motor of consciousness running, so it's difficult to properly access its influence. Secondly, our visual perception is structured by sensorimotor contingencies, which are based on the fact that we access our environment—physically and perceptively—in a practical way that enables us to confirm details and knowledge in three-dimensional totality. [251] Nöe describes sensorimotor contingency in relation to movement-dependence and object-dependence, which influence how we perceive things externally in the world. Patterns of interdependence between movement and sensory stimulation demonstrate how familiar we are with these sensorimotor contingencies. [252] For example, as we move closer to an object it grows in size, and when we move around an object its profile changes. Nöe states that these patterns are learned and mediate our relation with our environment, which allows us to predict probable and possible states of things in relation to our context in the world. Sensorimotor contingencies, nonetheless, demonstrate how movement and object dependence condition our perceptual

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[249] Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*, 79.
[250] Nöe, *Art as Enaction*, 2.
[251] Ibid., 3.
[252] Ibid.

states, and that the content of an experience is gained over time through interaction, not instantaneously as with two-dimensional representations.[253] Nöe defines experience as enacted because it transpires through the knowledge and use of patterns of sensorimotor contingencies as observers interact with the world.[254] This knowledge, which can be practiced and developed, makes exploration of the environment an activity based on skill. In relation to aesthetic experience, this suggests that the more practice you have perceiving the world, the better you will become.

3.3.4. Experience

The enactive conception of perceptual experience contends that the world is not simply there, but rather that we *produce* the world by moving through it and interacting with it. Perception is a creative act and this has implications on how we practice and understand art. Noë sees the significance of artworks in their potential to present both perception and experience to observers, placing the value of artworks on their availability to be encountered over time and their inducement to construct perceptual experiences.[255] Every time we see and experience an artwork we *re*-enact it, since the original enaction is that of its creation. Through enactive experience, the productive acts of making and perceiving artworks, or perceiving and making artworks, become methods for enlightening experience itself.[256] It is this idea that led Nöe to define artists as experience engineers. He likens artistic practice to acts of phenomenological positioning, and believes that the philosophical practice of phenomenology can further advance by reflecting more on the practice of art. Nöe thinks that artworks can help to solve the paradox of perceptual transparency—the difficulty to focus on the study of experience because attempts to do so automatically deflect the focus to the

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[253] Nöe, *Art as Enaction*, 4.
[254] Ibid., 5.
[255] Ibid.
[256] Ibid.

content that we perceive in experience. As artworks deal with both the sensory world in terms of active exploration and the cognitive world in terms of concepts, they help to reveal the dual aspect of experience.[257]

Noë focuses on the idea of access as he differentiates between our perception of things in the world and things that are perceived indirectly or as thought. Dewey also differentiates between sensory (aesthetic) and the cognitive (intellectual) experience and highlights that the difference is primarily material. While the sensory experience of the world relates to the qualities of things, the material of cognitive experience consists of signs and symbols that *represent* things that can be experienced qualitatively.[258] He determines, nonetheless, that all experiences are marked with an aesthetic quality because of their structure; they conditionally comprise unification and fulfilment, which are accomplished through the organized and structured movement of experience. Without these qualities of unification and fulfilment, Dewey states that thinking is inconclusive. "In short, esthetic [sic] cannot be sharply marked off from intellectual experience since the latter must bear an esthetic stamp to be itself complete."[259] An experience is unified when it moves from experience in general to a singular, countable experience, which is accomplished when it is demarcated from what happened before and what happened after.[260] Furthermore, a single quality pervades each experience—despite its variable components—which further consolidates the unity of an experience.[261] An experience achieves fulfilment when emotions become associated to it, according to Dewey. "Under conditions of resistance and conflict, aspects and elements of the self and the world that are implicated in this interaction [of live creature and environing

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[257] Nöe, *Art as Enaction*, 5.
[258] Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 39.
[259] Ibid., 40.
[260] Ibid., 37.
[261] Ibid., 38.

conditions] qualify experience with emotions and ideas so that conscious intent emerges." [262]

Dewey uses a lack of unity and fulfilment to define regular, non-aesthetic experience in general, which is so ubiquitous that it establishes the unconscious norm of all experience.[263] He claims that all conscious engagement with the world forms part of our personal stream of experience, most of which is unremarkable and easily forgotten. To distinguish *an* experience means to separate it temporally and emotionally from the constant activity of our lives.

3.3.5. Conclusion to Perception & Experience

When considering aesthetic experience, the perception of artworks is paramount. Perception enables us to connect and experience the world in a variety of ways, and this includes the internal perception we have of our own bodies. It has been demonstrated how perception is achieved through active engagement with the world, where body movement and sensorimotor contingencies help us to maintain our context in focus. Action is inextricably combined with the sensation of external stimuli, which combine with internal feeling as the brain receives signals from multiple sources simultaneously. Perception thus involves a dual process of action and reception that are inextricably combined, which automatically ensure that internal feelings are associated with external stimuli. Emotion thus becomes a frame of reference through which all perception is considered. The idea of enaction helps us to better focus on the study of perception, which is easily deflected towards the content of perception instead of its functioning. Enaction reveals perception as the temporal process that involves an active engagement with the environment that is conditioned by operational parameters of the body. These object and motion-dependent contingencies that the body uses to facilitate perception are learned, embodied resources that also mark a corporal reference point that influences our understanding of the external world. By showing how perception is modified—

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[262] Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 36.
[263] Ibid., 41-42.

corrected, polished, or completed—by consciousness, enaction further demonstrates how our experience of the external world is an act of creation. As we combine external sensation with internal sensory and conceptual stimuli, we construct specific experiences by separating them from the flow of general experience and sealing them with a felt emotion or quality. Understanding how our bodies and minds unite to make experience possible is an important step in considering how works of art are able to influence and change individuals, as well as how aesthetic experience is feasible in the first place.

3.4. Consciousness

3.4.1. Introduction to Consciousness

Aesthetic experience is only possible through human consciousness, which implies the processes of both feeling and thinking in relation to context. The opposite, anaesthesia, demonstrates this to be true. When we are anaesthetized generally we are unconscious, feel nothing, and are unaware of our context. Consciousness, however, is similar to perception in that it too demonstrates a paradox of transparency. When we try to focus on the operation of consciousness, it deflects us to the content that consciousness provides instead of the process itself. As Nöe contends:

> the fact is we don't actually have a better understanding of how the brain produces consciousness than Descartes did of how the immaterial soul accomplishes this feat. After all, at present we lack even the rudimentary outlines of a neural theory of consciousness.[264]

Perhaps science, then, isn't the only place to look for an understanding consciousness. In the following chapter, we will turn to philosophy to get a better handle on the role of consciousness in gaining perceived separation from our environment. We will begin by looking at the work of Nicolas Luhmann, who attributes our ability to separate inner self from outer world as the basis of self-reference and subjectivity. This is compounded in language,

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[264] Nöe, *Strange Tools*, 94.

and our ability to simultaneously and alternatively employ subject and object determinations implies that meaning is associated with all perception. We will then look at the theory of *umwelt* as defined by Jakob Von Uëxkull, which demonstrates that an organism's relation with its environment is distinct for every species. *Umwelt* shows how perception and consciousness vary greatly amongst species because they are informed by different markers of significance, which demonstrate a multiplicity meanings and realities. We will then look at Martin Heidegger's concept *Dasein*, which considers "being in the world" as *being-in-the-world*, since neither being nor world can exist without the other. *Dasein* compares human consciousness with animal consciousness to explore how the concepts of captivation, disinhibition and revelation can help us to define consciousness. Finally, we will look at Giorgio Agamben's exploration of 'the open,' an idea of Heidegger's that describes how our consciousness permits us to understand distinct beings from the world around us, including ourselves. The detachment that is enabled by human consciousness both establishes and underlies all of our relationships with other beings, and thus greatly influences our capacities to be affected, to act and to understand. This is the essence of aesthetic separation.

3.4.2. Consciousness

In his book *Art as a Social System,* Luhmann is greatly influenced by the theory of autopoiesis as he explores art as a form of communication. While his theory of communication is largely based in semiotic theory, it also relies heavily on biological and neurological research that found theories of human mind and consciousness. One of the separations that defines his theory is the distinction between internal and external, which is established through the conscious perception that people are capable of.[265] We can feel our own bodies internally and externally, and we can perceive the world around us through our

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[265] Luhmann, *Art as a Social System*, 5.

senses. Our bodies, equipped with various types and intensities of sensory receptors, define the threshold between this inner self and outer world. While we usually take this natural boundary for granted, Luhmann claims that this division of interior and exterior is a prerequisite for self-reference that is generated by our consciousness.[266] As we saw in Chapter 3.2.4. Self, our reflective capacity to picture our self as an object is the foundation of subjectivity. Not all organisms are capable of recognizing themselves as separate or different from their environment. In fact, it's something quite special for humans. Luhmann contends that our distinct human nervous system constructs the external world around us with the aid of perception, which our consciousness in turn establishes as reality.[267] He points out the important filtration process that our brains carry out so that some perceptual information (such as the brain's own processing) is repressed and not brought forth into consciousness, which assists in creating the seamlessness of our "reality". As we saw in Chapter 3.3.3. Enaction, our incomplete perception of the world is cognitively supplemented to generate a more fluid conception of our interaction with the world.[268] Luhmann speculates that our shared acceptance of being distinct from our environment is facilitated through the copying of the "double closure" that distinguishes internal from external within consciousness.[269] This double closure refers to the brain's ability to divide levels of operation and position itself as the 'coordinator of coordination' of multiple functions.[270] Nonetheless, Luhmann admits that many questions remain as to how our consciousness affords us this operative closure.

Perception, nonetheless, unites our understanding of internal body and external environment, and the perception we have of ourselves as objects and not simply as subjects—the "me" as object *and* the "I" as subject—is modelled on our perception of the world.

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[266] Luhmann, *Art as a Social System*, 5.
[267] Ibid., 6.
[268] Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*, 14.
[269] Luhmann, *Art as a Social System*, 5.
[270] Ibid.

Luhmann uses this operational analogy of internal and external perceptual function to establish that all communication depends on perception.[271] Differentiating between the elements involved in perception and communication, Luhmann points out the important yet limited role of the nervous system, which only has the capacity to observe itself. It is a closed system or circuit that has no direct contact with the outside environment, requiring other systems to assist it to connect externally. Consciousness, on the other hand, is able to mix internal self-reference and external hetero-reference in its recursive functions.[272] It is capable of incorporating sensations beyond the boundaries of the body as concepts in simultaneous relation with the internal state of the body, according to Luhmann. This operational capacity of consciousness to distinguish between concurrent self-reference and hetero-reference is what allows Luhmann to presuppose that meaning is attributed to *all* conscious operations. This reflects the generation of significance through difference that we explored as a result of autopoietic separation between the molecular and molar levels (see Chapter 2.2.7. Perspective and Difference) and the implied meaning of every experience as internal emotion is coupled with external reference (see Dewey's explanation in Chapter 3.3.4. Experience). Thanks to the capacity for externalization, our consciousness presupposes an operative structure of signification that ensures the synchronized processing of signifier and signified.[273] As such, our capacity to combine internal and external perceptions endows our consciousness with the power to generate meaning for external stimuli, which we will explore more closely in Chapter 4.2.3.3. Subject of the Signifier. As we continue to explore aesthetic meaning, this ability is of vital importance.

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[271] Luhmann, *Art as a Social System*, 6.
[272] Ibid.
[273] Ibid., 8-9.

3.4.3. *Umwelt*

Jakob von Uexküll's theory of *umwelt* helps to develop a more thorough understanding of the relationship between animals—including humans—and their environment. The semiotic theory of *umwelt,* which means "environment" in German, claims that different animal species perceive the same environment distinctly.[274] Every species has its unique *umwelt*, which means that the conception that humans have of space and time is not repeated in the animal kingdom. Our human reality is unique to us. U*mwelt* develops the autopoietic idea that significance is generated in relation to the recognition of difference in context (see Chapter 2.2.7. Perspective & Difference) and explores how beings connect with specific aspects of their surroundings. The philosopher Giorgio Agamben describes how environment-worlds, *umwelten* (plural) are populated with a variety of 'carriers of significance' or 'marks,' which are the only things that attract the attention of animal species.[275] Uexküll uses the word *umgebung* to define the *umwelt* from the perspective of observation—the objective space in which humans perceive other animals behaving as they interact with their environments.[276] The theory of *umwelt* contends that animals are limited to consider objects as meaningful on three terms: desirable (+), undesirable (-) or safe to ignore (0).[277] Humans, on the other hand, have developed an *innenwelt* (inner-world) that includes a conception of self when they relate with the environment.[278] The concept of an inter-objective self allows us to distinguish objects in the world as distinct *beings*, which opens our capacity to attribute significance to our world well beyond the limits of desirable, undesirable or safe

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[274] Lexico Dictionaries, "Umwelt | Definition of Umwelt by Lexico,"
    https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/umwelt (accessed September 14, 2019).
[275] Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, (Stanford, USA: Stanford University
    Press., 2010), 40.
[276] Agamben, *The Open*, 40-41.
[277] John Deely, "Semiotics and Jakob von Uexküll's concept of umwelt," *Sign Systems
    Studies* 32.1/2, (2004): 15.
[278] Deely, "Semiotics and Jakob von Uexküll's concept of umwelt," 20.

to ignore.[279] The semiotician Thomas A. Sebeok posits that the cultural world for humans is only possible thanks to the 'symbolic objectivity' that their *innenwelt* enables, while other animals are limited to 'sensory objectivity' and thus are limited to social organization within the world.[280] This is important for our conception of aesthetic theory, since art is not possible without symbolism.[281] This also grounds the framework that Luhmann uses to found his theory of observation that we examined in Chapter 2.3.5. Observation. The theory of *umwelt* demonstrates how the richness of our symbolic and communicative capacities as humans is dependent on our capacity to establish self through subject-object relativity, which greatly distinguishes us from other animals. Cognitive capacities are species-specific and play an important role when recognizing and endowing significance to elements within the environment.[282] A maple leaf, for example, signifies different things for distinct animals: food for a snail, shelter for bird, camouflage for a moth, or national identity for a Canadian citizen. Through the concept of *umwelt,* we can begin to appreciate how the practice of art is specific for humankind.

3.4.4. The Open

Heidegger used Uexküll's theory of *umwelt* to form his idea of *Dasein,* which offers a distinct conception of human existence by stressing the importance of our inherent coupling with the environment.[283] As mentioned in the chapter introduction, *Dasein* reconsiders the existential state of 'being in the world' without the separation that is implied by putting

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[279] Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, 148-149.

[280] Marcel Danesi, "The Concept of Model in Thomas A. Sebeok's Semiotics," *AISS Publications: Proceedings of the World Congress of AISS-AIS*, (2014). http://www.iass-ais.org/proceedings2014/view_lesson.php?id=168 (accessed August 30, 2019).

[281] Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*, (Indianapolis, U.S.A.: Hackett Publishing Company, 1978), 66.

[282] Agamben, *The Open*, 40-41.

[283] Ibid., 39.

spaces between the words, since neither 'being' nor 'world' can exist without the other. Heidegger uses hyphens to provide a sense of connection, and when he compares the human "being-in-world" to the animal's "poverty-in-world," he is referring to the limited relationship that animals have with their environment.[284] Humans, on the other hand, are capable of forming worlds, which are unique, meaning-infused conceptions of our environment based on our powers of perception—similar to the shift from 'environment' to 'context' that we examined in Chapter 2.3.4. Context. In *The Origin of the Work of Art*, Heidegger reflects the aesthetic opposition of material and form with the words 'earth' and 'world' as a way of differentiating between the natural material and the composed form of artworks.[285] He defines 'knowing' in reference to the Greek origin of the word: "a bringing forth of beings in that it brings *forth* what is present, as such, *out of* concealment, specifically *into* the unconcealment of their appearance."[286] In reference to Uexküll's assertion that the environment is populated with carriers of significance, Heidegger agrees that animals are only affected by the things that trigger their actions, or activate their "being capable," when they relate with their environment.[287] They are in a constant state of inhibition until they are *disinhibited* by something in their environment.[288] Heidegger uses the term *benommenheit* to describe the animal's constant state of captivation, which he later associates with "being blocked," or "being absorbed" (*eingenommen*).[289] Agamben states: "[i]nsofar as it is essentially captivated and wholly absorbed in its own disinhibitor the animal cannot truly act (*handeln*) or comport itself (*sich verhalten*) in relation to it: it can only behave (*sich benehmen*)."[290] The limited relationship that animals have with their environment implies that they are unable to

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[284] Agamben, *The Open*, 55.
[285] Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, 14.
[286] Ibid., 35.
[287] Agamben, *The Open*, 51-52.
[288] Ibid., 52.
[289] Ibid.
[290] Ibid.

comprehend the distinct components they interact with as symbolic *beings*. They are unable to see the world that humans can see. Heidegger states: "[t]o say that captivation is the essence of animality means: *The animal as such does not stand within a potentiality for revelation of beings. Neither its so-called environment nor the animal itself are revealed as beings.*"[291] Our ability to comprehend the things within our environment as distinct beings—including ourselves—enables us to escape the captivation that defines animal existence. While other species only recognize the 'earth' of an artwork, humans are able to recognize both 'earth' and 'world'—the raw material of the artistic support and its formal composition, which we understand as being contingent on human intentionality. While we will explore this more thoroughly in the coming chapters, the unconcealment that our cognitive powers of distinction provide us is obviously influential to our practice of art. Agamben muses on the special capacity of humankind to consider ourselves as separate from the world, proposing that the impulse to divide, separate, and distinguish is what truly makes us a distinct species:

> "In our culture, man has always been thought of as the articulation and conjunction of a body and a soul, of a living thing and a *logos*, of a natural (or animal) element and a supernatural or social or divine element. We must learn instead to think of man as what results from the incongruity of these two elements, and investigate not the metaphysical mystery of conjunction, but rather the practical and political mystery of separation. What is man, if he is always the place—and, at the same time, the result—of ceaseless divisions and caesurae?"[292]

Agamben contemplates Heidegger's notion of 'the open' as the potential space of truth as animals behave in their environment.[293] Humans and other animals demonstrate different states of *Dasein* within the open, but we are the only species that is able to perceive it as such; a potential space of truth. Agamben equates the "poverty in world" of the animal to an "openness without disconcealment," which contrasts with the "world-forming" capacity that

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[291] Agamben, *The Open*, 54.
[292] Ibid., 16.
[293] Ibid., 57.

characterizes the human conception of the environment.[294] While animals are open to their disinhibitors, they are not open to their disinhibitors being *revealed* as such, as beings.[295] Agamben contends that this means that animals exist in a dual state of constant lack in relation to their environment. They lack what they need to survive physiologically—food, water, shelter, etc.—but they also lack the ability to recognize and understand their situation of *being* within its environment. Heidegger states: "Plant and animal depend on something outside of themselves without ever 'seeing' either the outside or the inside, i.e., without ever seeing their being unconcealed in the free of being."[296] Agamben reiterates this thought, focusing on the reflexive inter-objectivity that allows human thought to awaken to the possibility of meaning. "Only man, indeed only the essential gaze of authentic thought, can see the open which names the unconcealedness of beings. The animal, on the contrary, never sees this open."[297] 'The open' provides the idea of a conceptual space that exists in duality as a physical and psychic relationship between organism and environment. While the physical relationships human beings and animals have with the environment are similar, our psychic relationships are very distinct. According to Heidegger, seeing 'the open' is tantamount to experiencing truth. "Truth is the ur-strife in which, always in some particular way, the open is won; that open within which everything stands and out of which everything withholds itself—everything which, as a being, both shows and withdraws itself."[298] Truth, as such, needs to be actively achieved, and seeing the truth in artworks is an excellent example of the specialized contemplation that our species has come to excel at. Our human consciousness allows us to separate ourselves from the world and, in turn, to consider components of our environment as distinct beings with potential meaning. In addition, our cognitive processes creatively

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[294] Agamben, *The Open*, 55.
[295] Ibid., 58.
[296] Ibid.
[297] Ibid.
[298] Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, 36.

combine external references and internal feelings that attribute signification as we interact with our environment. As we become unconcealed to ourselves, meanings are generated and revealed to us in the *open*.

3.4.5. Conclusion to Consciousness

When it comes to understanding how consciousness enables us to perceive ourselves as separate from our environment, science, semantics and philosophy combine to give a well-rounded picture. Our ability to separate inner self from outer world forms the basis of self-reference and subjectivity, against which objectivity and the idea of other are established. This is reflected in our capacity for language, which enables us to simultaneously and alternatively employ subject and object determinations. This, along with the duality of our cognitive architecture, implies that meaning is associated with all perception, which helps us to understand that no observation is neutral. *Umwelt* demonstrates that an organism's relation with its environment is distinct for every species. It further shows how markers of significance inform our perception and consciousness of the environment. These vary greatly depending on each species, and in turn demonstrate a multiplicity of possible meanings and realities. While meaning associated to external stimuli is mostly limited to positive, negative or neutral, humankind is capable of expanding external relationships through our competence for inter-objectivity and our ability to understand objects in the world as 'beings.' *Dasein* relates our coupling with the environment to being-in-the-world without subject-environment separation. It shows how the concepts of captivation, disinhibition and revelation can help us to define human consciousness in contradistinction to that of animals. Our consciousness permits us to understand ourselves as distinct beings from the world around us, and to appreciate the potential for the unconcealment of truth. The detachment that is enabled by human consciousness both establishes and underlies all of our relationships with other beings,

and greatly influences our capacities to act, to be affected and to understand. All of these abilities are critical aspects of the captivating practice of art.

3.5. Conclusion to Thought / Self

Life and Art

Our cognitive abilities facilitate aesthetic experience and the practice of art. Without the reflexive conception of self and the perception of experience that it allows, our consciousness wouldn't be able to reveal the significance that artistic practice depends upon. While this chapter on human thought doesn't directly broach the subject of connecting life with art, it does prepare the coming chapters to do so by establishing the cognitive framework that makes artistic practice possible. It explores various ways in which separation is evident in our corporal and cerebral functioning, which work together to combine internal and external reference. It also looks at the cognitive processes that form the foundation of aesthetic experience, including thought, memory and self. Furthermore, it divulges various fallacies and inadequacies of human thought that are supplemented by our consciousness. We are left with a picture of human cognition that is capable of reasoning and understanding, but also of being creative through its association of internal and external sensations in reference to a qualitative evaluation of self in order to form experiences. More than anything, it is our inter-objectivity and our reflexive distinction of self from world that enables our species to conceptualize beings symbolically, and establish new carriers of significance within the world in which we live together. This is the true foundation of aesthetic experience, as feelings and concepts intermingle to inform our complex being-in-world.

<u>Separation</u>

Separation is an obvious aspect of parallelism, where every physical event is necessarily a cognitive event, and vice versa, which demonstrates the interconnectedness of body and mind. The human body and mind work in tandem to facilitate thought, memory and perception, all of which combine to produce consciousness, experience and a conception of self. These processes and capacities are contingent on an individual's constant relation with their environment, which becomes the external counterpoint that reinforces the individuation of self and permits the psychic distinction from the environment. This is reinforced by the twofold capacity for communication within the human body, which utilizes both the endocrine (chemical) and nervous (neuronal) systems to maintain all parts of the body connected and responsive.[299] The distinct functionality of these two systems provides an added layer of complexity to both internal and external communication, which helps to establish our understanding of self. Our reflexive self-conception becomes the persistent reference point against which we understand the world as we *become* individually in relation with our environment.[300] Perception is the active process of coupling with our surroundings to receive information about our situation. Perception is also a twofold operation that combines external sensory or internal conceptual stimuli in reference to the concurrent emotional body state at the time of interaction.[301] Feeling marks perception automatically, as such, and becomes a frame of reference through which all perception takes place. While our nervous system is limited in its internal mechanisms of neuronal communication, the consciousness that it supports extends into the world and mixes external hetero-reference with internal self-reference.[302] The twofold architecture of conscious experience thus ensures that meaning is attributed to all conscious operations through the inherent association of internal and external

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[299] Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, 206.
[300] Ibid., 100.
[301] Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 38.
[302] Luhmann, *Art as a Social System*, 6.

components. Sensation and/or conceptualization combine with emotion to mark each conscious experience with both signifier and signified.[303] While other species have limited understanding of their relation with their carriers of significance, humans are able to objectify beings in their environment, which permits us a far more complex relationship and comprehension.[304] Understanding elements of our environment as beings enables us to escape the captivated inhibitive nature that characterizes animal behaviour.[305] This is dependent on our ability to understand ourselves as separate from our environment, which is an inherent consequence of self-reference and human consciousness. It implies that disconnection founds other profound and inescapable existential issues that define our human nature, conditioning us to contemplate the paradox of our shared isolation as we live our lives 'apart together.'

Human Cognition / Aesthetic Thought

Our unique capacity to think establishes the mechanisms that enable aesthetic experience. While thinking is a corporal event that demonstrates the interconnectedness of body and mind, the control centre of the nervous system is the brain, which uses 'neural representations' to generate thought.[306] These mental images are neural patterns that can be established, modified and referenced as the brain orchestrates a remarkable interconnectivity of input and association, both internal and external. Our ability to store and represent mental imagery facilitates memory and subsequently our aptitude to learn.[307] While it is limited and entropic in nature, memory allows us to *re*cognize, which is the basis of autopoietic identity formation. As such, it establishes our foundation of knowledge, which the mental processes of conceptualization and categorization depend, and lead to the human faculties of reason,

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[303] Luhmann, *Art as a Social System*, 8-9.
[304] Deely, "Semiotics and Jakob von Uexküll's concept of umwelt," 15.
[305] Agamben, *The Open*, 55.
[306] Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, 89.
[307] Ibid., 93-94.

understanding and judgement, which define aesthetic thought. Memory also provides us a consistent perspective of corporal and cognitive states, both of which help to consolidate our individual conceptions of self.[308] This reflexive ability to distinguish inner and outer stimuli reinforces our self-identity in language in relation to subjectivity and objectivity.[309] All of our conscious thought uses this conception of self as a backdrop against which the world is experienced and considered.[310] The combination of action with reception in perception also helps to demonstrate the sensorimotor contingencies that condition our observation of the world around us. Enactive conception highlights the fact that perception is temporal, active and conditioned by the cognitive functioning of our bodies.[311] The partial and fallible perspective that perception affords us is filled in and polished by our consciousness, which eliminates all traces of its operation and impact.[312] As we explore the paradox of visibility/invisibility and notions of self-deception in Chapter 6. Artworks & Art, this point of comparison between people and artworks will be more fully explored. The action and impressionability involved in perception ensure that it's a naturally creative process. The experience that it facilitates for us is equally creative, as we combine external and internal reference as we engage with the world around us.[313] Even when we perceive purely cognitive concepts, there is always a reference to external context. While we experience the world and our thought as ongoing processes in consciousness, specific experiences are marked by temporal and qualitative distinctions.[314] Every experience is composed in time with a beginning and an end, and every experience is imbued with an emotional quality that

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[308] Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, 238-39.
[309] Ibid., 242-243.
[310] Ibid., 152.
[311] Nöe, *Art as Enaction*, 3.
[312] Ibid., 3-4.
[313] Luhmann, *Art as a Social System*, 6.
[314] Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 36.

separates it from ubiquity.[315] This is the essence of aesthetic experience, as subjective

emotions are reflexively engaged during interactions with beauty, art or the unknown.

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[315] Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 37.

CHAPTER 4. HUMAN BEINGS / INTENTION

4.1. Introduction to Human Beings / Intention

Art is connected to life through human activity and thought, and in order to thoroughly appreciate this union it's important to understand what makes human beings unique. Why don't other species practice art? Are the capacities that facilitate art *purely* human or could they extend to other forms of intelligence—animal, artificial or alien? According to Kant, the various modes of cognitive thought that humans are capable of—specifically rationality, judgment and understanding—enable a special kind of comprehension and experience that is called *aesthetic*. While aesthetics and art are not the same, they are definitely related in our contemporary understanding of artistic appreciation. Rancière's aesthetic philosophy, in particular, is dedicated to exploring how the aesthetic regime of art—our practice and understanding of art after Kant—demonstrates the connection of art and everyday life.[316] As mentioned in Chapter 2.3.3. Organization, artworks in the 'mimetic regime' of art were understood as distinct from life because they were thought of as mere representations—mimetic copies that separated the subject from its image.[317] Kant's *Critique of Judgement* changed everything, though, and helped people to begin to think about the practice of art differently, and to think of artworks as something that provided a unique experience. Artworks began to be considered as vessels of truth that functioned well beyond simple representation. As Tanke states:

> Aesthetics, with its central categories of experience and reflection, emerged with the recognition that there were no longer any preordained rules for distinguishing in advance the objects of art from the products of everyday life, and that each experience had to be evaluated in its irreducible singularity.[318]

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[316] Tanke, "What is the Aesthetic Regime?" 73.
[317] Ibid., 72.
[318] Ibid., 72-73.

The thought processes that Kant defined in his aesthetic theory enable art to be understood as an inimitable, transcendental practice of humanity, the mechanics of which will be further explored in Chapter 5.2.2. Summary – The Critique of Judgement, Analytic of the Beautiful.

Art, however, needs more than intelligence and aesthetic thought to exist. Beyond the cognitive processes that are necessary for an individual to know and appreciate art, artworks require human society and institutions in order to function. Art only works in relation to systems of artistic practice that have been established and developed by people over time. Artworks may be new, but art certainly isn't. It's something that we are born into, something we're exposed to, something we learn and something we advance. In order to understand how life is reflected in art, then, we must take into account the institutionality that supports the practice of art. How, though, can we begin to relate our convoluted understanding of the art world with our self-conception as autopoietic organisms? How do the building blocks of life—our molecular entities—extend to facilitate the complex operation of the art system on a global scale? Taking on the task of answering such expansive philosophical questions, Searle has championed a naturalist philosophy that attempts to connect our mindless and meaningless molecular selves with our conscious and significant molar selves. While Searle posits that collective intentionality is the foundation of society, our specifically human political reality is comprised of two more characteristics: constitutive rules and the imposition of function.[319] These two ideas lead us to the focus of this chapter, which will explore language and technology as two distinguishing features of human society that play a crucial role in our conception of art and aesthetics. While constitutive rules require language to be established, the imposition of function leads us to explore the role of technology in defining who we are as a people and a species. Exploring language and technology—two defining

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[319] Searle, *Freedom & Neurobiology*, 85-86.

characteristics of humanity—will help us to establish how artworks exist as beings in relation to society.

Tangentially, using language and technology to differentiate between humans and other animals not only demonstrates how art reflects human society, but it also helps to better understand our tendency as a species to distinguish and separate in the first place. This, in turn, will help to clarify some of the mechanisms involved in acts of separation, which are needed to distinguish the practice of art from other human practices and to dismantle the distinctions between art and life. Studying how we as a species establish and manoeuvre around boundaries and limits helps to enlighten our human nature and the possibility of thinking of art as autonomous. The division between humans and animals is doomed from the beginning, however, since human beings *are* animals by definition. Two contemporary philosophers—Giorgio Agamben and Jacques Derrida—have recognized the practice of language and the use of technology as the two main attributes that have historically separated homo sapiens from other animal species. As they dismantle this distinction, I will continue to explore the work of Nöe, who demonstrates how our conception of art directly relates to both language and technology. With regards to language, I will explore the influence of establishing a subject, the difference between the words 'reaction' and 'response,' and the act of writing or mark-making in relation to art. As I move on to examine our use of technology, I will largely explore the underlying ideas of reorganization, progression and function that relate technological practices to art and aesthetics. In conclusion, language and technology are demonstrated to be specialized capacities that establish human politics, while the practice of art subverts them to distinguish its own value and autonomy within human society.

4.2. Language

4.2.1. Introduction to Language

Human society is largely established through language, which makes it an important aspect to explore in our journey to relate art to life. Exploring language as a distinguishing factor between humans and animals is not without its difficulties. Agamben speaks of the aporia that the linguist Heymann Steinthal encountered in the nineteenth century in his work to determine the prelinguistic stage of homo sapiens. If we did evolve from another great ape species, then he thought it was obvious that at some point 'we' did not have language. But this, here, is the difficulty. Without language, this ancestor of ours is not 'us.' It is a different species. As Steinthal states, "Either man has language, or he simply is not. … With it, true and proper human activity begins; it is the bridge that leads from the animal kingdom to the human kingdom."[320] As Agamben explores Steinthal's contradiction of a prelinguistic man, he tries to demonstrate the "anthropomorphic machine" that is constantly at work in contemporary culture, and the contradictions that it inherently entails. The problem, according to Agamben, is that this 'machine' functions by means of an exclusivity-inclusivity duality that *always* presupposes the human. We are left with a circular definition that Agamben describes as a state of indeterminacy, which has little use aside from illustrating the contradictory nature of our being. For me, however, this unstable definition of humanity can be viewed positively, as it assures that we as humans recognize that we are still in a state of development and transformation. Furthermore, this indeterminate state can be seen to reflect the ontology of artworks, which we will explore in Chapter 5.3. 'The Fragment.' Returning to the idea of a prelinguistic humanity, Agamben rejects the thought of defining the human as an animal *plus something* (for example, "animal plus language" or "animal plus technology").

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[320] Agamben, *The Open*, 35-36.

He believes that rationality and language are not things that humans *have*, but rather they are things that we *are*—abilities that we use in order *to be*.

Despite the great leaps in the philosophy of language over the past century, Searle laments the continued resistance to thinking of language as an extension of human biology. In his work to relate molecular biology with sociology, he defines language as: "[our] special ability to form derived intentionality, i.e. meaning, in sentences and speech acts."[321] As we explored in autopoiesis (Chapter 2.5.3. Observation), intentionality is based upon the molecular functioning of an organism but implies the molar consciousness of the organism in relation to perception and action within their environment, which in turn relates language to expressions of purpose and desire. Searle constructs his theory of language in terms of functions and rules that attribute meaning to things through the use of symbols. Aside from facilitating elaborate forms of communication, language provides humanity with two specific abilities that enable our uniquely political nature. The first is the ability to attribute "status functions" on objects, which are collectively accepted purposes or meanings.[322] A perfect example is money, which functions not because of its physical structure but because of the shared attitudes we have towards it. The second ability that language provides us is the ability to establish rules, and Searle distinguishes between "regulative" and "constitutive rules." While regulative rules regulate familiar norms of behaviour (i.e. drive on the right side of the road), constitutive rules regulate while creating new forms of behaviour. His example is the game of chess, which is defined and functions according to its rules in context. Two players must accept and follow the rules of chess, which stipulate how each distinct piece can move, which establishes what a checkmate position can be.[323] Language helps to establish constitutive rules by establishing that x equals y, or x equals y in context z, which means that

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[321] Searle, *Freedom & Neurobiology*, 8.
[322] Ibid., 87.
[323] Ibid., 88.

we can place meaning or function on anything and, furthermore, make this meaning conditional. Through our accepted use of status functions and constitutive rules, Searle asserts that human society becomes institutionalized through ideas of family, education, politics, economics, and religion. While highlighting the necessity of individual belief in these social rules and functions—their recognition and agreement—Searle also points out the necessity of representing them in language.

> In order that something can be money, property, marriage, or government, people have to have appropriate thoughts about it. But in order that they have these appropriate thoughts, they have to have devices for thinking those thoughts, and those devices are essentially symbolic or linguistic.[324]

In this chapter we will explore three distinct aspects of language that play an important role in establishing communication, subjectivity and symbolism. All three of these concepts are essential to the practice of art, and we will explore how language is constitutive of these ideas by looking more specifically at speech, subjects and writing. Furthermore, these topics help to clarify how we as a species separate ourselves from other animal species, and more importantly, how our tendency to separate defines us as a species. As we explore aesthetic separation and the thresholds of art and life, the role of language in facilitating separation is of key importance. Understanding the purpose and functionality of language will help us to establish the mechanisms through which art is practised on with the aid of reflexive and symbolic thought. It will begin to do so by looking at the way in which we as a species use language to differentiate ourselves through thought.

4.2.2. Speech

4.2.2.1. To Name

As humans, we speak for many reasons. In our condition of 'being apart together,' speech offers us a way to communicate and connect with others, a way of externalizing and

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[324] Searle, *Freedom & Neurobiology*, 94.

sharing our interior lives. We use language in other ways, though, in order to relate with and understand the world around us. This chapter is largely based upon an examination of recent texts by Derrida and Agamben, which explore how we use language to distinguish ourselves from other animals. Through their insight it becomes obvious that language is not only used to define and differentiate, but also to establish authority and influence. Derrida looks to the creation narrative of Genesis to explore the originary power of language to exert control, before cautioning about the potential of abstraction that language offers. This is evident in the theorization of art, in the naming and renaming that is constantly practiced in attempts to understand and position movements and periodizations. It is also apparent as we shift our thought from artworks to art, a generalization that uses language to transform real objects into abstract, universal concepts. Returning to the distinction of humans and animals, Agamben explores the influence of the biological taxonomy of Linneaus, a Swedish biologist who used language to identify living species, while distinguishing humans by their reflexive nature. Taxonomy is used in the realm of art too, and we will look at the work of Osborne to describe and define the are movements of the aesthetic regime and the various facets of modernism, all of which relate to our understanding of contemporary art practices. For my purposes, these various uses of language reflect the manner in which art is continually subjected to linguistic analysis in attempts to identify, distinguish, position and challenge. By examining the role of language to establish difference between species, or practices within the history of art, we can begin to see how language is used as a way of differentiating and organizing ourselves within the world around us. Understanding how we separate and distinguish ourselves is an important step to fully appreciate the complex connections between art and life.

Language is a creative and powerful force. In his exploration of the distinction between humans and animals, Derrida examines the biblical story of Genesis to uncover the linguistic mechanisms at play in the creation narrative of Judaism and Christianity. After

making the universe and resting for a day, God creates man—Adam—and gives him authority

over the animals. Derrida notes the importance of man coming *after* animals—following, as it

were—and highlights the manner in which the authority over animals is granted to man

through the act of naming.[325] Power is established within man through spoken language, and

the resounding silence of the animals during this process appears to confirm the truth and

weight of this vocal act. The tradition of naming is repeated to this day, as we name our pets

through spoken acts and use these names to call, command, scold or tame. Derrida attributes a

"deep sadness" to the animal kingdom as a result of their inability to speak or to name

themselves.[326] In terms of art, acts of naming are mandatory. Aside from the naming of

artworks by their authors, which establishes their authority as creators, art historians and

theorists mount elaborate arguments in support of the naming and renaming of artistic

tendencies and movements. Rancière is no exception, and his fabrication of terms such as 'the

aesthetic regime,' aesthetic separation, and 'the aesthetic break' can be seen to function in two

distinct ways. On one hand, the invention of new terminology offers a fresh start to

understanding what something is and how it works, without the distraction of preconceived

notions that existing terminology might impose or limit. This is the creative use of language,

once again demonstrating authority over a subject. Once this new terminology becomes

collectively accepted over the course of time, however, it can become just as restrictive and

controlling as the previous terminology, or it can become collectively accepted to mean

something that wasn't originally intended. As we briefly explore the word 'modernism' in the

coming paragraphs, this possible subversion of language becomes obvious. Sometimes,

though, a new name helps to reposition an ill-conceived, accepted conception of something.

Take, for example, Osborne's effort to replace the label 'contemporary art' with the term

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[325] Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 16.
[326] Ibid., 19.

'postconceptual art.' It is an attempt not only to eliminate a general and somewhat confusing term for a periodization, but to acknowledge the importance that conceptual art strategies and methodologies continue to have on the practice of art at the moment. While the logic behind this periodization will be further explored in Chapter 5.3.4. Contemporary / Postconceptual Art, I for one am comfortable to identify my current practice as postconceptual, with a 'tip of the hat' towards some of my main artistic inspiration.

As Derrida continues to explore how language is used to differentiate humans from animals, he notes that part of the problem is language itself. In particular, he looks at the problematic difference between uncountable nouns (i.e. 'the animal' in general) and countable nouns (i.e. a specific animal). If we consider a parallel situation between 'art' (uncountable) and 'artwork' (countable), we can begin to see the relevance for this thesis. The difficulty is that the subject 'the animal' as a universal singular is in fact no specific animal at all, and yet it conjures the meaning of the entire animal kingdom, apart from humans of course. The problem is that this use of language allows us to group and understand an abstract generalization in a specific way, which in turn allows us to disregard a variety of specific details (i.e. gender or age in terms of animals, or media and dimensions in terms of artworks) that should be taken into account if we are to thoroughly understand any actual (structural) differences between organisms. For this reason I am very careful to differentiate between the word 'art' as an abstraction of the mind and 'artwork' as a real, specific thing or being. Derrida demonstrates his creative knack by developing the word "*animot*," which combines the words "animal" and "*mot*" (meaning "word" in French).[327] As a new word, it avoids any interpretive possibility of 'the animal' in general singular, while simultaneously pointing towards the function of language as it is used to define—or in this case, *to subject*—individual animals and species to anthropomorphization. By subjecting animals and artworks to human

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[327] Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 41.

language through naming and generalization, we impose anthropomorphic meaning upon them. As we examine the idea of the artwork as subject and Other in Chapter 4.2.3. Subjects, the significance of this will become clearer. This imposition of language, as natural as it may be, determines, distinguishes and directs the world around us.

Naming is more than simply establishing power relationships, however. It is through naming that we differentiate and identify the vast array of life with which we share our planet. In the mid-eighteenth century, fifty-five years before Kant published his *Critique of Judgement*, the Sweedish biologist Carl von Linne (a.k.a. Linnaeus) had begun dividing *all* living things into their nomenclatures and taxonomies. In the tenth edition of his *Systema Naturae*, Linnaeus coined the term *Homo sapiens*, which was polemical at the time for two reasons.[328] The first was that he placed humans within the category of 'animal,' disregarding any hierarchy that the prevalent religious thought of the day sought to impose. The second reason was that the Latin words which he chose to define humans didn't follow the physiological binomial that was used to attribute names to other animals and plants. Instead, Linnaeus defined humans by their cognitive faculty of "knowing oneself," effectively describing humans as fundamentally reflexive animals. Agamben once again points out the state of indeterminacy that is implied in this reflexive taxonomy of modern man: "*Homo sapiens*, then, is neither a clearly defined species nor a substance; it is, rather, a machine or device for producing the recognition of the human."[329] In other words, being a member of our species is the capacity of self-recognition *as human* in relation to our non-human ancestors who share the *homo* genus. Rancière's condition of 'being apart together' once again gains relevancy, but this time in relation to interspecies relations. Nonetheless, the biological archive that Linnaeus began during the enlightenment had such influential intellectual repercussions that it can only be rivalled—in biological terms—by the groundbreaking

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[328] Agamben, *The Open*, 25.
[329] Ibid., 26.

discoveries of Darwin's *The Origin of the Species*, which was obviously informed by Linnaeus' initial separations.

The use of language to categorize can also be easily found in historical and theoretical discussions about art. In his recent analysis of modernism, Osborne maps out the art movements that form the aesthetic regime, the term defined by Rancière that spans the art movements from the age of enlightenment to now. For a general overview of the periodization of the aesthetic regime in relation to both Osborne's conception of modernism and the source material of this thesis, see Appendix 2. Osborne separates the main movements and includes the main mediating principles at work during each period and the logical form of each period's key principles.

Periodization	Mediating principle(s)	Logical forms
Classicism	hierarchy of genres	subsumption
Romanticism	primacy of the individual work	fragment
Aestheticism / aesthetic modernism	aesthetic intensities of modern life	aesthetic identity
Modernism of avant-gardes	isms of movements	groups
Formalist modernism	mediums	species
Generic modernism 1	['readymade' as negative meta-medium / vanishing mediator of the destruction of mediums]	proper name
'Contemporary art' / generic modernism 2: dialectic of modernisms	critical *isms* and series	distributive entities

Table E. Periodization of mediating forms.[330]

This chart offers a simple reduction of many pages of art historical and philosophic research into the tendencies of media use and formal structures that have been used by artists and generalized by critics over the past three hundred years. The purpose of Osborne's broad view is to position contemporary art practice in relation to antecedent practices. This is an important contextualization that takes into account the *autopoietic* logic that: "[a]n organism

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[330] Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All*, 86.

is never outside a history, and necessarily always finds itself in a particular state and position as a result of its previous states and positions."[331] As you can see, there are five different conceptions of modernism listed in the periodization provided by Osborne, who borrows Linnaeus' biological nomenclature to define relationships at work within contemporary artistic practice—what Osborne refers to as "generic modernism 2". Referencing Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*, Osborne tries to settle the disparate reality between the universal (abstract) conception of 'art' and the determinate (real) singularity of 'artwork' discussed a few paragraphs ago. As he states: "the challenge is to theorize the unity of the generic concept of art conceptually, as the distributive unity of a historical process of determinate negations."[332] For Osborne, every individual artwork within modernism represents a determinate negation (or set of negations) of 'art'—for example, in order to be modern an artwork must be *new* and perform a temporal logic of negation in relation to its precursors[333]—and thus relies upon an *a priori* conception of 'art' in order to function as an individual 'modern' artwork. The interdependence of artworks and art—the singular and the universal—differentiates the "generic modernism 2" conception of modernism from Osborne's other conceptions based on the theories of Greenberg or the readymades of Duchamp.

Genus	'Art'	Critical distributional unity of the historical totality of works of art
Species	Arts	Afterlife of mediums within 'art'; critical 'isms', individual series and new forms, corresponding to structural negations of the received artistic field
Individuals	Works of art	Ontologically distinctive subject-like entities producing the illusion of autonomous meaning-production through the mediation of determinate negations

Chart D. Generic artistic modernism 2/dialectic of modernisms (historical ontology): a *negation* of historically received (craft-based) mediums; an *affirmation* of new determinate negations of varying aspects of the established artistic field.[334]

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[331] Maturana, *Cognition*, 8.
[332] Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All*, 82.
[333] Ibid., 74.
[334] Ibid., 83.

Osborne acknowledges that problems arise with the term 'modernism' either because it isn't understood as an operative or generative logic, or because we associate the name modernism to one specific facet (i.e. *High* modernism).[335] This conception of contemporary art will be further explored in Chapter 5.3.2. Description – 'The Fragment' and 5.3.3. Autonomy. For now, it is enough to demonstrate how the structural logic of Linnaeus is used to categorize various facets of art practices within the aesthetic regime and modernism, demonstrating once again how language is used to differentiate, define, and position.

In conclusion, the use of language to differentiate humans from other animals offers an example of how we use words to understand through identification and distinction. By attributing words to things, we gain cognitive power over those things, which can be called and manipulated in thought through their representation in language. The power of language was demonstrated by Derrida in the creation narrative of Genesis, where man's naming of the animals was concurrent with his achievement of dominion over them, and their silence foreshadowed their impending domestication. The act of naming is central to artistic practice as well, where artworks obligingly distinguish themselves with a proper name and the associated name of their creator. Authority is established through naming. The theorization and historicization of artistic practice also demonstrate a continued tradition of naming that offers potential new ways of understanding or reconsidering specific topics. One of the key functions of naming is providing an accessible handle for abstract concepts so that things which don't exist physically or are difficult to identify can be more easily represented in thought. An example is art, which is a generalization of *all* artworks, an impossible yet necessary concept upon which contemporary—and postconceptual—artworks rely. This relation of the singular being to the universal generalization is a key movement that aesthetic experience embodies, made possible through language but also present as we consider the

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[335] Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All*, 77.

subject within society and the artwork in relation to art, equally 'together apart.' As art movements are categorized and positioned to highlight various relationships, the use of language is prevalent once again. This is evident in the adoption of Linneaus' taxonomy, which was a very influential conceptualization of the distinctions and relationships of living species. As reflected in the taxonomy of modernism by Osborne, providing a nomenclature of movements and tendencies allows us to grasp a broad perspective in a glance, which facilitates a positioning of art practices in relation to collective trends. As we briefly explored, Osborne's notion of contemporary art requires a preconceived idea of art, an established counterpoint against which artworks must demonstrate some form of novelty to be categorized by the temporal artistic conceptions of 'contemporary' or 'modern'. While our personal conceptions of art may not require language to function as such, language provides an example of how a singular entity like an artwork can become a universal generalization like 'art' through the simple act of being represented by a word. This is how we use language to think,[336] which we explored more thoroughly in Chapter 3.2.3. Thought. For now, though, we can begin to see how language is a distinguishing and authoritative capacity. Not only do we use it to separate ourselves from other animals, but we use it to discern everything and anything, even things that can only ever exist as abstractions. This is how we differentiate and organize ourselves, using language to command and control the world around us. As we continue to explore the power to respond, the importance of language to the practice of art will become all the more noticeable.

4.2.2.2. To Respond

Language endows humanity with the ability to respond, which helps to establish relationships amongst people and forms the basis of our political reality. As Searle notes:

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[336] Nöe, *Strange Tools*, 40-41.

"There are lots of social animals, but man is the only political animal. What has to be added to the fact that we are *social* animals to get the fact that we are *political* animals?"[337] As we will explore in this chapter, language offers us the opportunity to expand and complicate our interpersonal relationships while clarifying our understanding of communicated reality, through which our beliefs and knowledge are shared. We will look once again to Derrida, who connects a lack of response to a lack of responsibility in other animal species. In the absence of responsibility, we can begin to understand how the institutional constructions of human society are largely based on language. In particular, the ability to respond allows us to position ourselves politically in relation to other people and ideas. As we look more closely at the work of Searle, who clarifies epistemological and ontological perspectives in terms of subjectivity and objectivity, we can begin to understand how our own beliefs and knowledge of the world are formed through language and our ability to distinguish between fact and opinion. Finally, we will look at the way in which Rancière connects the political efficacy of art with the capacities to being affected and responding. Since Rancière believes that politics is largely about the ability of being seen and heard,[338] the practice of art becomes the perfect arena in which significance and truth are contested and repositioned. Whether an artwork is understood as a response in itself or is appreciated for the responses that it generates, the political implications of these responses once again demonstrate the relevance of language in establishing the political nature of art.

It is not simply the deprivation of language that distinguishes animals from humans, but rather their inability to respond that defines them—or better yet, *con*fines them. While humans can both respond and react, animals are condemned to instinctive reaction. This has repercussions that extend well beyond individual survival and into the social realm. As Derrida points out, the inability of animals to respond means that animals lack *responsibility*,

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[337] Searle, *Freedom & Neurobiology*, 84.
[338] Tanke, "What is the Aesthetic Regime?" 78.

and are incapable of being responsible.[339] Responsibility thus becomes a distinguishing

quality for humans, an attribute that once again bestows an authority upon humans in terms of

duty and accountability, which is denied to other animals. As Searle notes, this *deontic*

capacity of humans is essential in order to establish collective recognition between

individuals, which in turn enables the 'status functions' that structure our institutional lives.[340]

While pointing out the lack of responsibility in animals, Derrida nonetheless questions the

boundary between "reaction" and "response," which Lacan uses as a firm point of distinction

between humans and animals. While Lacan associates animal communication with fixed

codes that elicit reactions, he permits responses to humans through the recognition of both

semiotic language and the Other, which implies subjective recognition.[341] Animals only react

to things, while humans can react to both things and to other people as beings. Derrida

summarizes the thoughts of Lacan:

> When bees appear to "respond" to a "message," they do not *respond* but *react*;
> they merely obey a fixed program, whereas the human subject responds to the
> other, to the question from or of the other. This discourse is quite literally
> Cartesian. Later, as we shall see, Lacan expressly contrasts *reaction* with *response*
> as an opposition between human and animal kingdoms, in the same way that he
> opposes nature and convention.[342]

The problem, according to Derrida, is that this differentiation of reaction having fixed

meaning and language *not* having fixed meaning is not entirely true. Derrida notes that the

meaning of signs—for example, letters that form words that form sentences—are always

dependent on their position and relation to other signs, meaning that there *is* a "fixity," to use

Derrida's term, that underlies human language as well. While the scope of human language,

and thus response, is much broader than the possibilities of animal reaction, it nonetheless *is*

limited in its functionality. The value or meaning of language is contextual, based on order,

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[339] Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 73.
[340] Searle, *Freedom & Neurobiology*, 92-93.
[341] Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 122-123.
[342] Ibid., 123.

position and relations. As such, the argument of Lacan rests on a matter of amplification, which can ultimately be reduced to the same limitation of meaning because it must be fixed or coded at some point in order to work.[343] This demonstrates that as grandiose as our language use might be, it can be deconstructed to its elemental parts and more easily connect to our existence as genetically coded organisms. Having noted that, the constructions that language facilitates are definitely improvisational and can be seen to provide us with definite advantages over other animal species, especially through our abilities to organize ourselves politically and institutionally.

Our ability to respond—to answer, or to contest—is a crucial element of our political reality. While there are many social species of animals, human beings are the only political animals, and language plays a significant role in establishing this distinguishing capacity.[344] Considering the mechanisms that enable our political reality, Searle notes the importance of language in distinguishing between observer-independent and observer-dependent reality, which separate reality into things that don't require a consciousness to exist (i.e. gravity) and things that do require a consciousness to exist (i.e. money). This takes into account the *autopoietic* intentionality that is characteristic of organisms as they observe and interact with the world, while noting how the act of observation filters and thus changes reality. Another level of distinction is also necessary to consider, since observer-independent and observer-dependent attributes of the world can be distinguished between epistemic objectivity or subjectivity, and ontological objectivity or subjectivity. As Searle describes:

> *Epistemic* objectivity and subjectivity are features of *claims*. A claim is epistemically objective if its truth or falsity can be established independently of the feelings, attitude and preferences, and so on, of the makers and interpreters of the claim. Thus the claim that van Gogh was born in Holland is epistemically objective. The claim that van Gogh was a better painter than Manet is, as they say, a matter of opinion. It is epistemically subjective. On the other hand, *ontological* subjectivity and objectivity are features of *reality*. Pains, tickles, and itches are

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[343] Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 124.
[344] Searle, *Freedom & Neurobiology*, 84.

> ontologically subjective because their existence depends on being experienced by human or animal subject. Mountains, planets and molecules are ontologically objective because their existence is not dependent on subjective experiences.[345]

These are important distinctions to consider as we determine the nature of politics and art, which are observer-dependent and thus ontologically subjective features of our reality, requiring subjects in order to exist. It also helps us to appreciate vocalizations of aesthetic experience, which are epistemically subjective claims that convey ontologically subjective thoughts and feelings. More generally, this categorization of language helps us determine the differences between what we believe and what we know—whether a claim is true or false or a matter of opinion, or if something is only real because of our subjective, human existence, or in spite of it. This language provides us with the tools to distinguish, rationalize and understand, which in turn establishes our social, political and institutional reality. It also allows us as individuals to position ourselves—to make a stand—in relation to others, and responding to someone else's claims as true or false or a matter of opinion is the foundation of our political capacity as subjects. The ability to contest is the political potential to challenge other people, ideas and institutions. In relation to the politics of aesthetic experience, Rancière purports that artworks function through the subjective *re*positioning of subjects. The creation and enjoyment of artworks provide the opportunity for people to become aware of and to alter their subjective positions in the world.[346] Tanke states:

> Aesthetic practices are political because they contest, impact, and alter what can be seen and said. … Aesthetic art is a rejection of the idea that things have a single and definitive meaning. It is therefore one of the means by which the meanings of an object, a body, a policy or a group of people can be contested.[347]

Art from the aesthetic regime gives priority to subjectivity and reflection and thus persistently challenges the authority of established, universal significance. As such, political efficacy is established in artworks through their capacity of being seen and heard, independent of their

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[345] Searle, *Freedom & Neurobiology*, 83.
[346] Tanke, "What is the Aesthetic Regime?" 78.
[347] Ibid., 73.

subject matter. The experience of artworks is political in itself, through the potential to alter the understanding that people have of themselves and their position in relation to the world around them.

In conclusion, our ability to respond endows us with responsibility and separates us from other animals, which are confined to mere reaction. With responsibility, human beings attain both duty and accountability by establishing a unique subjectivity through language. Furthermore, the deontic powers that responsibility bestows upon us enable us to be political beings. As Searle states: "All political power is a matter of status functions, and for that reason all political power is deontic power."[348] As 'status functions' are the collectively accepted attributions of meaning through the establishment of rules and function, language can be seen as a crucial element of our political nature. Language not only allows us to position ourselves in relation to facts and claims, but it empowers us to contest and challenge these facts and claims, and to consider them in broader terms of epistemology and ontology. This helps us to appreciate the political nature of artworks, and more easily understand the claims of Rancière that the practice of art is inherently political. Since Rancière believes that politics is largely the struggle to be seen and heard—which in effect offers the opportunity for your subjective position to be publicly or officially established—artworks are political because their existence as art is conditional on being experienced by people. Furthermore, artworks have the power to stimulate self-awareness and reposition the understanding that observing subjects have of themselves, in part through the ability of artworks to function as a proxy for a subject.[349] Thus, aesthetic experience is not only political in reference to responsibility, but also in terms of our capacity to be *responsive*—adaptable and impressionable in the presence of works of art.

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[348] Searle, *Freedom & Neurobiology*, 98.

[349] The idea of an artwork as "a proxy for a subject" was briefly explored in Chapter 2.3.5. Observation and will be more thoroughly explored in Chapter 5.3. The Fragment.

4.2.3. Subjects

4.2.3.1. The Bio-political Subject

As we explore the role of language in constructing our social and political existence, our perspective on the paradoxical condition of 'being apart together' that Rancière uses to found his theory of aesthetic separation becomes clearer and clearer. Furthermore, we can appreciate the capacities that language provides us as a social and political species, specifically in contrast with the existence of animals that lack the many skills that language provides us with. One of these skills is very basic but fundamental—our ability to establish subjectivity through the use of a linguistic subject. In this chapter we elaborate upon the use of language to enable political agency by examining the importance of the subject in establishing rationality and dignity. This will be done by exploring Derrida's examination of Kant's analysis of Descartes' famous *cogito ergo sum*, the original Cartesian separation between thought and being. We will then look at Agamben's reading of Foucault, who explores the transformation of the human subject to 'vegetable' in the absence of potential subjectivity in the state of clinical death. These considerations help us to appreciate the ways in which language helps to generate subjectivity, and the importance of the subject in establishing our political existence. As we consider the political nature of artistic practice, these deliberations will help us to realize the political function of artworks.

One important thing that language allows humans to do is to identify themselves as subjects—as an active agent in a linguistic sentence. The grammatical subject (I, you, he, she, we, they, it) is necessary to form sentences, and thus to represent thoughts, beyond exclamation.[350] Subjects allow us to differentiate between individuals, groups, or things involved in an action, whether physical or psychological. More importantly, they allow us to distinguish the self from the Other, offering symbolic representations that provide an example

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[350] This is true in English. The Spanish language allows for verb tenses to identify the subject without stating it, although the subject is always implicit and recognizable.

of our subjective independence. According to Agamben, it is this ability to separate, divide and isolate that makes humans capable of distinguishing between humans and animals in the first place.

> The division of life into vegetal and relational, organic and animal, animal and human, therefore passes first of all as a mobile border within living man, and without this intimate caesura the very decision of what is human and what is not would probably not be possible.[351]

Kant determines that the animal is not rational because it lacks the "I think" that is necessary in order to understand and to reason.[352] This, of course, refers to Descartes' *cogito ergo sum*—"I think, therefore I am". If we explore the proposition "I think" more closely, we can see how language allows us to separate the subject from the verb, or the agent *of* the action from the action itself. The space that we leave between the "I" and the "think" is monumental, because in objective reality, the agent and action are never actually separate. Language offers us the ability to conceptualize this separation nonetheless, allowing us to think of ourselves as independent beings in relation to other beings. As we saw in the last chapter, without the rationality upon which understanding and reason function, the animal is incapable of becoming a subject that can uphold duties and enjoy rights, both of which are inherent possibilities for human subjects.[353] Derrida purports that the result of said obligations and rights (which are established and granted through language) is that the life of the rational human can be *an end* in itself—a culmination of intentions, aspirations and purpose. The non-rational animal is denied this opportunity by humans, and the animal is only ever a means and can never be an end, aside from a sacrificial end at the hands of humans.[354] The difference that Kant establishes, according to Derrida, is that in addition to being denied subjectivity, the animal is deprived of dignity—the ability to reflexively value one's own life as an end in

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[351] Agamben, *The Open*, 15.
[352] Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 49-50.
[353] Ibid., 99-100.
[354] Ibid.

itself. As an abstract value established through language, dignity neither correlates with any market nor equates with any price.[355] The use of language, once again, empowers us not only to be independent, but also to be dignified.

Considering how the human subject is understood by modern governmental institutions, Agamben refers to the biopolitics that Foucault championed to explore another interesting aspect of political subjectivity. Moving beyond comparisons of human life with animal life, Agamben emphasizes the use of the medical term "vegetative state" to describe complete lack of cognitive function in human patients with brain trauma. In the absence of brain activity, a human being is incapable of conscious thought and is thus separated from their subjectivity—from the ability to demonstrate their self as an independent subject.[356] While the patient is still alive, their complete lack of self-awareness places them in direct comparison with plant life, while molecular biological and autonomic functions continue to operate and maintain their life in the absence of the molar capacities of consciousness. After a year of stasis, and with the medical assurance that recovery is impossible, family members must take the responsibility themselves to decide whether the unconscious life of their loved one is worth maintaining in a vegetative state. Needless to say, so much of how we define ourselves—specifically as individuals and generally as a society or species—is dependant on the subjective abilities that conscious thought facilitates. If we compare this vegetative state with the practice of anaesthesia, where patients are induced into temporary states of unconsciousness, we can see how this line of thought relates with aesthetics through a negative comparison. As a negation of aesthetic experience, anaesthesia is defined by three main functions that combine to alleviate a patient's discomfort during invasive surgical procedures. These include *analgesia*, which provides relief from pain; *paralysis*, which relaxes muscles and limits movement; and, *amnesia*, or memory loss, which is achieved by

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[355] Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 99-100.
[356] Agamben, *The Open*, 14-15.

rendering the patient unconscious.[357] Anaesthesia can consist of any combination of these three factors, and is further distinguished between local and general, only the latter of which involves unconsciousness. If we look at the opposite of anaesthesia, we are faced with a heightened form of 'aesthesia' that could be refined to feeling (pain or sensation), moving (or locomotion), and consciousness (or awareness). These three human capacities most definitely distinguish us from plant life, and furthermore, they help us to focus upon the defining operations of aesthetic experience. While these topics will be more thoroughly discussed in Chapter 5. Artworks / Art, it is obvious that they help us to understand how our capacity for subjectivity, which is facilitated through biological operations, is the foundation for our political existence as human individuals within society.

In conclusion, political capacities are subjective capacities, and without the possibility of demonstrating selfhood, political responsibility is denied. Subjectivity is established and demonstrated through language, which enables us to think of an agent as separate from its actions and in relation with other agents and actions. One result of this separation is a sense of independence, which we as individual subjects demonstrate politically through our decisions and acceptance of responsibility for those decisions. As subjects, we attribute a sense of purpose to our lives—an end, as Derrida describes it—which gives us a sense of dignity that we deny to other animals. If we become unable to demonstrate our subjectivity, however, we too are stripped of self-worth. This is evident in the case of patients in vegetative states, whose lives must be negotiated in the absence of both their consciousness and the hope of their recovery. In the situation of being equated with plant life, the value of our human consciousness and subjectivity becomes obvious in the ways that we differentiate our lives from other beings. The meaning of aesthetic experience becomes evident when we conduct a similar comparison, examining the medical practice of anaesthesia, which can be understood

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[357] Tim Newman, "General anesthesia: Side effects, risks, and stages," *Medical News Today*, https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/265592.php (accessed Sept. 14, 2018).

as the negation of aesthetic capacities. Since anaesthesia functions in terms of relieving pain, limiting movement and eliminating memory or consciousness, aesthetics can be understood as causing sensation, stimulating movement and generating awareness and association. All of these elements of aesthetic experience are dependent on the subjective capacities of an individual human being, who establishes their subjectivity through biological operation and cognitive abilities. As language both enables subjective thought and facilitates political practice, we can further appreciate the connection between the biopolitical subject and the political function of artworks.

4.2.3.2. The Legal Subject

Legal subjects can be identified and categorized in different ways, and attain rights and obligations that are granted or restricted under various rules of law. Since subjectivity is largely identified and proven through language use, the inability to speak excludes animals from enjoying the rights and obligations of a legal subject. Language, as such, is both the characteristic and the methodology for proving subjectivity, empowering human beings to separate themselves from other forms of life and to deny other species of the rights and privileges that selfhood legally implies for us. As we will explore in this chapter, human subjectivity was established and has been upheld through the transmission of Descartes' *cogito ergo sum*—"I think, therefore I am"—which has been used by many great philosophers to explore the relationship of the subject to thought, reason, being and the unconscious. This subjective foundation of human thought, however, is not without its problems, suggesting that the basis of human society is not as isolated or pure as often believed. Looking at a recent court case that bestows some human rights on an orang-utan, we will examine the blurring of the boundary between human and animal in terms of legal rights. Examining how the system of law uses language to make arguments and build cases, the connection of law and aesthetics

becomes obvious as they both rely on the subjective judgement of individuals. As court cases culminate in a requisite subjective decision, the value and power of the subject is once again upheld through the use of language. Understanding how language empowers us as a species and facilitates our separation from other species will help us to better understand the mechanisms with which we establish our unique political abilities and understanding. It will also help us to better understand the nature of our subjectivity, through which we exercise our aesthetic capacities as humans.

Law, which is established and functions through language use, also has a role to play in distinguishing human subject from animal subject. As Derrida examines the work of various philosophers, he develops a sequence of thought that establishes human rights upon the basis of the human subject, the possibility of an "I," while making animal rights problematic through their inability to claim themselves as a self. Beginning with Descartes, Derrida shows how a series of influential thinkers have helped to deny animals the ability to be legal subjects because of their inability to speak and respond, and their inability to produce or understand signs outside of basic instinct. As humans have these abilities, they gain the legal right to subject animals to atrocities that humans are legally protected from. From a legal perspective, the *cogito ergo sum* of Descartes establishes the foundation of the subject (or the ability to proclaim oneself as subject) as the underlying element that differentiates humans from animals.[358] Exploring the role that this grammatical subject has had in maintaining the distinction of human and animal, Derrida develops a lineage of philosophical influence that stems from the subject "I" in the "I think therefore I am" of Descartes. To begin with, when Kant relates the self to reason, which accompanies every representation, he bases it upon the subject "I" in Descartes' "I think".[359] As the judgement involved in aesthetic experience is

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[358] Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 89-90.
[359] Ibid.

entirely based upon *subjectivity*, the importance of this grammatical subject "I" becomes obvious. As Derrida states:

> "This capability, this power to have the "I" takes the high ground; it erects, it raises man infinitely above all the other beings living on earth. This infinite elevation identifies a subject in the strict sense, for immediately after Kant emphasizes the fact that "I" signifies the unity of a consciousness that remains the same throughout all its modification. The "I" is the "I think," the originary unity of the transcendental apperception that accompanies every representation. The subject that is man is a person, "one and the same person," therefore, who will be the subject of reason, morality, and the law."[360]

Next, Derrida claims that Heidegger uses Descartes' "I am" to found his idea of *Dasein*, which is determined through a deconstruction of Cartesian subjectivity.[361] Derrida is referring to Heidegger's attempt to eliminate the space, or separation, that consciousness permits us to think and, as a result, experience ourselves as separate from our environment. As we saw in Chapter 3.4.4. The Open, this is an important concept in understanding how our context greatly influences our cognition of 'being-in-the-world.' Continuing his investigation of Cartesian influence, Derrida then speaks of Lacan's psychological subject as being inherited from Descartes, and although it is based upon the Freudian unconscious, it is still rooted in the Cartesian subject who *is* as a result of thinking.[362] Once again we can see how the grammatical subject enables us to separate ourselves as subjects, but this time it is in relation to the Other. As clarified in Chapter 5.3.3. Autonomy, the idea of the Other is another significant factor in understanding aesthetic experience, especially as we consider the artwork as a substitute of a human subject. In terms of the legal subject, Derrida makes it obvious how so much of our current society and culture, whether inherited or reproduced, is still based upon Descartes famous declaration, "I think, therefore I am." The power of the grammatical subject, especially the "I," is irrefutable, especially as we appreciate how our political lives are based upon the subjectivity that language helps to provide us. As explored in Chapter

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[360] Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 92.
[361] Ibid., 89-90.
[362] Ibid.

3.2.2. Parallelism, this is a problematic foundation upon which our modern society is based, for the *cogito ergo sum* implies a division of mind and body, and this division is in fact illusory.[363] This is the basis of Damasio's revolutionary book, *Descartes' Error*. Nonetheless, Derrida's ancestry of Cartesian influence makes it clear that the separation implied in the perceived division of mind and body forms the basis of a large part of our cultural inheritance, which includes our legal consideration of the subject. Human rights remain a privilege for those who are capable of identifying themselves as human subjects.

Eyal Weizman explores this boundary between human rights and animal rights by exploring a recent court case in Argentina in which an orang-utan ape was declared to be a "non-human person" that was being unjustly denied of her liberty in a zoo.[364] While human rights purists defended the boundary between human and animal based on differences of language ability and inability, animal rights activists made their arguments based on similarities between the anatomical and cognitive proximity of apes to humans.[365] As Weiman states:

> In recent years, primatologists have successfully mapped traits and proven characteristics as complex as mental and emotional consciousness, self-awareness, compassion, causal and logical reasoning—previously thought to be uniquely human—as existing in these 'almost human' creatures.[366]

Furthermore, it has been clearly demonstrated that some apes have language capabilities, which was confirmed in the adoption of non-vocal human sign language and pictorial language, and has supported claims that the orang-utan has its own non-human language in its natural habitat.[367] As noted in Chapter 4.2.2. Speech, the distinction of the species *homo sapiens* was fairly indeterminate to begin with in terms of nomenclature. Animal to human

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[363] Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, 224.
[364] Eyal Weizman, "Are They Human?", *e-flux Architecture - e-flux*, https://www.e-flux.com/architecture/superhumanity/68645/are-they-human/ (accessed June 29, 2019).
[365] Ibid.
[366] Ibid.
[367] Ibid.

organ transplants are the clear example of this imprecise border, with the baboon heart transplant recipient "Baby Fae"—the first infant xenotransplant procedure performed in 1984—being the most poignant example, despite its brief duration of success.[368] This blurry boundary between human and animal demonstrates the importance of language in establishing the arguments that determine and challenge existing laws that maintain a strict separation. As Thomas Keenan and Eyal Weizman point out in their exploration of forensic aesthetics, lawyers must argue their cases in relation to measures of probability and margins of error. The implementation of the law is never a mechanical operation or a simple calculation, and as such, a final decision of judgment is always required in legal cases. If we take into account Kant's *Critique of Judgement*, we can see just how much our judicial institutions rely on the functioning of aesthetics. Judges in the court of law need to be impartial and make their decisions based on their powers of reflexive subjectivity and the evidence presented to them. While the outcome of aesthetic judgment isn't as profound or severe as court rulings, focusing more on notions of taste and beauty or subjective pleasure and thought, they both rely on the faculty of judgment and thus their operation and operating conditions are the same. Furthermore, the court of law is a naturally creative environment, since lawyers must combine evidence and construct lines of reasoning in order to *make* their cases. This likens the making of facts with the making of artefacts, which are created in an attempt to convince the judge through the senses, including common sense. "The word *conviction* thus articulates the legal verdict with the subjective sensation of confirmed belief, of being convinced."[369] Belief, in the end, is all about subjective thought. As it becomes apparent how judgment connects legal and aesthetic practices through the primacy of the subject, the boundary that separates humans

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[368] Larry Kidder, "Stephanie's Heart: The Story of Baby Fae | LLUH News," *Loma Linda University Health*, https://news.llu.edu/patient-care/stephanie-s-heart-story-of-baby-fae (accessed February 19, 2019).

[369] Thomas Keenan and Eyal Weizman, *Mengele's Skull: The Advent of a Forensic Aesthetics*, (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012), 23-4.

from other animals, or culture from nature, becomes clearer too. It is a separation that we establish through language, an argument that excludes animals from legal rights based on their inability to make a case for their own subjectivity.

In conclusion, language is the characteristic that we possess *and* the methodology that we use to prove our subjectivity. This, in turn, empowers us as a species to separate ourselves from other forms of life and to deny the rights and privileges that we enjoy to other species. Nonetheless, as we saw in this chapter, the human subjectivity that we establish through the *cogito ergo sum* of Descartes has a defect in its implied separation of body and mind—a separation that is illusory, as we explored in Chapter 3.2.2. Parallelism. A lot of recent evidence suggests that not only is this separation of body and mind faulty, but also the supposed separation between humans and other animals. This is evident in the court case that bestowed human rights to an orang-utan, a non-human subject. This not only questions our understanding of the legal subject, but it highlights the ways in which the legal system operates through language use and aesthetic thought. Since lawyers use language to make arguments and build cases, and court cases culminate in a requisite subjective decision, the connection of law and aesthetics becomes obvious on the basis of subjective judgement, where the value and power of the subject is once again upheld through the use of language. This demonstration of how language empowers us as a species to distinguish ourselves from other species shows how fundamental and significant subjectivity is to us as a species. In consideration of aesthetic separation, the dependence of subjectivity on language shows how inherently divisive it is in the first place.

4.2.3.3. Subject of the Signifier

As any good anarchist would ask, why do we need laws? The answer, of course, is to protect ourselves from each other. Human beings are complicated, and our capacity for

dishonesty is yet another distinguishing feature of our species. In this chapter we will consider the subject once again as the distinguishing factor between humans and other animals, but this time we will do so by looking at the ability to recognize oneself as 'the subject of the signifier.' This is an expression that Derrida finds in the work of Lacan, who uses it to explore the psychological recognition of the Other. While attributing this capacity to humans, Lacan denies it in animals because of their supposed inability to cover their own tracks. Humans, on the other hand, are able to recognize the potential meaning of the marks that are left in the world, and an implications of this, according to Lacan, is our capacity to "pretend pretence." If we consider the ability to fake, and then duplicate it to achieve 'faking to fake,' the relationship of reflexive trickery to the practice of art begins to undeniably appear. If we consider the condition that artworks be *artificial*—that they be made by a human rather than occurring naturally—our ability to deceive our self and each other becomes a fascinating prerequisite for artistic practice. The representational nature of mimesis, which is a conventional tradition of artistic practice, certainly relates with this ability to pretend pretence as well. It is our biological nature to imitate—that is how we learn, after all—and our capacity to deceive not only defines us as a species but also structures the practice of art.

Derrida further explores the separation of human beings and animals by examining Lacan's ideas of the unconscious and how it relates to both the subject and to language, including the abstraction of language and the abstract thought that it enables. As stated earlier, Derrida's problem with Lacan's distinction of human and animal is that his idea of the conscious and unconscious subject is based upon Descartes' *cogito ergo sum*. Derrida states that while Lacan attributes the unconscious to humans, he denies it to animals largely because they are incapable of recognizing the Other. "[T]he animal has neither unconscious nor language, nor the other, except as an effect of the human order, that is by contagion,

appropriation, domestication."[370] In effect, Lacan denies meaning to the animal, unless of course it is achieved through anthropomorphic means. He proves his theory with an interesting observation: animals never intentionally cover their own tracks. Humans are the only species that have demonstrated the ability to do so, and according to Lacan, this inability of animals to erase their own tracks demonstrates a few important things. Not only are animals limited in their ability to identify or to recognize—*to know*—the significance of the marks that they make in their environment, but they are also unable to be the "subject of the signifier,"[371] which would necessitate adding reflexivity to the equation. Derrida states:

> to be subject of the signifier is also to be a subjecting subject, a subject as *master*, an active and deciding subject of the signifier, having in any case sufficient mastery to be capable of pretending to pretend and hence of being able to put into effect one's power to destroy the trace.[372]

The agency of the self, according to Derrida, is based upon the ability to be a reflexive "subject of the signifier," which in essence is to recognize oneself as a *self*. It is also about recognizing one's affect on the environment; one's ability to interact with and alter the world.

While we have already explored the idea of self quite thoroughly in Chapter 3.2.4. The Self, a basic summary would be helpful in this linguistic context. The "I" in the "I think, therefore I am," could be anyone, yet it denotes a specific person, the person who thinks it or claims it. The subject "I" is an auto-deictic term, which means that its significance is derived from its context. In stating "I", any person establishes themselves as a subject, an individual, and a self. In essence, a self is a person capable of reflexive recognition or auto-identification. Human languages exist through the use of symbols and signifiers, where spoken sounds and visual or tactile marks attain significance through collective acceptance. As a self learns and as a self remembers it gains both history and meaning, and it is through this history and consistency of meaning that a self is established. It is not that other animals can't learn,

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370 Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 121.
371 Ibid., 120.
372 Ibid., 130.

remember or have a personal history, and Lacan acknowledges the strategic pretence that animals are capable of as warriors, predators, persecutors or seducers.[373] Nonetheless, they are unable to recognize themselves, their sounds or their marks *in a symbolic way*. This is something that humans do naturally, something that language enables and makes certain.

> According to Lacan it is that type of lie, that deceit, and that pretence in the second degree of which the animal would be incapable, whereas the "subject of the signifier," within the human order, would possess such a power and, better still, would emerge as subject, instituting itself and coming to itself as subject *by virtue of this power*, a second-degree reflexive power, a power that is conscious of deceiving by pretending to pretend.[374]

What Derrida suggests in this sentence is that we attain subjectivity by deceiving ourselves that we are subjects, and through this self-deception we are capable of identifying the deceit of others. The implications of this should not be taken lightly, especially considering the magnitude of the social institutions that are built upon the foundation of the subject. This relates with the capacity that our consciousness has for illusion, which we explored in Chapter 3.7. Consciousness. Nonetheless, recognizing your footprints and deciding that you don't want others to see them is a perfect example of how human beings understand the potential meaning of their marks, and Derrida asserts that the complex understanding that this demonstrates helps to make us unique as a species. "It is by means of a power to pretend a pretence that one accedes to Speech, to the order of Truth, to the symbolic order, in short, to the order of the human."[375] Through our capacity to be reflexively dishonest, we enable our potential to understand truth.

The connection between artifice, deception and art becomes clearer if we consider an artistic example of *erasing tracks* or *pretending pretence*, such as Robert Rauschenberg's

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[373] Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 127-128.
[374] Ibid., 128.
[375] Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 131.

"Erased de Kooning Drawing" (1953),[376] where the artist's creative act was the erasure of an existing drawing by another artist. There is definitely an acknowledgement of reflexivity at play in this artwork, which is an inspiration for project I created for the practical research in Chapter 6.3. *Cover Your Tracks*. Rauschenberg recognizes that art and life are distinct and yet related, as recognized by his intention to position his practice "in the gap between art and life."[377] One important difference between the two is the neutrality of nature and the marks that human beings make, which can be interpreted by others to have meaning because we understand them ourselves to have communicative or symbolic potential. The misleading intention of covering your tracks uses mimesis to represent nature, which demonstrates the duplicitous nature at the heart of mimetic representation. According to Rancière:

> This is what *mimesis* means: the concordance between the complex of sensory signs through which the process of *poiesis* is displayed and the complex of the forms of perception and emotion through which it is felt and understood—two processes which are united by the single Greek word *aisthesis*.[378]

Rancière describes the aesthetic break and the shift from the mimetic regime to the aesthetic regime of art as the collapse of the connection between *poiesis* and *aiesthesis*, where creation and sensation are no longer interdependent. He uses the Greek theatre as an example of artistic tradition, where the action on the stage was directly understood by the audience because of a continuity between signs and bodies. In the aesthetic regime, the deceptive nature of artifice is recognized with a willing suspension of disbelief, where the subject knows it isn't true but temporarily believes it's true for the purpose of enjoyment.[379] It is also

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[376] Robert Rauschenburg, *Erased de Kooning Drawing*, 1953, traces of drawing media on paper with label and gilded frame, 64.14 cm x 55.25 cm x 1.27 cm, San Francisco, U.S.A., SFMOMA. https://www.sfmoma.org/artwork/98.298/ (accessed September 14, 2019).

[377] Liz Jobey, "Robert Rauschenberg: in the gap between art and life," *FT Magazine / Financial Times Online*, (November 18, 2016). https://www.ft.com/content/63f68508-ac60-11e6-9cb3-bb8207902122 (accessed August 7, 2019).

[378] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 60.

[379] Lexico Dictionaries, "Suspend Disbelief | Definition of Suspend Disbelief by Lexico," https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/suspend_disbelief (accessed Sept. 9, 2019).

a realization that artistic intentionality can never prescribe a specific effect because it can never escape its deceptive impetus, the subject. Within the aesthetic regime of art, what is astonishing is that pretending pretence positions artworks within the realm of truth, as though they were two negatives that cancel each other to become a positive. While we will study this more closely in Chapter 4.7. Autonomy, our capacity for pretending pretence is based upon our ability to self-identify as 'subject of the signifier.' Considering the deceptive human tendency that underlies mimesis and trickery, we can begin to understand the enjoyment that the practice of art provides us. We are not disappointed by the deceit of artifice because we expect it. In this way, even an erased drawing can provide us with sensational pleasure.

In conclusion, not only does dishonesty distinguish humans from other animals, but it connects the practice of art to the imitative nature of mimesis and representation. By looking at the ability to recognize oneself as 'the subject of the signifier' we can see how human subjectivity forms the basis of recognizing meaning. While animals are incapable of covering their own tracks, human beings are able to recognize the potential meaning of the marks that they leave in the world. Lacan bases this on our capacity to pretend pretence, a multiplication of false display that can only be reflexively understood. In relation to the representative nature of artistic practice, where artifice functions through simulation and symbolism, we can appreciate the deceptive foundation that mimetic acts entail. The artificial requirement of artworks suggests that we take great pleasure in being deceived, and deceiving ourselves, but only when we can anticipate the impending trickery. At the root of this deception is the human subject, who is capable of recognizing deception because of the inherent duplicity at the root of subjectivity itself. Ironically, however, pretending pretence leads us to appreciate the instability of our subjective truth, and the truth of the world that selfhood facilitates. Artworks, in all of their misleading layers, enable us to recognize our truth.

4.2.4. Writing

4.2.4.1. Mute Speech

As we explore the relationship between language and aesthetic experience, the symbolic nature of written language and artworks are an obvious point of connection. Moving from direct to indirect forms of interpersonal communication, we encounter symbols that function through representation and meaning. While this relates to Rancière's conception of translating 'sense to sense,' it also demonstrates the combination of earthly and manipulated materials that compose the sensory fabric of our world. To explore these connections and combinations, we will look at Rancière's book *The Aesthetic Unconscious*, which explores how Freud's ideas on the unconscious relate with aesthetic experience. To begin, we will explore the nature of writing as a carrier of thought and non-thought, a paradoxical idea that demonstrates the uncertainty of meaning at the heart of the 'aesthetic realm.' We will then look to the work of Novalis, a German philosopher who reveals the possibility of meaning in all objects, on condition that they be understood in terms of the history that they imply in their material and form, and that they enter into human narrative. The relation of these ideas, which Rancière uses to explore the functionality of written language, is obviously relevant to our understanding of the functionality of the artwork, which: "remains somewhere between the *cry* of the suffering and struggling people and the 'earth's song', between a voice of human division and a melody of cosmic—inhuman—harmony."[380] In our search to understand the nature of the aesthetic experience of artworks, written language is an excellent point of comparison. The symbolic nature at the base of writing provides the perfect example of how artworks function through their form, interpretation and meaning.

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[380] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 57.

Rancière's argument that the human unconscious is relevant to aesthetics and the practice of art rests on his paradoxical idea that there exists a "thought that does not think."[381] With written words or artworks in mind, this idea is fairly easy to grasp, as words and artworks can be considered as the results or products of human thought—conscious decisions made and actions carried out that result in a physical entity—that act as a container or holder of antecedent human thought. A second and more difficult idea to understand, which is implicit in this last idea, is Rancière's conception that there is non-thought in thought.[382] This can be understood as the absence of thought that thought implies simply by functioning, or as the unconscious element that is always present in consciousness. Casey Ford expands upon these notions by describing two ways we might conceive of this 'unthought in thought.'[383] In the first case, the unthought in aesthetic experience reflects a reality that is partially independent of the subject and object because it is based upon the affects of the experience. As defined by Deleuze in *What is Philosophy?,* "Sensations, percepts, and affects are *beings* whose validity lies in themselves and exceeds any lived. They could be said to exist in the absence of man because man, as he is caught in stone, on the canvas, or by words, is himself a compound of percepts and affects."[384] Secondly, aesthetics is founded upon the 'unthought' condition of human consciousness that is established prior to any experience, which connotes the underlying physiology upon which aesthetics depends. When we think about written words or artworks as examples, there is always some unconscious element brought forth through the writer or artist who produces it, just as there is residual non-thought in the result of their decisions and actions. After all, not *everything* can be considered when creating, and this can be understood as non-thought present in thought. If we remember Luhmann's description of the form of observation (see chapter 1.6. Observation)—the "this-and-not-that"

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[381] Rancière, *The Aesthetic Unconscious*, 32.
[382] Ibid., 28.
[383] McCullagh and Ford, "The Desert Below," 158.
[384] Deleuze, *What is Philosophy?,* 164.

that necessarily separates the distinguished from the non-distinguished—we see a perfect

reflection of Rancière's notion of non-thought in thought. Rancière describes a power that

exists in this polarity of thought in non-thought, and non-thought in thought, and uses written

language as a means to explore it.

> Writing refers not only to a form of manifestation of speech but more fundamentally to an idea of speech itself and its intrinsic power. It is well known that for Plato writing designated not only the materiality of the written sign on a material support, but a specific status of speech. He considered writing to be a mute *logos*, speech that is incapable of saying what it says differently or of choosing not to speak. It can neither account for what it proffers nor discern those whom it is or is not appropriate to address. This speech, simultaneously mute and chatty, can be contrasted with speech that is action, discourse guided by a signification to be transmitted and a goal to be achieved.[385]

For Rancière, this contradictory nature of writing—to speak and be silent at the same time, to

know and not know what is being communicated—makes it a perfect metaphor for what he

calls the "aesthetic revolution."[386]

Exploring the relationship between thought and non-thought that is implicit in writing

and aesthetics, Rancière goes further to explore two major influences that contribute to this

understanding. The first is that "everything speaks," an idea conceived by the poet-

mineralogist Novalis, who was part of a group of German philosophers known as the Jena

Romantics (who will examined more closely in Chapter 5.3. 'The Fragment'). While both

written language and artworks imply human production, this is not a necessary condition for

something to speak or have meaning. As Novalis states: "[e]very sensible form, beginning

from the stone or the shell, tells a story."[387] Thinking back to the contextual logic of

autopoiesis, this adds narrative to the idea that everything exists in the present as the result of

its previous circumstances.[388] For Rancière, this denotes the possibility of meaning that every

inanimate object implicitly carries in its matter and form. The idea of traces or tracks is very

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[385] Rancière, *The Aesthetic Unconscious*, 32-33.
[386] Ibid., 33.
[387] Ibid., 34.
[388] Maturana, *Cognition*, 8.

relevant here, and it is important to understand that traces can be left and tracks can be made by living and non-living sources. Returning to the idea of the unconscious, Rancière compares the methodical questioning that Freud espouses in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, which contends that nothing is insignificant and every detail denotes a mark, a meaning.[389] This brings us to the second influence that Rancière employs to help understand the polarity of thought and non-thought in aesthetics: "in order for the banal to reveal its secret, it must first be mythologized."[390] This, of course, brings us back to language, back to the realm of human action and thought. This returns us to aesthetics, to recognition and creation, to communication and understanding, to sensation and feeling. Anything can gain significance through the communal act of revelation. This, of course, is what making art is all about, and written language offers a perfect parallel to better understand this functionality. Rancière summarizes as follows:

> The aesthetic unconscious, consubstantial with the aesthetic regime of art, manifests itself in the polarity of this double scene of mute speech: on the one hand, a speech written on the body that must be restored to a linguistic signification by a labor [sic] of deciphering and rewriting; on the other, the voiceless speech of a nameless power that lurks behind any consciousness and any signification, to which voice and body must be given.[391]

Looking at the operation of writing and reading, we can see how letters and words come to have meaning through the recognition of their material and form, and their existence within human narrative tradition. This of course implies learning. Speech comes quickly and naturally to humans through imitation, but to read and write takes longer, and we must learn to connect visual forms with sounds and meanings in order to be capable of reading and writing. This points towards the tradition of art that precedes our capacity for art, and the assertion that an artwork can never be understood outside of context.

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[389] Rancière, *The Aesthetic Unconscious*, 36-37.
[390] Ibid.
[391] Ibid., 41-42.

Written language provides a window into the symbolic functioning of artworks. As indirect forms of communication, artworks combine materials of the earth and the form of their creation, and the traces that are embodied can be interpreted and read, just like a written text. And just like sentences, there are implicit and explicit details. Rancière develops his idea of the aesthetic unconscious by showing the existence of non-thought in thought, a paradoxical idea that connotes various things. For one, it demonstrates the impossibility of authors and artists of being completely in control and conscious of their effects as they create. As indirect forms of communication that need to be interpreted, much the same way that Freud interprets dreams, artworks are also subject to the aesthetic separation that this interpretation involves. Aesthetic experience involves the translation of 'sense to sense,' and this implies that nothing can be guaranteed to be interpreted in a specific way. The idea of non-thought in thought reflects the idea that our physiology and unconscious have a transparent effect on aesthetic experience. This is reflected in the form of observation, where a distinction separates the focus of attention from that which is disregarded, and implicitly connects the distinguished to the non-distinguished. Once again a being's inability to escape its context becomes evident. Acknowledging that everything has potential meaning, Rancière demonstrates the process through which significance is established and conveyed, through the material and form that the history of every object displays, and through the mythologizing of objects and their deciphered histories. By penetrating the realm of human thought and becoming language, symbolic meaning is both established and conveyed.

4.2.4.2. Mark-making

Moving beyond the inherent symbolism at the root of orthographic functionalism, the relationship between writing and language offers an interesting model for the organizational operation of artistic practice. Focusing on Nöe's organizational theory of art, this chapter will

explore the ways in which writing is more than a mere transcription of verbal language, but rather a form through which we think with language. Writing offers a reflexive and organizational structure for verbal language to be recorded, transmitted and considered. Furthermore, writing transforms how verbal language is practiced, and the relationship between the two forms of language creates a transformative feedback loop that establishes both the functional and transformative nature of language. Nöe uses this as a model for the metamorphic nature of artistic practice, where two levels of organizational activities provide a reflexive functionality for writing and artworks. The first level is the basic level of organized activities, such as seeing or drawing. The second level uses the first level activities as its raw material, exploring the nature of the basic activities and, in doing so, the nature of how we as humans organize ourselves in the world. This organizational model for artistic practice offers a different perspective for appreciating how contemporary artists incorporate everyday life to create artworks and new relations within society. Furthermore, it offers a transformative structure upon which we can better understand the influential and transitory relationships that artworks have with tradition. Both of these are key concerns of Rancière's aesthetic regime, which makes an exploration of writing and language a relevant perspective to examine.

Just like Rancière, Nöe asserts a direct connection between written language, art and aesthetics. In fact, he claims that both art and philosophy "are bent" on the invention of writing, implying that not only is there a relationship between writing and art, but that art *presupposes* the invention of writing.[392] His argument begins by asserting that writing does not simply depict sound, but rather, it represents language.[393] An example is the phonetic alphabet, which is not the alphabet we use when we write words, but rather it's the alphabet we use to signify the pronunciation of word elements. As well—in the English language at least—the same letter can have different sounds depending on its context. Take, for example,

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[392] Nöe, *Strange Tools*, 37.
[393] Ibid., 34.

the letter "s", which sounds differently when you say "this is" out loud. The "this" carries an "s" sound and "is" carries a "z" sound, and this variation is the same for many letters and their myriad possible combinations. Nöe asserts: "We do not write to record language. Like language itself, *writing is to think with.*"[394] Writing began with scoring, a simple way of annotating or counting so that we could frame problems or think about phenomena differently.[395] Nonetheless, speech and writing are obviously related, and our use of them in contemporary society is such that establishing precedence of one over the other has little relevance. Sure, our hominid ancestors probably attributed meaning to sounds before attributing meaning to marks, and today children learn to speak well before they are able to read and write. Nöe states that despite this logic, speech and writing are so intertwined in our contemporary lives that they are simply two different aspects of one inseparable idea, language.

As we saw in Chapter 2.3.5. Organization, Nöe builds his organizational theory of art in contemporary society by distinguishing between levels of human activity, with the first division between unorganized and organized activities. Focusing on *organized* human activities, which is where we find the practice of art, Nöe further separates between first order and second order activities. To briefly illustrate this division once again, first order activities are things that we do naturally, and second order activities are things that we do to help think about or better understand first order activities. The best example that Nöe offers defines dance as a first order activity, and choreography as its second order activity. Dance is natural, and choreography is a way of organizing dance so that we can see and understand it in a different way. A second order activitiy can be thought of as an ideology, which Nöe describes as: "a way of thinking about an activity that so permeates the activity that we can no longer

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[394] Nöe, *Strange Tools*, 40-41.
[395] Ibid.

really differentiate them."[396] The relationship between first and second order activities is so symbiotic and influential that second order activities "loop back" to alter how first order activities are carried out. This modification of first order activities in return changes the second order activity, establishing a reflexive loop of action, thought and modification. Going back to speech, writing and language, Nöe proposes that we:

> think of the relation of the arts and philosophy (second-order practices) to their raw material (first-order activities) as analogous to the relation of writing to speech. Writing is invented by speakers to model how they speak, or to represent language to themselves. The availability of this very image of language serves to change and reorganize the way we speak in the first place.[397]

With this feedback loop of influence established between first and second order organized activities, we can look back to unravel Nöe's claim that art and philosophy are "bent on" writing. What he means is that as second order activities, both art and philosophy arise when first order activities are recognized as reflexive concerns, for themselves. "Which is to say when they fully become what they are, that is to say, organized activities that are governed by a self-conception of those activities themselves (i.e., by an ideology)."[398] In terms of art, we can think of picture-making as a first order activity and art as a second order activity. There are a lot of different ways that we can make pictures, and there are a lot of different reasons for making pictures, but not *all* of these can be considered to be art. To be considered as art, a second order activity—in this case, picture-making—needs to function in a reflexive way so that the ideology of picture-making or picture-viewing becomes the subject of the picture-making—the theme behind the picture's creation—in order to see or understand the actions of picture-making and picture-viewing in a new way, differently or more clearly than before.[399] All pictures invite you to see something, but not all pictures invite you to contemplate their making. This is the realm of art as a second order human activity.

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[396] Nöe, *Strange Tools*, 42.
[397] Ibid., 37.
[398] Ibid., 42.
[399] Ibid., 43.

The reflexive organizational theory of art presented by Nöe mirrors the operational conditions of autopoiesis very well. Just as we are organized reflexively as living organisms, so too is the practice of art. Considering the feedback loop structure of the different levels of organization, one is easily reminded of the separation between the molecular and molar levels of life, one operational and the other intentional and observational. In Nöe' consideration of artistic practice, the molecular level of operation would be represented by the basic or natural ways in which we organize ourselves, and the molar operation would represent the 'bigger picture' exploration of our basic organizational lives. In relation to Rancière's conception of aesthetic separation, Nöe's theory offers a new way to understand how artists "induce alterations in the space of everyday life, generating new forms of relations."[400] If the true material of artworks is the realm of first-order activities, as opposed to physical materials like marble, acrylic paints or film, then the reflection of life in art becomes easy to see, and impossible to avoid.[401] If the raw material of art is always the organizational nature of humanity, then the practice of art is forever bound in contiguity with life. Human life, after all, is an extension of the reflexive and organizational impetus at the foundation of *autopoietic* theory. Everything in life comes down to principles of conservation and adaptation and the order that they call forth. Furthermore, the reflexive feedback loop that Nöe illustrates— where the second-order activities return to alter the first-order activities, which in sequence shift the second-order activities—offers us a model for understanding the relationship that artworks have with art in terms of tradition. While artworks are always created in relation to antecedent traditions of art, every artwork nonetheless changes the tradition by extending it further, which in turn influences a shift in traditions to come. The feedback loop model of artistic practice thus offers a mechanism for considering the aesthetic break that Rancière speaks of, where aesthetic thought caused an alteration in the tradition of artistic practice,

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[400] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 53.
[401] Nöe, *Strange Tools*, 37.

both its creation and appreciation. While artworks consist of many more facets of operation, the comparison between writing and language helps to situate the practice of art within the realm of human life and within the transformative progression of artistic tradition.

4.2.5. Conclusion to Language

Not only is language a defining characteristic of human beings, but it is the methodology that we use to distinguish ourselves from other species. As a mechanism we employ to think with,[402] language inevitably influences the practice of art and our conception of aesthetics. Furthermore, language provides models for the operation of aesthetic thought, where subjectivity, symbolism and significance combine in the practice of artistic creation and appreciation.[403] Language provides us with the ability to name, which in turn endows us with the power to command and control, resulting in authority and authorship.[404] Our capacity to respond demonstrates how language enables us to be political, by showing the essence of responsibility in response, and the duties, rights and obligations that this entails.[405] Our specific political reality is comprised of two characteristics that relate with language: constitutive rules and the imposition of function.[406] The political power of human beings implies the capacity for subjectivity, which language structurally provides by separating the grammatical subject from its action and object, and providing a sense of agency for the person who identifies as the subject. The source of political power lies in our ability to position ourselves and contest others through language,[407] which demonstrates the important connection between language and politics.

Exploring the lineage of philosophical influence that began with the famous *cogito ergo sum* of Descartes, we can see how contemporary notions of thought, reason, being and

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[402] Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, 166.
[403] Searle, *Freedom & Neurobiology*, 94.
[404] Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 16.
[405] Searle, *Freedom & Neurobiology*, 92-93.
[406] Ibid. 85-86.
[407] Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 84.

the unconscious all rest upon the ability of a subject to think, and therefore, to exist.[408] The separation of mind and body that is implicit in this dictum, however, foreshadows the fallacy at the root of our militancy to separate ourselves from other beings. Exploring the role of language in the practice of law, we can see how the inherent uncertainty at the root of legal issues requires lawyers to use language to *make* their case, while judges use language to judge the *interpreted* evidence.[409] The result is a subjective judgement, which places equity between the creative, demonstrative and judgemental practice of law and the analogous practice of art. In either case, the subject is paramount, and exploring our ability to recognize ourselves as the subject of the signifier, we can begin to clarify our relation to the Other. This is most obvious in the imaginatively deceptive act of covering ones tracks, which demonstrates the human ability to pretend pretence.[410] Exploring the deceptive root of this action, it becomes apparent how the recognition of significance in the marks one makes directly relates with the practice of writing and creating artworks. The mimetic nature of these symbolic acts embodies an inherent duplicity or trickery, which highlights the recognizably artificial and reflexive nature of art. Imitation, after all, is an implicit function of language, which emerges from the derived intentionality of a subject and extends through collective acceptance of society.

As an indirect form of communication, writing provides us with the best example of how language establishes an infrastructure for the practice of art. As sign and symbol, writing demonstrates how meaning exists in represented form. Distinguishing meaning in physical form reveals how non-thought is always present in thought.[411] This is partially because understanding can only be achieved in the moment in relation to pre-established thought, but it is also due to the fact that the affect that causes the thought is partially independent of both

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[408] Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 89-90.
[409] Keenan and Weizman, *Mengele's Skull*, 23-4.
[410] Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 128.
[411] Rancière, *The Aesthetic Unconscious*, 28.

subject and object.[412] While suggesting the presence of the unconscious in artistic creation and interpretation, the simultaneity of thought and non-thought further demonstrates a paradox at the heart of aesthetic experience, where uncertainty of meaning is eternal when there is uncertainty of subjective truth. So much depends on the existence of the human subject, and language—which constitutes the subject—is also our best way to prove it. The practice of art, nonetheless, provides the opportunity to become aware of and reposition individual subjectivity, providing new ways of thinking and understanding the reflexive and organizational structure of human life. This structure is reflected in both language and artworks, which demonstrate two levels of operation that mutually influence and transform each other,[413] much like autopoiesis. Revealing the way that human beings naturally organize themselves, artworks provide the opportunity to reconsider the ideology at the root of human organization.[414] This helps to show how artworks inevitably utilize human life as their raw material, and also positions contemporary art practice within the transformative progression of artistic tradition. The mechanisms at the heart of artistic practice come into better view in relation to language, demonstrating how the operational structures that facilitate the practice of art are also restrictive to some extent. Language capacitates human life to become political life, and the practice of art is the illumination of the complex structures that both separate and connect us as political beings within society. The practice of art grounds our politics by combining materials of the world with human agency, leaving traces and marks for society to reflect on itself.

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[412] McCullagh and Ford, "The Desert Below," 158.
[413] Nöe, *Strange Tools*, 37.
[414] Ibid., 42.

4.3. Technology

4.3.1. Introduction to Technology

Our use of technology is another principal characteristic that distinguishes human beings from other animals. While we aren't the only species that uses technology, we are certainly the only animal that is never in its absence. From the day we are born to the day we die, our use of technology is constant. In the following chapters we will explore how technology defines us as a species, but more importantly, how technology relates to the practice of art. Just as language has been shown to capacitate our thought processes and expand the way that we act and relate, technology demonstrates a similar provision through our persistent consideration of use and function as we negotiate the world around us. As art is often defined in part through its subversion of functionality, the intentional purposelessness of artworks can be more clearly perceived in contrast to technology. Looking at the main concepts of orchestration, recursivity and function in the following chapters, we will get a clearer understanding of the key ideas that Rancière develops in his text "Aesthetic Separation, Aesthetic Community," including our social condition of 'being apart together', the transformation of 'sense to sense,' and art's distortion of function in 'the aesthetic regime.' After exploring a broad description of technology, the three following chapters will largely focus on the concept of 'strange tools' that Nöe has developed to position the practice of art in relation to technology. As explored in Chapters 2.3.5. Orgnaization and 4.2.4. Writing, Nöe contends that all art is about organizing, or rather, putting human organization on display. We have developed it over time as a species to learn, adapt and understand ourselves and our relation with the world. Having said that, there is a contradiction of placing a functionalism on the practice of art, which is defined in part by its uselessness. As such, exploring technological function in relation to art is an important endeavour to undertake. Let's begin by looking at what technology is by exploring the mythological birth of

technology, which defines human beings in relation to lack, and then moving on to consider a definition of technology that extends beyond mere tools and mechanization. Understanding technology as a form of social organization will help us to understand how art operates socially as well, which will make the reflection of life in art much easier to contemplate.

Reviewing one of the most ancient origin stories of technology in the Western world, which describes how humanity attained technology in the first place, is a perfect way to begin. Derrida points towards the myth of Prometheus to once again analyse the roots of human culture, and further explore the distinction between human and animal. A brief summary of the story is as follows. After creating humanity out of clay, Prometheus steals fire from the gods to bring to humanity, thus endowing humans with *ars* and *techne*, Latin synonyms for 'art' and 'craft' respectively.[415] While Prometheus' brother Epimetheus had previously provided all of the other animals with their necessities to survive, humanity was left naked. Derrida emphasizes this basic lack as the impetus for Prometheus' endowment of fire to humanity, which he claims capacitates both language and technology.[416] By cultivating these unique traits, culture became proper to humankind, which was thus able to demonstrate its superiority over the animal kingdom.

> [W]hat is proper to man, his subjugating superiority over the animal, his very becoming-subject, his historicity, his emergence out of nature, his sociality, his access to knowledge and technics, all that, everything (in a non-finite number of predicates) that is proper to man would derive from this originary fault, indeed, from this default in propriety, what is proper to man as default in propriety—and from the imperative necessity that finds in it its development and resilience.[417]

This fault at the foundation of humanity is echoed in the thought of Agamben, who positions humans in a state of suspension between 'the animal' that is beneath us and 'the gods' who are above us. Describing the anthropological machine at the heart of humanism, Agamben proposes that our very being is one that embodies the distance between the terrestrial and the

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[415] Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 20.
[416] Ibid., 45.
[417] Ibid.

celestial, and as such our being is: "always less and more than itself... The humanist discovery of man is the discovery that he lacks himself, the discovery of his irremediable lack of *dignitas*."[418] While we saw how Derrida attributes dignity to humanity through our ability, as subjects, to consider subjective life as an end in itself in Chapter 4.2.3. Subjects, the ideas of Derrida and Agamben aren't necessary conflictive. If considered from another perspective, it suggests that we ascribe our lives with purpose because they are lacking it in essence to begin with. Whatever the case, this original lack in humankind, which we explored in relation to autopoiesis and art in Chapter 2.3.8. Lack, can be seen as our impetus for action in the world, where we encounter not only the elements we need to survive but also context and meaning. As we continue to explore the relation of art and technology the idea of lack is important to keep in mind, for not only does it found some basic principles of aesthetic thought, but it also influences our interaction with the world around us.

Technology has become a far more complex and ambiguous concept than its etymological meaning of "the logic of craft" might suggest.[419] The German philosopher Walter Benjamin denounces the traditional understanding of technology as the mastery of humanity over nature, opting instead to define it as: "the mastery of the *relations* between humanity and nature. [my italics]"[420] Shifting the focus to the negotiation of humanity with the world around it, Benjamin is able to avoid a sharp separation of humankind from nature, which I believe is important. While it is easy to consider ourselves as isolated subjects, the coupling with the environment that autopoiesis implies makes Benjamin's definition an ideal counterpart to Rancière's conception of 'being apart together.' But what exactly are these relations that Benjamin speaks of? Along the same line of thought, W. Brian Arthur defines

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[418] Agamben, *The Open*, 29-30.
[419] Jon Dron, "Soft is hard and hard is easy: learning technologies and social media,"
     Form@re, Open Journal per la formazione in rete, Vol. 13, No. 1 (2013): 33-34.
[420] Agamben, *The Open*, 83.

technologies as: "an orchestration of phenomena to our use."[421] This general definition of technology easily supports the inclusion of tools and machinery, however it advances the understanding of technology by allowing tools to be either physical or conceptual in nature. As such, pedagogy and prayer can both be considered as technologies, since they are combinations of various elements that organize people, materials, space and time in order to achieve a goal.[422] Jon Dron commends such a definition because it allows technology to be considered equally as process and product. Increasing the specificity of the relations between humans and nature that Benjamin's definition of technology establishes, Arthur's definition determines the concepts of orchestration, phenomena and purpose as key features of technology. An orchestration connotes the combination or coordination of different elements, with an implied conductor who performs the intended task. The term 'phenomenon' implies something that is observed as existing or happening in the natural world, something independent of humans and technology. In addition to the necessary act of observation for a phenomenon to exist, the act of orchestration also establishes a subjective source for the purpose or intentionality that points the technology in a certain direction towards a use or function. While these specific ideas will be further explored in the following chapters, it is important to note the connection to the *autopoietic* notions of organization and intentionality, which connect the use of technology to biological operation.

To expand and illuminate a broader and more flexible conception of technology, it is now considered in terms of *hardness* or *softness*. If you think about computer hardware and software, you can begin to understand the characterization. In general, the degree to which a specific technology predetermines human involvement determines how hard or soft that technology is, with softer technologies requiring more human participation and harder

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[421] W. Brian Arthur, *The Nature of Technology: What It Is and How It Evolves*, (New York, U.S.A.: Free Press, 2009), 53.

[422] Dron, "Soft is hard and hard is easy," 34.

technologies offering less.[423] The result is a sliding scale with purely hard or purely soft technologies being quite rare. As Dron describes: "[h]ard technologies provide efficiency, speed, accuracy and consistency. Soft technologies give flexibility, creativity, malleability and adaptability."[424] Aside from considering the nature of technical interaction with people, it is important to keep in mind is that all technology is context dependent. While a technology is obviously understood distinctly by different species, the same technological object can be used in a number of different ways. While a tool remains the same, the technology changes nonetheless when the *use* of the tool changes.[425] Dron uses the example of a stone, which can be used to open a nut or to stop a door. While the same stone might be used to serve both functions, the technology differs as the purpose changes. Furthermore, the same technology may be hard for one user and soft for another, with the possibility of transformation over time as a user *softens* a technology with their increasing expertise. It all depends on the user's perspective. Dron uses the example of a violin, which is a harder technology for a beginner and a softer one for an expert. "Each new trick that we learn or technique that we refine does not eliminate existing possibilities but adds new possibilities and increases the potential for further possibilities as a result."[426] Dron describes a 'technique' as a technology that is enacted by a person, stating that techniques—like all technologies—can never exist in isolation.[427] Since softer technologies require more human thought to operate them, they require more decisions to be made by the user and, as such, are more difficult to use, according to Dron. Harder technologies, on the other hand, have less user input, fewer decisions to make, and are easier to use as a result. Coming from an educational background, Dron is interested in considering pedagogies as technologies in order to explore the distinct

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[423] Dron, "Soft is hard and hard is easy," 34-35.
[424] Ibid., 35.
[425] Ibid., 33-34.
[426] Ibid., 35.
[427] Ibid., 36.

operational perspectives that teachers and students have of the same educational methodology. Considering a parallel relationship between the distinct perspectives of creators and observers of artworks, the distinction between soft and hard technologies becomes a relevant method for understanding the difference between artistic creation and appreciation, and for the varying degrees of participation that artworks involve. As the separation of artistic production and enjoyment is an important aspect of the 'aesthetic break' as described by Rancière, we gain new methods of describing cultural transformation by considering a comparison between art and technology.

As we continue in the following chapters, this comparison between technology and art will become more clearly appreciated. While we now have a basis for a comparison, we have yet to explore the distinction between the two. Nonetheless, with a broader understanding of technology we can begin to see many aspects that connect the two distinct practices. The etymology of the word "technology" and the Prometheus myth help us to determine the same origin for art and technology, as *ars* and *techne* were 'endowed' to humanity to compensate for their inherent lack. Positioned between other animals and gods, humans are naturally paradoxical in their reflexive self-conception of superiority and inferiority, always more than animals and less than gods. Once again, this conflictive self-perception destabilizes the foundation of the human subject, which calls forth technology and art to help sustain it. Understood as the mastery of relations between humanity and nature, technology should be understood more in terms of process than simply product. Arthur's definition of technology as 'assemblies of orchestrated phenomena for a purpose' helps us to understand the operations at the root of technology, while also connecting it to our biological function as *autopoietic* organisms. This positions technology in relation to assemblies and orchestration, which demonstrate the necessity of subjective intentionality and coordination in relation to purpose. Just as composition is requisite of artworks, so too is assemblage and orchestration requisite

of technology, both of which demonstrate an inherently subjective impetus. The terms *hard* and *soft* help us to identify a range of technological processes with varying degrees of user input, which expands our conception of technology to include more socially determined mechanisms of function. While this allows us to go so far as to consider language as a tool,[428] it helps us to perceive how the practice of art has fundamental parallels with our use of technology. By demonstrating a range of flexibility and expertise, the conception of technology as *hard* and *soft* also puts into perspective the varying positions that artists and spectators might have in relation to observational technique. Just like artworks, technologies can never exist in isolation, not only because of their reliance on people but because of their dependence on the artworks and technologies that came before them. As such, tradition contextualizes the connection of artworks and technology to society, which in turn helps us to appreciate the relationship between art and life.

4.3.2. Reorganization

Arthur's conception of technology as an orchestration of phenomena for a purpose implies that separate components are organized in relation to each other at the service of a rationale. This sounds a lot like composition to me, and the easy association of an orchestra and its composer shouldn't be taken lightly, for it implies that a symphony can be categorized as a technology. Should we be worried about this blurring of boundaries? While many people might be uncomfortable labelling a symphony as technological in nature, Arthur's broad definition certainly allows it to be understood as such. While there are some definite functional similarities between art and technology, some distinctions must certainly remain nonetheless. In this chapter we are going to explore the process of the reorganization in relation to technology and the practice of art by looking at Nöe's conception of artworks as

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[428] Dron, "Soft is hard and hard is easy," 33.

'strange tools.' As we explored the basic structure and functioning of Nöe's organizational conception of art in Chapters 2.3.5. Organization, and 4.2.4. Writing, in this chapter we will expand upon it to examine the ways that technologies and artworks are organized, or reorganized, and the ways that people interact with art and technology, in addition to being affected by their use. Not only do we organize when we make artworks and technology, but artworks and technology in turn organize and reorganize us. This relates to the concept of recursivity, which concerns the ways that existing elements of technology or art are reincorporated to make new technologies or artworks. This points towards the ways that technology and art transform over time in reference to their antecedents, and this idea of reorganization helps us to appreciate how tradition inherently gives form to new art and new technologies. Furthermore, we will consider the ways in which technological and artistic processes of reorganization rely on context differently, which establishes one of our first distinctions between artworks as technologies. In the end, the concepts of orchestration and organization help us to understand how our use of technology is natural and how artworks can be considered as technological in nature.

Our comparison of art and technology begins in relation to organizational processes, which Nöe considers in his book *Strange Tools*. He claims that technological practices presuppose art practices, which means that art wouldn't or couldn't exist without technology.[429] That's a bold claim to make, and yet his reasoning is quite clear. As we have seen, Nöe's whole theory of art is based upon the idea of organization, something that we as humans do naturally. He considers technology broadly as something that we use to carry out organized activities, which can be anything from breast-feeding to drawing a picture to sending a text message. It is important to note the distinction between basic activities, which are simple things that we do naturally, and organized activities, which bring normal activities

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[429] Nöe, *Strange Tools*, xii-xiii.

into the realm of thought (see Chapter 2.3.5. Organization for a more thorough description).

The idea of basic activities in relation to organized activities runs parallel with Arthur's idea

of natural phenomena in relation to orchestrated phenomena. Both conceptions involve two

separate levels of function, much the same way that autopoiesis does with its molecular and

molar conception. It also reflects Rancière's description of artworks as simultaneous beings of

natural earth and composed expression:

> the solid end-product of the activity that 'twists' the materials of sculpture or painting remains somewhere between the *cry* of the suffering and struggling people and the 'earth's song', between a voice of human division and a melody of cosmic—inhuman—harmony.[430]

An important caveat for Nöe is that second-order activities always bring first-order activities

into thought.[431] This observational position of a higher order to a lower one is a distinguishing

factor that potentially transforms any organized activity into art, with thought infusing

purpose into the organized activity and the natural activity upon which it is based. Pictures, in

whatever form, are always a technology, and yet they aren't always considered art. In order to

be considered art, a picture (an organized activity) must demonstrate reflexivity by showing

how we as people are organized by pictures (or said organized activity), which could mean

how we are organized by the production or by the use of pictures (the organized activity).[432]

A two-tiered operational structure where a second-order activity reflects back to the first-

order activity that founds it enables a reflexive opportunity to observe both the ways that we

organize our lives and the ways that our lives are organized for us. Basing his theory of art on

organization allows Nöe to relate it with both biological and technological principals, where

distinct levels of organization implicitly provide opportunities of separation and coordination.

As Arthur explores the nature and evolution of technology, he notes the important

principle of 'recursiveness' in the orchestration of technologies. It is based upon the principle

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[430] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 57.
[431] Nöe, *Strange Tools*, 30-31.
[432] Ibid., 20.

of combination, which asserts that a technology is composed of component parts, systems or assemblies.[433] From a functional standpoint, every technology can be divided from the overall (molar) technology to its main assemblies, sub-assemblies, and so on, down to its elemental parts. From this we can form a hierarchy of functional structures that demonstrate technology to consist of component parts that are also technologies in themselves, which consist of sub-parts that are also technologies, and so on. The idea of recursivity is that technology is built from other technologies; that each separate assembly or sub-part is *itself* a technology. Thinking back to Nöe's organizational theory of art, the first and second order organized activities also demonstrate recursivity. In terms of technology, Arthur points out that recursivity implies that technologies are rarely fixed, but rather they change and adapt quickly as purposes shift and elements are upgraded.[434] "In the real world, technologies are highly reconfigurable; they are fluid things, never static, never finished, never perfect."[435] The idea of recursivity helps us to consider the ways in which contemporary art incorporates everyday life, not only in terms of organized activities but also component parts. One of the key formal novelties during the shift from the representative regime of art to the aesthetic regime was the incorporation of everyday objects into artworks. As Tanke states:

> Everyday objects, gestures, and forms of expression assumed a status previously reserved for historical, mythological, and religious subject matter. Thus, throughout what is customarily designated as "modernity," quotidian objects and practices were imbued with complex layers of meaning, and the artist charged with the task of collecting, organizing, and deciphering its traces.[436]

The concept of recursivity shows how the incorporation of elements of everyday life into artworks shifted the subject matter of art towards everyday life. Tanke claims that this practice of using quotidian materials in art helped to show that there were no longer any fixed rules for distinguishing art products from the products of everyday life. This distinction had to

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[433] Arthur, *The Nature of Technology*, 38.
[434] Ibid., 42.
[435] Ibid., 38.
[436] Tanke, "What is the Aesthetic Regime?" 72.

be made individually, on a case-by-case scenario, which is the cornerstone of the aesthetic regime. Furthermore, recursivity allows us to appreciate the incorporation of external influence in artworks, where precedent techniques or elements from other artworks are copied or appropriated to create a new artwork. In this way, artworks can be seen to be feeding off of tradition in a process of furthering artistic tradition. Recursivity addresses contemporary art's incorporation of non-art practices, which helps us to understand the seemingly complete dissolution of traditional art practices as art mutates into new forms. John Roberts, in his exploration of the Avant-Garde, lists several current artistic strategies that utilize non-art or anti-art systems in what he calls 'deflationary art practices':

> 'amateurism' (general strategies of professional deskilling), the 'trickster' (the artist as creator of ruses or hoaxes), 'imageless truth' or the 'post-visual' (the dissolution of artistic form into forms of social praxis, into non-art practices), 'ventriloquism' (the adoption of authorial surrogates) and 'iatrogenesis' (ideological co-adaptation or exchange with non-art practices).[437]

Several of these strategies necessitate that artists move from art institutions and out into the 'real' world, where preconceived notions about how an artwork is supposed to function don't exist. Escaping defined conceptions of what an artwork is, or a fixed understanding of how artworks function, allow artists to maintain an element of surprise and more easily demonstrate the essence of aesthetics, where an artwork must be evaluated in the moment as a singularity. It also demonstrates the recursive nature of art, where tradition evolves and progresses by feeding off of itself.

As hubs of organization, art and technology not only demonstrate a recursive nature in terms of objects and elements, but also in terms of how their use reorganizes us and our behaviour. Describing the close connection between technologies and second-order activities, Nöe describes how that might work: "Technology is not mere stuff. It is the equipment with which we carry on our organized activities. Technologies organize us; properly understood,

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[437] John Roberts, *Revolutionary Time and the Avant-Garde*, (London, U.K.: Verso, 2015), 63.

they are *evolving patterns of organization.*"[438] Considering the heightened interactivity of soft

technologies, we can appreciate technology as an aspect of our behaviour, a technique we use

to facilitate our cognition of the world around us. Our use of technology, after all, is a

perfectly natural behaviour for us. One simply needs to observe a child with a smart phone to

recognize how they instinctively *know* what they are doing. We use technology to relate with

our environment differently, and in doing so technology changes *how* we relate with our

environment.[439] Technology changes our patterns of activity, our ways of being in the world,

and this changes our understanding of the world. This is because technology not only allows

us to do things we previously couldn't, but it allows us to think differently as well.[440] It can be

used to help solve old problems, but it can also be used to define or discover new problems

that we were unaware of beforehand.[441] As we use technologies, they can help us to think new

thoughts and understand new ideas. This is how technologies extend us both physically and in

thought.[442] Nöe relates these ideas back to art. Considering how our lives are inundated with

technology and organization, he states that art and philosophy: "are practices for investigating

the modes of our organization, or rather, the manner of our embedding in different modes of

organization."[443] With human life being governed by organization, art becomes the realm for

putting this organization on view—and escaping it. Art helps us to contextualize our position

in relation to organization, whether it is how we organize ourselves or how we are organized

by the world in which we live. Offering new perspectives for observing our organized

activities, art changes how we think about them and, in turn, facilitates a reorganization of

ourselves.[444] As we explored in Chapter 2.3.4. Context, one of the ways in which art

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[438] Nöe, *Strange Tools*, 19-20.
[439] Ibid., 29.
[440] Ibid., 26.
[441] Ibid., 25.
[442] Ibid., 27.
[443] Ibid., 28.
[444] Ibid., 29.

accomplishes this shift of perspective is by changing the context—the embedding—in which we consider artworks or technologies. Technology is context dependent, and Nöe asserts that a tool only has significance as a technology in the context of its embedding. A tool out of context is useless in terms of its intended function, and without a purpose it stops being technological in principle. Nöe uses this dependence of significance on context to establish a key distinction between technology and art.[445]

> Art is interested in removing tools (in my extended sense) from their settings and thus in making them strange and, in making them strange, bringing out the ways and textures of the embedding that had been taken for granted. A work of art is a strange tool, an alien implement. We make strange tools to investigate ourselves.[446]

Nöe asserts that the practice of self-investigation that both art and philosophy provide helps us to "make sense" of the ways in which we organize and are organized. This is a practice of contextualization and recontextualization that provides an understanding of how we fit into our embedding as people within the world. 'Sense' is at the foundation of this process of self-awareness, according to Nöe, since it connects this form of reflective analysis to subjective feeling and emotion. Art puts people on display, unveiling our selves to ourselves, which is made possible through the reflective judgement that happens during the evaluation of artworks.[447] We must rely on our own senses, experiences and knowledge in order to think about art, and this in turn provides an opportunity for us to experience ourselves in the moment. This is what Rancière uses to position the practice of art as a political activity, since it gives us the chance of being conscious of our subjective position in the organized world. Art examines and represents how we organize our world through the transformation of

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[445] Nöe, *Strange Tools*, 30.
[446] Ibid.
[447] Ibid., 101.

materials and conventions, and how we organize ourselves through acts of production and experiencing.[448]

> Technology serves ends. Art questions those very ends. Art affords revelation, transformation, reorganization; art puts into question those values, rules, conventions, and assumptions that make the use of technology possible in the first place.[449]

The insight that aesthetic experience offers is what makes art a legitimate field of investigation, in the same vein as philosophy.[450] Art offers a recursive moment of self-reflection where personal state and position can be contextualized in relation to how we organize and are organized.

Considering the organizational processes involved in art and technology, they are clearly related in their operational necessity of composition and orchestration. With a focus on the operation of combining natural activities or phenomena with a purpose in mind, we can understand Nöe's claim that art presupposes technology. In his organizational theory of art, Nöe reflects the two-tiered system of autopoiesis and establishes a defining feature of artworks that is based on the reflexive reference of second-order to first-order activities. As a second-order activity is always an extension of the first-order activity, an artwork is defined by its capacity to bring first-order activities into the realm of thought, which exposes the underlying organization of both the activities that create the work and the people who observe it. In this way, the experience of art is reflective in terms of structure and thought. The recursive nature of technology is reflected in the practice of art, where existing elements or components are used in combination to create a new technology or artwork. This helps to demonstrate how everyday life began to be incorporated into the practice of art during the 'aesthetic realm,' and how contemporary artworks today adopt the forms of non-art practices. More than anything, recursivity shows how the practice of art is dependent upon tradition,

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[448] Nöe, *Strange Tools*, 111.
[449] Ibid., 64.
[450] Ibid., 111.

which firmly establishes it as a social institution. Not only do art and technology transform in relation to themselves, but we also transform through our use of art and technology. The organization that artworks display helps us to see how we organize and are organized, which in turn enables us to be transformed through artistic practice. Technology changes us in a similar way through its use, demonstrating how technology is naturally incorporated into our human behaviour. It allows us to do different things and to think differently in the world. While the function, and thus value, of technology is related to its contextual embedding, artworks in opposition subvert contextual understanding in order to function. This enables an awareness of function in relation to organization that wouldn't be possible otherwise, which enables artworks to show how we are organized as people.

4.3.3. Progression

Technology, much like art, is produced and used for humans by humans. While it is easy to consider both technology and art as distinct from nature as a result of their artificiality, I would argue that the role that human beings play in creating and activating technology and art positions these practices within a bio-logical realm. Technology and art evolve alongside us, in a similar way that we evolve as a biological species. In this chapter we will look at the ways in which this transformation happens, focusing on the ways in which technological evolution informs the way that the practice of art transforms. We will begin by looking at the unstable boundary between human beings and technology by looking at the work of Adrian MacKenzie, who presents us with the process of *information* in order to better understand the continuous development of humans, and to appreciate a more nuanced conception of technological transformation beyond simple before-and-after procedural steps. This concept of *information* leads us to consider the state of indetermination that all humans, technologies and artworks must demonstrate. Assuming they are accessible, the degree of openness of a

technological or artistic system varies depending on its interface. These varying potentials of control show the distinct ways in which we use artworks and machines, and remind us that our ability to affect the world is proportional to our ability to be affected by it. This leads us to our final consideration of the chapter, which explores the internal mechanisms of technological and artistic evolution. Expanding upon the idea of recursivity that we explored in the last chapter, here we focus on the internal structure that permits art and technology to transform reflexively, which reflects *autopoieitic* systems operation. It demonstrates how artistic and technological systems change from within, which makes their evolution reflexive in nature. This provides insight into the transformation of traditions and cultures, but also the creative process in itself. As we look to find connections between art and life, and to understand the functioning of aesthetic separation, these considerations offer many fruitful ideas and comparisons.

Positioning the use of technology within a bio-logic, Nöe states that the organization that results from our use of technology is so natural that it should be thought of as biological.[451] Technology is dependent on biological systems, at the very least, as it is never entirely free of them. Bodies shape technologies and technologies in turn affect bodies, which is evident in the impact that agricultural and pharmaceutical technologies have had on human evolution,[452] not to mention our impact as a species on the world. The philosopher Adrian MacKenzie takes a similar stance, promoting a conception of the human body as an open system that actively integrates both non-living and technical elements.

> Unless we assume that a body has pregiven limits (for example, that a body is always fully alive), there is always a potential contamination of the living by the non-living, of the natural by the technical, of the *physis* by *techne*. The inherently unstable and divergent advent of iteratively stabilized bodies cannot radically exclude the non-living. Distinctions between the corporeal and the non-corporeal,

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[451] Nöe, *Strange Tools*, 59.
[452] Ibid., 60.

> between the technical and the non-technical, and between the living and the non-living, cannot be exempt from this logic of interactive destabilization.[453]

This perspective is perfectly in line with the *autopoietic* conception of the human being as a molecular organism that incorporates non-living molecules to facilitate its life. Addressing the fact that a variety of domains are involved in technological activity, MacKenzie describes the thresholds between the human and non-human as unstable, and purports that one of our main uses of technology is to provide an interactive stabilization of our concept of what it means to be human.[454] One could suggest that the practice of art functions in a similar way. In order to properly acknowledge the many transformations that occur during the use of technology, MacKenzie avoids a simple binary understanding of these changes, where: "the human (collectively or individually) *shapes* or is *shaped* by technology."[455] Instead, he follows the work of Gilbert Simondon who deems this hylomorphic conception to be inadequate because of its limited scope of interactive considerations during technological formation, and its overreliance on an underdeveloped distinction between material and form. As we explore the notion of form more closely in relation to artworks and aesthetics in Chapter 5.2.6. Form, the relevance of this opposition will become more clearly distinguished. The alternative that Simondon presents is the process of *in-form-ation*, which reconceptualizes the opposition of form and matter by negating the static 'before-and-after' conception of inert, raw material and finished product.[456] Much like the operational systems logic of *autopoietis*, this process of *information* acknowledges that technology is never complete. "Since living entities individuate continuously, rather than being formed once, they *are* information. They are continuous, variable processes of matter-taking-form."[457] The work of MacKenzie and

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[453] Adrian MacKenzie, *Transductions: Bodies and Machines at Speed*, (London, U.K.: Continuum, 2002), 42-43.
[454] MacKenzie, *Transductions*, 43.
[455] Ibid., 45.
[456] Ibid., 46.
[457] Ibid., 50.

Simondon help us to understand how the limits that we establish between our bodies and the inert world, or our bodies and technology, are largely *informed* by our interaction with those elements, and as such, they are actively involved in forming our understanding of what it means to be a living, human body.[458] This, of course, is a process, and it relates to Rancière's conception of 'non-thought in thought,' which helps us to more fully appreciate the complexity of the influences that affect our understanding. In relation to the Deleuzian conception of *becoming*, the idea of human beings as *information* is perfectly in line as well, and our use of technology and artworks helps us to identify the processes of *becoming* and *information* that human life entails as a result of our biological interactions with the world.

This isn't the first time that we have seen the idea of *information* in this thesis. As we saw in Chapter 2.3.5. Observation, Luhmann uses the concepts of "information" and "utterance" to distinguish between the communicative modes of hetero-reference, which is external, and self-reference, which is internal. If we apply Luhmann's idea of hetero-reference to MacKenzie's process of *information*, we can appreciate how the process of being-in-formed is necessarily in relation to external relations. Understanding technologies and humans as processes of *information* helps us appreciate the openness and responsiveness that enable our capacity to interact with the world around us. If a technology didn't maintain some aspect of indetermination, it could never function as a technology. "A machine must articulate some degree of openness to a milieu in order to remain technological."[459] Spinoza suggests a similar indeterminatation within humanity, which we briefly explored in relation to the conatus in Chapter 2.2. Autopoiesis, stating that our capacity to affect the world around us is equal to our capacity for being affected. Spinoza proposes that our affective capacity as humans is directly related to our capacity to be affected by the world, equating our power for

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[458] MacKenzie, *Transductions*, 52.
[459] Ibid., 53.

external influence on our capacity to internalize and be influenced.[460] The consideration of technology and our selves as processes of *information* could easily extend to the practice of art and the aesthetic experience of artworks. Artworks, just like technology, are always patiently waiting for people to activate them. MacKenzie identifies certain limitations, nonetheless, in the interface of technology, which establishes a set range of indeterminacy regardless of the sophistication of the machine.[461] Artworks must also be open to being experienced through an interface, which could be understood as the way in which spectators access them. While technologies maintain strict boundaries that limit their use through their interfaces, artworks are more open in their perceptivity because they function within the realm of observation. There is no correct way or order to observe an artwork, aside perhaps from time-based artworks that operate in a progressive sequence. Nonetheless, within that sequence the observation is not controlled to facilitate artistic function. Artworks function as indirect communication, and in doing so they are liberated from the strict binary functionalism— on/of, yes/no or 0/1—that structures technology.[462] Artworks function by being totally open to interaction and interpretation, even if they are intentionally limiting in some formal way or another. While technology imposes limits at the service of its function, Luhmann states that: "a work qualifies as art only when *it employs constraints for the sake of increasing the work's freedom in disposing over further constraints.*"[463] Accessibility and openness, nonetheless, are requisite for interaction to take place amongst humans, artworks and technologies, and the destabilized boundaries that exist between these seemingly separate beings help us to understand how technology and art do function in relation to a bio-logic.

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[460] Duff, "Towards a developmental ethology," 626.
[461] MacKenzie, *Transductions*, 53.
[462] Luhmann, *Art as a Social System*. 20.
[463] Ibid., 35.

In a similar way that we are not exactly human without language,[464] we aren't exactly human without technology either. "Our mode of being—how our lives are organized—is constituted in part by technology. Take away the technology and you are left not with us, but with, at most, something like distant cousins of ourselves."[465] Technology defines us as a species because it is natural for us. It was technology, after all, in the form of social organization that had the biggest influence on how we transformed as a species around fifty thousand years ago.[466] As I examined in *Sweat, Feel, Think, Art*, the evolution of human creativity can be largely attributed to the role of sexual selection in diversifying human personality. As the secondary mechanism of Darwin's evolutionary theory, sexual selection connects the activities of display and attraction during mate selection to the development of expressive variation (including story-telling and humour) and perceptive acuity (distinguishing between strategic and revealing handicaps).[467] Beyond mere survival concerns that focused on establishing protective procreative relationships, sexual selection—which is largely controlled by females—assured that personality features such as creativity and loyalty became just as attractive as big muscles and well-proportioned symmetry.[468] As our human personalities developed over time, our use of mechanical and social technologies increased too, and our species transformed its relationship with the environment and within its communities. Thanks to the reciprocal transformative affect of organized activities on our behaviour, our use of technology transformed not only our biology but also how we think about our relationships with the world. It is important to note, however, that the impetus for reflexive reorganization is never external but comes from *within* an organized activity,

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[464] See Chapter 4.2.1. Introduction to Language, regarding "prelinguistic man".
[465] Nöe, *Strange Tools*, 23.
[466] Ibid., 21.
[467] Waters, *Sweat, Feel, Think, Art*, 75-85.
[468] Ibid.

looping back to alter the first-order activity upon which the second-order activity is based.[469]

To illustrate, Nöe describes how the prehistoric practice of picture-making has shaped how

we as humans see.[470] Pictures captivate us—or hold us captive—to this day, which is easy to

consider in our contemporary lives of screen-filled spaces, rooms and pockets. On the other

hand, Nöe contends that pictures always: "supply the resources we need to free ourselves of

their control."[471] As humans we are born into a world of pictures and our culture of

pictoriality is inevitable. Art, however, can liberate us from a fixed organization of pictures,

allowing us to change the culture of picture-making from within.[472] This cycle of re-

production evokes the chicken and egg paradox, as artistic acts become a precondition for the

transformation of materials that is necessary for the construction of technologies.[473] Is art

dependent on technology, or is technology dependent on art? Whatever the case, Arthur

positions technology as *autopoietic* in its self-producing operation since it: "builds itself piece

by piece from the collective of existing technologies."[474] In terms of art, the internally

reflexive nature of reorganization assures that the transformations it catalyzes are never

immediate and always surrounded by conscious and critical thought within a community.[475]

Art and technology are essentially cultural practices because they exist through community

use, and their meaning is both established and challenged through this culture.[476] The

mechanisms of transformation within art and technology are integral to their productive

communities, and while they operate in distinct ways, the essence of their evolutionary

development is reflexive.

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[469] Nöe, *Strange Tools*, 31.
[470] Ibid., 54.
[471] Ibid., 50.
[472] Nöe, *Strange Tools*, 50.
[473] Ibid., 56-57.
[474] Arthur, *The Nature of Technology*, 168-170.
[475] Nöe, *Strange Tools*, 58.
[476] Ibid., 58.

To conclude, both technology and art can be considered as biological practices because of three things; their dependence on, their openness to, and their transformation by living organisms. The living organisms in question, of course, are human beings, and art and technology exist through our practice and use of them. As Donna Harraway considers the fluid boundaries of our bodies and our culture, she states: "The boundary is permeable between tool and myth, instrument and concept, historical systems of social relations and historical anatomies of possible bodies, including objects of knowledge. Indeed, myth and tool mutually constitute each other."[477] Thus a relationship of interdependence exists between people, technology and art, and it becomes impossible to establish one of these concepts in isolation of the others. As we transform as people and as a species, technology and art evolve alongside us. MacKenzie's process of *information* helps us to better appreciate the continuous development of human beings and technology beyond a simple before-and-after conception. In relation to Luhmann's communicative conception of *information*, which connotes the hetero-reference with the world around us, the multitude of influences and states that are inherent in processes of *information* can be more easily located and appreciated. Furthermore, it helps to avoid simple binary conceptions, such as the hylomorphic opposition between material and form.[478] The process of *information* reveals how material and form relate not only with technological and artistic production, but they also operate in conjunction with the material and form of the human beings that use them. This implies an inherent state of indetermination that all humans, technologies and artworks demonstrate. The degree of openness of a human, technological or artistic system varies depending on the system's interface. While people employ consciousness, sensation and movement to openly interact with their environments, technology and artworks utilize structural and formal elements to

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[477] Donna Harraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, (London, U.K.: Free Association Books, 2005), 164.

[478] This will be further explored in Chapter 5.2.6. Form.

establish their indeterminate interactivity. While all three systems have inherent limitations to their interactivity, a human being's power to affect the world is proportional to their ability to be affected by it. While artworks and machines must possess varying degrees of determination in order to function, they demonstrate this determination distinctly in relation to their differing modes of function, which will be explored more deeply in the following chapter. To briefly foreshadow, technology is determined in order to serve a function, while artworks are determined in order to negate further functional determination. This difference exists largely as a result of the observational and communicative nature of artworks, which are produced in relation to a tradition that obviates expediency. Nonetheless, the existence of tradition in relation to art, technology and humanity demonstrates how these systems evolve over time in relation to their relative antecedents. This evolution can never be escaped, and the transformative mechanisms at play within these three interconnected realms of art, technology and humanity shows how they transform themselves from within. While sexual selection motivates the perpetuation of endearing personality traits in humans, the concept of recursivity shows how art and technology reproduce by reflexively incorporating elements from their distinct practices and traditions. This is possible as a result of an internal structure that is inherent to art and technology that establishes two tiers of operation, where an advanced secondary level is built out of components of a more basic primary level. Not only have we witnessed a similar structure in the molecular and molar operation of *autopoieitic* systems, but also in the first-order and second-order observational theory of art proposed by Luhmann, who considers artworks to be 'observations of observations.' The separation between two levels of operation, as we have seen in Chapter 2.3.5. Organization, facilitates an interactivity in which both reflexivity and meaning are generated. As we have seen here, it also demonstrates how artistic and technological systems can transform their own systems from within, which makes their evolution *autopoietic* in nature. This provides insight into the

importance of tradition and culture in the creation of new artworks and technologies, but it also demonstrates how traditions and cultures transform over time through their reflexive use.

In relation to Rancière's conception of aesthetic separation, this conception of artistic and technological evolution shows us how the transformation from the mimetic regime of art to the aesthetic regime happened in relation to the transformation of society at large. The practice of art transformed over time through the creation of artworks that were made in relation to the tradition of art. As artworks changed, people's conception of art changed, which means that people inherently changed as well. Since artworks are created in order to be observed, they function in the realm of perception, which frees them from the pragmatism that controls technology. This helps us to consider the political efficacy of artworks, especially in light of the reflexive, internal processes of transformation that both art and technology demonstrate. Aesthetic experience demonstrates hetero-reference through a subject's experience of an external artwork in concert with self-reference as the subject reflects upon the internal sensations that the hetero-reference has inspired. While potential changes of a subject from an external source are usually met with suspicion and resistance, potential transformation from within is more readily accepted thanks to the reflexive, and seemingly independent, source of impulse. Artworks thus offer the opportunity for subjects to change themselves from within by surreptitiously converting an external stimulus into an internal realization. This is the process of *information*, as subjects become *informed* by the world around them. Demonstrating how aesthetic experience is a process of *information*, where the boundaries between art, technology and humanity are permeable, we can better appreciate the political potential and functionality of art.

4.3.4. Function

Nöe's theory of art, which equates artworks to *strange tools,* asserts that the function of art is philosophical in nature; that we use it to develop and to learn about ourselves. "Art and philosophy share a common aim: self-transformation and the achievement of understanding."[479] The problem with associating art with an aim is that purpose is always governed by concept, and as Kant describes, aesthetic judgement is always without concept. As soon as you place the purpose of 'changing people,' or 'better understanding your relationships with society and the world' on art, its judgement changes from being reflexive to determinant. Instead of describing art using the word "beauty," which is based on subjective feelings of pleasure or displeasure that are independent of a concept, we would have to use the word "good" or "bad" to describe it, as the judgement would be based on a purpose or concept. Good art, in line with Nöe's philosophical purpose, would be art that changes people quickly or profoundly, or art that helps you understand yourself or capitalism more thoroughly. This is the kind of politically motivated artworks that Rancière describes in "Aesthetic Separation, Aesthetic Community," which are created to actively persuade the subjects who experience them to understand something differently. But here we are reasoning what art is, not judging it, and because of this Kant would probably disavow Nöe's contemporary formulation that relates art with purpose. One important consideration, however, is that the practice and appreciation of art has certainly changed since Kant wrote *The Critique of Judgement,* and the art that Kant was looking at and considering at the time was very distinct from the artworks that Nöe uses to illustrate his contemporary notion that art presupposes technology. Rancière distinctly states that: "Art entails the employment of a set of concepts, while the beautiful possesses no concepts."[480] While beauty is still a familiar

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[479] Nöe, *Strange Tools*, 140.
[480] Ibid., 64.

adjective used to describe artworks, it certainly isn't the only thing that artists strive to provoke. As Mick Wilson states in a recent Conceptual Art exhibition catalogue:

> In the most simple and everyday terms conceptual art has given rise to a new criterion in judgements on art. Encountering a work of art, instead of the question 'Is it beautiful?' or 'Is it moving?' we now find ourselves more often than not, first asking ourselves, 'Is it interesting?'[481]

In defence of Nöe, he does preface his book by stating that, "the job of art, its true work, is philosophical." This holds true to Rancière's definition of aesthetics, and at the very least, Nöe positions the purpose of art within the reflexive tradition of human thought. Whether contemporary art is judged as beautiful, or reasoned as good or bad, its primary mode of experience is cognitive and reflexive, which is the essence of aesthetics. In this chapter we will continue to explore the functionality of aesthetic experience, using technology as a counterpoint to more fully understand what makes art a unique practice and field of study. We will begin by further exploring Nöe's theory of *strange tools*, in particular by looking at how pictures can be understood in relation to models and samples. Utilizing the ideas of proxy and substitution to establish a basis of comparison between artworks and technology, the operative considerations of relation, intention and shared understanding will be explored in relation to artistic functionality. We will then move forward to explore Heidegger's consideration of artworks in relation to equipment, and the basis of comparison he finds in their intermediate positions between matter and work. While Heidegger considers thinking in relation to purpose and use to be natural, he cautions about its preconceptions, which limit a more integral understanding of the true work that art does. In conclusion, the 'unconcealment' that Heidegger determines as the *work* of art is very much in line with the functionality that Nöe speaks of in his quote at the start of this paragraph. After exploring this more thoroughly

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[481] Mick Wilson, *What is Conceptual Art?*, (Dublin, Ireland: The Irish Museum of Contemporary Art, 2009), p. 14.

in the following paragraphs, we will conclude by seeing how this relates to Rancière understanding of the political efficacy of art.

Nöe proposes that a picture functions in the same way as a model, which he defines as something we use to "stand in" for something else.[482] If we call to mind all of the models we can think of—model cars, architectural models, fashion models, or even scientific models—we can understand how they are used in order to imagine or study something else. Nöe uses the word "proxy" to define models, which is something that is used to represent something else. The effectiveness of a model lies both in how we make them and how we use them.[483] A qualitative engagement with models helps us to think about the thing that they represent in ways that might otherwise be impossible. Nöe makes two important points to show how models are based on both relation and intention. In terms of relation, a model isn't simply a model because of its size or composition.[484] The fact that a house is small and made of balsa wood does not mean it is automatically a model, as it could be a toy dollhouse. This small, balsawood house becomes a model through use, by representing something that existed or might exist in the future. The second point Nöe makes is related, as it connects the relativity of what a model represents to an intention or purpose.[485] As an example he uses is Watson and Crick's DNA model, which helped to imagine how information could be stored biologically through a particular molecular pattern. There was a purpose to their model, and the double-helix would not have been a successful or useful model without this intended biological use. What both of these features of models demonstrate is that models are only models—effective representations of something else—within a context of shared

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[482] Nöe, *Strange Tools*, 152.
[483] Ibid., 153.
[484] Ibid.
[485] Ibid.

understanding.[486] We need to know *what* models represent and the *purpose* of their representation in order for them to function as models.

Similar to using models to explore art in relation to technology, Nelson Goodman explores the inherent symbolism in 'samples,' which are always a representation of some properties of a thing but never all properties.[487] When you get a food sample in a grocery store, for example, it is a sample of the prepared ingredients and flavour but not a sample of the amount or shape. Nelson's point is that a sample is understood in relation to its context, in which the properties that it exemplifies—*and* the ones that it doesn't—are made obvious. When we see a fabric sample, we understand that it is a sample of the colour, pattern and texture but not the size or age. The understanding of a sample is relational, and Goodman compares it to the association of friendship, where friends are not distinguishable by any one characteristic but rather by having spent a period of time in a relationship as friends. This directly relates to the constitutive rules that Searle defines as the foundation for our ability to attribute conditional meaning, which we explored in Chapter 4.2.1. Introduction to Language. The conditional understanding of samples reflects the way that artworks do not simply possess properties but they exemplify them, which helps to show how all artworks function through symbolism.[488] "Whoever looks for art without symbols, then, will find none—if all the ways that works symbolize are taken into account. Art without representation or expression or exemplification—yes; art without all three—no."[489] While this idea of 'the sample' reflects the contextual relativity and the intended purpose that inform our understanding of 'the model,' it expands Nöe's representational notion of pictures by establishing the symbolic nature of the representation that all artworks inherently employ. While artworks are similar to models and samples in their relativity and dependence on

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[486] Nöe, *Strange Tools*, 154.
[487] Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*, 64-65.
[488] Ibid., 66-67.
[489] Ibid., 66.

context, artworks differ from models and samples because the intention, purpose or usefulness behind their creation is either non-pragmatic or non-existent. As we have seen in Chapter 2.3.5. Observation, the intentionality of the artist is never an innate part of the artwork. Ultimately, our shared understanding of the concepts of models, samples and art is established in light of their contextually dependent meaning. While the functionality of models and samples allows their understanding to be easily shared, this is not the case for art. The intrinsically subjective evaluation of artworks means that our shared understanding of their significance is difficult to attain, especially in the absence of a preconceived functionality.

Pictures, nonetheless, can have a representational and intentional functionality within a shared context of understanding in a similar way as models and samples. According to Nöe, we use pictures collectively as a society through our practices of picture-making and picture-sharing.[490] A prime example that Nöe pulls from art history is that of religious icons, or images of sacred importance. As icons, pictures of Jesus on the cross have representational and intentional functionality within a shared context of understanding. The representation is that of a beaten man in his thirties being crucified, and the intention is to arouse the Christian values of sympathy and compassion, amongst other things. The shared context is the church, a place where religious faith is practiced collectively. While this example clearly demonstrates the comparison between pictures and models, Nöe asserts that all types of pictures function in a similar way thanks to one simple principle; substitution.[491] Pictures are technologies for showing, and we use them as substitutes for what they represent.[492] Different kinds of pictures operate in different ways depending on their conventions, practices, interests, settings or time, which in turn govern the ways their substitution functions. We use pictures to replace many things in many ways and for many reasons. An important point that Nöe makes, however, is

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[490] Nöe, *Strange Tools*, 162.
[491] Ibid., 165.
[492] Ibid.

that pictures and art are *not* the same thing. A picture can be art, but it is not intrinsically art simply because it represents.

> Artists don't make pictures (depictions) simply to take part in the pre-existing pictorial economy in which we are embedded. … The work of art happens precisely when that economy, that function, that rhetoric, that invisibly familiar practice, is disrupted.[493]

This disruption assigns a functionality to artworks that runs counter to a collectively accepted intentionality associated with use value. Use value in artworks, as such, is achieved through their potential to subvert pragmatic understanding while utilizing the operational components of pragmatic technology. This implies using contextual relationships within a shared context of understanding to negate utility and escape usualness.

Heidegger considers the role of technology and function as he explores the true essence of artworks. He states that artworks are easily compared with pieces of equipment because they both share an intermediate position between matter and form, a perspective from which both artworks and tools can be understood in relation to substance and to work.[494] Heidegger warns, however, about the preconception of this equipmental relationship that has come to condition our universal perception of all beings.[495] The problem is that this bias leads us to consider or judge things in terms of utility and reliability, which are mutually dependent on each other and catalyse the 'becoming-usual' of the being. This way of thought confines us to understand things, such as tools or artworks, fundamentally as equipment, which means that any aesthetic value we attribute to the being exists as an addition to the equipmental basis of the being.[496] Heidegger refuses to accept this. For one, he states that this conception of artworks as equipment doesn't fully consider the "thingly" element in the work—its matter, material, or earthly origin. Secondly, it implies the inclusion of a substructure and a

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[493] Nöe, *Strange Tools*, 166.
[494] Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, 10.
[495] Ibid., 12.
[496] Ibid., 18.

superstructure to explain the facets of the artwork that function beyond its equipmentality. More than anything, forcing a preconceived framework onto the understanding of an artwork denies our possibility of finding the true essence of the work of art, which is the *work* of the artwork.[497] Heidegger determines that this labour is twofold, involving the setting up of a world, which is the creation of an artwork, and the setting forth of the world, which is the presentation of the artwork.[498] The setting up and the setting forth of the world—the *work* of the artwork—positions the raw materials of the earth in relation with the observability of the world, which reflect back on each other to reveal the intermediate and indeterminate position of the work. It is important to remember that 'earth' represents the neutral material as it exists without human involvement as an ontologically objective phenomenon, while 'world' requires humans to create it and as such it is an ontologically subjective reality. This helps us to appreciate the relationship of material and form that artworks inherently embody, whereas with technology, the potential material consideration of the being is "used up" in its utility.

> Because it is determined through usefulness and serviceability, equipment takes that of which it consists into its service. In the manufacture of equipment—for example, an ax—the stone is used and used up. It disappears into usefulness. The less resistance the material puts up to being submerged in the equipmental being of the equipment the more suitable and the better it is.[499]

In artworks, on the other hand, the relationship between materiality and form remains distinguishable, which allows us to appreciate the "strife" that exists in the opposition and conciliation of earth and world.[500] It is through this strife that artworks vibrate, in part through their resistance to being taken for granted as *usual* in their usability. This is what Nöe refers to when he describes the ways in which art functions through subversion and disruption of the usual, or an expected use. It also alludes to the vibration that Rancière speaks of when he describes the artwork as a monument that exists between the melody of cosmic harmony—the

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[497] Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, 19.
[498] Ibid., 22-24.
[499] Ibid., 24.
[500] Ibid., 26.

neutral earth—and the cry of human suffering—the form of the world. The important point that Heidegger makes is that by escaping the reliance of a technological framework for preconceiving works of art, we are able to better identify and appreciate the true nature of artworks, which is located in their power to "unconceal."[501] This operation at the heart of artistic practice reverberates in line with Nöe's functionality of art in which artworks *work* to make us more aware of ourselves. As explored in Chapter 3.4.4. The Open, this relates with Heidegger's concept of *Dasein* and the unconcealment that our special form of reflexive consciousness provides, which enables us to more fully appreciate the potential truth of art.

In conclusion, the functionality of 'unconcealment' that is inherent to the practice of art is a use that retains its indetermination, and as such it avoids confining artworks as determinant begins. It could in fact be understood as a phenomenon of artistic practice, something that is natural to it. As much as artists might try to use this phenomenon to their service, Rancière's concept of aesthetic separation helps to show how this is impossible:

> all forms of art can rework the frame of our perceptions and the dynamism of our affects. As such, they can open up new passages towards new forms of political subjectivation. But none of them can avoid the aesthetic cut that separates outcomes from intentions and precludes any direct path towards an 'other side' of words and images.[502]

While artworks transform us and help us to become more self-aware, their indeterminate nature assures that this *work* of unconcealment can never be predetermined. This is due to the subjective nature of aesthetic experience, where material sense is transformed into cognitive sense as artworks are contextualized by individuals. Considering artworks in relation to models and samples reveals the ways in which artworks function in terms of representation, proxy or substitution. While the significance of models and samples is determined through use in relation to purpose within a shared context of understanding, artworks disrupt or subvert preconceived notions of use, purpose and context, assuring that shared notions of

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[501] Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, 30.
[502] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 82.

understanding can only be determined posterior to the experience of an artwork. While we naturally encounter the world in relation to practical use, it is no surprise that artworks are conceived in relation to equipment, as both occupy positions as manufactured objects between inert material and potential work. Nonetheless, this 'useful' preconception of beings gradually eliminates the material consideration of the object because it is used up in the functionality of the object, where utility and reliability wear out potential meaning by making the object usual. As we saw in Chapter 2.3.7. Difference, if there is no distinction that marks something as different—as *unusual*—then it remains insignificant. Escaping functionality, or operating in a negative relation to practical functionality, allows artworks to demonstrate their true work, which is to manifest the relationship between earth and world that material and observation represent. Through this dualism an artwork *works* by representing the strife that is paramount to the 'being apart together' of the earth and the world, of matter and beings, and of individuals and society. Artworks work by unconcealing the separations that define us as people, which in turn helps us to become increasingly self-aware as people.

4.3.5. Conclusion to Technology

As the Prometheus myth demonstrates, technology is a gift from the gods to compensate for our inherent lack as a species.[503] We gain mastery over our relationship with nature thanks to technology,[504] which can be defined as an orchestration of phenomena to our use.[505] While the intentionality and organization inherent in this definition are shared by technologies and artworks, the fields of technology and art diverge on their handling of use and utility.[506] Nonetheless, both technologies and artworks rely on human involvement, are

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[503] Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 45.
[504] Agamben, *The Open*, 83.
[505] Arthur, *The Nature of Technology*, 53.
[506] Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, 26.

context dependent and demonstrate some relativity in terms of how they are understood.[507] Technologies can be categorized in terms of hardness and softness, which allows us to indicate the amount of user interaction and flexibility that they inherently display.[508] While artworks don't utilize this nomenclature, it could be relevant to help describe the increasing tendency of social art practices, which Rancière describes in his observation of artists wanting to induce alterations in the space of everyday life. The more interaction and input that spectators have with an artwork, the 'softer' it would become, which would imply more difficulty and nuance in terms of its effective interaction, understanding and use. The problem arises, though, as to define what exactly the effective interaction, understanding and use of an artwork is. While this categorization system may be useful in terms of indicating the levels of interaction of an artwork, it's irrelevant in terms of measuring its understanding or use, which are completely subjective due the fact that an artwork's purpose can never be predetermined.

Focusing in on the organizational processes involved in the creation of both artworks and technology, their inherent composition and orchestration make them opportune comparisons for studying the relation of matter and form. Nöe's organizational theory of art reflects the two-tiered system of autopoiesis and defines artworks through the reflexive reference of separate levels of organized activities. As a second-order activity is always an extension of the first-order activity, an artwork is defined by its capacity to bring first-order activities into the realm of thought, which exposes the underlying organization of both the activities that create the work and the people who observe it.[509] In this way, the experience of art is reflective in two ways, in terms of structure and thought. The recursive nature of technology can also be found in the practice of art, where existing elements or components are used in combination to create new technologies and artworks. This helps to show how

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[507] Dron, "Soft is hard and hard is easy," 33-34.
[508] Ibid.
[509] Nöe, *Strange Tools*, 30-31.

elements from everyday life began to be implemented into the practice of art during the aesthetic regime, and how contemporary artworks today are pushing the boundaries of artistic practice by incorporating non-art components and fields into their methodologies. Furthermore, recursivity demonstrates the dependence of both art and technology on tradition, which firmly establishes them as social institutions that function through the use of people. Not only do art and technology transform in relation to themselves, but people also transform individually and as a species through the use of art and technology.[510] The organization that artworks display helps us to see how we organize and are organized, which facilitates our reflexive transformation through the practice of art. Technology changes us in a similar way through its use, allowing us to do more and to think differently in the world. While the functionality and value of technology is related to the shared understanding of its contextual embedding, artworks subvert contextual understanding to enable a new awareness of function in relation to organization and show how we are organized as people.[511]

A consideration of artistic and technological recursivity and evolution show us how the transformation from the mimetic regime of art to the aesthetic regime happened in relation to societal transformation in general. The practice of art transformed over time through the creation of artworks made in relation to tradition, and as artworks changed, people's conception of art changed, which in turn changed people.[512] Since artworks are created to be observed, they function in the realm of perception and are free from the pragmatism that defines technology.[513] This positions experience and sensation as the priorities of art and helps us to consider the political efficacy of artworks, especially in light of the reflexively integrated processes of transformation that both art and technology display. Aesthetic experience unites external and internal sensation through the hetero-reference of a subject's

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[510] Nöe, *Strange Tools*, 19-25.
[511] Ibid., 30.
[512] Ibid., 58.
[513] Luhmann, *Art as a Social System*, p. 20.

external experience of an artwork in concert with their self-reference as they reflect upon the internal sensations that the artwork inspired. While subjective transformation from an external source is usually met with suspicion and resistance, transformation from within is more readily accepted as a result of the integral and independent source of change. Artworks thus offer subjects an opportunity for reflexive transformation by surreptitiously converting an external stimulus into an internal realization. As subjects become *informed* by artworks and the world around them, they demonstrate the process of being *information*.[514] The political implications of this subjective transformation through the practice of art are an important aspect to consider in relation to art's capacity to reflect life.

Our technological tendencies as human beings facilitate the ways in which we relate to the world in terms of organization and function. We are technological by nature, and we use technology to define who we are as a species. This includes the practice of art, which can be understood as a subverted form of technology. While artworks display processes of organization, intentionality and relativity in much the same ways that technologies do, they remain indeterminate in terms of their functionality and use value.[515] As a counterpoint to technological purpose, then, art vibrates in its resistance to predetermination, calling attention to itself in its avoidance of being usual and usable. Intentional subversion is how artworks *work* as they maintain their unique, undefined positions between matter and composed form. Artworks enhance their material significance by contrasting it with the formal composition that their creation makes evident. Standard technologies, on the other hand, emphasize utility and reliability and exhaust their material significance through their use.[516] Furthermore, technologies rely on context and shared understanding to establish their utility and meaning, while artworks subvert the contextual relations that inform the meaning of beings. This is how

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[514] MacKenzie, *Transductions*, 52.
[515] Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, 22-24.
[516] Ibid., 24.

artworks achieve their special version of functionality, through the potential *unconcealment* of beings and organization that their consideration provides to its users.[517] While technologies prioritize utility in context to achieve predetermined objectives, artworks challenge contextual and utilitarian understanding to achieve unique moments of aesthetic contemplation.

4.4. Conclusion to Human Beings / Intention

<u>Life and Art</u>

The human capacities for language and technology use provide important ways to more thoroughly understand the functionality of aesthetics and the union of life in art. Language is the mechanism we largely use to think with,[518] and as such it has great influence on the practice of art and our conception of aesthetics. If we consider the ways that language establishes and utilizes subjectivity, symbolism and significance, its influence is undeniable. Language is thus an essential tool to connect art to life through its role in human thought and the establishment of subjectivity. Furthermore, the practice of art provides the opportunity to become reflexively aware of one's self and reposition individual subjectivity, providing new ways of thinking and understanding the organization of human life.[519] This helps to demonstrate how artworks inevitably utilize human life as their raw conceptual material, and can influence personal change through their use.[520] In relation to the physical nature of artworks, we gain mastery over our relationship with nature thanks to technology,[521] which can be defined as an orchestration of phenomena to our use.[522] Both technologies and artworks are unavoidably indeterminate and necessitate human involvement, which

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[517] Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, 30.
[518] Nöe, *Strange Tools*, 40-41.
[519] Ibid., 37.
[520] Tanke, "What is the Aesthetic Regime?" 78.
[521] Agamben, *The Open*, 83.
[522] Arthur, *The Nature of Technology*, 53.

effectively binds the practice of art with human life.[523] Through their recursive development, art and technology transform in relation to themselves, and we in turn transform as people and as a species through our use of art and technology.[524] The practice of art transforms over time through the creation of artworks made in relation to tradition, and as artworks change, people's understanding of art changes, which in turn transforms the culture of people. The political implications of the potential subjective transformation of human beings through the practice of art demonstrate a definite and important connection between art and life.

<u>Separation</u>

Through an examination of language and technology, the concept of separation in relation to aesthetic experience is also expanded and clarified. Language helps to establish our conception of subjectivity, which allows us to see our selves as separate individuals from others.[525] Our capacity to respond to others shows how language enables us to be political, by demonstrating the essential nature of response in responsibility, which is necessary to obtain the duties, rights and obligations that responsibility entails.[526] Our source of political power lies in our ability to position ourselves and contest others through language, which endows us with the power to ideologically distinguish our selves. Nonetheless, language also shows how our impulse to separate should be done with caution. For example, the separation of mind and body that is implicit in Descartes' dictum *cogito ergo sum* foreshadows a fallacy at the root of our militancy to separate ourselves as subjects from other beings.[527] While distinctions can be made between body and mind, they are completely integrated in terms of function, as we saw in Chapter 3.2.2. Parallelism. Written language is also useful in demonstrating the relevance

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[523] Luhmann, *Art as a Social System*. Stanford, 20.
[524] Arthur, *The Nature of Technology*, 38.
[525] Maturana, "Autopoiesis," 29.
[526] Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 73.
[527] Ibid., 89-90.

of separation in aesthetic experience. Writing is an indirect form of communication that transmits information between two subjects who are physically separated, which provides us with the perfect example of how language establishes a symbolic infrastructure for the practice of art. As sign and symbol, writing demonstrates how meaning exists in represented form.[528] Distinguishing meaning in physical forms demonstrates how non-thought is always present in thought,[529] since understanding can only be achieved through pre-established structures of thought that provide context to observation, which combines the distinguished with the non-distinguished. This is Luhmann's theory of second-order observation, which we explored in chapter 3.3.4. Observation. Another way that language and the practice of art demonstrate separation is the reflexive reorganization that naturally occurs through their practice. Similar to the two distinct levels of operation in autopoiesis, Nöe's organizational theory of art demonstrates how human beings organize themselves, with artworks providing a chance to reconsider the ideology at the root of human organization.[530] Nöe uses language to show how the practice of writing changes language itself, in the same way that artworks and people change through the practice of art. This recursive change is found in the use of technology, which transforms itself and its users through reflexive reference.[531] As with the evolution of technology, the practice of art incorporates existing elements or components in combination to create new artworks. The recursive alteration inherent to language, technology and art demonstrates their potential for subjective and social transformation.

Human Cognition / Aesthetic Thought

Language, technology and art help to show how our form of cognition is unique to our species. As a basic structure of human thought, language provides ways in which subjective

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[528] Nöe, *Strange Tools*, 40-41.
[529] Rancière, *The Aesthetic Unconscious*, 28.
[530] Nöe, *Strange Tools*, 29.
[531] Arthur, *The Nature of Technology*, 38.

and symbolic meaning can be expressed and recognized, which enables authority and authorship. The ability of subjects to think about themselves demonstrates the reflexive action that establishes existential meaning and dignity.[532] This extends to the recognition of the subjectivity of the Other, upon which our social and political lives are based. Language capacitates human life to become political life, and the practice of art is the illumination of the complex structures that both separate and connect us as a society. As we have seen through Derrida's exploration of Lacan, our ability to recognize ourselves as the 'subject of the signifier' is most obvious in the imaginatively deceptive act of covering ones tracks, which demonstrates the reflective human ability to pretend pretence.[533] Distinguishing the meaning of physical forms, such as footprints, demonstrates an visionary projection of possibilities and consequences. The observation of distinction, which combines the simultaneity of thought and non-thought, demonstrates a paradox at the heart of aesthetic experience, where the possibility of meaning is eternal when there is uncertainty of subjective truth.[534] Technology also demonstrates how human cognition facilitates the practice of art. While the organizational nature of autopoietic theory helps us to understand the foundation of our lives, our technological tendencies as human beings enable the ways in which we relate to the world in terms of organization. We are technological by nature, and we use technology to define who we are as a species. Intentionality and organization are inherent to technologies and artworks, both of which are context dependent, rely on human involvement, and demonstrate some relativity in terms of how they are understood.[535] The fields of technology and art diverge, however, on their handling of use and utility, and technology provides a counterpoint that the practice of art subverts for its own creative purposes.[536] As mentioned earlier, Nöe's

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[532] Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 99-100.
[533] Ibid., 130.
[534] Rancière, *The Aesthetic Unconscious*, 41-42.
[535] Dron, "Soft is hard and hard is easy," 34-36.
[536] Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, 26.

two-tiered theory of art establishes a reflexive relationship between organized activities, which show second-order activities, such as artworks, bringing first-order activities into the realm of thought.[537] This theory addresses the reflexive structure of artworks in combination with the potential subjective transformation through aesthetic experience. This positions experience and sensation as the priorities of art and helps us to consider the political efficacy of artworks, especially in light of the reflexively integral processes of transformation that both art and technology display.[538] Aesthetic experience unites external and internal sensation, through the hetero-reference of a subject's external experience of an artwork in concert with the self-reference of the internal sensations that the artwork inspired. Artworks thus offer subjects an opportunity for reflexive change by surreptitiously converting an external stimulus into an internal realization. This is how artworks achieve their special version of functionality, through the potential unconcealment of beings and organization. In these various ways, language and technology demonstrate the backdrop of human cognition against which aesthetic experience is compared and contrasted.

Language and technology help to distinguish aesthetic thought from other forms of human thought by offering a common point of departure. Reiterating the importance of subjective and symbolic conceptualization, our exploration of legal judgements has shown a parallel use of language in the practice of art, where creative, demonstrative and judgmental functions are analogous.[539] The deceptive capacity of pretending pretence, which we explored in reference to covering tracks and is made possible through the recognition of the subjectivity of the Other,[540] alludes to the artificiality that all artworks inherently display. Artworks reflect our self-deception, and ironically point us towards subjective truth.[541] This is

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[537] Nöe, *Strange Tools*, 30-31.
[538] Ibid., 29.
[539] Keenan and Weizman, *Mengele's Skull*, 23-4.
[540] Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 128.
[541] Ibid., 131.

achieved through the expectation of artifice and our capacity to make judgements based on the evidence of composition during observation, which artworks incorporate in their inherent contrast of material and form. Similar to artworks, the inherent composition and orchestration of technologies make them ideal for studying the relation of matter to form. Unlike technology, however, artworks are undetermined in terms of use which enhances their material significance by contrasting it with the formal composition that their creation makes evident. Standard technologies, on the other hand, emphasize utility and reliability and exhaust their material significance in their use.[542] Recognizing this difference is essential for the aesthetic judgement of artworks. While technologies prioritize utility in context to achieve predetermined objectives, artworks challenge contextual and utilitarian understanding to achieve unique moments of aesthetic contemplation.

Artworks

To determine artistic products from other human products, many of the ideas from the previous paragraph on cognition and aesthetic thought are relevant. As language and technology help to distinguish aesthetic thought from regular thought, so too do they assist in the distinction of artworks from other beings. Beginning with the condition of artificiality, the deceptive potential of human beings to pretend pretence grounds the man-made stipulation of artworks, which establishes a promise of intentionality and communication in the spectator. This relates the appreciation of artworks with actions of mimicry, as the observation of an observation reflects the creative acts inherent to the analytic processes of artistic creation. Creative imitation is an implicit aspect of language, which originates from the intentionality of a subject but functions through the collective acceptance of society. Artworks inherently demonstrate some form of human intervention, which establishes them as a specific example

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[542] Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, 24.

of work.[543] With an indeterminable yet undeniable communicative intention, the simultaneity of thought and non-thought in artistic creation demonstrates a paradox at the heart of artistic interpretation. This relates in part to the malleable inter-objective relationship of the spectator during aesthetic experience, but more importantly reflects the indeterminate functionality and use value of artworks. As a counterpoint to technological purpose, artworks vibrate in their resistance to predetermination, and call attention through their aversion of being usable and *usual*.[544] This intentional subversion is how artworks maintain their unique, undefined positions between matter and composed form. While the functionality and value of technology is contingent on the shared understanding of its contextual embedding, artworks subvert context in order to enable a new awareness of function in relation to organization, which reveals how we are organized as people.[545] Artworks are made to be observed, and as such they function in the realm of perception and are free from the pragmatism that defines technology.[546] This highlights the importance of being able to recognize and contextualize compositional forms, which positions artworks within the realm of art in order to be evaluated appropriately. As points of comparison, language and technology are indispensible ways of isolating the symbolic, artificial and functionally subversive nature of artworks.

Art, Society & Tradition

In order to connect the practice of art to tradition, language and technology provide excellent methods for revealing art as a social practice in essence. Language catalyses our interpersonal social tendencies and establishes the foundation upon which we have become a political species, through collective intentionality and the acceptance of regulatory rules.[547]

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[543] Ibid., 22-24.
[544] Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, 30.
[545] Nöe, *Strange Tools*, 30.
[546] Luhmann, *Art as a Social System*, p. 20.
[547] Searle, *Freedom & Neurobiology*, 85-86.

As an indirect form of language, writing provides us with the best infrastructure for the practice of art through its symbolic mark-making, a common way in which we communicate meaning through organized forms. Language transforms human life into political life,[548] and the practice of art elucidates the complex structures that found our society. The practice of art grounds our politics by combining materials of the world with human agency, leaving traces and marks for current and forthcoming societies to contemplate. Nöe's organizational theory of art shows how artworks allow us to reconsider human organization, positioning contemporary art within the transformative progression of artistic tradition.[549] Artworks, like technologies, are recursive in nature, which illustrates how elements from everyday life began to be implemented into the practice of art during the aesthetic realm, and how contemporary artworks today are pushing the boundaries of art by incorporating non-art components and practices into their methodologies.[550] Furthermore, recursivity demonstrates the dependence of art and technology on tradition, and firmly establishes them as social institutions that function through the use of people. The evolution from the mimetic regime of art to the aesthetic regime happened in relation to societal transformation at large, which includes the development of our own self-conception. The practice of art transformed over time through the creation of artworks made in relation to tradition, and as artworks changed, people's conception of art shifted. Language and technology are thus key models for the development of art through its use, and the transformation of people through its practice, which demonstrate the practice of art as a firmly established, inevitably malleable, social tradition.

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[548] Ibid., 87-88.
[549] Nöe, *Strange Tools*, 42.
[550] Tanke, "What is the Aesthetic Regime?" 72.

CHAPTER 5. ARTWORKS / ART

5.1. Introduction to Artworks / Art

Exploring the practice of art in relation to life, it is clear that the connection between the two exists through human activity and thought. Aesthetic thought is distinct from other kinds of thought while at the same time relying on them in order to differentiate itself. As the concept of separation has helped to clarify the biological and cognitive operations that inform aesthetic experience, which Rancière describes as the transformation of 'sense to sense', it is still somewhat unclear how artworks relate to society. The second aspect of aesthetic separation relates to the transformation of artistic tradition, which is a more abstract conception of how the practice of art evolves recursively over generations. But how exactly do physical artworks relate or connect with such abstract universal generalizations? In this chapter we will explore the way that artworks relate to art by looking at the concepts of the *parergon* and 'the fragment,' both of which focus on artworks in relation to context. A *parergon* is a supplementary framing device that was described by Kant in *The Critique of Judgement* and subsequently explored by Derrida as a way of deconstructing aesthetic theory. We will look at how the *parergon* helps to better understand aesthetic thought and the contextualization of artworks by examining how the concepts of order, position and form inform both artworks and our understanding of them. While the *parergon* frames artworks in relation to an immediate and ideological context, the concept of 'the fragment' helps us to conceive of artworks in relation to the tradition of art. Associating artworks with the philosophical tool known as 'the fragment,' Osborne demonstrates both the autonomy of artworks as unique receptacles of thought, and the autonomy of art in relation to other human practices and traditions. This is grounded in a historical conceptualization of artistic avant-gardes and related to contemporary and postconceptual art practices, where the artistic employment of series and projects can be sees as reflections of the logic of 'the fragment.'

One condition of art's autonomy, however, is the dependence of artworks and art on the social traditions that establish them, which unites the practice of art with an existential conception of life that can be conceived over the breadth of human history.

5.2. The *Parergon*

5.2.1. Introduction to The *Parergon*

As physical manifestations, all artworks—whether objects or events—exist through some material form, and at some point this material ends and the context within which the artwork exists begins. In his text *The Parergon*, Derrida explores this boundary between the artwork and its context through an analysis of Immanuel Kant's *The Critique of Judgement*, which establishes the nature of aesthetic experience. The word *parergon* comes from the Greek language, with *ergon* translating to "work" and *par* meaning "accessory" or "supplement."[551] In *The Critique of Judgement*, Kant defines three kinds of *parerga* (plural) that he considers as secondary or adjunct to artworks; frames on paintings, drapery on statues, and columns on buildings (or architecture). Derrida fixates on these different 'ornaments' as a way of identifying the framing structure of *The Critique of Judgement* and the functioning of aesthetics in general. The idea of the *parergon* provides him with a philosophical tool to explore the opposition of interior/exterior in artworks, and to focus on the essence of aesthetic thought as defined by Kant. While the original three *parerga* defined by Kant are all physical accessories that relate to the traditional categorization of artworks by media, Derrida's exploration demonstrates the continued significance of the concept of the *parergon*. Julianne Rebentish describes the importance of Derrida's exploration in relation to contemporary art practices, where single artworks are increasingly diffuse and disperse in their nature:

> In a discussion of Kant's *Critique of Judgement*, Jacques Derrida has shown that the limits of an aesthetic object can be considered one of the central questions of

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[551] Derrida, "The Parergon," 18-20.

> traditional aesthetics. According to Derrida, however, and I agree with this, it is precisely the *impossibility of answering* this question that must be regarded as a crucial structural feature of the aesthetic as such. The question as to what actually constitutes the artwork as opposed to whatever is merely externally ascribed to it or projected onto it remains constitutively open in any aesthetic experience.[552]

For my purposes, the *parergon* highlights many key concepts that are useful for understanding the malleable boundaries of artworks and their consideration in relation to their non-art context and the tradition of art in general. In this chapter we will begin with a summary of Kant's "Analytic of the Beautiful" from *The Critique of Judgement* in order to better engage with Derrida's concept of the *parergon*. The concept of order helps us to see the recursivity of Kant's writing, and to explore the internal lack that the use of a *parergon* implies. The concept of position helps us to identify the inherent instability and movement of the *parergon*, which exposes its inherent paradoxical simultaneity as visible/invisible. The concept of form helps to demonstrate the most important opposition of all within aesthetic thought—that of material and form—while providing the source of connection between an artwork and *parergon*. In conclusion, the *parergon* exposes the formal structure of aesthetic thought as supplementary to the experience of artworks, which helps to clarify the tradition of aesthetics that informs our current understanding of artworks and art. By helping to expose the ways that we frame artworks during our experience of them, we can see how our acts of contextualization place artworks within the scope of a more universal thought and tradition.

5.2.2. Summary –The Critique of Judgement, Analytic of the Beautiful

Before summarizing the cognitive operation of aesthetic judgement, it is important to contextualize it in relation to the practice of art today. Over the past two hundred and twenty-nine years, people have been adapting Kant's influential theory of aesthetics in relation to the

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[552] Julianne Rebentish, "7 Negations. Against Aesthetic Affirmationism," in *Aesthetics and Contemporary Art*, ed. by Armen Avanessian, Luke Skrebowski, (Berlin, Germany: Sternberg Press, 2011), 57-58.

concurrent transformations of society and artistic practice. One key idea as I explore aesthetic separation and the reflection of life in art is that aesthetics and art are *not* the same thing, and it is very important to differentiate between them. While Kantian aesthetics is a process that revolves around experience and thought in relation to beauty, pleasure and the unknown, art is a practice that involves the creation and appreciation of artworks, which implies aesthetic thought in their creative and appreciative operations. My favourite recent definition of aesthetics comes from Rancière, who writes:

> I do not consider aesthetics to be the name of the science or discipline that deals with art. In my view it designates a mode of thought that develops with respect to things of art and that is concerned to show them to be things of thought. More fundamentally, aesthetics is a particular historical regime of thinking about art and an idea of thought according to which things or art are things of thought.[553]

This definition connects the practice of art to the practice of thinking, and thus, to philosophy. It also connects aesthetics to a tradition of art that is beyond our subjective selves that continues to transform around us through society. One principal difference between Kant's aesthetics and its contemporary understanding is the role of concepts in predefining the object being judged. Rancière points out in "Aesthetic Separation, Aesthetic Community": "Art entails the employment of a set of concepts, while the beautiful possesses no concepts."[554] Osborne agrees and criticizes Kant for confusing the judgement of art as a *purely* aesthetic form of judgement, since art relies on concepts and is logically conditioned by the determinate concept of 'art' that its tradition denotes. This is not the case when judging something as 'beautiful,' as you will see in the coming paragraphs. Osborne states: "There is thus a conceptual gap between art and aesthetic that cannot be adequately bridged within the terms of Kant's thought."[555] Derrida uses the *parergon* to explore this gap, and to position aesthetic thought within the realm of its contemporary tradition. Osborne thinks that aesthetic

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[553] Rancière, *The Aesthetic Unconscious*, 5.
[554] Ibid., 64.
[555] Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, 42.

purity misses the point of art anyway, since art distinguishes itself from nature through its functioning in terms of theory, intellect, and political ideology.[556] While art and aesthetics are not the same, our current understanding of art is certainly related to Kant's aesthetics, which initiated the aesthetic regime of art in which we find ourselves today.

As Kant explains in *The Critique of Judgement*, understanding and reason form the basis upon which we distinguish between concepts of nature and concepts of freedom, the former relating to objects as "intuitable" phenomena and the latter as objects that are not "intuitable."[557] It is important to note that for Kant, who wrote *The Critique of Judgement* in 1790, 'intuition' meant the sense perceptions of particular objects at that time, and not the contemporary notion of 'presentiment' or 'instinct.'[558] Between these modes of thought, which help us to *understand* the external sensory concepts of nature and to *reason* the internal super-sensible concepts of free thought, there is a separation that Derrida defines as an abyss.[559] While these two modes of thought are completely disjointed, they influence each other through judgement, which bridges understanding and reason together through the use of imagination and functions as a transition between these otherwise distinct modes of cognition.[560] It is only through judgement that an experience becomes aesthetic.[561]

But how? What does judgement have to do with determining aesthetic experience? As Kant explains, while understanding relates to the faculty of knowledge and reason relates to the faculty of desire, judgement relates to feelings of pleasure or displeasure.[562] The cognitive mode of judgement, as such, relies on subjective feelings, which is where the word

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[556] Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, 43.

[557] Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, 12-13.

[558] James Grant, "4. Kant's Critique of Judgement: Lecture 1," *Aesthetics and Philosophy of Art Lectures,* Podcast audio, University of Oxford Podcasts, https://podcasts.ox.ac.uk/series/aesthetics-and-philosophy-art-lectures (accessed November 5, 2016).

[559] Derrida, "The Parergon," 4.

[560] Ibid., 5.

[561] Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, 41-42.

[562] Ibid., 15-16.

"aesthetics" comes from. In ancient Greece, the word *aesthetica* was understood to mean "sensation," or "a sensible element in knowledge."[563] Depending on whether a judgment is based on a universal concept or a particular example, the judgment is respectively categorized as *determinant* or *reflective*.[564] A determinant judgement uses a universal concept to focus on a particular object, and a reflective judgement considers a particular object in the absence of a universal concept. There are two kinds of determinant judgements and Kant uses the adjectives *good* and *agreeable* to describe the differences between them; the word *good* is used to describe objects with a concept or purpose (i.e. this is a good pen), and *agreeable* describes objects that gratify the senses (i.e. this wine tastes great) or are constitutional for you (i.e. what fresh air).[565] In both of these cases, determinant judgments are based on universal concepts. We know how a *good* pen should write, and we know how an *agreeable* wine should taste, both based on concepts achieved through memories of empirical experience. In relation to the pleasure or displeasure that an object stimulates in a reflective judgment, it is the reflection back onto the subject that makes the judgement aesthetic. There is no universal *a priori* standard upon which we can base our judgement, and while we use our memory of experience to relate reflective judgement with determinant judgement, reflective judgement is resolved in a present moment of subjective evaluation and feeling.[566] Reflective judgements are singular and cannot be proven by argument.[567] For Kant, if an object is beautiful you are pleased in how its representation makes you feel, not in its existence.[568] Aesthetic judgment is based on disinterested pleasure, which means that you are impartial or indifferent to the existence of the object that incited the pleasure in you (see Chapter 2.3.7. Difference for a more detailed exploration of indifference). If you think about

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[563] Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, 41.
[564] Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, 18.
[565] Ibid., 44-46.
[566] Ibid., 30-31.
[567] James Grant, "4. Kant's Critique of Judgement: Lecture 1."
[568] Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, 49.

the importance of impartiality when judgements are made in the court of law, the same reasoning applies with aesthetic judgement. According to Kant, desire is based on pleasure related to a concept, and since aesthetic judgement can't be based on determinant concepts, it can't be based on desire either.[569] Aesthetic pleasure is based on reflective subjective experience, when your awareness of feeling pleasure pleases yourself.[570]

The purely subjective nature of aesthetic experience leads us to another relevant aspect of Kant's description of aesthetics; that an aesthetic judgement of something specific as beautiful projects to the objective universal.[571] Because aesthetic judgement is based on disinterested pleasure, or pleasure without desire, when you judge something as beautiful it automatically implies that everyone should think the same.[572] This is not the case when we judge that something is good or agreeable, which are determinant judgments that something serves its purpose or gratifies our senses. If we determine that something is *good*, we use this word based on the universality of the concept attributed to it, not on our aesthetic judgment of it. In the case of describing something as *agreeable*, we would never assume that what gratifies one person's senses would be the same for everyone. I prefer beer and you might prefer wine, but we can both argue as to why we like a specific wine or beer. With an aesthetic judgement this is different, as my lack of determinant concepts to predefine or desire the object of judgement allows me to assume that the pleasure I feel from the beautiful thing I'm experiencing will be the same for everyone. The fact that it *isn't* always the same adds an element of practical reality to aesthetic theory, as we will explore more thoroughly through the notion of the *parergon*.

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[569] Ibid., 30-31.
[570] Derrida, "The Parergon," 14.
[571] Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, 50-51.
[572] Ibid.

5.2.3. Description - the *Parergon*

The *parergon* is generally associated with ornamentation in relation to artworks, which calls into question the integrity of artworks in both physical and conceptual terms. Derrida's general understanding is that every *parergon* denotes an inherent lack or deficiency in the artwork that it adorns.[573] But just what is it that is implicitly lacking in a nude sculpture, an unframed painting or a building without columns? Before more thoroughly exploring the three examples of *parerga* that Kant establishes in *The Critique of Judgement*, it is important to examine the functionality of the *parergon* in terms of separation, lack and prosthesis. Once we have a better understanding of the relationship between artwork and *parergon*, Derrida's exploration of aesthetic theory will more clearly demonstrate the ways in which artworks relate to contexts and traditions, and aesthetic theory functions in terms of paradox.

Separation is at the heart of aesthetic thought, and Derrida uses the idea of the *parergon* to highlight how. It is not simply in his description of the abyss between reason and understanding, which is the impetus for judgement. Derrida emphasizes Kant's positioning of the faculty of judgement as "detachable" from the faculties of reason and understanding.[574] Judgement, it seems, is something that can be added or subtracted as need be to our experience of the world. It's not a standard mode of thought but one that comes or goes depending on the situation. We only need judgement when we do not have a determinant concept to identify or recognize the object we are judging. This transitory nature of judgement reflects the fluctuating nature of the *parergon*, which appear and disappear depending on the observational frame of reference. This relates with Luhmann's systematic description of observation (Chapter 2.3.5. Observation) and will be further explored in relation to visibility/invisibility (Chapter 5.2.5. Position). For both judgement and the *parergon*, the potential for separation becomes an integral aspect of the cognitive movement that aesthetic

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[573] Derrida, "The Parergon," 22.
[574] Ibid., 6.

thought entails. If *parergon* can be separated from artworks, then they can also be added. According to Derrida, the very inclusion of the *parergon* implies that there is a lack in the artwork. If there were nothing inherently lacking in the artwork, then the *parergon* wouldn't be there or be necessary.[575] The question is, does every artwork inherently lack something, and if so, how does the *parergon* relate to it? As we examine the three examples of *parerga* that Kant describes in *The Critique of Judgement* we can more clearly evaluate the missing elements. A *parergon*, in the end, is a kind of prosthesis that attaches and detaches from an artwork.[576] All prosthetics, as forms of technology, have utility and purpose that attribute determinant concepts to them. This allows them to be judged in terms of functionality—as good when they serve their purpose or bad when they do not—which distinguishes them from the artworks they adorn (see Chapter 4.3.4. Function). As they satiate a deficiency within an artwork, they also function as a mediator between the artwork and its context, which is most obvious for frames on paintings. A good mediator is able to appreciate both sides to every argument, and the *parergon* is no exception. Its formal qualities enable it to be perceived as part of the artwork, working as a counterpoint to help highlight compositional elements within the artwork while functioning as a means of supplementary expression. Nevertheless, the functional qualities of a *parergon* can never be fully discarded. They remain dormant, in hiding, while the subject is distracted by the pleasure provided in the moment of aesthetic experience. As an artwork's prosthesis, a *parergon* functions theoretically and practically at the same time, reflecting the paradoxical nature of the aesthetic experience of artworks.

Thinking about frames on paintings, I'll begin with some practical considerations. I worked in a frame shop for several, so I have practical experience of what framing pictures entails. The main purpose of putting a frame on a picture is to protect it. The inclusion of a protective glass barrier depends on the fragility of the medium, and the frame reinforces the

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[575] Derrida, "The Parergon," 22.
[576] Ibid., 37.

structure and provides security for the artwork. While most canvas paintings have stretchers to act as an internal support, the frame provides external protection and a hanging mechanism that alleviates any potential compromise of the internal support. While Kant doesn't stipulate the representation of the painting in the same way that he did with sculpture (or rather, statues), there are important aesthetic features of frames as well. Frames *frame* paintings; they make them stand out from their environment. They provide a visual division between the represented image and the context of the painting, most commonly referencing the view through a window. The colour and design of a frame are commonly used to accentuate or influence elements within the painting, which is most often accomplished by matching the colours and textures of the frame and the painting. In practical terms, then, frames show us that paintings lack strength and durability, while they visually suppose a lack of unity, emphasis and attention to detail.

Considering the drapery on statues, if we remove the *parergon* we are left with three-dimensional representations of nude human beings. What, other than clothing, do naked people need? As a Canadian, my first answer would be that we lack warmth without clothing, which we use to protect ourselves from harsh environments. A more social answer is that we use clothing to hide our bodies, or specific parts of them. Our embarrassment to be seen without clothing suggests that we're lacking confidence or self-esteem. Clothes also provide us with a manner to express our individuality, style and social standing, while situating us within an obvious historical timeline. Moving to more formal considerations, what is artistically lacking in a nude figure? Drapery adds a texture to a statue, not only through the fabric itself but through the lines and folds as the fabric clings to and hangs off the figure. The fabric also becomes a vehicle for motion as the creases of the drapery guide the observation of the artwork in ways that would not be possible without it. In this analysis, it seems that an unclothed human being lacks protection, self-confidence and expressive capacities, while a

statue of a human body without drapery lacks texture, expressive movement and associative historical indicators.

The final example that Kant provides of a *parergon* is the inclusion of columns on buildings or architecture. Columns are used to support buildings, which make it obvious that buildings without columns lack support. Instead of a colonnade an architect could simply use a wall, which demonstrates the other thing that columns provide a building; openness. Columns are usually located on the facades of building, proving space for both light and people to enter. Visually, columns add verticality and rhythm to buildings through their repetitive positioning as a group and the fluting on individual column shafts. They also offer a location for decoration, on the capital, and a sense of grandeur. From this we can determine that buildings without columns lack support, light and people in practical terms, and verticality, rhythm, ornamentation and importance in visual terms.

As briefly explored above, *parerga* demonstrate an affinity to separate and connect with artworks in a similar way as prostheses, exposing an inherent lack in artworks while functioning in an indeterminate and fluctuating manner. Examined as a whole, the *parergon* as defined by Kant demonstrates that artworks in general lack protection and support. As the *parergon* is located at the outer limit of the artwork—at its threshold—I can't help but relate these transitory elements to the borders of countries, which are fortified with protective infrastructures such as boundary walls, surveillance mechanisms and access controls. It seems that the *parergon* works in a similar way at the threshold of an artwork and its context, at least on a practical level, demonstrating that artworks are inherently exposed and vulnerable. The aesthetic analysis suggests that artworks lack expressive elements, which *parerga* counter in their individual formal ways. Either that or the expressive nature of a *parergon* becomes contaminated by the artwork that it connects with, and methods of expression spread from artworks to their surrounding *parergon*. In any case, this idea of lack is a pertinent one that

was explored in relation to the systematic functioning of life in Chapter 2.3.8. Lack. As we continue to explore the functioning of aesthetic theory in contemporary art practices, the dissolution of media specificity begs the question of what a contemporary *parergon* might be. By reversing the logic of the *parergon*, we should look to the formal structures that protect and support artworks in contemporary society. As a postconceptual artist, I cannot think of a more protective or supportive *parergon* than the conceptual contextualizations that accompany artworks in the form of written texts nowadays. It seems that every artwork needs a verbal explanation or justification nowadays—either that, or a curator. Without these modern *parerga*, artworks seems destined to be disregarded as weak and irrelevant.

5.2.4. Order

The use of order within *The Critique of Judgment* is contradictory, which reflects the opposition between the logic of reason and the subversive counter-logic of artworks. While musing on Kant's use and definition of the *parergon*, Derrida questions the order in which the analytic of the beautiful should be read or examined.[577] If *The Critique* were considered as an artwork, he proposes, then there would be no set beginning for its analysis. This is because the only artworks that condition a starting point are temporal, like a performance, or textual, like a book. For sculpture and painting you can start your analysis where you want. The question of order is not only about organization, then, but about sequence and time, which is vital to the functioning of aesthetic thought. Judging in general permits us to think of a specific thing in relation to a general principle. If a concept is provided beforehand, the judging process *determines* the particular thing being judged, and thus is a *determinant* judgement. The specific thing fits into the category of the general idea. If there is no prior concept with which to judge, meaning that we are unsure of what exactly we are judging, then

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[577] Derrida, "The Parergon," 15.

we start with the specific thing and more towards the general in an attempt to figure it out. This is a *reflective* judgement, where the example precedes the concept and is unknown.[578] One final way to consider ordering is in relation to imposing command—to give orders—and Derrida's analysis of *The Critique of Judgement* uncovers where Kant forces a previously used structure on its internal logic. Derrida describes Kant's recursive imposition as hypocritical in its confusion of logical and illogical subjects, which is ultimately *parergonal* in nature and exposes an implicit internal lack in Kant's theory of aesthetics.

There are two recursive structures that Kant uses in *The Critique of Judgement*. The original use of the word *parergon* is from in another text of Kant's titled *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*. Here the *parergon* is applied to four aspects of religious observation: Works of Grace, Miracles, Mysteries and Means of Grace. The four respective *parerga* for these aspects of religious observation are: fanaticism, superstition, supposed understanding of the supernatural order, and thaumaturgy (or magic).[579] Derrida notes that these *parerga* are neither internal nor external to religious observation, but that they effectively serve to *frame* and to *square* the work, and he relates them respectively to: damage, injury, deviation and seduction in relation to religious practice.[580] An association can be made to the practice of art between the third observation, mystery, and its *parergon*, deviation, which we explored in Chapter 4.2.3.2. Subject of the Signifier, and will become relevant again as we explore the enigmatic quality of artworks in Chapter 5.3.3. Autonomy. More important, however, is the example of recursivity that Kant provides by incorporating this existing theoretical implement—the *parergon*—upon his new theoretical subject—aesthetics. This idea of a recursive imposition can be found yet again in the conceptual schema that Kant applies to the *Analytic of the Beautiful*. It presents four categories as in *Religion*, but this time the source of

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[578] Derrida, "The Parergon," 17.
[579] Ibid., 21.
[580] Ibid., 20.

his schema is the analytic of concepts from Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*.[581] The judgement of taste is assessed according to the recursive four-part schema: 1. Quality, 2. Quantity, 3. Relation to ends, and 4. Modality. Kant's analysis finds that a beautiful object is one that: 1. provides disinterested pleasure, 2. lacks concept and pleases universally, 3. is final but without an end, and 4. is understood as an object of necessary pleasure, despite lacking a concept.[582] Kant addresses the idea of the *parergon* in the third category, relation to ends.

Derrida points out the problem, or hypocrisy, of taking a logical structure from *The Critique of Pure Reason* and imposing it on an 'illogical' structure (i.e. without determinant concept), such as *The Critique of Judgement*.[583] He claims that the resulting "violence" of forcing this framework limits the theory of aesthetics to a theory of beauty, the theory of beauty to a theory of taste, and a theory of taste to a theory of judgement, and scolds Kant for not justifying this imposition, the contents of which can't help but exceed their forced containment. According to Derrida, the imposed structure in Kant's *Critique of Judgement* is itself a *parergon*.[584] Reiterating the function of the *parergon*, this points towards the internal lack in Kant's *Critique of Judgement*, which requires supplementary support and ornamentation. The irony, according to Derrida, is that this 'imposed' and 'unjustified' structure is used to determine the formal process through which various oppositions of judgement exist; material and formal, pure and impure, inside and outside.[585] As Derrida states: "The analytic *determines* the frame as *parergon*, that which simultaneously constitutes and destroys it."[586] This shifting between constitution and destruction affirms the unstable character of the *parergon*, and relates it to the adaptive nature of autopoietic operation. It also establishes opposition and paradox as integral aspects of aesthetic experience.

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[581] Derrida, "The Parergon," 29.
[582] Ibid.
[583] Ibid., 30.
[584] Ibid., 34.
[585] Ibid.
[586] Ibid., 33.

Kant's aesthetic theory thus demonstrates a contradictory nature in relation to order. While the importance of organization and succession is shown in the cognitive mechanics of aesthetic experience, a logical formal structure—one that uses determinant concepts—has been imposed upon an illogical subject—one that only functions in the absence of determinant concepts. Furthermore, *The Critique of Judgement* utilizes the recursive appropriation of two existing theoretical structures—the *parergon* and the four-by-three categorization by quality, quantity, relation to ends and modality—which deviates from the reason of their original use and is left unexplained by Kant. In the end, however, this illogical subversion of existing logic reflects the nature of artworks. This not only demonstrates the *pareregonal* nature of the structures that support *The Critique of Judgement* and the logic of aesthetic experience, but also the lack that is inherent to *The Critique*.

5.2.5. Position

The unstable nature of *parerga* is important to its potential functioning as mediator between an artwork and the context within which it is aesthetically experienced. In this chapter we will examine this instability in relation to the limits, movement and visibility of the *parergon*, which help to demonstrate the importance of position and opposition in aesthetic theory. Aesthetic judgement is ultimately an act of framing, which implies the imposition of a *parergon* and establishes the position of the subject who makes the judgement. Just as the reflexive position of the subject is changeable, so too is the nature of the *parergon.*

As its definition connotes, the *parergon* is a supplement to the artwork, whether it is drapery on statues, columns on buildings or frames on paintings. In exploring the example of *parerga* on paintings, Derrida points out that there are two limits that are defined by the frame that include the limit between the artwork and the frame, and the limit between the frame and

the exhibition space.[587] Described as such, the *parergon* has a thickness and a surface, and its strength of connection to the artwork is dependent on the viewer's focus. When focusing on the painting, the frame separates itself and becomes part of the context. If the focus shifts to the exhibition space, however, the limit between the frame and the painting dissipates and the *parergon* becomes part of the artwork. The ability to disappear is the nature of the *parergon*, according to Derrida.[588] It connects to and separates from the artwork depending on the concentration of the viewer. It is seen as an accessory, as external, or it is not seen at all—as intrinsic to the artwork.[589] It's ability to shift between two positions highlights the inherent movement of aesthetic experience, and reflects the paradox of observation as explored in Chapter 2.3.5. Observation.

Despite its position between the interior and exterior of an artwork, the idea of the *parergon* is far from being a simple binary threshold. Even if we imagine a simple line as a frame, a line too has a thickness, depending on how closely you look at it. In his book *Memoirs of the Blind*, Derrida writes about the daughter of Butades, a girl who created the "very first drawing" by tracing the shadow of a shepherd on a wall.[590] The tracing of this line—the mythological first contour—created a limit between interior and exterior, yet it also paradoxically disappears in its formal creation of figure and ground. We can either see the line or perceive the form. As Derrida writes:

> The outline or tracing separates and separates itself; it retraces only borderlines, intervals, a spacing grid with no possible appropriation. The *experience* or *experimenting* of drawing (and experimenting, as its name indicates, always consists in journeying beyond limits) at once crosses and institutes these borders[.][591]

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[587] Derrida, "The Parergon," 24.
[588] Ibid., 24-26.
[589] Ibid., 26.
[590] Jacques Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*, (Chicago, U.S.A.: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 54.
[591] Ibid.

This contour line is described with a remarkable affinity to the *parergon*. Derrida attributes surface to every *parergon*, which enables it to be distinguished from its *milieu*, just as a figure is from its ground.[592] Despite having two limits, as mentioned earlier, the *parergon* appears or disappears into the context or the artwork depending on the focus of the viewing subject.[593] As opposed to artworks, which attract attention through their inherent difference, the *parergon* seems to function in parallel fashion as our consciousness (see Chapter 3.4.2. Consciousness), which is generally imperceptible in spite of its obvious presence.

Even when the *parergon* is implemented as a supplementary theoretical structure, as in Kant's repeated use of a four-by-three conceptual schemata, it follows this same pattern of appearing and disappearing, shifting focus to and from the content and its container.[594] As Derrida comments on the imposed order of the recursive schemata, which places the mathematical categories of quantity and quality before the dynamic categories of relation and modality, the positioning of quality as the first category is what establishes all of the oppositions through which aesthetics functions; material and form, figure and ground, subject and object.[595] Position and opposition are thus created through an act of framing in *The Critique*, and the act of judging itself becomes an act of positioning, especially due to reflexive acknowledgement.[596] The requirement of a subjective voice automatically establishes a point of origin and identity to which each verdict must belong. The discursive nature of aesthetics assures that every point has its counterpoint, every position its opposition, and every observation its source.

The intrinsic instability of the *parergon* demonstrates the necessary movement between position and opposition during aesthetic experience. While the *parergon*

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[592] Derrida, "The Parergon," 24.
[593] Ibid., 26.
[594] Ibid., 35.
[595] Ibid., 34.
[596] Ibid.

demonstrates its own physical presence between the limit of the artwork it adorns and the limit of the context within which it functions, it also demonstrates its ability to disappear and become invisible, depending on the position of the viewer. This once again highlights the importance of subjectivity in aesthetic experience, and demonstrates how every judgement is a subjective positioning, as impermanent as it might be. The instability of position and visibility of the *parergon* reflects the subjective-objective opposition of human life and artworks, which helps to further align aesthetic functionality with the operation of life.

5.2.6. Form

The transformation of material to form is the essence of artistic creation, making form a definitive aspect of artworks. Art cannot exist without form, and the intellectual movement that results from the consideration of the material/form opposition is a cornerstone of aesthetic thought. As we will explore in this chapter, it is only through formal means that a *parergon* can connect with an artwork. While providing a clandestine justification for Kant's use of recursive *parergonal* structures to organize *The Critique of Judgement*, this caveat also points towards the vital importance of the formal condition of artworks. As a formal theory itself, aesthetics must also be appreciated in its formality, which functions distinctly from the natural "material" that founds human thought—its molecular structure. Through this simultaneous separation and connection, which we establish in thought, form provides a way of considering art in relation to life.

The opposition of material and form is firmly established in *The Critique of Judgement* as a key modality of aesthetic thought. It is in and through this opposition that we find the work of the artist, through the transformation from material to form in the production of an artwork. Form, however, never stops being material, which means that during the aesthetic experience of an artwork there is movement back and forth between the two

conceptions of matter. As Rebentisch states: "any object becomes aesthetic in a *constant passage* between these two poles: between form and content, or, more precisely, between material and meaning, or between thing and sign."[597] While Rebentisch is speaking in reference to postconceptual art—specifically the use of everyday objects for creating artworks—this transience between material conceptions of objects is equally relevant for traditional artworks too.

Derrida uses the *parergon* to explore the vital importance of the relationship between material and form in aesthetic thought. According to Kant, the only way that a *parergon* can successfully unite with the artwork it adorns is through formal means. Derrida highlights the omnipresence of the material/form opposition throughout *The Critique of Judgement*, which he concedes as a fundamental "conceptual schema" for *all* art theory. This entails pairing the irrational and illogical with 'material'—which is also considered in terms of nature, chaos and disorder—and coupling the rational and logical with 'form'—which can also be thought in terms of artifice, orchestration and composition.[598] Kant introduces the word *parergon* in his *Critique* when he distinguishes between material and formal judgements, but it is only the latter that can be associated with judgements of taste. Material judgments are not aesthetic. Formality is the only true space of aesthetics, and this is a constant throughout the history of art.[599] Furthermore, Rancière contends that the experience of artworks is political in the ways that it affects the sensibilities of the viewer via form. As McCullagh notes: "his aesthetics is concerned with the conditions of sensibility insofar as sensibility is capable of being formed, unformed, and transformed together with the forms and works of art that activate changes in

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[597] Rebentish, "7 Negations. Against Aesthetic Affirmationism," in *Aesthetics and Contemporary Art*, ed. by Armen Avanessian, Luke Skrebowski, (Berlin, Germany: Sternberg Press, 2011), 54.
[598] Derrida, "The Parergon," 28.
[599] Ibid.

sensible worlds."[600] This brings to mind the process of *information* that we looked at in Chapter 4.3.2. Reorganization, which highlights the malleable nature of our ongoing transformation as individuals. Form, nonetheless, becomes the vehicle through which anything can be considered in an aesthetic way. The constructed nature of Kant's formal structure within the *Critique of Judgement* implies its own system of framing, which is both imposed and provisional, just like a *parergon*.

Artistic creation is the work of transforming material into form, and the aesthetic appreciation of artworks is the recognition and evaluation of this transformation in relation to reason and sensation. The material/form opposition is paradoxical because it can appear or disappear like a *parergon*. They are not true opposites and can exist simultaneously in harmony, and yet the condition of work within an artwork—of human intervention—implies that they can always be separated in terms of form. This is how the indefiniteness remains an essential aspect of both artworks and the tradition of art. As paradoxical beings, artworks are definite in form while being indefinite in terms of use and significance. The tradition of art— which incorporates aesthetic thought—is indefinite in its continued evolution through practice. The opposition of material and form demonstrates the cornerstone of this tradition, connecting the tradition of art to its contemporary practice. In its association of matter and meaning, material and form also connect the practice of art with autopoiesis and our understanding of life in terms of biological functioning and existential experience.

5.2.7. Conclusion to The *Parergon*

Aside from being an excellent revision of the functioning of aesthetic judgement as initially defined by Kant in *The Critique of Judgment*, Derrida's article "The *Parergon*" highlights the inherent paradoxes that help to make Kant's aesthetic theory so intriguing and

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[600] McCullagh and Ford, "The Desert Below," 158.

influential. While the purpose of a *parergon* is to supplement or decorate an artwork, Derrida's exploration demonstrates its protective role that reveals the inherent vulnerabilities of artworks. As an adjunct to an artwork, a *parergon* inherently demonstrates separation, and its detachability defines its function as ornament while reflecting the separability of the faculty of judgement from other forms of thought, namely reason and understanding.[601] Using the concept of order to examine Kant's aesthetic theory and the *parergon*, Derrida shows how its versatility as a concept to denote organization, sequence and command demonstrates hypocrisy within *The Critique of Judgement* between logical theoretical structures and illogical subject matter.[602] This duplicity is further accentuated by the recursive adoption of the logical forms from previous theoretical texts, which are used to frame aesthetic theory in relation to quality, quantity, relation to ends, and modality.[603] As an imposed theoretical structure, Kant's reused schema becomes a *parergon* itself and suggests an internal lack at the heart of *The Critique of Judgement*.[604] Exploring the *parergon* in terms of position, its instability in reference to context and content reflects the implicit cognitive movement during aesthetic experience. Paralleling Lumann's paradoxical form of observation, the *parergon* fluctuates between visibility and invisibility depending on the focus of the observer, appearing as part of the environment when focusing on the integrity of the artwork, but part of the artwork when focusing on the space in which the artwork is exhibited.[605] This demonstrates the nature of the *parergon* as a frame, which functions as a contour line that separates figure from ground. This nature is repeated in Kant's aesthetic theory, shifting focus between the content of the analysis and the theoretical frames that constrain it.[606] As a result, every aesthetic judgement can be understood as an act of framing that establishes the position

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[601] Derrida, "The Parergon," 6.
[602] Ibid., 34.
[603] Ibid., 29.
[604] Ibid., 34.
[605] Ibid., 24-26.
[606] Ibid., 35.

of the subject in relation to the oppositions that facilitate aesthetic thought.[607] The most important of these oppositions is between material and form, which establishes the entire tradition of art on the conflict between the presence and lack of logic.[608] This distinction, which composes and conditions all artworks, is the same division that constitutes and defines ourselves as living beings—as subjects and objects. Just as autopoietic operation on the molecular level functions in the absence of meaning, so too does the material component of artworks as experienced by other beings. It is the observational powers of the molar levels of cognitive functioning that enables the capacity of differentiation that produces meaning in human beings, which allows us to identify the form of a composed material and associate significance to it. This separation of material and form further parallels our existential condition of 'being apart together,' a society of inter-objective individuals. The operation of aesthetic experience allows us to see this paradoxical condition of simultaneity, which is reflected in the indefinite artwork and the unstable *parergon* that adorns it.

5.3. 'The Fragment'

5.3.1. Introduction to 'The Fragment'

To understand how artworks relate with their context is to move well beyond their immediate physical environment and to consider their situation in relation to society and history. These immense fields of study contain endless concepts that subjects navigate and refer to when viewing artworks, just as artists do when making them. Contemporary artworks are full of cultural references and whether they are recognized or not by a viewer is consequential. The possibility of social and historical ideas being *contained* in objects and then *accessed* by a viewing public is far more important, especially from the perspective of artistic creation. It is one of the ways artworks can be conceived of as indefinite in spite of

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[607] Ibid., 34.
[608] Derrida, "The Parergon," 28.

their finite form. It is one of the great mysteries of artworks as they are accessed over generations, a question of how meaning is generated by and through things in relation to people and context. It is also a question of art's autonomy and self-sustaining existence as separate yet connected to other fields and practices. But how does this autonomy work?

Separation is a key concept that can be used to better understand the ontology of the artwork—the set of concepts and categories that help to explain its inherent properties and relations. In his book *Anywhere or Not at All*, Osborne finds some remarkable affinities between artworks and 'the fragment,' an organizational tool developed by a group of German philosophers known as the Jena Romantics.[609] 'The fragment,' as you can well imagine, is understood as a separate part in relation to a whole. Freidrich Schlegel, who was working in the late 18th and early 19th Century as part of this philosophic group, developed 'the fragment' in response to perceived philosophical limitations at the time.[610] Osborne uses the formal and conceptual properties of 'the fragment' to explore both post-Kantian aesthetic philosophy and the ontological structure of contemporary art. In this chapter we will explore 'the fragment' in relation to aesthetic separation, which can be understood as the division between external and internal in aesthetic experience—the transformation of 'sense to sense'—and the separation of artworks from the tradition of art from whence they came. After briefly describing the philosophical origin of 'the fragment,' we will examine its role in establishing the autonomy of artworks and the autonomy of art in general. The cost of said autonomy is a series of conditions that must be met, which in general relate the practice of art with other social practices, such as economics. Once we explore the historical example of the Russian avant-garde known as the Constructivists, we will move on to explore contemporary art practices, which Osborne considers in a postconceptual light. Finally we will look at two common methodologies of contemporary art practices—the series and the project—that accentuate the

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[609] Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, 59.
[610] Ibid.

potential of 'the fragment.' In the end, 'the fragment' can be seen to provide a theoretical framework that helps to clarify how artworks function autonomously in relation to their historical and social contexts, which will undeniably assist us in revealing how life is reflected in art.

5.3.2. Description – 'The Fragment'

A fragment, as its name suggests, is a part in relation to a whole. In this chapter we will explore its history as a philosophical tool that is paradoxically complete and incomplete at the same time. While it resolved existing philosophical problems at the time of its creation—nine years after the publication of Kant's *The Critique of Judgement*—the theoretical structure of 'the fragment' makes it a perfect model for exploring the philosophical functioning of artworks. After examining the origin of 'the fragment' it becomes clear how its association as a work of art in itself facilitates a better understanding of the relationship between aesthetics, art and society.

'The fragment' was used by the early, Romantic philosophers as a motif in their attempt to develop a new way of expressing philosophical ideas, in order to resolve or avoid existing theoretical obstacles at that time. According to Osborne, the problem with the traditional philosophical model was its requirement of an impossible theoretical procedure in which the world could be known in truth as a whole.[611] Friedrich Schlegel's use of fragments in his magazine *Athaneum* was a way of implementing an anti-system, a way to orient towards a potential infinite while recognizing the incomplete nature of individual fragments within a collection.[612] As Osborne puts it: "the fragment acquired its philosophical meaning by being posited as the *medium of reflection* of this apparent contradiction between the finite and

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[611] Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, 58-59.
[612] Ibid., 59.

infinite aspects of an absolute knowledge."[613] A fragment displays limitation while also demonstrating self-sufficiency. It has a negative relation to the system with its autonomous nature as a singularity, and carries the idea of totality within itself negatively (in relation to the group), positively (in relation to itself) and as a concept (a recognized idea).[614]

One of the problems that Schlegel tackled by developing the fragment was the idea of infinite regress, which occurs when the subject ("I") attempts to *know* itself.

> The specific contradiction inherent to the principle of the I as a first principle of philosophical knowledge is that each time the I posits itself as the object of its own knowledge it separates itself qua object from itself qua subject of that knowledge, thereby knowing itself only incompletely.[615]

The regress moves to infinity when the subject tries to understand itself again in this subject-object duality, and it separates itself from its knowledge once again. In opposition to the accepted thought of the time, Schlegel held that this 'obstacle' of infinite regress simply *is* the structure of the subject.[616] After exploring the role of language in creating the subject in Chapter 4.2.3. Subjects, and the generation of self in Chapter 3.2.4. The Self, we can see how inter-objectivity is rather taken for granted nowadays. Schlegel's early acceptance of this volatility shifts the problem of knowing the world as a whole from a fundamental philosophical question to a problem that is inherent in the reflexive form of infinite reflection.[617] Using both the artwork and 'the fragment' to demonstrate the form of this infinite reflexivity, Schlegel transformed the commonly understood form of the infinite regress—a straight line—into the infinite form of a self-enclosed, self-limiting circle.[618] Adorno later explored this structure, which he called 'parataxis,' in *Aesthetic Theory*. "It is

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[613] Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, 59.
[614] Ibid., 60.
[615] Ibid., 64.
[616] Ibid., 64.
[617] Ibid., 64-65.
[618] Ibid., 65.

this transformation of a straight line into a circle that redefines the infinite as itself absolute—that is, beyond its own opposition to the finite."[619]

The comparison of 'the fragment' to a work of art is not conjecture, since an example from the *'Atheneum' Fragments* clearly states it. "A fragment, like a miniature work of art, has to be entirely isolated from the surrounding world and be complete in itself like a hedgehog. [*AF* 206]" [620] According to Osborne, the image of a 'hedgehog' in this self-reflexive fragment helps to provide a burst of recognition that is typical of romantic epistemology. The independence that Schlegel places as a condition of 'the fragment' is what founds its autonomy. Osborne uses this specific fragment to establish a "dialectics of completion-incompletion" within the philosophical structure of 'the fragment' that works on three levels. The first is internal to each fragment, the second is at the level of a collection of fragments, and the third is the speculative level of the totality of all possible additional fragments.[621] In relation to Rancière's conception of being apart together, there is remarkable affinity in terms of structure and relations, while the speculative level of additional fragments serves to propel this paradoxical state into perpetuity. As we explored in Chapter 4.2.3. Progression, this state of indetermination is a defining characteristic of artworks, especially in relation to function and interpretation. Osborne further states that by becoming a fragment, anything can become a possible object of philosophical interpretation, which he describes as a possible object of the experience of truth that would necessarily combine the partiality of its content and the completeness of its form. By equating 'the fragment' with the work of art, Osborne claims that the practice of art becomes a philosophical practice. While the paradoxical conditions of aesthetics make it difficult to fully understand, they also make

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[619] Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, 65.
[620] Ibid., 60.
[621] Ibid.

Osborne's proposition easy to accept. Nöe certainly agrees: "The job of art, its true work, is philosophical."[622]

Offering a solution to the philosophical problem of infinite regress, 'the fragment' is a perfect model for the paradoxical integrity of artworks that demonstrate limitation and self-sufficiency concurrently. Similar to the functioning of the *parergon*, the state of 'the fragment' or artwork depends on the position of its subjective observation, which can interpret it as positive or negative in relation to the grouping, or simply as a concept. In any case, its reflexive form as an infinite circle also makes it a model for subjective instability, which equally possesses inherent limitation and autonomy. As an anti-system, 'the fragment' accepts the imperfection that founds the formal world, including the structure of aesthetic thought. As with the *parergon*, the vulnerability that this demonstrates aligns it with the subversive functionality of artworks, which in turn allows us to extrapolate the autonomic operation of artworks and art in relation to other aspects of human society. This includes the contemplation of artworks in relation to the tradition of art and the aesthetic regime of art, in which we currently find ourselves. As we continue our exploration of 'the fragment,' the relationship between aesthetics, art and society will become increasingly apparent.

5.3.3. Autonomy

One of the most important consequences of the introduction of aesthetic theory into the tradition of art was the autonomy of artistic practice that accompanied it. This newly acquired independence, however, was not achieved without the conditioning of art's functionality in relation to society at large, which positioned its practice in terms of heteronomy. Many of the resulting conditions of artworks have been explored in previous chapters, but here we will focus on them and highlight how they are integral to our current

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[622] Nöe, *Strange Tools*, xii-xiii.

definition of artistic practice, which is defined in relation with other fields of practice and thought. One association that is explored for the first time in this thesis is an artwork's autonomy in relation to economics, which relates the ideas of commodity and use-value into our understanding of artworks. While relating to previously examined notions of counter-functionality that we explored in Chapter 4.3. Technology, these ideas be developed in relation to economics using the art historical example of the Constructivist movement of the Russian avant-garde. In their attempt to create an art for the people by the people, they have indelibly affected our current understanding of art's autonomy in relation to collective intentionality and the economy. While the movement has long passed, the idea of the avant-garde nonetheless lives on strongly in contemporary art practice, and provides a historical example of the operational relationships of art, society and tradition.

With their conception of 'the fragment,' the Jena Romantics determined that every artwork is ontologically autonomous: "a distinct form of presentation of truth."[623] They did this by determining the capacity of objects—specifically art-objects—to produce meaning, which Novalis described as a "presentation of the unpresentable," and Jean-Francois Lyotard defined as "the infinite finitely displayed."[624] To define an artwork as ontologically autonomous, however, there are contextual conditions that must be met, specifically regarding the relationships that objects of art have with time and to society.[625] Osborne notes that the heart of the Jena Romantics' contribution to the field of aesthetics was to determine the ongoing mediation that artworks have with temporal and social practice, which ironically allow artworks to gain their own independent ontology.[626] While the aesthetic judgement of beauty may be considered in a purely Kantian way, the aesthetic judgement of artworks is

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[623] Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, 44.
[624] Ibid.
[625] Ibid.
[626] Ibid., 45.

condemned to being dependent on its contextual relations.[627] With the introduction of aesthetic thought, the definition of art began to become dependent on the relationship between art and society, and established a counterpoint in which difference—and thus significance—could be recognized in the practice of art. As Tanke explains:

> The aesthetic regime posits that art is the occasion for an experience that disrupts the results of domination in everyday life. …[A]rt is not and never was autonomous from other aspects of existence. Aesthetics defines an identity of art in which art's power is contained in its difference from the everyday, not its identification with it.[628]

As explored in relation to autopoiesis in Chapter 2.3.7. Difference, significance is generated through the observation of difference. Osborne states that artworks themselves mark their autonomy ontologically through their individuality, which in turn constitutes them as indeterminate—as *enigmas*.[629] A work of art's autonomy results from its distinct production of meaning, through which it acts like a subject, according to Osborne. This stems, in part, from the communicative intentionality that every artwork assumes, as described by Luhmann in Chapter 2.3.5. Observation, which equates the experience of artworks to the observation of observations. Furthermore, it relates to the absurdity of artworks, which act like puzzles that cause perpetually doubt, no matter how many times they are solved or answered.[630] As an enigmatic object that acts like a subject, the obscurity of an artwork's subjectivity is persistent, and its intentionality is never clear. With this duplicity of ipseity, Osborne claims that every artwork calls attention to the fact that a human subject is an object as well, highlighting the illusory nature of the subject—the misunderstanding that the subject is not an object. "That dialectical transformation of the object into a subject that *is* the work of the artwork is matched, epistemologically, by a dialectical reversal of the human subject into

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[627] Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, 45.
[628] Tanke, "What is the Aesthetic Regime?", 78.
[629] Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, 85.
[630] Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, (London, U.K.: Continuum, 2004), 161.

an object, which renders subjectivity, *in itself,* opaque."[631] In this way, the aesthetic experience of artworks—which functions in relation to their beautiful, pleasurable and unknown qualitites—reflects the subject-object instability of the observer *and* the artwork being observed. Once again, Rancière's state of 'being apart together' is a perfect metaphor for this paradox, which parallels the hermeneutics of both the *parergon* and 'the fragment.'

In his exploration of the avant-garde, John Roberts defends the importance of art's autonomy. In his reading of Luhmann and the autopoietic nature of art, Roberts determines that autonomy is produced through acts of negation, much the same way that an autopoietic organism identifies itself as autonomous through its negative relation with its environment.[632] "Autonomy is a space of differentiation and distinction, where the dominant conditions of heteronomy are tested, discarded and worked through."[633] He stresses two interrelated caveats as he examines the autonomy of art in relation to reflexivity, adisciplinary research, and situatedness. The first is that art's autonomy is necessarily a social relation that is connected to the practice of art, and as such it is established through the malleable relationships that art has with materials, thought and politics.[634] This supports Osborne's equivalent assertion that we explored in the previous paragraph. Roberts' second stipulation is that the autonomy of art must exist through form (material or immaterial), although it need not be determined by any specificity of media. This condition reflects the findings of Derrida that we explored in Chapter 5.2.6. Form in relation to the *parergon*. Both of these conditions that Roberts places on the autonomy of art are largely determined through the capitalist commodity status of artworks, which can't be recognized as pure commodities with a standard function of exchange-value, but neither are they free of said function and purely autonomous.[635] This

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[631] Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, 85.
[632] Roberts, *Revolutionary Time and the Avant-Garde*, 92.
[633] Ibid., 86.
[634] Ibid., 92.
[635] Ibid., 83.

simultaneous positive/negative relation that artworks have with the commodity form results from their adherence to production for a private market while maintaining sovereignty from instrumental (i.e. functional) use. As such, art's critique of exchange-value becomes fixed to its process of commodification.[636] As Roberts states: "As socialized, non-coercive labour (or purposeless purposiveness in the language of Kant), the artwork's fabricated uselessness is able to recall for the spectator the freely human and non-instrumental content of labour."[637] The social caveat that Roberts determines as a condition of art's autonomy can be understood in relation technology, which provides artworks with a counterpoint against which they can express their negative functionality and their resistance to being usual or usable (see Chapter 4.3.4. Function). In relation to economics, however, art's subversion of functionality attains new meaning.

Roberts utilizes the work of Adorno to expand upon these ideas, demonstrating that the significance of art's autonomy comes largely from its illusory independence from exchange-value. This deceptive freedom from heteronomy creates a space for reflecting upon the separation between art and the commodity form, which in turn demonstrates how art is dependent upon the heteronomy of standard economic practices to act as a counterpoint for generating its autonomy.[638] The same can be said in terms of art's adverse relation to technological functionality. Guy Debord reflects the same idea in his conception of 'the spectacle,' which is dominated by ideas of separation that relate aesthetic and economic theories. He states:

> The spectacle originates in the loss of the unity of the world, and the gigantic expansion of the modern spectacle expresses the totality of this loss: the abstraction of all specific labor [sic] and the general abstraction of the entirety of production are perfectly rendered in the spectacle, whose *mode of being concrete* is precisely abstraction. In the spectacle, one part of the world *represents itself* to the world and is superior to it. The spectacle is nothing more than the common

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[636] Roberts, *Revolutionary Time and the Avant-Garde,* 83.
[637] Ibid., 96.
[638] Ibid., 85.

> language of this separation. What binds the spectators together is no more than an irreversible relation at the very center which maintains their isolation. The spectacle reunites the separate, but reunites it *as separate*.[639]

Separation places emphasis on the irremovable boundary at the heart of artistic practice. Adorno's assertion of a determinate concept of art that presupposes aesthetic experience stresses the importance of the mediation of autonomous strategies *through* every artwork, which becomes: "the mediator of the shifting symbolic relations of art's internal and external divisions."[640] In this way, Roberts contends that the avant-garde is not something that exists historically in singular artworks or epochs, but rather something that functions while art's potential reverberates throughout society.

> [T]he autonomy of the art object/event is something that is produced out of the social relations that constitute the institution of art itself. … This means that autonomy is not the formal outcome of semblance, but the always practical and theoretical outcome of the contradiction between the artwork's exchange-value (its approbation as a sign or token of market and academy) and its use-value (its circulation as knowledge, its reception as *Bildung*). In other words, because of the perpetual threat of the loss of its use-value, art is continually compelled to find strategies (relations and non-relations) which resist or obviate this process of critical and artistic dissolution – the history of the 'new' in modernism deriving precisely from art's resistance to its exchange-value. But, at the same time, art generates its social identity and value from this process.[641]

The paradoxical generative-destructive nature of artistic practice has various implications. On an existential level, Roberts claims that the unresolvable nature of an artwork's interpretation reflects a subject's unresolvable understanding of themselves in the world. It is through this reflection that Rancière rightfully associates artistic creation and intentionality towards 'a people which is still lacking.' On the level of production, artworks must continually renew themselves by challenging and resisting the tradition and context from whence they came, which are also used to identify and define them. Artistic autonomy thus depends on persistently crossing boundaries, and this is where the practice of art extends itself into non-

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[639] Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, (Detroit, U.S.A.: Black & Red, 2016), Thesis. 29.
[640] Roberts, *Revolutionary Time and the Avant-Garde*, 86.
[641] Ibid., 98.

art and anti-art realms to assure its survival and independence. Through its dissonant relation with standard economics, an artwork's autonomy also rests on the condition of its originality—its distinguished difference and singularity from other commodities.

An important exemplification of economic influence on artistic autonomy is the avant-garde movement of Russian Constructivism. The various factions involved in Constructivism were interested in making artistic practice socially relevant, described as part of a process of societal rationalization at the turn of the twentieth century.[642] Artworks, especially under communism, should be made by the people for the people. As Osborne notes, however, the process of 'rationalizing art' was imbued with two important contradictions that have left a permanent mark on our current tradition of art. The first reflects an conflict between political and formal concerns, and the second an opposition between processes of production and expression.[643] In relation to the former conflict, an encouraged freedom of artistic experimentation during post World War One Constructivism contradicted the inherent social isolation of artistic enjoyment, which was limited both by the locational accessibility of artistic display and the educational accessibility that was determined by social upbringing and class. Aside from logistical impossibilities of making artworks accessible to everyone, an 'art for the people *in general*,' it stands to reason, is never experimental in nature. In relation to the latter conflict between production and expression, the materials used to make artworks were conditioned to reflect the social ideals of communism, which lead to the adoption of purely utilitarian supplies (i.e. construction materials).[644] While Constructivist creativity flourished for some time, these contradictions began to erode the intended social unity of the movement. Combined with economic insufficiency—especially in relation with material requirements—Constructivism eventually drifted back to operate as an independent faction of

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[642] Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, 154.
[643] Ibid., 155.
[644] Ibid., 156.

society, according to Osborne. In its return to its autonomous domain, however, he contends that artistic production would never be the same. As though ashamed of its unsuccessful attempt at social rationalization, Osborne believes that artworks henceforth confront this failure reflexively within their own structure, and that their social impracticality is necessarily reflected in their construction and compounded in their autonomy as artworks.

> Art had to become 'critical' once it had failed to become universally actual, if it was to continue to be associated with both the freedom and the social possibilities for critically significant expression that it had acquired in the formalist/aestheticist critique of tradition. From that point on, critical artistic meaning became inextricably but problematically tied to the question of the relationship of the individual artwork to the rationality (and irrationality) of social forms. This problematic relationship is manifest internally, within the work in the dialectic of construction and expression. It appears externally, at the level of cultural form in the contradictory character of the social space of art. [645]

The retreat of this intended social integration of art practices echoes Rancière's description of the aesthetic break and how artworks become disconnected from a particular place or function that attributes meaning—the transformation of tradition that defines the second aspect of aesthetic separation. Subversion of functionality assures that artworks inherently acknowledge their autonomy while generating it. In this way, artworks are defined by their intentional 'functionlessness'[646] which was explored in relation to equipmental understanding in Chapter 4.3.4. Function. Constructivism helps to demonstrate this by showing how a revolution to integrate art into society returned full circle—albeit altered—to its exceptional peripheral position. It also shows how the practice of art is inescapably constructed through social relations and the differentiation of artistic practice through subversive and integral means. In an attempt to coordinate an art for everyone, the rebellious nature of artworks became a recognized convention of its socially defined tradition.

'The fragment' helps to establish the autonomy of art by demonstrating the importance of negative association in self-determination; defining what something is by determining what

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[645] Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, 156.
[646] Ibid., 158.

it is not. In this way, the definition of art is made in contradistinction to other social practices, which is most notable in comparison with the functionality of technology and economics. While the Jena Romantics determine artworks as ontologically autonomous through their unique existence, this autonomy is conditioned by contextual conditions of a temporal and social nature. An artwork's singular production of meaning and truth enables it to be recognized as a subject, which in turn reflects the inter-objectivity of the observer. The formal condition of artworks positions them in relation to the commodity relations of economics under capitalism, which demonstrates art's inherent subversion of use-value in relation to exchange-value. This reflects the perpetually indeterminate position of artworks in relation to the intentionality of function and use. While creating a space for reflection as a result of its illusory separation from logical economic functioning, the subverted use-value of artworks is short-lived and originality becomes a condition of artistic significance. The provision of novelty is what fuels art's avant-garde drive, which in turn feeds off of its social relations in order to adapt and secure innovation. Tanke states:

> [A]rt's leap outside of *mimesis* is not only the origin of art's autonomy (as the narrative of modernism would have us believe), it is the historical pre-condition for strategies associated with the autonomy of art—abstraction in painting, silence in literature—as well as the source of art's heteronomy—the exchanges between the various arts and the blurring of the distinction between art and life. [647]

The Russian Constructivists failed attempt at extensively integrating artistic practice into society and everyday life resulted in yet another condition for art's autonomy. The social impracticality of artworks must be reflected in their formal construction. This impracticality becomes the defining feature of artworks, highlighted in contrast to the practicality that dominates our daily lives. It also demonstrates the deviant and rebellious nature of art, which creatively appropriates society in order to become something new. This reflects our own

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[647] Tanke, "What is the Aesthetic Regime?," 78.

unresolved impracticality as subject-objects, and our own illusory autonomy as we live our lives 'together apart.'

5.3.4. Contemporary / Postconceptual Art

Artworks are necessarily identified in relation to a precedent conception of art, which positions the significance of artworks in relation to a subjectively understood precedent tradition of art. The necessity of artworks to be unique assures that this tradition of art is constantly evolving, which implies that as new art movements begin, existing traditions begin to fade away. The aesthetic regime of art is an example of this transition of practice and tradition, as it slowly replaced the mimetic regime of art that came before it. We are still within the aesthetic regime of art, and this chapter focuses on the contextualization of contemporary art practices in relation to the larger artistic tradition of the aesthetic regime, which can be visualized in Appendix 2. Timeline of Referenced Periods and Source Material. We will explore historical notions of art before moving on to examine the nature of postconceptual art practices, a movement that Osborne defines in relation to the continued influence of conceptual art on contemporary practice, and in distinction to purely Kantian aesthetic conception of Modernist art history. Postconceptual art practices will be explored in relation to their increased focus on conceptualization, which relies on social relationships, and the increasingly expansive nature of artworks' formal constitution and multiplicity. While being distinct from the traditions that precede it, postconceptual art continues to reflect the society it collaborates with to define its original significance.

In order to identify an artwork as art, the concept of art must already exist in the subject who is performing the process of identification. This precedent necessity of the concept of art is one way in which artworks connect with society and tradition, which provide a general understanding of what an artwork is and what the practice of art entails, as vague as

this might be. The ongoing transformation of art and the tradition that defines it assures that it remains indeterminate. When it is determined, it is always in the moment in relation to a subject within a context, which are also in motion, and thus the determination is fleeting. Osborne refers to the writing of Adorno to emphasize that the: "ongoing retrospective and reflective totalization [of the concept of art] is necessarily *open, fractured, incomplete* and therefore inherently *speculative.*"[648] There is nothing wrong with trying to determine the nature of art, but to properly do so means taking into account art's indeterminate and provisional nature, and knowing the historical and practical tradition of art certainly helps this endeavour. In order to conceive of the nature of contemporary art practices in relation to philosophy, Osborne provides a historical analysis of aesthetics that amplifies the philosophical map upon which the concept of contemporary art can be positioned and examined, while helping to navigate the myriad relations that establish its ontological significance. He praises the work of Adorno, who states: "Art acquires its specificity by separating itself from what it developed out of; its law of movement is its law of form."[649]

As explored in Chapter 4.2.2.1. To Name, Osborne has a problem with the label "contemporary art," which is admittedly confusing in its temporal and categorical ambiguity. He defines the idea of contemporary as: "a temporal unity in disjunction, or a disjunctive unity of present times."[650] Projecting a "single historical time of the present," he considers the term "contemporary" to be an operative fiction that regulates the division between the past and the present, occurring exclusively within the present. (For a more thorough exploration of the fiction of time, see Chapter 2.3.6. Time). This union of different conceptions of time within the present, along with the social relations and spaces that generate these constructions, become the two main pillars that support Osborne's historical notion of contemporary art as

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[648] Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, 51.
[649] Ibid., 50.
[650] Ibid., 22.

postconceptual art.[651] As the ontology of the artwork has transformed over time in association with the social operation of artistic practice in context, Osborne thinks that contemporary artistic practice must be conceived in relation to its general economic and communicational grounding. As explored in Chapter 5.3.3. Autonomy, the conditions of art are established through communicative (i.e. formal) and economic relations that help to define and establish its autonomy. This provisional and socially determined conception of contemporary art results in a dissolution of two historical paradigms: the traditional conception of the arts as specific mediums (in favour of multidisciplinarity), and national social conceptions of art space (in favour of globalized perspectives).[652]

Rancière's conception of the mimetic (or representational) regime of art, which preceded the aesthetic regime, finds little room for the subjective interpretation of artworks.

> [T]he representative regime corresponds roughly with French "*classicisme*," and the heavily regimented forms of cultural production known as the *belles lettres* and the *beaux arts*. … A crucial feature of the art of the representative regime is that the question about the relationship between art and life is settled in advance by the idea that art is a representation.[653]

By demonstrating how artworks are singular expressions of ontological truth, the Jena Romantics helped to break artworks out of a purely representative meaning and into a practice of hermeneutics that privileges subjective interpretation. The theory of aesthetics influenced novel ways in which the practice of art could move more freely into the social and political spheres. The result was the development and acceptance of distinctive new art practices, the expansion of what could be considered an artwork, and a renegotiation of political efficacy through artistic practice.

> Aesthetics, with its central categories of experience and reflection, emerged with the recognition that there were no longer any preordained rules for distinguishing

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[651] Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, 27.
[652] Ibid., 28.
[653] Tanke, "What is the Aesthetic Regime?," 72.

in advance the objects of art from the products of everyday life, and that each experience had to be evaluated in its irreducible singularity.[654]

The aesthetic break reconnected the practice of art with the same instability that defined the lives of the subjects who produced and appreciated it.

Two hundred years later—many transitions, artistic movements and ideologies later—we arrive to what is popularly known as the period of contemporary art. One of Osborne's criticisms with recent art theories that establish an opposition between the Modern and Post-modern periods is that he doesn't consider Modernism to be finished. He recognizes the postconceptual period as a continuation of the Modern epoch of art, and a more appropriate name to describe the ontology of contemporary art. This is primarily because it recognizes the important influence that conceptual art practices of the late 1960's and early 70's had and continue to have on contemporary art practices.[655] One of the reasons this was overlooked during the time of Post-modern critique was the powerful and ubiquitous position of aesthetic discourse during Modernism, where media specificity and purity became the motor for artistic inspiration and innovation. Artists who implemented conceptual strategies for making art were moving in the opposite direction, and not simply in a reactionary way against the practice of abstraction within High Modernism. They were pushing the boundaries of what art was and could be, on a conceptual level obviously, but also in formal ways. In fact, it was conceptual art's failure that Osborne concedes as its biggest contribution to our conception of art.[656] He states that in their attempt to create a purely conceptual art, an art of pure theory, conceptual artists were unable to eradicate the aesthetic element of artworks. As ephemeral as a conceptual artwork might be, there is always a formal trace through which artistic significance is transmitted. In this 'disappointment,' however, Osborne asserts that they found a necessary limit for all art: its inescapable aesthetic dimension, or art's condition of form.

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[654] Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, 72-73.
[655] Ibid., 47.
[656] Ibid., 49.

Every artwork has an aesthetic or formal quality, even the most purely conceptual artwork. Inadvertently finding this formal condition of art in its failure of conceptual purity, its inverse also became apparent; that every artwork has an inevitable conceptual component too.[657]

While conceptualization is key to understanding contemporary art—or as Osborne prefers, postconceptual art—there are two concurrent yet overlapping philosophical approaches with which it can be considered: 'art as aesthetic' and 'art as (historical) ontology'.[658] These discourses are founded in the work of Kant and Jena Romanticism respectively. The problem Osborne has with the former, which represents the hegemonic power of High Modernism, is that it fails to properly account for the influential contribution of conceptual art practices. By neglecting conceptual art, he states that the 'art as aesthetic' line of criticism: "fails to provide a theoretical basis on which we might specify the ontological distinctiveness of contemporary art."[659] An alternative sequential categorization of movements—from formalist modernism to conceptual art to postconceptual art—provides a more adequate way of thinking the cultural logic and lineage of modernism as a whole, which includes conceptual and postconceptual art.[660] Keeping in mind the various relationships that artworks must acknowledge, Osborne defines six conditions of possibility for postconceptual artworks.[661] They are:

> 1. Art's necessary conceptuality. (Art is constituted by concepts, their relations and their instantiation in practices of discrimination: art/non-art.)
> 2. Art's ineliminable—but radically insufficient—aesthetic dimension. (All art requires *some* form of materialization; that is to say, aesthetic—felt, spatio-temporal—presentations.)
> 3. The critical necessity of an anti-aesthetic*ist* use of aesthetic materials. (This is a critical consequence of art's necessary conceptuality.)
> 4. An expansion to infinity of the possible material forms of art.

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[657] Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, 49.
[658] Ibid., 46.
[659] Ibid., 47.
[660] Ibid., 48.
[661] Ibid.

5. A radically distributive—that is, irreducibly relational—unity of the individual artwork across the totality of its multiple material instantiations, at any particular time.
6. A historical malleability of the borders of this unity.[662]

These conditions enable broad and innovative ways with which to evaluate and understand individual artworks. By infinitely expanding the possible materials that can be used to make art, conceptual art practices disregard the importance that media-specificity once had in the 'art as aesthetic' tradition.[663] Not only that, but the conceptual practices that align with 'art as (historical) ontology' have exploded the notion that an artwork must exists as a self-contained entity. Similar to the way that autopoiesis defines the operation of life through systemic organizational relationships, Osborne suggests that artworks have moved beyond the limitation of a purely physical determination and now exist in potentially unlimited (albeit conceptually defined) ways and forms while still being considered the same artwork. Compounding this physical liberation is a temporal one, according to Osborne, as the significance of the artwork transforms over time and is endowed with a historical, "retroactive ontology." This problematizes a cohesive conception of the borders of the artwork, shifting it from a question of external boundary to a logic of integral unity of the work.[664] As artworks move out into the world of everyday life, eschewing conventional settings of artistic experience, they rely more and more on the organizational conventions that define artistic practice in terms of methodology. This leads to contemporary art's increasing approach to urbanism, which Rancière describes as artists' desire to: "get out of the museum and induce alterations in the space of everyday life."[665] Conceptual art has certainly made social intervention a common creative strategy, and thus a new convention through which the

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[662] Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, 49.
[663] Ibid., 50.
[664] Ibid., 144.
[665] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 53.

concept of art can be defined, despite the inevitable formal conditions that bind these conceptual practices to aesthetic tradition.

Roberts thinks that the shift of artistic practice towards the conceptualization of art is reminiscent of the intellectual study of the Renaissance *studiolo*, but this time the artist is acting more like a technician or operator conducting an exploration of art's formal and cognitive possibilities.[666] One of the most effective ways to establish art as a concept has been to eliminate the expressive touch of the artist, which helps to shift the productive and sensorial focus from emotion to meaning when experiencing an artwork. Roberts contends that the result of this shift is a turn towards artistic determinations that are more social, procedural and theoretical. Roberts lists seven axioms to help illustrate this transition towards art's conceptualization:

> 1. Art is not a thing or set of discrete things, but an eventual process in which objects may or may not play a part, and, therefore, ultimately do not fix the possible meanings, strategies or outcomes of art.
> 2. Art as an evental process is determined by its social and political conditions of emergence and possibility.
> 3. Art as an evental process, determined by its social and political conditions of emergence and possibility, is theoretically driven, insofar as making sense of these conditions means that practice and theory are coextensive.
> 4. As a theoretically driven set of practices necessarily embedded in the conflicts and divisions of the social world, art produces transformative effects and affects in the world.
> 5. As a theoretically driven set of socially transformative practices, art is at all times a collective or group enterprise, insofar as artists participate with other artists, technicians, workers and non-artists directly or indirectly in the social division of labour; this, in turn, presupposes art's dissolution into general social technique.
> 6. The function of the artist and the concept of artistic skill are the specific outcome of this process of general social technique; authorship is first and foremost interdisciplinary and processual.
> 7. Art, as a theoretically driven set of transformative practices, sets itself the historical and critical task of incorporating its speculative strategies and practices into the advanced scientific and technological forms of general social technique; art participates in the advanced relations of production.[667]

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[666] Roberts, *Revolutionary Time and the Avant-Garde,* 2-3.
[667] Ibid., 3.

Through this description, Roberts demonstrates how the practice of art today relates more to divisions of labour (social relations) than to stylistic concerns (formal relations). Nonetheless, the conditions that define artworks remain the same. The observer of formal relations within conceptual artworks simply needs to adjust their conception of the materials that are being formed (or transformed) to create artworks. Instead of traditional materials, a postconceptual artist forms concepts and relations—in addition to materials and existent beings—that make up our everyday lives. These immaterial materials still need to be manipulated, however, and they still need to function subversively in relation to function and use-value. Being able to identify the formal manipulations of concepts and relations is perhaps more difficult than recognizing material evidence, but there must always be material evidence that displays the 'work' that comprises the 'art.'

Lovers of art history are well aware of the dramatic shifts in artistic movements and ideologies as society changes and the practice of art transforms with it. Understanding how art develops out of the tradition that begets it is easy if you consider your understanding of the world in relation to the generation that brought you up. Your view of the world is similar and yet distinct from your parents' perspectives. Some things remain the same, but lots of things are quite different too. The same is true of artistic practice, and as some traditions fade, others gain acceptance. Looking at the larger epoch of the aesthetic regime, and the transition from the mimetic regime beforehand, we can see how aesthetic thought liberated art in terms of creation and interpretation while fixing it to the social relations within which it operates. These include historical and economic considerations, which connect the intentionally distorted functionality of art to the recognizable concepts that we use to organize our lives. In relation to contemporary art practices, the 'postconceptual' label follows the ontology of the Jena Romantics more closely than Kant's aestheticism, prioritizing the social relations of art instead of its formal conditions. While eliminating the confusing ambiguity of the

categorization 'contemporary art,' postconceptual art properly acknowledges the significant influence of the conceptual artists of the late 1960's and early 1970's—an influence that is still very relevant in the current practice of art in 2019. As artistic practices move towards an increased focus on conceptualization, art becomes increasingly defined in terms of processes, systems and relations, as opposed to media, style and emotion. The processual nature of postconceptual artworks enables them to engage with existing systems and social constructs, embracing instability while establishing novel relations that create new ways to experience art. While this allows artworks to be diaphanous and disperse in composition, or stretched in temporal extension, artworks nonetheless must adhere to the concept and tradition of art that establishes them. While the concept of art is malleable, the conditions of art are quite durable.

5.3.5. Series and Projects

Two of the most common mediating principles of postconceptual art—the series and the project—clearly reflect the ontology of 'the fragment.' The simultaneous state of being incomplete while being complete allows artworks in the form of series and projects to expose the internal and external relations that inform their existence as art. In relation to series, its content and form relate to the concept of information, which is marked by its instant verifiability and self-sufficiency. The series also helps to illustrate the distinction between the two historical pillars of contemporary art criticism, which tend to align either towards the aesthetic tradition of Kant or the ontological tradition of the Jena Romantics. As a formal structure, the relationship between subjective and objective control during artistic creation makes the series applicable to both critical lineages. Projects, on the other hand, focus more on relationships and networks that emphasize the processual nature of artworks. 'The fragment' once again acts as model for this media in its perpetual indeterminateness. While reflecting the temporal and transcendental principals that define Kant's aesthetic theory, the

project also aligns with Heidegger's concept of *Dasein*, which renders the subject-object opposition obsolete and likens artistic creation as *projective* in nature. As the possibility of possibility, the art project is comprised of an ideal—which is always more than it is—and potential—which is forever incomplete. In this way, the art project represents freedom, and demonstrates why 'the fragment' is such an important model for considering the contemporary practice of art. Aside from their creative promise, the series and the project offer ideal ways to relate the practice of art with social tradition and the reflection of life.

In his effort to situate contemporary art within the modernist tradition, Osborne explores major transformations that have taken place since mid-eighteenth century Classicism in terms of mediating forms, as we saw in Chapter 4.2.2.1. To Name. While acknowledging the common practice of using of *isms* to categorize individual artworks within universal groupings of art, a more fundamental mediating principle is identified within postconceptual practice: the use of series.[668] Reflecting the complete/incomplete relationship that 'the fragment' embodies, an individual artwork within a series relates even further to parallel the subjective/objective situation of human individuals within social communities, which defines the 'together apart' paradox that founds Rancière's concept of aesthetic separation. Osborne points out the work of Jean Paul Sartre and his attempt to contemplate the relationship of a human being within society, using it as a model for understanding how the internal-external relations might function for artworks. While Osborne isn't convinced that Sartre's theory of serialization is suitable to people, he does acknowledge its utility in relation to artworks.[669] The structure of a series establishes a relational framework of commonality that allows an artwork to maintain its individuality and highlight its uniqueness.

> Under conditions of tendentially increasing aesthetic nominalism, each work must create the mediating conditions of its own intelligibility. In the absence of new, unalienated social forms of universality, the series is the most common formal

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[668] Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, 86.
[669] Ibid., 86-87.

mode for the construction of such conditions. It is here that the structural libertarianism of contemporary art resides. As subjects of exchange in capitalist societies, we live 'within and against' the series as a social form of relations between individuals. The work of art reflects and re-presents this form, in the form of a wish. [670]

The self-sufficiency of 'the fragment' as it exists apart from (yet in relation to) its grouping can be used to compare the series with information. As we saw in Chapter 2.3.5. Observation, Luhmann uses the term information to describe the external hetero-reference of artistic communication that serves as an starting point for further communication, whether artistic or oral, and functions in difference to utterance, which indicates internal self-reference. We have also explored *information* as a process of transformation in Chapter 4.2.3. Progression. MacKenzie's use of *information* as a verb helps us to appreciate a more nuanced conception of material transformation beyond simple before-and-after productive steps, while leading us to consider the state of indetermination that all technologies, artworks and humans inherently demonstrate. Using the idea of information to describe the nature of artistic series, Osborne uses the example of Sol Lewitt's *Sentences On Contemporary Art*[671] to show how each individual sentence becomes a fragment when reduced to a unit of information.[672] To explore the essence of information, Osborne turns to the philosophy of Benjamin, which defines the two main features of 'information' as instant verifiability, and understandability in itself (or semantic self-sufficiency). Benjamin fixes the complete value of information to the now, which Osborne uses to emphasize the 'contemporaneity' of contemporary art and to explain the decline of narrative in art. Osborne claims that Lewitt's use of information in a series demonstrates its semantic self-sufficiency while giving it new meaning by

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[670] Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, 87.

[671] Sol Lewitt, *Sentences on Conceptual Art*, 1968. Felt-tip pen on fifteen sheets of paper (one with pencil and ballpoint pen), felt-tip pen on three postcards, and felt-tip pen on letterpress card, dimensions variable.

[672] Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, 62.

demonstrating information in its pure form.[673] Inevitably, Friedrich's *Athenaeum Fragments* and Lewitt's *Sentences* can be connected structurally through their use of series, despite their obvious differences. As a series is a 'mode of unity' of a work of art, Osborne claims that both of these examples of series are associated with the human subject. As we consider our self, our identity as an individual person, over the course of our lives, we can easily recognize our self as a distinct yet continuous being *information*.

The series as a formal principle helps to demonstrate yet another aspect of inter-objective operation, which is a vital founding concept for aesthetic experience. The series helps to demonstrate the two ideas of exactness within Kant's philosophy that describe the state of indefiniteness.[674] The first is the transcendental, which is the "condition of possibility" of some particular form of experience, and the second is that the totality of the series of conditions cannot be known by sensuous finite beings such as ourselves.[675] "[T]here is always another condition of possibility to be known."[676] While adopting these Kantian ideas, the Jena Romantics developed them further by adapting the concept of infinite regress (by changing the line into the circle—see Chapter 5.3.2. Description – 'The Fragment') to reflect, firstly, the self-reflective structure of the subject, and secondly, the internal dynamics of the work of art. This converts the artwork into a quasi-subject, an "epistemologically privileged site" of infinite reflection.[677] Using Lewitt's *Sentences* as an example, Osborne notes the important counterpoint in a series between the subjectivity of the starting point (the establishment of a rule) and the objectivity of its process as the work is carried out (its mechanical necessity).[678] In this sense, Osborne states that a conceptual artwork, which is determined by an idea, demonstrates a withdrawal of subjectivity during the production of the

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[673] Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, 63.
[674] Ibid., 64.
[675] Ibid.
[676] Ibid.
[677] Ibid., 85.
[678] Ibid., 65-66.

actual work. This in turn reveals a combination of formal necessity and chance. He points out that: "the rationality of any series is compromised by the arbitrariness of its beginning (its rule) and (if it is in principle infinite) the point at which its pursuit is terminated."[679] As such, the relational format of conceptual artworks demonstrates a particular tension between the subjective and objective, a point where the infinite is grasped in the finite.[680] The closest connection between the Jena Romantics and Lewitt is their priority of process over result, which results from the ontological prioritization of the idea of the work.[681] While focusing on the concepts helps to define artworks through their objective relationships, artworks in series nonetheless exemplify subjectivity through their uniqueness and aesthetic interpretation.

Another mediating form that is ubiquitous to contemporary art is the project, which Schlegel defines as: "articulated combinations of ideas and modes of actualization."[682] While a *work* of art commonly connotes a distinguishable individual entity, an art *project* is more diaphanous in nature, extended in terms of procedure, materialization and time. Osborne points towards the increasing occurrence of 'the project space' as a marker of the project's established significance for the presentation of contemporary art.[683] This act of artistic presentation is far from traditional, according to Osborne, since it incorporates the widest possible range of art objects and actions with more socially engaged interactions that form a nexus for networks and relationships. The architectural space itself declines in importance as art projects focus less on material results and more on the strategies, processes and communication of artistic practices in motion.[684] This, in the end, is one of the leading reasons why artist's projects are evading the institutional contexts that project spaces imply. With the newfound importance of relationships, procedures and interaction for artistic projects, artists

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[679] Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, 66.
[680] Ibid., 66-67.
[681] Ibid., 67.
[682] Ibid., 67-68.
[683] Ibid., 172.
[684] Ibid.

are finding more opportunities and taking more risks by implementing their projects within the realm of everyday life.

As with 'the fragment,' the ontological conception of 'the project' took place within Jena Romanticism, through their idea of art as being: "forever becoming, never completed."[685] This notion originates from Schlegel's description in one of his *Athenaeum Fragments*, in which he defines 'the project' in terms of both temporal and transcendental notions, equating projects to "fragments of the future."[686] Of specific interest to Schlegel was the inherent nature of the project to both idealize and realize its object simultaneously, which Osborne contends establishes it as theoretical and practical concurrently. Through this embodied connection (and disconnection) of the ideal and the real, Osborne states that a project is transcendental in nature, and its processual nature makes it a perfect mediating concept for postconceptual art.[687] The necessary incompletion of the project endows it with a perpetual inertia towards the future, yet this thrust forward can never fulfil its end. At the same time, Osborne claims that the necessary conception of an ideal conclusion of a project during the process of its realization endows it with a permanent sense of incompletion, of "forever becoming." As organized expressions of conceptual and procedural realization, projects are trapped in a paradoxical state between partially realized and ideally complete.[688] As process is inevitably questioned and emphasized during negotiations between practice and theory, the project is a perfect media for highlighting the operational nature of artistic practice. Through the succession and movement of artistic operation—its creation and reception—and the incompleteness of the art project, Osborne conceives of art projects as *living* beings. In contradistinction to this idea, one of the biggest problems that he identifies with our understanding of *non*-contemporary artworks is our tendency to think of them as

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[685] Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, 168.
[686] Ibid., 169.
[687] Ibid.
[688] Ibid.

complete.[689] By doing so, we overlook the disconnection between the real and the ideal that all artworks inherently embody, and this separation is essential for understanding the transcendental potential of the work, which in turn relates art with life.

Osborne further strengthens the connection of art and life by exploring 'the project' in relation to the idea of *Dasein*, which he claims was developed by Heidegger by associating the artistic concept of the project with the human being as "Being-in-the-world."[690] As we explored in Chapter 3.4.4. The Open, the concept helps to render the traditional subject-object opposition obsolete by denying the possibility of separation of a human being from its world. Under these conditions, Heidegger considers the creation of art to be a *projective* structure of human existence, while conceiving of *Dasein* itself as a "thrown projection."[691] The result is possibility as possibility, something that is always more than it is (ideally) and yet forever incomplete (potentially).[692] As Osborne states: "Projecting projects possibilities as possibilities. And the being of possibility is freedom."[693] The movement implied in this operation is undeniable, as an artwork—as a projection—is projected into the unknown and, in doing so, makes the unknown attainable. The implied potentiality of the artwork in this projective conception associates artistic practice with the promise of the future. The conception of *Dasein* as an existential project of possibility and freedom allows us begin to fathom new possibilities for understanding life beyond the subject-object opposition. Furthermore, it demonstrates how artworks make the impossible possible and the invisible visible, connecting potential with reality. "The existential and social structure of the project itself becomes the carrier of artistic reflection."[694] With the blurring of the boundary between

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[689] Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, 170.
[690] Ibid., 168.
[691] Ibid., 170-171.
[692] Ibid., 171.
[693] Ibid.
[694] Ibid., 173.

art and life, the inherent potential of states of indetermination becomes apparent and applicable to both the practice of art and the life every human being.

Through their reflection of the ontology of 'the fragment,' the media formats of both the series and the project reflect the philosophical foundation of postconceptual art practices. This is based on the indetermination of 'the fragment,' which displays the simultaneity of being incomplete and complete, and allows series and projects to expose the internal and external relations that inform their existence as artworks. Since series contain a multiplicity of unique yet related units, they formally relate to the concept of information, which is marked by its intelligible immediacy and self-sufficiency. This relates series to processes of both communication and development, as the process of being *information* eliminates binary readings of before and after and places importance on the complexity of transformation and influence in the moment. Through subjective and objective associations, the series helps to demonstrate the ontology of the artwork in relation to 'the fragment,' which Osborne uses to define the relational conception of postconceptual art in distinction from the more aesthetic line of contemporary criticism that adopts a more purely Kantian aesthetic tradition. Despite the breadth of critical positions, the series and the project help us to consider the contemporary practice of art in terms of integrity and relationships, which echo the internal/external division that marks human life and aesthetic experience. Projects help to bring focus to the procedural nature of artistic practice by highlighting the indeterminate nature of artworks and individual subjects, with 'the fragment' as the perfect example of complete incompleteness. This reflects the fluctuating movement from subject to object—or particular to universal—that defines Kant's aesthetic theory, which acknowledges the temporal and transcendental nature of artistic practice. Relating art to Heidegger's concept of *Dasein*, which denies the possibility of subjective separation from the world, creation in general is a projective act. The art project, as such, is all about movement and potential. Like

'the fragment,' it is forever incomplete and simultaneously represents the potential of the artwork in movement towards its ideal. The art project demonstrates the possibility of possibility, and the inherent freedom of indetermination. Through their manifest potential, art projects can be conceived as living beings, as they parallel and reflect the indeterminate and relational nature of our existence, and provide a perfect connection between the practice of art and our conception of life in motion.

5.3.6. Conclusion to 'The Fragment'

'The fragment' is a philosophical idea developed by the Jena Romantics that provides an ontological model to more thoroughly understand the paradoxical nature of subjectivity and artworks. The logic rests on the coincident completeness and incompleteness of the formal structure of 'the fragment,' which is a part in relation to its grouping, but an independent part nonetheless in its unique unity.[695] This model establishes a clear union between integral structure and exterior relations, both of which define 'the fragment' and make it a useful analogy for connecting the natural functioning of artworks and individual people. It facilitates this comparison by resolving the subjective conundrum of 'infinite regress,' where the possibility of a human subject to reflexively know themselves as a subject is put into question through the necessary objectification of the subject during the process.[696] The Jena Romantics changed the assumed linear form of infinite regress into a circle, which created a unity in which the infinite became finite.[697] The human subject exemplifies this duality of limitation and potential, as does the artwork.[698] With a finite form that is infinitely interpretive, both artwork and subject reflect the paradox of 'the fragment.'

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[695] Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, 59.
[696] Ibid., 64.
[697] Ibid., 65.
[698] Ibid., 60.

The autonomy of artworks is established through the opposition of internal/external relations that 'the fragment' represents. The integrity of an artwork—its ontological autonomy—is determined by its contextual conditions, which are established in relation to temporal and social factors at the moment of the aesthetic evaluation of the artwork.[699] This is illustrated by the requisite concept of art to recognize artworks, which places some form of personal history or tradition as precedent to the examination of the artwork. The integrity of an artwork is determined by its originality, which is a condition that influences an artwork's capacity to produce meaning.[700] The uniqueness of an artwork also results in its indetermination, assuring that its interpretation is perpetually open, especially in consideration of potential future evaluation. The significance that is produced by an artwork effectively transforms art objects into subjects. [701] This capacity of subject-object duality in artworks establishes them as true reflections of human limitation and agency, and connects aesthetic experience with self-knowledge. The social relations that externally condition artworks are coupled with the formal condition of art, which positions artworks under the same commodity logic of capitalist economics.[702] While every art*work* is a form of labour, however, artworks have a negative relation to use-value because of their indeterminate intentionality.[703] This subversive economic functionality ensures that a critique of exchange-value—a deliberate uselessness—is fixed to the formal condition of artworks. The illusory independence from exchange-value provides a space for reflection on the nature of valuation, while establishing economic practice as a necessary social counterpoint for artistic significance.[704] Threat of the loss of this unique artistic use-value, which would result in a paralysis of meaning production, assures that artistic practice is continually refreshing itself, with perpetual novelty as another

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[699] Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, 44.
[700] Ibid., 85.
[701] Ibid., 85.
[702] Roberts, *Revolutionary Time and the Avant-Garde*, 83.
[703] Ibid., 96.
[704] Ibid., 85.

condition of contemporary art.[705] The cycle of invention and entropy that results assures that avant-garde art practices continue to attempt the unknown while challenging the established tradition. An example of this can be found in Modern art history with the Russian Constructivists, who were part of a process of social rationalization in which art and society intended to become one for all.[706] An art for all of the people by some of the people is naturally contradictory, which was demonstrated in the dissonance between political intention and formal achievement, and the incongruence between the ideals of production an realities of expression.[707] One consequence of the failed Constructivist experiment is that the societal impracticality of artworks be reflected in their construction and unique autonomy, providing an origin story for the stipulation of the deliberate uselessness of artworks.[708]

As artworks are defined in relation to their social context,[709] it is important to contextualize the present moment of artistic practice in relation to the aesthetic regime that establishes the historical scope of this thesis. 'The fragment' has helped to determine that all artworks are defined in relation to a precedent concept of art, which is subjectively understood through the personal experience and social education of the observer. As new artworks are made in relation and reaction to tradition, we can understand the motion from one movement to the next as historical paradigms dissipate and new ones establish collective acceptance. As the aesthetic regime replaced the representational regime, the traditions of media specificity and national importance began to disappear, making way for new methodologies in which multidisciplinary artworks and global conceptions of art developed. With new focus on subjective interpretation of artistic meaning, aesthetic thought liberated the practice of art in terms of both its production and reception, opening it up to the social

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[705] Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, 98.
[706] Ibid., 154.
[707] Ibid., 155.
[708] Ibid., 156.
[709] Ibid., 50.

relations of everyday life. This has become ubiquitous in contemporary art practices, where social relations have tremendous importance on artistic significance. A multiplicity of possible influences now inform the practice of art, and Osborne denotes two specific lineages based on the aesthetics of Kant and the historical ontology of the Jena Romantics.[710] The logic of 'the fragment' applies to the latter, which aligns itself with conceptual art practices that emphasize the importance of the artistic idea as opposed to the form. While the failure of a pure conceptual art demonstrated that both idea and form are essential elements of every artwork,[711] there is a growing trend towards conceptualization within current artistic culture, which is evident in the procedural and relational emphasis of contemporary artworks. To acknowledge the importance of conceptual art, Osborne establishes the term 'postconceptual art' to propose a reconceptualization of historical nomenclature. Aside from eliminating the ambiguous term 'contemporary art,' the new historical lineage replaces the Modern/Post-Modern opposition by affirming that the Modern epoch of art is still developing.[712] The indeterminate nature of postconceptual artworks enables them to engage with existing systems and social constructs, embracing instability while establishing new external relations that generate innovative modalities for aesthetic experience. While this liberates artworks in terms of composition and temporal extension, artworks must still adhere to artistic tradition. While art movements come and go, the concept of art that grounds them is pervasive.

The series and the project are two familiar media formats of postconceptual art. Reflecting the indetermination of the ontology of 'the fragment,' the series allows artworks to be complete and yet incomplete,[713] while the project focuses on the process and potential of artistic creation.[714] In either case, series and projects expose the internal and external relations

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[710] Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, 28.
[711] Ibid., 49.
[712] Ibid., 48.
[713] Ibid., 86.
[714] Ibid., 172.

that inform their beings as artworks. Series formally relate to the concept of information through their multiplicity of unique yet related units that must be immediately intelligible and intelligibly independent. Relating to communication, information connotes the external hetero-reference that instigates or maintains an interaction. Relating to development, the process of being *information* eradicates simple binary interpretations by placing importance on the innumerable relations and transformations in the moment.[715] Both of these relations align information with states of indetermination, which associates them back to 'the fragment.' Furthermore, the series helps to demonstrate the nature of contemporary artworks in relation to their subjective and objective associations. Osborne uses this to determine the relational priority of postconceptual art in difference to a more aesthetic line of criticism that is founded in the tradition of Kant. The series and the project highlight the importance of integrity and relationships in the practice of contemporary art, which echo the internal/external separation that defines human life and aesthetic experience.[716] Focusing on the procedural aspects of artistic practice, the project emphasizes the ways in which artworks and individuals are indeterminate.[717] This is reflected in Kant's aesthetic theory and the fluctuating movement from particular to universal, or subject to object, and the transcendental and temporal essence of artistic practice. In order to escape the trap of subject-world separation, *Dasein* provides us with a conception of life where being-in-the-world is implicitly unified.[718] This allows us to conceive of artistic creation as a projection in terms of movement and potential.[719] An art project is forever incomplete, demonstrating the inherent freedom of indetermination, and possibility as possibility.[720] Their movement and inherent

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[715] Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, 62.
[716] Ibid., 85.
[717] Ibid., 169.
[718] Ibid., 168.
[719] Ibid., 171.
[720] Ibid., 173.

potential allows projects to be conceived as living beings,[721] as indeterminate and relational as our own individual lives. Life and art connect through the ontology of 'the fragment,' which unites artworks to the social tradition of art that defines them.

5.4. Conclusion to Artworks / Art

Life and Art

The *parergon* and 'the fragment' provide many interesting insights into how the practice of art and life are connected. Derrida's exploration of the *parergon* highlights the inherent paradoxes that help to make Kant's aesthetic theory so influential and intriguing. The opposition between material and form, which the *parergon* helps to isolate,[722] establishes the entire tradition of artistic practice on the difference between *natura* and *ars*, the natural and the composed, or ontological objectivity and subjectivity. This distinction, which defines all artworks, is the same division that constitutes and determines our inter-objective situation as living human beings; natural bodies and active agents. Just as autopoietic operation on the molecular level functions in the absence of meaning, so too does the material component of artworks as experienced by other animals. The separation of subjective and objective perspectives parallels our existential condition of 'being apart together' as we identify our integral self in relation to society and the world around us. This clear relationship between exterior relations and integral structure reflects the nature of 'the fragment,' which makes it a useful analogy to connect the ontological functioning of artworks and the reflexive self-conception of individual people.[723] The logic rests on the coincident completeness and incompleteness of the formal structure of 'the fragment,' which is a part in relation to a group, but independent nonetheless in its singularity. The indeterminate nature of an artwork is a

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[721] Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, 169.
[722] Derrida, "The Parergon," 34.
[723] Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, 85.

result of its individuality, which assures that its interpretation is perpetually open,[724] especially in consideration of potential future evaluation. The ability to produce significance effectively transforms artworks into subjects.[725] This subject-object duality in artworks establishes them as true reflections of human inter-objectivity, which provides aesthetic experience with an inherent potential for the revelation of self-knowledge. Through the concurrent limitation and agency of artworks, which can be conceived of finite form with infinite interpretability, our own limits and potentials are revealed. The complete/incomplete nature of 'the fragment' recognizes that all artworks are defined in relation to a precedent concept of art,[726] which is subjectively understood through the personal experience and social education of the observer, and establishes a subjective understanding of tradition. Artworks connect to life through human thought and the conceptualization of art as a universal idea that is recursively passed down through generations. Considering the current culture of contemporary art, 'the fragment' reflects postconceptual practices by highlighting the combined importance of internal integrity and social relationships when evaluating artworks,[727] which echoes the internal/external separation that defines human life and aesthetic experience. By focusing on the procedural aspects of artistic practice, art projects emphasize the perpetually indeterminate nature of both artworks and individuals.[728] *Dasein* shows how the movement and inherent potential of projects allows them to be conceived as living beings that are just as incomplete and relational as our own lives.[729] The concept of *Dasein* provides us with a conception of life where being-in-the-world is naturally unified, as opposed to the Kantian tradition where the subjects, objects and environments are separate.[730]

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[724] Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, 85.

[725] Ibid.

[726] Ibid., 50.

[727] Ibid., 44.

[728] Ibid., 172.

[729] Ibid., 171.

[730] Ibid., 168.

Exploring aesthetics in relation to the *parergon* and 'the fragment' helps us to appreciate how life and art are connected through the appreciation of artworks the social practice and tradition that defines them.

<u>Separation</u>

The *parergon* and 'the fragment' make the separations of artistic practice evident through the contradictions, oppositions and paradoxes that are inherent to the current functionality of artistic creation and aesthetic experience. As an adjunct to an artwork, the *parergon* inherently demonstrates separation, and its "detachability" defines its function as supplement and ornament while reflecting the sporadic necessity of the faculty of judgement in relation to more common forms of thought, namely reason and understanding.[731] Exploring the *parergon* in terms of position, its instability in reference to context and content reflects the implicit cognitive movement during aesthetic experience. Paralleling Lumann's paradoxical form of observation, the *parergon* fluctuates between visibility and invisibility depending on the focus of the observer, appearing as part of the environment when focusing on the integrity of the artwork, but part of the artwork when focusing on the space in which the artwork is exhibited.[732] This demonstrates the nature of the *parergon*, which functions like a contour line that separates figure from ground, or artwork from context. It is at once divisive and elusive, much like our consciousness. This nature is repeated in Kant's aesthetic theory, which shifts focus between the content of the analysis and the theoretical frames that constrain it.[733] It establishes an associative connection between the separate influences of external relations and integral identity as we compare 'the fragment' with artworks and self-knowledge. Considering the autonomy of artworks, negation is the methodology in which art separates

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[731] Derrida, "The Parergon," 6.
[732] Ibid., 26.
[733] Ibid., 35.

itself from other practices,[734] which is usually accomplished through the subversion of collectively accepted social norms. The intentional perversion of use-value that artworks demonstrate ensures their distinction from other commodities, while constraining them to a condition of perpetual innovation in order to maintain their singularity and the meaning that it promises.[735] Attempts to eradicate the separation between the practice of art and society at large have resulted in discord between political and artistic intention, and conflict between rational and expressive ideologies,[736] which helps to establish the counter-cultural nature of artistic practice, which seems to necessitate distinction. This is evident in Osborne's revision of Modernist taxonomy to found two interrelated lineages of artistic practice; an aesthetic focus based on the formal theories of Kant, and a conceptual focus founded on the historical ontology of the Jena Romantics.[737] The logic of 'the fragment' applies to the latter, which aligns itself with conceptual art practices that place importance on the artistic idea as opposed to the form. The distinction of material and form is the separation that founds all art theory,[738] and connects the essence of art with life by reflecting our condition of being apart together. The *parergon* and 'the fragment' have helped to identify the fundamental separations through which artistic practice operates, such as material/form, subject/object, logical/illogical, visible/invisible, complete/incomplete, finite/infinite, content/container and figure/ground.

Human Cognition / Aesthetic Thought

One of the most important contributions of Derrida's article *The Parergon* is its revision and deconstruction of Kant's aesthetic theory. Through an examination of *The Critique of Judgement* using the *parergon*, Derrida finds that Kant's ordering (in terms of

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[734] Roberts, *Revolutionary Time and the Avant-Garde*, 92.
[735] Ibid., 98.
[736] Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, 156.
[737] Ibid., 48.
[738] Derrida, "The Parergon," 34.

organization, sequence and command) demonstrates hypocrisy within *The Critique of Judgement* between the use of logical theoretical structures for illogical (i.e. without concept) subject matter.[739] This duplicity is further accentuated by the recursive adoption of the logical forms from previous theoretical texts, which are used to frame aesthetic theory.[740] As an imposed theoretical structure, Kant's reused schema becomes a *parergon* itself and suggests an internal lack at the heart of *The Critique of Judgement*.[741] Highlighting the subjective position of the observer as imperative to determining the visibility and functionality of the *parergon*,[742] we can appreciate how every aesthetic judgement is an act of framing that establishes the subject in relation to the artwork and the oppositions of aesthetic thought. 'The fragment' expands aesthetic theory by providing an ontological model to more thoroughly understand the paradoxical nature of artworks and subjectivity.[743] It does so by resolving the problem of infinite regress, in which subjective knowledge is muddled by the inherent inter-objectivity of the process of knowing oneself.[744] By changing the supposed linear form of infinite regress into a circle, the Jena Romantics created a unity in which the infinite is finite,[745] with the human subject reflected in the duality of corporal limitation and potential freedom. 'The fragment' also demonstrates how the integrity of an artwork is determined by its contextual conditions, which are established in relation to temporal and social factors at the moment of aesthetic evaluation.[746] Art's illusory independence from intentional functionality provides a space for reflection on the nature of valuation, establishing society as a counterpoint to artistic independence.[747] With a new focus on subjective interpretation of

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[739] Derrida, "The Parergon," 34.
[740] Ibid., 29.
[741] Ibid., 34.
[742] Ibid., 26.
[743] Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, 59.
[744] Ibid., 64.
[745] Ibid., 65.
[746] Ibid., 44.
[747] Roberts, *Revolutionary Time and the Avant-Garde*, 85.

artistic meaning, aesthetic thought liberates art both in terms of its production and reception, while opening it up to the social relations of everyday life. The indeterminate nature of postconceptual artworks enables them to engage with existing social constructs and establish external relations that generate innovative modalities for aesthetic experience. The indeterminate nature of postconceptual artworks are reflected in the predominant use of the series, which demonstrates the ontology of the artwork through its inherent hetero- and self-reference,[748] and the project, which focuses on the procedural and relational aspects of artistic practice.[749] The inherent movement implied in these media reflect the inter-objectivity of Kant's aesthetic theory and the temporal essence of artistic practice, demonstrating how the *parergon* and 'the fragment' accentuate our understanding of aesthetic experience.

Artworks

Our understanding of artworks is also broadened by the *parergon* and 'the fragment,' which directly relate them with the concept, practice and tradition of art. While the purpose of the *parergon* is to supplement or decorate an artwork, Derrida's exploration of it shows how its supportive nature resolves an inherent lack and vulnerability of artworks.[750] More than anything, *parerga* provide support and expressive possibilities to artworks, and while their structural nature is important, it is only by way of form that a *parergon* can become part of the artwork it adorns.[751] Derrida highlights the omnipresence of the material/form opposition throughout *The Critique of Judgement*, which he concedes as a fundamental "conceptual schema" for *all* art theory. This entails pairing the irrational and illogical with the material—which can also considered in terms of nature, chaos and disorder—and coupling the rational and logical with form—which can also be thought in terms of artifice, composition and

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[748] Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, 86.
[749] Ibid., 172.
[750] Derrida, "The Parergon," 22.
[751] Ibid., 28.

order.[752] As we have seen, the transformation of material into form is coupled with the intentional subversion of functionality that an artwork embodies. This can be considered as a deceptive condition of artworks, which is evident in terms of their intentional uselessness but is compounded in terms of use-value and economics.[753] The social relations that condition artworks externally are coupled with the formal condition of art, which positions artworks under the same commodity logic of capitalist economics.[754] While every art*work* is a form of labour, however, artworks have a negative relation to use-value because of their indeterminate intentionality.[755] This subversive economic functionality ensures that a critique of exchange-value—a deliberate uselessness—is fixed to the formal condition of artworks.[756] Threat of the loss of this unique artistic use-value, which would result in the paralysis of meaning production, assures that artistic practice is continually refreshing itself, with perpetual novelty as yet another condition of contemporary art.[757] The cycle of generation and destruction that results assures that avant-garde creative practices stimulate subjective uncertainty while challenging the established tradition. An artwork's autonomy is determined by its singularity, which is a condition that influences an artwork's capacity to produce meaning.[758] Since the subjective base of aesthetic experience assures that its interpretation is perpetually open, the nature of an artwork is indeterminate as a result of its individuality, especially in light of potential future evaluation. In this way, the artwork is equated to 'the fragment' through its finite form but infinite possible interpretations.[759] While both idea and form are essential elements of every artwork,[760] there is a growing trend towards conceptualization within

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[752] Derrida, "The Parergon," 28.
[753] Roberts, *Revolutionary Time and the Avant-Garde*, 96.
[754] Ibid., 83.
[755] Ibid., 96.
[756] Ibid., 98.
[757] Ibid., 85.
[758] Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, 85.
[759] Ibid., 60.
[760] Ibid., 49.

artistic creation, which is evident in the procedural and relational emphasis of contemporary artworks. This is evident in the predominant use of the series and the project, two media formats that have become conventions of postconceptual art. In either case, series and projects expose the internal and external relations that inform their identity as artworks. Series formally relate to the concept of information through their multiplicity of unique yet related units that must be immediately intelligible and intelligibly independent.[761] Osborne determines the relational priority of postconceptual art in difference to a more aesthetic line of criticism this is founded in the aesthetic tradition of Kant,[762] and the series and the project both highlight the importance of contextual relationships in the generation of integral meaning. *Dasein* allows us to conceive of artistic creation as a projection in terms of movement and potential,[763] and escape the inherent separation of subject, object and environment that Kant's aesthetics implies. As a projection, an art project is forever incomplete like 'the fragment', demonstrating indetermination and the potential of possibility.[764] Artworks are beings of promise, and the *parergon* and 'the fragment' help us to appreciate the paradoxes and conditions that make the impossible possible through the practice of art.

Art, Society & Tradition

One of the most important functions of 'the fragment' is its ability to demonstrate the social relations that make the practice of art operate and the tradition of art possible. As we have seen, the integrity of an artwork is determined by its contextual conditions, which are established through temporal and social influences at the moment of aesthetic judgement.[765]

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761 Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, 62.
762 Ibid., 48.
763 Ibid., 171.
764 Ibid., 173.
765 Ibid., 44.

This is illustrated by the necessity of the concept of art to recognize artworks,[766] which is established through experience and education and places some form of tradition as precedent to the examination of the artwork. As artworks are defined in relation to their social context, it is important to contextualize the present moment of artistic practice in relation to the aesthetic regime that founds the historical scope of this thesis. As new artworks are made in relation (and reaction) to tradition, we can understand the motion from one movement to the next as historical paradigms dissipate and new ones establish collective acceptance. As the aesthetic regime replaced the representational regime, the traditions of media specificity and national social importance began to disappear, making way for new practical methodologies in which the creation and experience of artworks developed.[767] With the new focus on subjective interpretation of artistic meaning, aesthetic thought liberated art both in terms of its production and reception, while opening it up to the social relations of everyday life that informed it.[768] This has become ubiquitous in contemporary art practices, where social relations have gained tremendous importance in establishing artistic significance. In order to acknowledge the important influence of conceptual art practices of the twentieth century, Osborne establishes the term 'postconceptual art' to reconfigure the historical nomenclature of Moderism. In addition to eliminating the temporally ambiguous confusion of the term 'contemporary art,' the new historical lineage replaces the Modern/Post-Modern opposition by affirming that postconceptual art is still within the Modernist epoch.[769] While postconceptual artworks are more liberated in terms of their material and temporal extension, they must still adhere to the tradition of art through the use of conventions. Focusing on the social relations that inform artistic meaning, postconceptual artworks blur the lines of what an autonomous art being might be. Nonetheless, they rely on the concept of art and the tradition

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[766] Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, 50.
[767] Ibid., 28.
[768] Tanke, "What is the Aesthetic Regime?," 78.
[769] Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, 48.

that is associated with it, which is used to distinguish an artwork from the context within which it exists. For the moment, the tradition of contemporary art is founded upon the transformation of material and the subversion of functionality, which provide artworks with a unique use-value that counterpoints society at large. The practice of art embodies and exposes the society from whence it came, reflecting the volatile potential of the lives it fills.

CHAPTER 6. PRACTICAL RESEARCH

6.1. Introduction to Practical Research

This chapter considers two art projects of mine as forms of practical research into aesthetic separation and the reflection of life in art. The first artwork, "*uncover RECOVER*,' is an ongoing project that began in 2011 and was recently exhibited as part of the group exhibition "OROI: Queda mucho pasado por delante"[770] in Artium Museum in Vitoria-Gasteiz, Spain. It involves the cultivation of medicinal plants using soil obtained from mass graves from the Franco dictatorship of Spain. While the artwork originated before I began my doctorate, it provides a relevant contextualization of current artistic strategies in relation to Rancière's conception of aesthetic separation and Osborne's conception a postconceptual ontology for artworks. The chapter itself is an article that will be published in the upcoming book titled *Toward an Eco-social Transition: Transatlantic Environmental Humanities / Hacia una Transición Eco-social: Humanidades Medioambientales desde una perspectiva Transatlántica.*[771] Aside from exploring the political and social angles of Rancière and Nöe's writing, the article offers insight into my creative process and acts as a counterpoint to the second artwork I will examine as practical research.

Cover Your Tracks was developed especially for this research project as a case study that would serve to investigate and experiment the theoretical research of the four previous chapters of my thesis. It involved the creation of Japanese dry garden installations within the Jardí Botànic de Barcelona (Botanical Gardens of Barcelona) that provoked an interaction for visitors to make and cover their footprints. While the artwork was inspired by my research—

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[770] Enrique Martínez Goikoetxea, curator. "OROI: Queda mucho pasado por delante," (2018-20). http://www.artium.eus/es/exposiciones/item/60784-oroi-queda-mucho-pasado-por-delante (accessed September 4, 2019).

[771] Instituto Franklin-UAH, Toward an Eco-social Transition: Transatlantic Environmental Humanities / Hacia una Transición Eco-social: Humanidades Medioambientales desde una perspectiva Transatlántica, (Alcalá, Spain: Colección CLYMA, Biblioteca Benjamin Franklin, forthcoming 2019/2020). http://www3.uah.es/gieco/index.php/libros-publicados-por-gieco/

specifically the work of Derrida and Lacan as explored in Chapter 4.2.3.3. Subject of the Signifier—it is a logical extension my professional artistic career, and demonstrates numerous paths of potential artistic creation and criticism in relation to my research into aesthetic separation and the reflection of life in art.

6.2. Changing Matter, Changing Minds

6.2.1. The Transformative Potential of Art

It's a tricky task to reveal how an artwork might provoke a person to change, and there are many ways to explore how this transformation might function. As an artist, I focus on the manipulation of common materials in an effort to connect with people aesthetically and conceptually. I hope that somehow my innovative transformation of known materials will be recognized and felt, resulting in some kind of echo of alteration, promise of possibility or lasting impression. Rancière positions contemporary art in relation to everyday life by asserting that artists: "weave together a new sensory fabric by wresting percepts and affects from the perceptions and affections that make up the fabric of ordinary experience."[772] Whether it's Teresa Margolles creating a memento mori moment by blowing bubbles with water that had previously cleansed cadavers (*In the Air*, 2003)[773], or Simon Starling cultivating live mussels on a Henry Moore sculpture to comment on colonialism (*Infestation Piece*, 2006-08)[774], there is no shortage of contemporary artists mixing conceptually charged materials and life processes for politico-artistic purposes. But just how does this newly created sensory fabric *affect* people to change their minds and subsequent actions? Furthermore, if artworks are capable of inciting change, how can we as artists be assured to

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[772] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 56.

[773] Teresa Margolles, *In the Air,* 2003. Art installation (water used to clean cadavers, soap, bubble machine).

[774] Simon Starling, *Infestation Piece*, 2006-08. Sculpture (steel replica of Henry Moore's *Warrior with Shield* (1953-54) and zebra mussels), 157.5 x 73.7 x 83.8 cm.

provoke the changes we *desire* through the results of our creativity? To address these questions I will look to my own artistic practice and, in particular, a project called *uncover RECOVER*. I will employ contemporary art theory to help think through the mechanisms of this social art project and illustrate the transformative potential and limitations of artworks. Influencing through art is a pertinent capacity for the environmental humanities to command.

My artistic practice is multidisciplinary in nature and focuses on the transformation of materials, ideas and people. I often work with a collage-inspired methodology of appropriating, manipulating, organizing and presenting. When I started making collages twenty years ago, I liked to think like a chef or a deejay: the better my ingredients or samples were, the better the final result would be. Over the years my practice has shifted from a formal, structural focus to incorporate the transformation of ideas or meaning that materials are capable of having. While I try not to limit myself in terms of media, my practice follows various lines of investigation related to the human body as it lives in terms of desire, conflict and freedom. An example of this material focus is one of my first ecologically based series titled *Getting Back to Nature*. Originally exhibited at pm Gallery in Toronto, the series depicts a feral giant investigating a highway service centre. The giant is naked and crawling on all fours as he manoeuvres around his environment. He leans down to smell the buildings amidst the bustling traffic and then lifts his leg to 'mark his territory' before running into the woods in the distance.

Image 1: Robert Waters, *Getting Back to Nature 3*. 2005, drawing with urine, balsamic vinegar and motor oil on paper, 28 x 76 cm. Private collection.

When I made this series, I was concerned about the idea of nature being something that we had to drive to and I wanted to eliminate the perceived separation between humanity, our culture and nature. While the political message is obvious through what this series represents visually, it is fortified by a second layer of meaning that is hidden within its materials; urine, balsamic vinegar and motor oil. I wanted to reference the expression "piss and vinegar" with these unconventional materials, to connote an aggressive or rebellious energy.[775] Combined with the motor oil, I sought to stimulate an added jolt of disgust, humour and understanding to anyone who was curious enough to read the information tag hanging next to the series. I wanted to provide the opportunity for viewers to look again at the images with a *new* understanding, one that was different from their first impression. While the traditional nature of my images makes them visually accessible, the conceptual leanings of my projects rely on knowledge that a viewer might or might not have, which largely depends on their personal context. While the expression "piss and vinegar" is quite common to English speakers, this reference would certainly be lost on Spanish speakers. As such, it is an artistic gamble to refer

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[775] Miriam-Webster, "Piss And Vinegar | Definition of Piss And Vinegar by Merriam-Webster," https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/piss%20and%20vinegar (accessed September 6, 2019).

to the potential knowledge of a viewer in an artwork. Nonetheless, it is something I have explored in a variety of ways in my practice, enabling the potential for conceptual recognition to add or skew an initial reading of an artwork. The manipulation of known culture—using the knowledge of individuals as an artistic medium to play with—is something that continues to motivate me as an artist.

6.2.2. *Uncover RECOVER*

After moving from Canada to Spain nine years ago I began formulating a project that employed a similar strategy, using material that was charged with meaning to create an artwork. I was invited to participate in the "Praxis" exhibition series at Artium, the Basque museum of contemporary art in Vitoria-Gasteiz. In the short time I had been living in Spain I became intrigued by the Spanish Civil War and its ongoing aftermath as it related to ideas of 'political amnesty' and 'historical memory.' I began attending lectures and exhibitions on the subject, which brought me in contact with Aranzadi, the scientific society that was helping to facilitate the exhumation process of mass graves across Spain. I was not familiar with the subject, which was and continues to be very divisive. It was noteworthy how most people with personal connections to the Spanish Civil War evaded speaking about the subject. Some think that the atrocities of the Franco dictatorship should be left buried in the past, while others believe that the exhumation process is a way of providing closure and restoring dignity for the families involved. As a foreigner my attention was drawn to the resistance to speak about this polarized subject. I was intrigued and disturbed by the stories of families torn apart by the Civil War and the lives cut short for having the "wrong" political opinion in the wrong place at the wrong time. I decided that I wanted to create a project that would offer a safe atmosphere for dialogue on the subject while providing me with a way of learning more about it directly from the community. I decided to use the soil from one of the mass graves of the

Spanish Civil War to cultivate medicinal herbs for the Spanish people.

After explaining my project to Aranzadi I was invited to an exhumation site that was located in the outskirts of a village near Pamplona. It was there on a cold winter morning that I collected soil being removed with spades and brushes from the skeletons of bodies that had been buried in this unmarked grave roughly seventy years earlier.

Image 2: Robert Waters, collecting soil from the mass grave at Oteiza de Berrioplano, Navarra, Spain. December 10, 2010.

The team of Aranzadi scientists and archaeologists, which was largely comprised of students and volunteers, had heard about this grave from an elder in the village. As most of the locations of the graves were only known by elders it was important to act quickly before this knowledge was lost in the passing of a generation. In this case it wasn't really a *mass* grave. There were only the remains of two bodies, which I later learned were two men supposedly related with the infamous 'San Cristobal' prison in Pamplona. After speaking with the crew I filled a bag with the soil that less than a century earlier had been living human flesh and I

returned to Vitoria-Gasteiz to begin the second phase of my project.

In Artium, a week before the exhibition began, I prepared the soil in planters and germinated thirty-six varieties of medicinal plant seeds. I determined my list of plants by cross-referencing the Spanish book *Plantas Medicinales*[776] and the seed product list from a local garden shop. As an important aim of the project was to *memorialize* the recuperation process after the war, I added *ginkgo biloba* to the list of autochthonous plants, since it has been proven to strengthen memory.[777] I collected these seeds myself below the *ginkgo* tree in Santa Barbara Plaza in Vitoria-Gasteiz. Next to each planter in the makeshift museum greenhouse, I displayed information about the growing plants and how they could be used to heal people from a variety of ailments. To accentuate the appearance of a healing environment I set-up a waiting room in front of the greenhouse space where visitors could sit down and read texts about the recent exhumations and the work of the Association for the Recovery of Historic Memory. A ticking clock was prominently placed in this provisional waiting room to remind observers of the importance of time in processes of healing. At the far end of the greenhouse space, hanging above my gardening workstation, was a map with a pin that marked the location of the grave where I had obtained the soil. A map, soil, and flesh. Three different yet interconnected ways to define a nation.

While the dark soil was the protagonist of the project at the beginning, the fresh green plants took over as they grew in variety and form over the course of the month, a shift of focus from death back to life. One of the founding concepts of the "Praxis" exhibition series was to showcase artists working in the museum space, and so I went there daily to water and care for the plants.

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[776] A. Vander, *Plantas Medicinales*, (Barcelona, Spain: Talleres Gráficos Vicente Ferrer, 1942).

[777] B. H. Field and R. Vadnal, "Ginkgo biloba and Memory: An Overview. - PubMed – NCBI," *U.S. National Library of Medicine*, (1998). https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/27414695 (accessed April 18, 2019).

Image 3: Robert Waters, watering the medicinal plants at Artium, Vitoria-Gasteiz, Spain. January 16, 2011.

As implied by the title of the "Praxis" exhibition series, my active presence provided me the opportunity to speak with museum visitors as they entered the space, somewhat curious to find a functional greenhouse being cared for by a foreigner. I learned a great deal through various personal discussions, not only about the Spanish Civil War but also about the lingering pain that accompanies wilful silence and resultant feelings of ignorance, isolation and uncertainty. The final part of my project involved returning the plants back to the community, which was facilitated through an adoption process. In the waiting room there was a list for visitors to sign up if they were interested in taking care of the plants when the exhibition ended.

Image 4: Robert Waters, distributing the medicinal plants to their adoptive parents at Artium, Vitoria-Gasteiz, Spain. March 30, 2011.

This way, the soil and plants would be returned to the context from which they originated and could be used and enjoyed as their new caretakers saw fit. One of the most rewarding aspects of the project was receiving images of the plants growing in the homes and gardens of their adoptive parents, grounded once again in personal lives of the community.

This full circle journey of transformation is the essence of *uncover RECOVER*. A human body, whose life was cut short by the violence of war, decayed and transformed into the soil of a country that continues to define itself. Into that soil I planted seeds, and with water and care the soil transformed into a provisional garden of medicinal plants. These plants, with distinct and innate healing properties, were gifted back to the community, providing an ancestral communion of sorts where lost lives were extended to help remedy the living. The *ginkgo biloba*, my favourite example, demonstrates the transformation of death back into life to help the living *remember*. It reflects the double meaning of the title *uncover*

RECOVER, which can be understood literally as removing and replacing a cover, but it also means discovering something new and healing as a result of it. This was my intention. To create a cyclical narrative that provided people with the space and opportunity to participate, share and heal. Art largely exists through the generation and reception of narratives, which stimulate people to reflect, to change and to grow.

6.2.3. Artworks and Politics

Uncover RECOVER is not political simply because its inspiration and subject matter revolve around the Spanish Civil War. It can be argued that all artworks are inherently political thanks to their conception as artworks within society. I would like to use *uncover RECOVER* to explore some of the conditions that Rancière uses to connect artworks with political transformation, which ultimately relies on the ability of artworks to stimulate change on a personal level. Essentially, art is inherently political because it exists within people and through social relations, incorporating and questioning ideas of social norms and structures. Let's look at how artworks *work* within people and society before exploring the capacity of artworks to transform individuals.

Despite our natural tendency towards separation, there are many things that we share as we live together within society. Rancière bases the relationship between aesthetics and politics on our shared sensation of the world around us, which includes both that which can and cannot be sensed. This inevitably depends on our context or situation in the world and how the things we sense are distributed and organized around us. There are ways in which we perceive the world in similar ways based on our needs and desires as human beings, but other ways in which our specific cultures ensure specialized perception and understanding within communities, or different levels of accessibility depending on position. In any case, Rancière insists that the political nature of art must be discussed and understood on the level of a

shared sensory fabric, which includes the shared perceptive capacities of a community and the ways in which its perception is understood and is structured.[778] Politics, after all, exists in and through people in similar ways that art does.

> What is common is 'sensation'. Human beings are tied together by a certain sensory fabric, a certain distribution of the sensible, which defines their way of being together; and politics is about the transformation of the sensory fabric of 'being together.'[779]

When thinking specifically about *uncover RECOVER*, I was very conscious of the community as I developed the artwork. The Spanish Civil War is a perfect example of a polarized understanding of a shared experience, where a political opinion communicated in public could have easily resulted in murder. The silence that resulted from the vindictive violence of the war can still be felt to this day, a perfect example of how a lack of sensation can also register as being shared. As my intention was to shift the focus from conflict to healing, in developing my artwork I wanted to concentrate on things that united the community, to take a step back and show a bigger picture of what was common amongst those affected by the war. From the distant perspective of an uninformed Canadian, it was the precarity, suffering and death of all involved that became the common thread for my project. As a foreigner I could avoid the necessity of taking a political side and more easily lift the conversation to a level of neutrality, which would certainly be more difficult for a Spaniard. An artistic context also helped to consolidate a space of neutrality, as sensations or opinions are commonly considered and discussed in art spaces without incident due to the subjective nature of the conversations.

The basis of Rancière's logic that unites aesthetics with politics lies in our paradoxical state of being connected and separated simultaneously. We easily understand ourselves as individuals, yet at the same time could never exist entirely as such. Rancière defines this

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[778] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 18.
[779] Ibid., 56.

situation as 'being apart together' and claims that the tensions that result from such a state extend into the practice of art, specifically in the distinction between the production and the enjoyment of an artwork.[780] At the root of artistic practice (creation and appreciation) there is a disconnection between artist and spectator, which is paralleled in an incoherence of intention that defines our current understanding of art. Alva Nöe notes one result of this absence of purpose by shifting art from a thing to a practice. "Art isn't a phenomenon to be explained. It is, rather, a mode or activity of trying to explain."[781] Nowadays, artworks contingently possess an incoherence of purpose as their original significance in religious, festive, aristocratic and decorative history has long disappeared.[782] This lack of purpose in art echoes Kant's negation of using determinant judgements during aesthetic experience, since universal concepts of purpose cannot be used to judge beauty nor art.[783] The result of this condition of disconnection between artwork and context, and artwork and purpose, is a form of artistic freedom where subjective judgements made by individuals are the only valid type of aesthetic evaluation. Nöe helps to clarify while corroborating Rancière's ideas:

> Art investigates or exposes by destabilizing. Art, I have urged, is a philosophical practice. One upshot of this approach is that anything can be art, but nothing, at least by virtue of its intrinsic nature, is guaranteed to be. Art is always relational and contextual.[784]

For *uncover RECOVER* I wanted to take aspects from the context of everyday life and transform them into an artwork, but not necessarily one that exists physically. For me it was more interesting to create an artwork that would exist through and amongst people and relations. The "Praxis" exhibition series was intended to (re)connect spectators with the creative processes of artists, and as such I was conscious of making the project accessible from the start. I started gathering my "materials" by researching ideas, concepts and meanings

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[780] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 59.
[781] Nöe, *Strange Tools*, 113.
[782] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 70.
[783] Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, 19.
[784] Nöe, *Strange Tools*, 73-74.

from my new surroundings, and I began playing with how I might transform them into an artwork that would at once stimulate and shift the focus of the discussion about the war. One important contextual disjunction of note is the time that had passed since Franco's death and Spain's transition to democracy, which began roughly thirty-five years ago, providing a much-needed cushion to broach such an incendiary topic. While there were many distinct professional fields involved in my project (anthropology, history, medicine, and botany), it was their novel combination and contextual disjunction that resulted in artistic affect. As isolated fields with specific contexts and purposes there is little 'art' to be found, but by extending and blending the fields their meanings become subverted through the poetry of imagination. As Rancière has described: "Many contemporary artists no longer set out to create works of art. Instead, they want to get out of the museum and induce alterations in the space of everyday life, generating new forms of relations."[785] In my case, I brought various non-art practices into the museum and organized them in such a way that their individual dispositions generated new significance by relating and functioning collectively.

While matter was obviously transformed on a physical level during my project, it is the conceptual restructuring of matter through various disciplines that catalyzes my artwork within the imagination of an audience. The series of transformations of everyday life (from dead bodies to soil to medicinal plants to living people) is a means through which freedom can be experienced in the imagination of the spectator. While this process happens on an individual basis, it can be imagined as being similar for everyone. Amplifying the aperture of the project from one specific field or topic to a more generalized view of various interrelationships positioned it as being both elevatory and alleviatory in nature, despite being based on such harsh realities. Instead of focusing on the inherent political divisions of war, *uncover RECOVER* offered a coherent joint perspective of the situation from a distance. Here

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[785] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 53.

the decontextualization of the elements involved can be seen as a strategy for both disarming the strong negative emotions that are associated with the Spanish Civil War, and leading towards reflection and personal transformation within spectators. Aligning personal transformation with the political potential of art, Rancière states:

> Aesthetic experience has a political effect to the extent that the loss of destination it presupposes disrupts the way in which bodies fit their functions and destination. … It is a multiplication of connections and disconnections that reframe the relation between bodies, the world they live in and the way in which they are 'equipped' to adapt to it. It is a multiplicity of folds and gaps in the fabric of common experience that change the cartography of the perceptible, the thinkable and the feasible.[786]

By composing various elements related to war and peace, trauma and healing, and death and life, *uncover RECOVER* enabled the audience to perceive the Spanish Civil War in a different way, one that hadn't been considered before. By empowering a novel perspective, or by offering a new—albeit imagined—position, we can begin to understand how art is inherently political. Artworks allow us to see the world differently and thus organize ourselves distinctly, creating the possibility for potential new community relations to emerge.

Despite the capacity of artworks to shift the common experience of political life, there is an underlying limitation to art's political effect. The inherent disjunctions of art, be they contextual or functional, imply that an artwork can never guarantee a specific political result since there is no direct relationship between cause and effect.[787] The desires of the artist, political or otherwise, have little influence on how an artwork is experienced and understood by an individual, especially in the absence of the artist. People think what they want about artworks despite artistic intention. Furthermore, intentionally politicizing artworks is tantamount to giving them a purpose, which endows them with a determinant concept against which they can be judged. This not only undermines the possibility of judging them aesthetically, but it also infringes upon their inherent freedom as artworks. As such, the

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[786] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 72-73.
[787] Ibid., 73.

creation or use of art as a political tool with specific goals should be carefully considered since the results can neither be guaranteed nor measured.[788]

This doesn't mean that artworks cannot be used towards educating or promoting the environmental humanities and a more ecological conception of the world. It simply means that in order to do so, it is important to consider *how* artworks affect and transform people. Nöe places the practice of art alongside the practice of philosophy: "Art aims at the disclosure of ourselves to ourselves and so it aims at giving us opportunities to catch ourselves in the act of achieving perceptual consciousness—including aesthetic consciousness—of the world around us."[789] He believes that artworks allow people to transform by providing them with unknown situations in which they can reflexively see and understand themselves, providing unique opportunities which otherwise wouldn't be possible.[790] In effect, artworks are inherently political because they give us the opportunity to encounter ourselves in unfamiliar thought and reflection, which provokes a reflexive repositioning.

> We start out not seeing what is there. But by looking and interrogating and challenging, we come to see it. The work challenges us to reorganize our seeing, our expectations, and our thinking. The work of art, like that of philosophy, is the reorganization of ourselves. And this reorganization, this work, aims also at understanding.[791]

Uncover RECOVER demonstrated the transformative potential of art physically and conceptually through the transformation of material and its meaning. By providing an alternative ending for victims of fascism I aimed to inspire the living and rouse conversation on a difficult yet significant topic. Instead of having a specific political goal, my project aimed to create a novel space for imagination and dialogue, which in turn might stimulate a reformation of the political. Transforming the sensory fabric means disconnecting people from the ordinary relations that structure their lives and proposing alternative visions that re-

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[788] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 70.
[789] Nöe, *Strange Tools*, 70-71.
[790] Ibid., 80.
[791] Ibid., 138.

establish understanding in extraordinary ways. By shifting our standard experience of context and purpose, artworks catalyse free thought and help to unlock impossible futures. While the novelty and uncertainty that artworks transmit facilitate an awareness and potential reassessment of self, the political efficacy of artworks is never certain. Nevertheless, if war has taught us anything it's that people loathe being manipulated or told what to do from external sources. An artist's true work, then—if they have political aspirations—is to plant seeds of change that will take root and blossom from within.

6.3. *Cover Your Tracks*

6.3.1. Introduction to *Cover Your Tracks*

This chapter describes and explores the art project *Cover Your Tracks*, which was developed in relation to the theoretical research of this thesis into aesthetic separation and the reflection of life in art. The chapter begins with a description of the artwork, which involved the installation of three Japanese *karesansui* dry gardens within the Jardí Botànic de Barcelona (Botanical Gardens of Barcelona). The description is followed by a theoretical contextualization of the project in relation to my research, and is divided to reflect the four main chapters of this thesis; Life / Context; Thought / Self; Human Beings / Intention; and, Artworks / Art. A final evaluation will examine the project and propose ways in which it might be transformed or extended for future exhibition. In conclusion, *Cover Your Tracks* is found to be an art project that successfully engaged with participants and demonstrated the importance of context in establishing artistic significance.

6.3.2. Project Description

6.3.2.1. Physical and Ideological Summary

Cover Your Tracks began development in 2017 and was exhibited in the autumn of 2018 in the Jardí Botànic de Barcelona (Botanical Gardens of Barcelona). The art project was comprised of three Japanese dry gardens located on walking paths throughout the grounds. The framed, shallow dry gardens blocked the visitors' intended paths, inviting them to traverse the raked surface of the dry garden and participate in the creation and erasure of marks, before continuing with their garden visit. In addition to the natural elements that composed the dry gardens (wood and sand), the artwork employed language and technology in their engagement with the public, which was intended to exemplify the inherent functionality of artworks (mimetic, social and symbolic) while highlighting the cognitive capacities that distinguish human beings from other animals. As an artificial construction within a botanical setting, the project provided an important counterpoint between natural and artificial elements, a condition that every artwork must inherently display. Furthermore, through the irrational placement of dry gardens within a botanical garden, *Cover Your Tracks* demonstrated the importance of context—both physical and conceptual—in facilitating the generation of artistic meaning, while also alluding to the inherent subversion of artworks. Although simple in composition, *Cover Your Tracks* is a reverential examination of the relationships and processes that make artworks function as art, highlighting the experiential process and reflective thought that make the practice of art truly sensational.

6.3.2.2. Formal Description

The artwork *Cover Your Tracks* was encountered by visitors to the Jardí Botànic de Barcelona (The Botanical Gardens of Barcelona) during November and December of 2018. It was located in three distinct locations within the garden, situated on the winding geometric

paths that visitors use to navigate their visit. Each installation consisted of a Japanese 'karesansui' dry mountain garden that was built using a low wooden frame that was filled with sand and completely covered one section of the cement pathway. To the side of each installation there was a sign that contained the silhouette image of a person raking and a text that read, "Cover Your Tracks" in Catalan, Spanish and English. There was a wooden karesansui rake next to each installation as well, which is distinguishable by its triangular teeth that leave ripple patterns when raking a dry garden. The installations were situated on secondary pathways in three separate climate zones of the Jardí Botànic, and were filled with different colours of sand to reflect their respective temperate locations and the botany that flourished around them. In the entrance to the Jardí Botànic there was a pamphlet about the project that explained its basic physical and conceptual components. At the end of the exhibition, all of the installation materials were reused by the Jardí Botànic for their regular horticultural responsibilities.

Image 5: Robert Waters, *Cover Your Tracks* (Installation 1), 2018, Jardí Botànic de Barcelona, Spain.

Image 6: Robert Waters, *Cover Your Tracks* (Installation 1, Group Visit), 2018, Jardí Botànic de Barcelona, Spain.

Image 7: Robert Waters, *Cover Your Tracks* (Installation 2), 2018, Jardí Botànic de Barcelona, Spain.

Image 8: Robert Waters, *Cover Your Tracks* (Installation 2, Visitor Raking), 2018, Jardí Botànic de Barcelona, Spain.

Image 9: Robert Waters, *Cover Your Tracks* (Installation 3), 2018, Jardí Botànic de Barcelona, Spain.

Image 10: Robert Waters, *Cover Your Tracks* (Installation 3, Visitor Walking), 2018, Jardí Botànic de Barcelona, Spain.

Image 11: Robert Waters, *Cover Your Tracks* (Installation Map), 2018, Jardí Botànic de Barcelona, Spain.
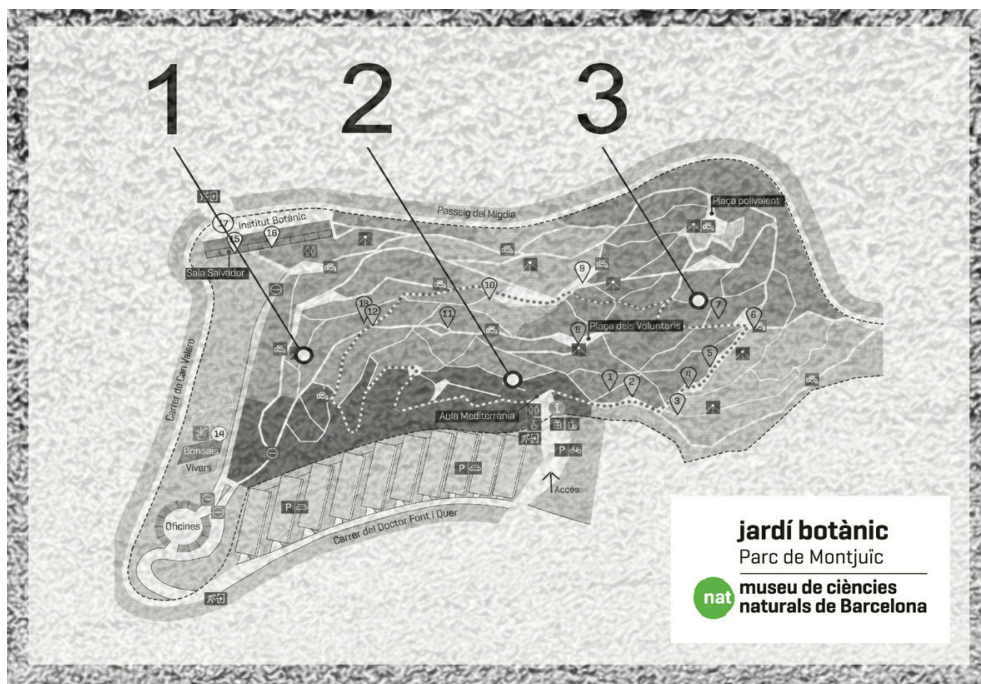

Image 12: Robert Waters, *Cover Your Tracks* (Pamphlets), 2018, Jardí Botànic de Barcelona, Spain.

6.3.2.3. Experiential Description

Visitors are confronted with a decision when they encounter the three *Cover Your Tracks* dry garden installations, which completely cover and block the walking path they are situated on. Do visitors turn around and go a different way in order to continue, do they leave the path—which is forbidden according to the Jardí Botànic de Barcelona—and walk around the installation, or do they traverse the dry garden in front of them? If they decide to walk across it, disrupting the undulating wave pattern in the sand and marking it with their footprints, they are confronted with yet another decision once they are across; do they obey the sign and cover their tracks, or do they leave them there for the next visitor to find? If they decide to cover their tracks, even more decisions confront them; do they use the rake provided to cover their tracks, and if so, how do they rake the garden? Do they follow the existing pattern that they encountered, or do they make a new pattern by raking in different directions? These physical and contemplative elements form the basis of the site-specific installation *Cover Your Tracks*, and while it is quite simple in its formation there are many considerations and associations that result from its contemplation.

The installation functions as a social artwork by subverting an important institutional convention that controls visitor interaction within public garden settings. Similar to the common rule that artworks are not to be touched in a gallery setting, it is understood that visitors to a public garden are not supposed to touch the plants or stray from the path unless granted permission by a figure of authority. In the case of both the gallery and the garden, a good visitor is an observer who makes as little impact on the exhibition content as possible, and this is best accomplished by maintaining visitors separate from artworks and plant life. This is the reason why paths are clearly marked, little fences are installed, or in the case of a gallery, lines are marked on the floor. With *Cover Your Tracks*, however, visitors are encouraged to 'break the rules' and interact with both artwork and garden in an unusual way.

This invitation to deviate from the norm—to actively participate with the work by walking across and raking the dry garden—is intended to make visitors feel self-conscious. Am I being watched? Is someone watching me? This question no doubt influences the visitor's decision to avoid or interact with the installation, and returns the act of external observation back to the subject who is doing the observing. The state of being observed and followed is the main impetus for covering your tracks in the first place. It's a simple act that is intended to deceive a pursuant and return the subject to a relaxed state of neutrality, without being observed or pursued. Successfully covering your tracks in the installation means that the evidence of a visitor breaking the rules is erased, liberating the visitor from any regulatory repercussions and restoring their sensation of freedom. All that remains is the brief recollection of making marks and covering them—a brief moment of attention in which situations were evaluated, decisions were made, and interactions were emphasized—in the memory of the visitor.

6.3.3. Theoretical Contextualization

6.3.3.1. Life / Context

There are many ways in which the artwork *Cover Your Tracks* reflects the theoretical topics explored in Chapter 2. Life / Context, in which I contextualize autopoiesis in relation to art and the key concepts that Rancière applies to define aesthetic separation. Let's quickly review these topics, which include processes (transformation, organization), capacities (observation, contextualization) and distinctions (time, difference, lack), to critically engage with the artwork *Cover Your Tracks* and to try to clarify the concept of aesthetic separation and the reflection of life in art. The theory of autopoiesis provides a clear distinction between the molecular functioning of biological life and the existential perception of individual lives. The distinction and connection between the physical and the epistemological conceptions of

human life are taken into account in relation to the material and formal considerations that inform the significance of artworks. The result is a broad exploration that highlights the subjective conception of *Cover Your Tracks* in relation to an objective understanding of the functioning of life and the experience of art.

Cover Your Tracks demonstrates various moments of transformation that parallel the processes of life as defined by autopoiesis. To begin with, the project was conceived, installed and removed in a way that mirrors the cycle of life. Materials were transformed in order to construct the installations that comprised the artwork, and transformed once again after the exhibition into non-artistic materials that the garden reused. The concept of the karesansui garden and its contemplative tradition was also transformed by making it a participative and interactive garden, which is not usually the case.[792] The experience of the project by individual visitors also demonstrates the processual nature of life, with marked steps that provide the encounter with a beginning, middle and end. The transformation of sense (sensation) to sense (reason) was also evoked in potential participants since the situation needed to be interpreted and assessed before the project was engaged with. The change in sensation from walking on the cement path to walking on the sand provided a chance of reflectivity, where the objective nature of the body that left the marks could be felt in tune with the subjective self that sensed the sand shifting beneath the body. There was a double transformation of marks as footprints were pressed into the sand and then covered with the pull of the rake, leaving the surface in a similar yet distinct state. This reflects the transformation of individuals who participated in the project, who are similar yet unique after their experience of this singular event. While the setting, materials and even the dry garden may have been known beforehand, the specific situation and provocation that *Cover Your Tracks* presented provided an inevitable shift in thought and consciousness. As minimal and

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[792] Sophie Walker, *The Japanese Garden*, (London, U.K.: Phaidon Press, 2017), 182.

fleeting as these alterations may be, the experience is subjectively transformative for the lives of the visitors who left and covered their tracks in the sand.

Cover Your Tracks utilized and highlighted acts of organization that position it in line with the organizational acts of life. On a material level, the installations are organized to mimic Japanese dry gardens, utilizing cut wood that is joined to create a frame which is filled with sand. Both the wood and sand that form the dry garden are transformed from their natural states, with the wood being cut and positioned in line with the cement pathways and the sand being prepared with the special karesansui rake. The project was organized to fit in with the botanical gardens by mimicking institutional conventions, with a professionally composed information panel installed beside the dry garden, next to a custom-made rake. Considering Nöe's organizational theory of art (see Chapter 2.3.5. Organization), *Cover Your Tracks* demonstrates the ways in which we as humans organize and are organized. Gardening is a basic human activity, as we care for the environments in which we live and tend to the natural spaces around us. As a second-order organized activity, we create gardens and garden pathways in order to arrange the natural world to our liking, and *Cover Your Tracks* uses this practice to reflect back on our organizational nature of nature. In relation to social organization, the artwork highlights the ways in which we are organized in institutional settings, with unwritten social rules that condition our behaviour. It the forest you wouldn't be concerned about stepping off the trail or pulling a leaf from a tree, but this is not the case in a botanical garden. By tempting visitors to break collectively accepted rules, *Cover Your Tracks* calls attention to the ways in which we are organized socially and institutionally.

The institutional context of the botanical garden is the perfect location to explore the relationship between art and life. Although the project doesn't incorporate any living beings—aside from the human beings who participate in its creation—the context of the garden provides the perfect counterpoint in which non-living and living, unorganized and

organized, can be compared. As an artwork that exists outside of a traditional artistic context, *Cover Your Tracks* fits the categorization of contemporary artworks that Rancière was speaking of when he wrote "Aesthetic Separation, Aesthetic Community." As a postconceptual artwork, the socially-engaged nature of *Cover Your Tracks* uses a lot of institutional conventions that connect it with artistic practice nonetheless. This was primarily facilitated by the information pamphlet that was available at the entrance to the botanical gardens—the *parergon* of the project—as well as the inclusion of the project in the programming of a conference on Japanese gardens. While mimicking the conventions of instituional signage, the project functioned as an artwork by being *out* of context, as explored in relation to the work of Nöe in Chapter 4.3.4. Function. Not only are the Japanese dry gardens that comprise the installations out of context nationally, but the location of the installations on garden paths is also out of place. As part of a contemplative tradition,[793] karesansui gardens are tended to by professionals before and after the public has access to them, which makes the human interaction of *Cover Your Tracks* another way in which convention is subverted in the name of art. By being out of context, *Cover Your Tracks* helps visitors to contexualize themselves *in the midst* of nature and artifice, and as an active agent in the *creation* of nature and artifice. As a man-made space with living elements, the botanical gardens is a logical place to find a karesansui garden, which helps to negate a preconception of its artistic intention and create a sense of uncertainty regarding its placement and use. In a different context this might not be the case because it would more obviously call attention to its illogical placement. This helps to demonstrate how acts of contextualization of artworks in relation to their environment plays an important role in establishing the significance of the work. Installing *Cover Your Tracks* in a gallery setting would change it most profoundly by eliminating the uncertainty and subversive invitation that the context of the botanical gardens

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[793] Walker, *The Japanese Garden*, 184.

activates, combining natural and artificial elements as gracefully as an artwork combines material and form.

In both botanical gardens and art galleries, observation is the principal intention and activity of visitors. As described in autopoietic theory, observation occurs on the molar level of biological functionality where cognition enables an organism to engage with its environment as a whole entity. In the case of human beings, that entity is conceived of as the self. While biological processes occur in the absence of meaning on the molecular level of life, the consciousness we have at the molar level of life provides our interactions in the world with significance, which is a main intention and consequence of visiting gardens and museums. Institutionally speaking, exhibitions follow a logic of intentionality that allows visitors to more clearly understand and enjoy their visit. While *Cover Your Tracks* incorporates the existing tradition of karesansui gardens, the intentionality of their location is called into question when visitors find them blocking their intended passage through the gardens, a simple subversion that moves them into the realm of art. As an artwork that briefly transformed materials and lasted very little time, the artistic intentionality of *Cover Your Tracks* can also easily be called into question. As described earlier, my intention in developing *Cover Your Tracks* was to create a simple participative artwork that explored the thresholds of art and allowed me to practically explore my theoretical research. As autopoiesis has taught us, intentionality is a way of attributing significance to our interactions in the world, and the significance of *Cover Your Tracks* is largely unfolding as this academic thesis progresses. Nonetheless, we have already explored how the intentionality of artworks as described by the artist is never definitive and needs to be scrutinized. Moving from the topic of intentionality back to observation, *Cover Your Tracks* helps to illustrate art as a system of communication. Every artwork is produced to be observed, according to Luhmann, which makes them a form of indirect communication and their aesthetic experience the "observation

of an observation" (see Chapter 2.3.5. Observation). This is unlike the direct observation of natural phenomenon, such as the vegetative and geological contents of a botanical garden, which lack communicative capabilities on their own. It is through the observation of formal composition that indicates whether an object is produced by humans or not, and has the potential for communicative meaning. Through the recognition of artificiality we distinguish works of art, which exist in an intermediate and fluctuating position between material and form. *Cover Your Tracks* both displays and questions this interstitial position and our ability to recognize and distinguish between what is natural and what is not. The context of the botanical gardens, which is a man-made ordering of plant species for the use of humans, is a perfect reflection of the combination of natural material and artificial form that artworks inherently display. The act of distinction itself separates the observer from the thing being observed, and this divisive act is something I wanted to highlight by having the active participation of visitors as an integral element of my artwork. Luhmann's conception of observation in relation to distinction further confounds the appraisal of artworks by connecting it with paradox, since the distinction of anything automatically connects it to everything that isn't included in the distinction. For example, as you are distinguishing *Cover Your Tracks* you are not focusing on the plants around it and yet they are connected as an invisible negative reference to the distinction of the artwork. The repeated act of making tracks and covering tracks is a way of making the visibility/invisibility opposition that informs artworks tangible. This is consolidated by the contemplative nature of the karesansui garden tradition, which confounds any singular conception of scale or temporality of the garden.[794] What can be seen or known by one person at any one time is limited, and the Japanese dry garden landscape helps to make this observational limitation manifest.[795] *Cover Your Tracks* demonstrates the nature of observational limitation by fluctuating between being

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[794] Walker, *The Japanese Garden*, 184.
[795] Ibid.

a garden or an artwork depending on your perception of it. In either case, the observation must be made. It is not a passive event, and through its activation the subjectivity and life of the observer becomes manifest.

Cover Your Tracks reflects our temporal conception of life through its experiential nature. Shifting from absence to presence to absence, the process of encountering the dry garden, making tracks in it and then erasing them is an extremely reduced reflection of birth, life and death. The frame of the dry garden marks the beginning and the end of the artistic experience, from the first step on the sand to the last pull of the rake. While experiencing *Cover Your Tracks*, attention is inevitably focused on the present moment; on the feeling of the sand as it presses beneath our feet, on the sound of the rake as it scrapes across the dry garden surface. When initially confronted with the installation, visitors evaluate the situation using memory that helps to identify the Japanese dry garden, perhaps associating it with sandboxes that we used to play with in our childhood. When making decisions about interacting with the installation, visitors anticipate the potential consequences of their actions, imagining possible futures. In relation to the horizon of expectation, *Cover Your Tracks* demonstrates the paradox of limitless potential within a limited form. As a blank canvas of sorts, the dry garden can be manipulated by the visitor in an unlimited number of ways, providing an indefinite amount of possibility. As a visitor, however, endurance places limits on the amount of time that can be spent engaging with the artwork, not to mention the time restrictions of the botanical gardens and the limited existence of the artwork. Attention on interacting with *Cover Your Tracks* is inescapably distracted at some point in time and the viewer moves on to focus their attention once again on their garden visit. The installation is left behind them as a memory, awaiting future visitors and future instantiations.

The acts of differentiation that separate life from non-life and subjects from the world around them are reflected in the artwork *Cover Your Tracks*. Using karesansui dry gardens as

a principal inspiration and manifestation of the project, the inert materials that compose the installation form a drastic contrast to the living plant life that form the Jardí Botànic. The once living wood elements of the dry garden, which include the garden frame and the karesansui rake, help to further contrast the connection between living and dead materials. The dry gardens come to life thanks to human intervention, which places the focus on the traces of organization and participation that the installations hide out of principle. The frame, signage and rake are the most obvious elements that differentiate the artwork from nature, and yet they all follow the institutional conventions of gardening and thus easily dissolve into the organizational infrastructure of the botanical gardens. The raked sand within the garden frames both demonstrates and hides human interaction, mimicking the undulating waves of water or the patterns of dunes while covering the tracks of the people who created them. Upon encountering the installation with the sand neatly raked, one is left with the impression that they are the first person to find it. As this is the same sensation for everyone, the installation aptly conveys the feeling of 'being apart together' that Rancière uses to found his theory of aesthetic separation. Visitors interact with the artwork individually, and yet they form an unknown collective through their shared experience of it. In relation to autopoiesis, the state of individuals being together apart as they couple with their environment is also emphasized by *Cover Your Tracks*, which shifts the external focus of the garden visit to the internal sensations that the interaction creates. This differentiation between objective and subjective focus helps to bring the internal/external division of personal identity into consciousness for participants with the artwork. This act of separation is something that we actively do as living beings, and our identity as people is created as we become conscious of this divide. As visitors interact with *Cover Your Tracks*, their subjectivity and objectivity collide as reflexive thoughts are externalized through physical action, and vice versa. For a brief moment, acts of differentiation are suspended and we become one with nature and art.

Life, from an autopoietic perspective, is a persistent state of lack that motivates intentionality and interaction. Rancière states that artworks are made in view of a people who are lacking, which implies a people yet to come but also an incomplete people. *Cover Your Tracks* not only waits for people to arrive but it also helps to complete them, to fill them up with something that they are missing. Emotions of surprise or uncertainty, thoughts of engagement and anticipation, sensations of earth giving way and muscles tensing, and feelings of pleasure and satisfaction. As a means of emphasizing subjectivity, the installation provides a reflexive moment of connection with the self as visitors actively experience the artwork. This provides a counterpoint in which all of the main topics of this chapter have the potential to become manifest, connecting the individual life of one person to the underlying functionality of life in general. Transforming and being transformed, organizing and being organized, observing and contextualizing, differentiating and coordinating, and appreciating the inevitable influence of time and lack on our lives. Through our experience of their unique existence, artworks allow us to see to feel ourselves in ways that would otherwise not be possible. As if reflecting our human existence, artworks themselves are inherently lacking. As mentioned, *Cover Your Tracks* demonstrated lack in its patient anticipation of visitors to encounter and engage with it. While the installation is encountered in a state of apparent termination, the act of walking across the dry garden returns it once again to an indeterminate state, until it is raked and returned to the state of peaceful tranquillity in which it was first encountered. The opposite, however, is the actual case, as the perfectly raked garden waits in indetermination until it is determined by being walked upon. Leaving tracks in the sand is tantamount to leaving a fingerprint which identifies a singularity, which runs counter to the deceptive neutrality of the intended first impression of a perfectly raked garden surface. The image of the perfectly raked karesansui garden is the recognizable concept upon which the first impression of *Cover Your Tracks* is based. While Kant stipulates that reflective thought

must lack concepts in order to be judged aesthetically, I would argue that the artistic functioning of *Cover Your Tracks* is not based on the recognition of the garden but rather the pleasure that is felt as visitors interact with it. The sensation of an unexpected encounter, sand underfoot and evidence erased. The other element of lack that Kant obliges for an experience to become aesthetic is the indifference towards the objective source of the sensations, which *Cover Your Tracks* facilitates through its basic materials and simple existence, little for anyone to desire. Through indifference towards the artwork, the sensations that are felt through its experience move to become subjectively universal, once again evoking the state of 'being together apart' and collapsing the distinction between the subject/object opposition. In this way, *Cover Your Tracks* provides a brief moment of communion that settles the disconnection we generate as we navigate our supposedly isolated lives.

In conclusion, the processes, capacities and distinctions that are inherent to the functioning of life as defined by autopoiesis provide a thorough structure to evaluate the aesthetic experience of the art project *Cover Your Tracks*. The operation of transformation is obvious in the construction of the artwork, which uses basic materials to create a series of contextually misplaced karesansui dry gardens. Transformation is also an active part of the experience of the installation, which provokes the creation and erasure of footprints, and a shift in consciousness and awareness of self as the interaction with the dry garden in the context of the Jardí Botànic de Barcelona occurs. The act of organization is relevant to a critique of *Cover Your Tracks*, which demonstrates the ways in which we organize and are organized by the world around us, connoting our existence as both subjects and objects. As a composition of organized materials and concepts, the dry garden installations draw attention to the activity of ordering the natural world to our liking. Furthermore, its location within an institutional setting and provocation to act against the norm calls attention to the ways in which we are socially organized. The context of *Cover Your Tracks* helps to highlight the

conventions that make art function differently from other practices, especially through the oppositions of nature and art, and material and form. Positioning the installations to block the natural progression of garden visitors makes the artwork function 'out of context,' provoking visitors to interact with the garden in ways that break with the karesansui tradition and the moral expectations of regular garden visits. *Cover Your Tracks* demonstrates the active nature of observation that functions to separate the observer from the observed, and the observed from the not-observed. The subtle nature of the artwork makes its distinction as art difficult, but when observed as an observation, the communicative play of *Cover Your Tracks* becomes clear, especially in comparison with the uncertain distinction between nature and artifice that botanical gardens inherently display. As an artwork that exists through repeatedly creating and covering tracks, it further demonstrates the opposition of visibility and invisibility that are simultaneously present in the observation of artworks, which always have more to offer despite their definitive constraints. As a sequence of events, *Cover Your Tracks* also evokes the temporal nature of life through the evocation of past memories and future anticipation while assessing the artwork, and a brief moment of attention and presence during the interaction with the work. Providing an ever-expanding potential for exploration, the artwork is limited only by the time of the visitor, demonstrating the paradox of the horizon of expectation that every artwork inherently displays. The state of difference, which generates significance for observers, is also an integral aspect of *Cover Your Tracks*. It is evident in the intentionally irrational location of the installations, as well as the intentionally distinct actions and sensations that the artwork provokes by doing things you would not normally do and feeling things that are uncommon to everyday experience. The differentiation of self from nature is also called into question through the interactions and sensations that *Cover Your Tracks* evokes, providing a dry garden in which the subjective can meet with the objective, the 'I' with the 'me.' Finally, the state of lack is exemplified by the indefinite nature of the

installation, which waits for visitors to activate it and return it to its default mode. While the artwork was made for a people to come, it helps to demonstrate and nourish the lack that people inherently have. In the case of *Cover Your Tracks*, the satiated lack is sensory and psychological, providing a moment of communion between visitors and life that helps to demonstrate the ways in which we cognitively separate ourselves from nature. In all of these ways, the functioning of life is reflected in the aesthetic experience of *Cover Your Tracks*, which brings the connection of art and life to public consciousness.

6.3.3.2. Thought / Self

While subtle in nature, the art project *Cover Your Tracks* demonstrates the many ways in which human thought, experience and consciousness operate during the aesthetic experience of artworks. In this chapter we will begin by exploring how the installation demonstrates ideas of parallelism, where body and mind function in tandem to establish self in relation to context. Internal and external sensations combine to generate an experience that is temporally distinguished and inherently marked with emotion, a combination that is based on reflexive thought and founds aesthetic experience. Our conception of self further allows us to operate in the world on a symbolic level, which brings *Cover Your Tracks* into semiotic functionality. Understanding that footprints carry potential meaning is obvious to us, but this capacity to recognize meaning in footprints is impossible in other animal species. This will be explored in relation to the *umwelt* and *Dasein*, which examine the functioning of the art project in relation to carriers of significance. The result is a wealth of cognitive analogies and analyses that examine *Cover Your Tracks* from the perspective of human thought.

The combination of psychic and physical interaction with the *Cover Your Tracks* installations exemplifies the interconnectedness of body and mind that both parallelism and embodiment defend. These approaches to perception support the understanding that every

physical event is necessarily a cognitive event, and vice versa.[796] Our ability to distinguish inner and outer stimuli reinforces our self-identity through the reflexive conception of ourselves as both subjects and object. The marks that were made as participants walked across the dry gardens made this paradoxical union of inter-objectivity obvious through the passivity and agency of the actions and consequences of the interaction. As a participant walks across the garden, the felt changes in texture, pressure, stability, and sound make their body obvious to themselves in a distinct way, while the footprints left behind confirm their physical, objective presence. At the same time, the subjective agency of the participant is prescient through the decision to cross the garden, but more importantly through the raking of the garden afterwards. While this once again fills the participant with corporal sensations, the erasure of the tracks allows the subject to metaphorically take control back from their objective self. Now on the firm ground of the cement path on the other side of the dry garden, the participant is changed through their altercation of reflexive differentiation.

Cover Your Tracks helped to demonstrate how perception is an active process of coupling with our environment. Perception is a twofold process where both external and internal sensations are combined with the emotional body state at the time of interaction. The feeling of emotion in conjunction with the (re)cognition of the stimuli becomes a frame of reference for the perception of the event.[797] The concrete paths of the botanical gardens offer very little resistance to visitors and make it easy for them to focus externally on the remarkable plants that inhabit the grounds. Interaction with the installation *Cover Your Tracks* provides a change in emotional grounding, and combines with the sensations of the interactions to mark the experience as distinct. The frame of the karesansui garden provides both a beginning and end to the experience, and with the imbued emotional quality of the interaction the aesthetic experience is separated from ubiquity.

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[796] Nöe, *Strange Tools*, 95.
[797] Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 38.

Cover Your Tracks relates to semiotic theory in terms of its use of symbolism and significance. As mentioned previously, the impetus for the installation was to experiment with the proposal that only human beings intentionally cover their tracks. The theory of *umwelt* helps to unravel this supposition by demonstrating how all species relate distinctly with the carriers of significance in their environment.[798] For any human being who is trying to escape or avoid being caught, the significance of their footprints are easily recognized. They show presence and demonstrate direction of travel, to begin with, but they can also carry meaning associated with the time of the impression and the condition of the fleeing person. These are more specialized skills that professional trackers learn over time, but footprints can indicate the height and weight of the person, as well as their state in terms of fatigue or injury. Our ability to comprehend such associative meaning is based on our ability to objectify the footprint, which is only possible through reflexive thought. Other animals are unable to do that, so far as we are currently aware, and *Cover Your Tracks* is intended to highlight our specialized perceptive capacities. We can easily distinguish if something has been manipulated by another person, and we inherently question the significance of what this manipulation might mean, which is the foundation of artistic practice. Our propensity for self-reference makes us experts as recognizing others, and our cognitive abilities not only distinguish us from other species, but we actively use them as subjects to distinguish ourselves reflexively. While other animal species are captivated in their environments, we are able to separate ourselves and see the elements of our world as unconcealed beings.[799] Our consciousness allows for the world to be open to us for revelation, and *Cover Your Tracks* allowed this unique capacity of ours to be revealed.

Cover Your Tracks demonstrates how human thought and consciousness determine the aesthetic experience of art. These two processes incorporate mind and body together in

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[798] Agamben, *The Open*, 40.
[799] Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, 35.

relation to the environment to establish a concept of self based on a relation of internal and external sensations. The installation reflects that by provoking a cerebral and sensory experience, where decisions and impressions are actively created and combined. The result is a refreshed awareness of self that results from the reflexive thoughts of our inter-objectivity. Furthermore, the installation functions at the symbolic level of thought in order to examine the symbolism we are capable of creating and recognizing, which separates us from other species. The semiotic functionality of *Cover Your Tracks* is one of its principal purposes, and one of the main ways we distinguish ourselves from other animals. Understanding that footprints or artworks have potential meaning is obvious to us, thanks to our capacity to identify them as carriers of significance. They are revealed to us as such thanks to the reflexive powers of our consciousness. Despite the brief and subdued nature of the interaction, *Cover Your Tracks* provides a focussed look at the significant cognitive powers that facilitate artistic practice.

6.3.3.3. Human Beings / Intention

As both language and technology define human beings as a unique species of life, their consideration in relation to the practice of art is important. Art, after all, is also a practice that is unique and definitive to humanity, and it functions in relation to language and technology to establish its distinct value and autonomy in our society. The art project *Cover Your Tracks* formally incorporates both language and technology into its composition, engaging with visitors to the botanical gardens in a recognizable way that mimics the institutional operation and authority of the Jardí Botànic de Barcelona. Furthermore, the theme of the artwork—covering one's tracks—is inspired by the human ability to recognize the significance of marks left by oneself or others, which is based upon our capacity to *be* a subject, which is largely established through language. As subjects learn to master their

relation with nature, we move into the realm of technology, which demonstrates reorganization, recursivity and functionality in similar ways that artworks do. As we proceed to relate *Cover Your Tracks* with the themes of language and technology, the unique connection of art to human life becomes clear.

The sign that visitors encounter when they arrive at each *Cover Your Tracks* installation contains the artwork title in Catalan, Spanish and English. It is an imperative phrase that connotes an order while granted a sense of permission for the visitors to interact with the karesansui garden that was blocking their path. Next to the sentences was an image of a man raking, which was meant to symbolize and fortify the message of the sign and provide an obvious methodology for fulfilling the task with the use of a rake, which was located next to the sign. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the mimicry of institutional conventions provided the art project with a sense of authority and showed that it was intended to be there, despite its illogical placement as an impediment. Furthermore, the sign recognized and confirmed the subjectivity of the visitors who encountered it, helping them to accept the situation as organized and safe. The permission that the sign granted to walk across the dry garden installation, however, opposed the ubiquitous message that public gardens use to forbid visitors to leave the path or touch the plants. In this way, the specificity of the installation was contrary to the usual universal understanding of acceptable behaviour within public garden settings. Using this potential knowledge of the visitors as a component of the artwork is one way in which *Cover Your Tracks* can be considered as a conceptual artwork, although its incorporation of aesthetic elements and institutional infiltration further align it with postconceptual art practices. The active involvement of visitors, as well, positions the project within a more social tradition of art, where the agency of the observer is called upon to activate the artwork in a participatory way. This once again reflects the communicative nature of the installation—and the practice of art in general—which provokes a response from the

participant. This not only acknowledges the subjectivity of the audience but extends authority and authorship to the active participant who makes and erases their footprints in the dry gardens. By responding to the artistic provocation, the active subject in turn acknowledges their responsibility, and the duties and obligations that this entails. This is why participants probably think twice before complying with the invitation to participate, worried that breaking the preconceived rule about trespassing and transforming the garden could have negative consequences. The implied uncertainty and stress of the interaction, however, is slight and momentary, lasting as long as it takes to cross the dry garden and rake away the evidence. Once gone, with the visitor safely on the other side of the installation, the moment of subjective awareness dissipates as the garden visit resumes as originally planned.

With subjective awareness at the root of artistic intentionality, the installation *Cover Your Tracks* could be considered as a test of visitors' humanity. Human beings, as the evidence suggests, are the only species that are capable of erasing their tracks in the wild in order to deceive other beings.[800] I wanted to put this assumption to the test and use art to explore the creative and cognitive implications of such a statement. As Derrida notes in the work of Lacan, the inability to recognize the potential significance of your tracks shows an inability for symbolic recognition—something that we as humans do naturally—but also an inability to be the "subject of the signifier," which implies reflexively recognizing yourself as a subject, and recognizing another being as the Other.[801] What is lacking in other animal species is reflexive thought, upon which our tradition of aesthetic experience is based. The potential deceit that is implied in the act of covering your tracks connects the aesthetic experience of *Cover Your Tracks* to a more generalized refection about the practice of art. If we think about the artificial necessity of artworks, or the 'natural' setting of botanical gardens, we can appreciate how our ability to recognize deception—or to turn a blind eye to

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[800] Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 128.
[801] Ibid., 120.

it—underlies the functioning of artistic practice. While other animals might be able to pretend, Lacan purports that humans are the only species that can *pretend* to pretend, which demonstrates yet another reflexive separation of thought.[802] *Cover Your Tracks* further shows the mimetic tradition that informs our understanding of art, which can in turn be associated to a sense of falseness or trickery. As in the theatre, the recognition of art is simultaneously an acceptance of deceptive intentionality. The source of deceit can be attributed to the artwork that represents a puzzle to be solved, or the artist who created it, but it is also found in observers of the artwork who willingly deceive themselves.

Through their use and acknowledgement of deceit, artworks point us towards the truth of our self-deception. Derrida posits that this stems from our accepted belief in our own subjectivity,[803] which autopoiesis demonstrates is a mask of sorts provided by our cognitive and observational abilities. The indetermination of artistic significance is perpetual when there is uncertainty of subjective truth,[804] as Rancière posits, one of several paradoxes related to the aesthetic experience of artworks. This is because the distinction of meaning in physical forms, such as footprints or artworks, can only be established by separating the distinguished from the non-distinguished, which unavoidably connects non-thought to thought. This relates the unconscious of the observing subject to their conscious assessment of the artistic interaction, but it also points towards the objective nature of participants and the *non-conscious* matter that structures their lives on the molecular level. This is the real point of connection between the garden and the visitor, and the artwork and the observer. The repetitive creation and elimination of marks that *Cover Your Tracks* involves is meant to reflect the various states of presence and absence, or disconnection and connection, that our subjective consciousness is capable of. It is also meant to acknowledge our facility for self-

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[802] Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 128.
[803] Ibid.
[804] Ibid., 36-37.

deception. The erasure of our footprints is simply the creation of distinct marks with the rake, yet another track that can be distinguished and have meaning. Nothing is *truly* erased, despite our acceptance that it is. If anything, our self-deception is revealed, but only for those who look closely. Becoming aware of our subjective agency not only allows us to see ourselves but also to reposition ourselves as subjects, which makes the aesthetic experience of artworks political in nature.[805] *Cover Your Tracks* shows how we as subjects organize the world around us, but also how we as objects *are organized* by the world, which helps to unconceal the subject-object duality of our existence and provide an opportunity to reconsider our understanding of lives and our selves.

The artificial nature of the botanical gardens was the perfect backdrop to explore the opposition of nature and artifice that artworks obligingly represent. As technology has been defined as the mastery over our relationship with nature, it becomes a fitting tool to further explore the artistic functioning of *Cover Your Tracks*. While the installation parallels the functionality of technology by demonstrating the intentionality and organization of human agency, the project distinguishes itself from technology by lacking any obvious use or utility. The location of the installations as impediments accentuates this by complicating normal movement and potentially confusing visitors. This helps to demonstrate how context informs our understanding of artworks and technology, both of which are dependent on functioning in relation to their environment. With *Cover Your Tracks*, the context can be understood on various scales; as installations on paths, as an intervention within a botanical garden, or as a karesansui Japanese garden in Barcelona, Spain. All of these distinct contextualizations influence the perceived significance of the work and establish the dry garden installation as as art by functioning *out of context*, which helps to generate the uncertainty and enigmaticalness that is necessary for aesthetic judgement to occur. *Cover Your Tracks* reflects the functioning

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[805] Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 72.

of technology through its recursivity, and how it incorporates existing elements or concepts in its manifestation. While new technologies are almost always progressions of existing ones, artworks also follow the lead of their precursors. If we compare *Cover Your Tracks* with *uncover RECOVER*, various similarities and progressions can be observed. Aside from the recursion of the word "cover" in their titles, both artworks involve the manipulation of soil in relation to social interaction and traditional understanding, albeit in very distinct ways. In relation to intentionality, both artworks offer subjects an opportunity for reflective transformation by converting an external demonstration of change into an internal realization of ipseity. Examining the principal material of the two projects—soil—we can establish yet another way in which the artworks relate with technology. Heidegger describes the creative process as a transformation of "earth to world," which parallels the usual aesthetic transformation of material to form.[806] Something natural is composed through human agency to become composition, which we as humans can recognize as being manipulated. While artworks enhance their material significance by contrasting it with the formal composition that their creation makes evident, technologies emphasize utility and exhaust their material significance in their use.[807] If we consider the rake in *Cover Your Tracks*, the wood that it is made of is only considered in terms of its efficacy in relation to purpose. Wood is lighter than metal, and is thus easier to use. These 'equipmental' considerations of the tool don't take into account the potential sensations that the material transmits. In artworks, on the other hand, the relationship between materiality and form remains distinguishable, which allows us to appreciate the "strife" that exists in the opposition and conciliation of earth and world.[808] It is through this strife that artworks vibrate, in part through their resistance to being taken for granted as *usual* in their usability. By being unusual, and by avoiding any determined

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[806] Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, 14.
[807] Ibid., 22-24.
[808] Ibid., 26.

usefulness, *Cover Your Tracks* highlights the conflict at the heart of its artistic essence, which is established through the material it is composed of, but functions more obviously through its disruption of integrated concepts and contexts. This is how *Cover Your Tracks* challenges a utilitarian understanding and provides a unique opportunity for aesthetic contemplation.

Cover Your Tracks incorporates both language and technology in its formal structure and uses them as counterpoints to demonstrate the unique functionality of art. Furthermore, it emphasizes the capacities that distinguish us as human beings, and our ability to be the 'subject of the signifier.' The project's use of language and symbolic communication helps to emphasize the importance of subjective awareness, while pointing towards the mimesis and deception that our self-conception entails. The project's incorporation of technology helps to highlight the material transformation at the heart of both art and technology, while distinguishing the subversion of use and context that are integral to the unique functionality of artworks. It assures that the recognition of composition leads towards an aesthetic experience of *Cover Your Tracks*, which uses common materials and concepts to provide a valuable moment of subjective awareness. It also helps to demonstrate how art connects to life through the unique cognitive capacities that make us distinct as human beings.

6.3.3.4. Artworks / Art

Cover Your Tracks was developed to function as a reflexive art project by exploring the features that make it art. Here we will consider the installation in relation to the *parergon* and 'the fragment,' two concepts that were used in Chapter 5. Artworks / Art to explore the nature of aesthetic theory, and the boundaries and relations of artworks in context. *Cover Your Tracks* illustrates the various components and conditions that make artworks distinct from other human products, as we have explored in previous chapters. Here the project will be

further contextualized in relation to postconceptual art practice, which is largely defined by an artwork's indeterminate nature and emphasis on social relations.

One of the most important implications of the inclusion of a *parerga* on an artwork is that the artwork is inherently lacking something that warrants its attachment. As supplement or ornamentation, Derrida found that the *parergon* functions like a prosthesis in order to support the artwork it complements.[809] While the original three *parerga* defined by Kant were drapery on sculptures, frames on paintings and columns on buildings, we will have to develop a new idea of the *parergon* for site-specific installations, or multi-disciplinary art projects in general. While my karesansui dry gardens were composed of wooden frames to contain sand, the frames I used didn't function in the same way would for pictures, as a source of protection. They do, however, function visually to contain one aspect of the installation, which more than anything provided a precise beginning and ending to the aesthetic interaction with *Cover Your Tracks*. This is not to say that nothing was lacking from the artwork. Indeed, as we will see in the coming paragraphs, the indeterminate state of the installations was an important aspect of their artistic functionality. What they lacked, more than anything, was some form of theoretical contextualization—something to position them ideologically to assuage the uncertainty that they intentionally evoked. While this lack purposefully created doubt and curiosity in prospective participants, many influences and associations of the project were undoubtedly lost on the participants who left their footprints and the raked them during their garden visit. One postconceptual *parergon* for the project, then, was the information brochure that was available at the entrance of the Jardí Botànic de Barcelona. While it contained a concise amount of information that I felt was relevant, it is not important to me that participants do not know all of the information. As suggested earlier, the project was designed on purpose on the threshold between artistic production and non-artistic

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[809] Derrida, "The Parergon," 37.

production as a way of exploring this indistinct area of perceptibility. As we continue, please keep this in mind.

Using a garden *within* a garden for my art project was a way to reference reflexivity, while at the same time generating some form of instability in terms of context and content. *Cover Your Tracks* functions as a *parergon* itself in various ways, beginning with its prosthetic nature as it was added to the Jardí Botànic and then removed. In addition, the installation generated cognitive instability in the way that it conformed as a garden within a garden, but not in a completely logical way. As with most *parerga*, *Cover Your Tracks* fluctuated between being visibly distinct and then disappearing within the botanical garden experience, depending on the focus and perspective of the participants. While the interaction with the dry garden installations stole visitors' attention from the 'legitimate' content of the Jardí Botànic—the gorgeous plants—the experience of concentration within the dry garden installation provided a shift in context that accentuated the regular garden visit through contrast. While the botanical garden is full of life, no living beings aside from humans are present in the karesansui dry gardens. From the opposite perspective, *Cover Your Tracks* provided insight into what the Jardí Botànic is lacking; physical interaction with the content of the garden. This makes sense, of course, for it would be unwise to permit visitors to pretend to be gardeners in such an institutional space. Nonetheless, it does emphasize the controlled nature of the institutional functioning of the garden, which gives the illusion of being natural while being contrived and controlled. This internal conflict that both the Jardí Botànic de Barcelona and *Cover Your Tracks* demonstrate is the opposition of material and form that all artworks inherently possess. It is the paradox of uniting the logical with the illogical, which alludes to the human condition of being natural and cultural at once.

The indeterminate nature of *Cover Your Tracks* is another aspect that associates it with the individuals who interact with it. The ontological structure of 'the fragment,' which is

simultaneously complete and incomplete, is the foundation of this logic. It provides us with a clear union between the internal and external relations that determine identity, and reflects the way that artworks and people are defined in part through our vital being and in part through our association with the world. For example, *Cover Your Tracks* functions as an artwork in part through the external reference of the conceptualization of its context and elements, and in part through the internal self-reference of the sensorial, subjective and subversive source of interaction. The indeterminate nature of artworks establishes infinite possibility within finite form, and this could be seen in the myriad ways in which visitors could have used the installation and interpreted their experience of it, all the while being confined to a basic form and functionality, for a limited time at that. This paradox of confined infinity philosophically reflects the human subject, whose potential for freedom is unlimited and yet only possible by being tethered to a finite life.

The opposition of internal and external relations that characterize *Cover Your Tracks* is what establishes its autonomy as an artwork. Its integrity—its ontological autonomy—was defined by its contextual conditions, which were established through temporal and social factors at the time of its interaction and evaluation. The most important social factor in this determination of sovereignty was the concept of art that the participant possessed prior to the interaction with the artwork. Based on this prior understanding of art, the observer either recognized the installation as art or not, based exclusively on the formal analysis of the artwork. The integrity of *Cover Your Tracks* as an artwork was also based on its originality, its distinction as a unique being, which is what empowers all artworks to generate meaning. By being unusual, which implies not having a determinant concept with which to ascertain a definite use or categorization, an artwork maintains its indeterminate nature and assures infinite potential interpretations. As mentioned earlier, the strange positioning of the dry gardens and their unusual invitation for interaction are what made *Cover Your Tracks* a

singular experience. Even if people didn't recognize it as an artwork, its recognition as an 'unknown' is enough to impede a determinate association that would negate the aesthetic experience. Possessing some unidentifiable aspect assures that the door to aesthetic judgement is always open. As artworks become usual, or common, with repeated interactions, they inevitably lose their ability to stimulate difference by being taken for granted, despite the fact that there is always another unknown interpretation waiting to be made. The originality of *Cover Your Tracks*—as subtle as it might be—relates to the condition of novelty that assures artistic innovation. Since the use-value of artworks is based on their capacity to induce a subversive shift from normality or balance in their participants, it is important that every artwork offer something new. That is, if generating meaning through the creation of difference is your intention. While *Cover Your Tracks* is a logical next step after my project *uncover RECOVER*, they are both somewhat subtle in their manipulation of materials and production of difference.

To contextualize *Cover Your Tracks* with the philosophical concept of 'the fragment' is to position it as a postconceptual artwork. This new periodization of contemporary art history was created by Osborne in an attempt to eliminate the confusing ambiguity of the word contemporary, and to establish an alternative lineage within the Modernist tradition in which conceptual and relational concerns are prioritized over aesthetic concerns in the production of artworks. As important as visual details are my artworks, *Cover Your Tracks* easily falls under the postconceptual label thanks to its reliance on the socially determined concepts of observers. Furthermore, the project attempts to engage participants in innovate conceptual ways, as aesthetic and sensory an experience as they might have. It is important to emphasize that these two conceptual and aesthetic lineages are not at all exclusive, but rather provide an interpretive scale that helps to define the mechanisms and relations that compose every artwork. *Cover Your Tracks* is quite basic aesthetically, and is obviously receptive to

external relations in its artistic function. As an indeterminate work, it focuses on the process and potential of artistic creation. It relates to the concept of information by being independent and instantly accessible, and by demonstrating the state of being *information*. *Cover Your Tracks* is a procedural artwork that relies on the interaction and action of people. It fluctuates in terms of its physical state and induces an oscillation of inter-objective awareness in its participants, who exercise their reflexive duality as subject and object during interaction with the project. By demonstrating the inherent freedom and openness of indetermination, *Cover Your Tracks* represented the possibility of possibility. Its indeterminate and relational essence reflected the movement and inherent potential of the lives of the people who activated it. For a non-living entity, *Cover Your Tracks* certainly had a brief yet sensational life.

As a reflexive artwork, *Cover Your Tracks* demonstrated the illusion of self-awareness in its dependence and openness to participants and external relations. The *parergon* and 'the fragment' both help to examine the nature of the installation in relation to aesthetic theory and the contemporary conceptualization of artworks. *Cover Your Tracks* illustrated a variety of factors and conditions that make artworks distinct from other commodities, and the project can be clearly positioned in relation to postconceptual art practices through its innate indetermination and abundance of social relativity. The examination as a specific artwork in relation to the tradition of art helps to show how the aesthetic experience of artworks depends upon a precedent conceptualization of art. Recognition of artifice opens the relational and communicative thought processes that permit artworks to play freely in the imagination, in combination with the emotions that their experience inevitably evoke.

6.3.4. Conclusion to *Cover Your Tracks*

My project *Cover Your Tracks* provides an excellent practical example for the exploration of my theoretical research into aesthetic separation and the reflection of life in art.

In relation to aesthetic separation, *Cover Your Tracks* demonstrated a distinct aesthetic experience for each participant, while functioning within an area of uncertainty in relation to institutional context and artistic determination. The aesthetic experience provided by *Cover Your Tracks* focused on shifts in cognitive awareness that highlighted the participant's reflexive modality of subject-object, while also accentuating the context of the botanical garden through a contrast of sensations. The theoretical evaluation demonstrates various conditions of artworks, most notably the relation of material and form, the subversion of function, and indetermination. The project also alludes to the social relations inherent in the practice of art by emphasizing the act of covering tracks, in which the presence of someone else is implied and yet absent. Finally, the dry garden installations that composed the artwork questioned the work's autonomy by fading into the infrastructure of the institution of the botanical garden, which in turn identified the elements that made it part of an artistic tradition. In these various ways, *Cover Your Tracks* addresses the research questions that found this thesis, including the relations of art and life, aesthetic thought, the nature of artworks, their connection with society and tradition, and the sovereignty of art in relation to other practices.

6.4. Evaluation of Practical Research

I consider both *uncover RECOVER* and *Cover Your Tracks* to be successful art projects in their unique ways. Part of their success is a consequence of my intentional lack of defining a strict goal or purpose for them. While I had an idea and key concepts at the start of each art project, I was flexible and adaptable when developing the projects with the various collaborators and institutions that assisted me in their production. My formal goals for both projects revolved around making the transformation of materials visible and sensible, and both projects involved a level of poetry that made the formal transformation of these materials significant in relation to pre-existing concepts. While I consider these art projects to be

conceptually driven, the material aspect of them is of vital importance. This interactivity between aesthetic and conceptual aspects is a key methodology of my artistic practice, and one of the various ways in which these projects can be categorized as postconceptual art.

Engaging the public also situates my projects within the postconceptual tradition, and their functionality in terms of social interaction has been positive. This, however, is more of an impression than an empirical evaluation. While *uncover RECOVER* allowed me to converse with participants, I was largely absent from the functioning of *Cover Your Track*, and as such relied on the testimonials of people I know to objectively evaluate the aesthetic experience and overall impressions. Including a post-interaction survey is one way to more academically register objective evaluations, but this would have negated the uncertainty of the project, which was vital to its artistic functioning.

While both projects include living and non-living beings within their formal and relational compositions, I don't think that this is a necessary contrast to employ in order to address the relations of life and art in an artistic manner. Interaction from public participants was essential to both of my projects, and it was through the thought and participation of people that I the connection of life and art was most effectively explored. The plant life that formed part of my projects was both an example and a symbol of life, and was an important counterpoint to the subjective lives of individuals, which is what interested me most.

Locating my projects outside of traditional art institution contexts and involving non-art practices re other ways in which my projects demonstrate postconceptual conventions. Social praxis formed an integral aspect of each project, which demonstrates my interest in exploring new contexts as a creative element of my artworks. Their functionality in relation to botany—as well as history, amongst other things—positions them as in relation to 'iatrogenesis,' which Roberts identifies as the ideological co-adaptation with non-art

practices.[810] This demonstrates an active movement towards the activity of everyday life, which is becoming a sign of the times in terms of conceptually based art practices. While increasing the opportunity for originality, exploration outside of art institutions is a way to introduce risk and uncertainty into the development of work, which has the potential to generate unforeseen new results. More than anything, though, using unfamiliar contexts for artworks helps to eliminate preconceived notions that participants might have about the *being* they are about to engage with, which increases the potential novelty of the experience.

6.5. Conclusion to Artworks / Art

The two artworks presented in this chapter demonstrate the reliance of artistic meaning on contextual, social and traditional sources of reference. While the artworks involve some aspect of life, or living beings, within their composition or contextualization, *uncover RECOVER* and *Cover Your Tracks* also show that you don't need to use life as a subject matter in order for artworks to make manifest the connections between art and life. In a very similar way, the subject matter of an artwork does not need to be political in order for an artwork to be political, as Rancière has demonstrated through his concept of aesthetic separation.[811] In both of these cases, artworks function by engaging with human beings and thought in ways that implicitly activate living and political potential. In relation to art's relations with life, it must be understood on a conceptual and experiential level at this point, which relates to a physical, living beings, and not in terms of artistic functionality or value. Nonetheless, these two projects provided an excellent means of exploring my theoretical research, and have demonstrated how separation is a useful concept for defining the functioning and significance of artworks.

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[810] Roberts, *Revolutionary Time and the Avant-Garde,* 63.
[811] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator,* 74.

These artworks also provide examples of the extensively social methodologies that postconceptual art projects utilize, focusing on external relations to help determine the value of the artworks. In both cases, procedure and social relations form the foundation of the conceptual composition of the works, which incorporate personal interaction to activate external social meaning in relations to individuals and the collective. *Uncover RECOVER* and *Cover Your Tracks* also show how ordinary materials can be incorporated by artworks to generate artistic significance while maintaining their original value, which demonstrates the strength of the material/form separation that defines artistic tradition. Despite the shift to more conceptual emphasis, postconceptual artworks most certainly rely on material manifestations in order to function as art.

CHAPTER 7 – CONCLUSIONS

7.1. Discussion

7.1.1. Key Findings

Operational and cognitive aspects of life are easily reflected in the practice of art, which has a particular functionality that ensures the generation of artistic significance. The results of my research indicate that separation is an effective concept to define the functionality of artistic practice, and that art and life are ultimately united through human thought and practice. My analysis demonstrates a correlation between the separations inherent to human life and to artworks, most notably an integral separation between object and subject (or material and form), and a separation between internal and external, which establishes a distinction of the individual from the group (or a particular and the universal). The study confirms that aesthetic experience is facilitated by human cognition, which implies the interaction of a human being with their environment and the use of reflexive and symbolic thought to process artistic significance, which is accomplished through internal and external reference. The research has shown that artistic significance is determined through an evaluation of integral formal composition and external conceptual relations, which include reference to artistic conventions as determined by artistic tradition, and the subjective conceptualization of art that exists prior to the aesthetic experience of the artwork. My findings demonstrate how artworks function congruently and antagonistically with the society and tradition that define them in order to demonstrate innovation and originality, which generates a distinct use-value for artworks and helps to establish the autonomy of art.

7.1.2. Interpretations

The comparative analysis of human cognition and aesthetic theory has identified two inherent separations that define human life and aesthetic experience. The first is an integral

division that can be represented by the object and subject in the human being, and material and form in an artwork. In both cases, the separations reveal a physical, natural element and a composed, meaningful element. A second separation of internal and external, or particular and universal (i.e. self/society and artwork/art) have been found to be essential to the operation of life, the understanding of self and the functionality of artworks. Artworks reflect human lives in many intriguing ways, which is undoubtedly why artworks captivate humanity. One unexpected encounter of my research was the correlation of vulnerability and fallibility between human cognition and artworks. Human perception is incomplete and supplemented by our consciousness, which itself functions transparently and thus evades demonstrating its supportive manipulations. Artworks demonstrate lack through their reliance on people and *parerga*, which provide protection and aesthetic assistance to the artwork. This correspondence between human and artistic weakness could demonstrate an empathetic connection during the aesthetic experience of artworks, which would further support the evidence that artworks function as proxies for subjects. It also reflects the self-deception that is implicit in 'the mask of subjectivity' that we self-impose, which implicitly creates an illusion of separation of our being from our environment.

The results of my research have exceeded my expectations and support my hypothesis, which is that acts and observations of separation can be used to define the practice of art, and to relate the practice of art to life. The observation and comparison of separation was more easily done in relation to an existential conception of human life, in which an artwork is compared with a subjective self. When we move to more biological conceptions and operations of life, it is more difficult to make effectual comparisons based on my research. While the theoretical conception of autopoietic life allowed me to make comparisons based on the systemic operation of life, where the molecular level of function is separate from the molar level of observation, more focused biological research would be necessary to directly

correlate art and life. Nonetheless, the division between the two levels of autopoietic function accurately defines a limitation of artistic jurisdiction. The practice of art is perceptual in nature,[812] and thus has no logical connection with biological operation, aside from metaphoric correlations. This is one of the reasons why neuroaesthetic research is limited in its ability to provide useful conclusions for artistic research. The realm of neuroaesthetic research is psychology and anatomy, and its implications on the social and conceptual relations that inform artistic practice are slight, especially in light of the subversive functionality of art.

One of my interests in exploring aesthetic separation related to the paradox of artworks being concurrently finite and infinite, which I originally defined in terms of being limited in convention and function but unlimited in terms of material and content. I found that the ability to determine an object or event as an artwork depends upon the concept and tradition of art, which *must* limit the artwork in some way in order for the definition to maintain its meaning. The material or content of an artwork is unlimited, although I found that artworks must have a material form that has to embody some artistic convention to be recognized as an artwork. One aspect of the finite/infinite paradox of art that I hadn't considered was the infinite interpretability that an artwork has in spite of its fixed form, which relates the aesthetic experience of artworks to social and traditional transitions over time.

In relation to my previous research, this thesis is more focused on the philosophical and theoretical study of artistic practice and aesthetics. While my earlier research more specifically explored the definition of art and the conventions through which artworks connect to artistic tradition—the limits of art—this research has focused more on the conceptual and social relations that influence the identification of artworks and the attribution of artistic meaning. This research employs distinct fields of study to achieve a different perspective on the exterior relationships that define artistic practice, two of the most relevant being language

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[812] Luhmann, *Art as a Social System*, p. 20.

and technology, which were concurrently informative in researching human cognition. What is missing from this study is a more thorough exploration of the economic relations that are implicit to artistic practice. Developing a holistic research model that was capable of identifying the subject of art from different perspectives required me to limit my research in many ways due to the vast amount of possible directions for the research. Nonetheless, I anticipated this shortcoming and determined my initial aim as a general overview in anticipation of future research.

7.1.3. Implications

The results of my research are in line with previous research, although they extend the idea of aesthetic separation towards a more fundamentally biological and cognitive foundation. While Rancière developed part of the concept of aesthetic separation in relation to the transformation of 'sense to sense,' which in general refers to aesthetic experience, his exploration of aesthetic separation stopped after establishing the division between external sensory data and subjective interpretation of meaning. By demonstrating and emphasizing this disconnection, Rancière shows how artistic intentionality can never be guaranteed to be understood in the observer as intended by the artist, thus eliminating the political efficacy of art. My intention to extend his notion of aesthetic separation—this gap between material and meaning—with the use of autopoietic theory was to investigate different hypotheses that might more directly connect the practice of art with human biology. One hypothesis I had was that the division between external sensation and internal meaning was based on the separation of our molecular and molar modes of being, simultaneously object and subject, or body and mind. This, in the end, is not the case, since I have found that the division between external sensation and internal meaning was more accurately determined by the particular subjective development of human individuals in relation to the social context of their upbringing. This is

more about what influences interpretation and association, and not how interpretation is defined biologically. Another hypothesis was that this same personal inter-objectivity—the subject-object reflexivity that also informs aesthetic theory—was associated to the relationship of material and form that defines artworks. This correlation I find much more promising, and while the connection is not directly biological, it is definitely psychological in the realization that inter-objectivity is a catalyst for reflexive thought, which is a requisite for aesthetic experience. It also shows a possible relation between empathy and aesthetic judgement, and if there is a practical implication of this thesis, this would be it.

A further practical application of this study could be to use it as a framework to evaluate, appreciate and criticize artworks. The simple establishment of basic separations that we as human beings share with artworks in real and metaphorical ways provides an effective means to compare and contrast the material and formal nature of artworks in relation to internal and external relations. As demonstrated with my theoretical interpretation of *Cover Your Tracks* in Chapter 6.2. *Cover Your Tracks*, these separations provide relevant associations between the artwork being evaluated and person undertaking the evaluation. This study has also found that faults are an important aspect of every artwork, which enables a highly critical perspective towards artworks that is equally more reverent than deprecating.

7.2. Conclusions

7.2.1. Answers to the Main Research Questions

<u>Life and Art</u>

Art and life connect through human practice and thought. The idea of art is established in individual people through their experiences of creating and appreciating artworks, and through a conception of artistic tradition that results from the accumulation of said experiences. The determinant concept 'art' is used to recognize artworks[813] by employing the cognitive abilities of reflexive and symbolic thought, which are predominant to human beings. The concept of 'life' is biological and philosophical, defined as both a general condition for living as opposed to non-living beings, and the experiential understanding of an individual's existence. As concepts, both 'art' and 'life' exist in comparative contemplation in our thought.

As a practice, art connects to life through the creation, appreciation and organization of artworks. Artworks are extensions of human life that are activated through interaction. Artworks are similar to technologies since they are both human products that involve the intentional organization of materials in a recursive system of production that positions new products in relation with existing products and tradition. Art and technology are ubiquitous practices that define human culture, although they differ in relation to their functionality and use value. Artworks subvert determined applicability and thus open a space for their contemplation and interpretation. The subversive functionality of artworks is specific to their creation and interpretation, while their organization within society (i.e. exhibitions, education, exchange) follows standard patterns of functionality that are shared with other fields.

Artworks reflect human lives physically and meaningfully. Artworks and people can both be considered in terms of the hylomorphic distinction between material and form, or

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[813] Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, 50.

natura and *ars*.[814] For artworks, the concept of 'material' refers to their neutral substance prior to artistic intervention, while the concept of 'form' refers to the manipulated composition that results in the substance after artistic transformation. For people, the concepts of nature and culture (or 'nature and nurture') are preferred to distinguish the natural (inherited, biological) disposition and the societal (familiar, educational) influences that inform human lives. In both human beings and artworks, the opposition of material and form is used to contrast the simultaneous *absence* and *presence* of intention, logic and organization.

This contrast is evident in people and artworks through the modality of inter-objectivity. Human beings are passive bodies (objects) and active agents (subjects), which is reflected in the distinct levels of autopoietic theory. While the molecular level demonstrates our structure and operation in the absence of meaning, the molar level produces an abundance of meaning through the capacities of observation and thought.[815] Artworks—whether *objects* or events—become proxies for subjects as a result of their originality,[816] which capacitates them with the inter-objective modality that humans naturally embody through their reflexive subjectivity. Artworks distinguish themselves through their individuality, which is the source of their potential meaning production.[817] Artworks demonstrate their originality in their composition, and establish themselves as artworks through the incorporation of artistic conventions in their form. Artworks as such exist in reference to tradition, which is instituted through artistic conventions. Nonetheless, artworks also depend upon their context, which provides a counterpoint for special meaning. In a similar way, people identify themselves in relation to society. For people, the reflexive recognition of self differentiates the individual from their society. This same reflexive thought is requisite in subjective judgements about

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[814] Luhmann, *Art as a Social System*, 23.
[815] Maturana, "Autopoiesis…", 12.
[816] Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, 85.
[817] Ibid.

artworks. Through the establishment of identity in relation to internal and external influence, the lives of people and artworks are clearly reflected.

People and artworks are indeterminate by nature. They are whole, but they are never complete. The human *self* is the constant against which an individual's life is reflexively measured, full of possibility, change and development. An artwork is determined as complete in terms of its fixed composition, whether physical or relational, and yet it is incomplete in terms of its heuristic potential, forever offering new meaning as it awaits future interaction within transforming social contexts. This shared state of indetermination reflects how artworks and people are lacking and adaptable. People are in a persistent state of lack in terms of their physiological and psychological being, while artworks are in a constant state of lack in terms of their impracticality and dependence on human interaction. The impetus for the majority of our actions in the world is to satiate an instance of lack or resolve some fault, which has influenced our cognitive evolution as a species.[818] Increasing the scope and command of our interactions with the world has increased our ability to survive. Artworks are peripheral to functional necessity due to their subversive relationship with use-value,[819] however their eschewal of practicality provides a reflective opportunity for people that serves psychological ends. The indeterminate meaning of artworks establishes a novel space for the contemplation of their significance, where their singular presence and paradoxical autonomy reflect the lives of the people who appreciate them.

Separation

A variety of related separations have been identified in this research into aesthetic experience, human cognition, and the practice of art, and many of these separations are shared by people and artworks alike. They include internal and external divisions, active and passive

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[818] Varela, *Autopoiesis*, 13.
[819] Roberts, *Revolutionary Time and the Avant-Garde*, 85.

separations, distinctions of level or modality, and paradoxical simultaneity of difference. The concept of aesthetic separation, which is a combination of divisions related with aesthetic experience and the social tradition of artworks, will be further addressed in the following sections on aesthetic thought and artistic tradition respectively. Nonetheless, the following separations are undoubtedly relevant to those conclusions.

People and artworks are defined in principle by an **internal** division and an **external** separation. In relation to the former division, people are integrally characterized in terms of **nature** and **culture** (or genetics and upbringing), while artworks are determined in terms of **material** and **form** (or media and composition). These divisions in human beings and artworks, which can be traced to Aristotle's theory of hylomorphism, imply a distinction between a **neutral** (or natural) element and a **developed** (or influenced) state. This division is repeated in several relevant oppositions; *natura* and *ars*,[820] earth and world,[821] non-human and human, non-logical and logical, unorganized and organized, insignificant and significant.

Autopoietic theory describes the internal division of human beings by distinguishing between two levels of operation within all living beings; the **molecular** level of structure and function, and the **molar** level of individuality and observation. Human consciousness operates on the molar level, which is where meaning is cognitively produced and recognized. The distinction between **meaningless** and **meaningful** reflects this autopoietic division, since meaning does not exist on the molecular level, where the components and products of all interactions are equal.[822] The distinction of meaning is based on the observation of **difference**,[823] which implies that the concept of **indifference** can be associated to a lack of meaning. In Kantian aesthetics, indifference towards the object being judged in the absence of

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[820] Luhmann, *Art as a Social System*, 23.
[821] Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, 26.
[822] Varela, *Autopoiesis*, 8.
[823] Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 288.

determinant concepts is what allows the judgement of beauty to move from a subjective statement to objective truth.[824]

People and artworks are further defined by an integral separation of **object** and **subject**, which reflects the physiological and psychological, or physical and thoughtful, aspects of being. Our reflexive consciousness of being both a subject ("I") and an object ("me") is what enables us to identify ourselves individually as a self.[825] The process of establishing selfhood is facilitated through the use of language, which attributes symbolic meaning to beings and implies the capacity to differentiate between **self** and **other**, which permits the formation and recognition of **position** and **opposition**. Artworks are easily considered as objects through their formal constitution, but they act like subjects through their individual capacity to produce meaning for people.[826] In this way, people and artworks demonstrate the modality of inter-objectivity.

The external separation of a human being from its environment happens naturally in two ways; through autopoietic operations that follow the law of adaptation in order to systematically distinguish an organism from its environment on the molecular level—the **living** from **non-living**—and through the conscious thought that results from the reflexive identification of self on the molar level. Artworks are defined by an internal/external separation between their integral composition—whether material or organizational—and the context in which they are displayed and evaluated. While the composition of artworks is determined through an assessment of material and formal qualities, they are defined externally in terms of temporal, locational, and social relationships. The most important of these is an artwork's relation to the tradition and/or concept of art that is associated to them during their evaluation, and the artistic conventions that this tradition or concept entails.

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[824] Derrida, *The Parergon*, 13.
[825] Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, 242-243.
[826] Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All*, 85.

The separation between an **individual** person and **society** reflects the distinction between **subjective** and **objective** determinations. This is paralleled in the relationship of the **particular** and the **universal**, which has an important bearing on aesthetic judgements. A **determinant** judgement uses a universal concept to focus on a particular object, while a **reflective** judgement considers a particular object in the absence of a universal concept.[827] The latter is the case when judging beauty and the unknown, which are common to artworks. The movement of a singular to a general conception defines the cognitive process of generalization, where a particular is categorized with other similar particulars to become a universal categorization based upon the shared attribute. This process of abstraction is how an individual **artwork** is connected with other artworks to establish the concept of **art**.

Another division that informs aesthetic experience is the paradoxical relationship between the **invisible** and the **visible**. This relates in part to the semiotics of observation, which connects the **non-distinguished** to the **distinguished**,[828] and further associates the presence of **non-thought** in **thought**.[829] An artistic example of this paradox is the use of a contour line to create the illusion of **figure** and **ground**. If you focus on the line, the figure and ground disappear, but if you focus on the figure or the ground, the line disappears. This can be further related with the paradox of perceptual transparency, which occurs when research into cognition and consciousness must utilize their elusive objects of study to reflexively examine themselves.[830]

One final paradox that informs both people and artworks is the simultaneous state of being **complete** and **incomplete**, or **finite** and **infinite**, which has largely been referred to in this research as the state of indetermination. People are complete in their individuality, which is established through the continuity of self, and incomplete through the potential

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[827] Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, 18.
[828] Luhmann, *Art as a Social System*, 54.
[829] Rancière, *The Aesthetic Unconscious*, 28.
[830] Nöe, *Art as Enaction*, 5.

development of self over time. Artworks are finite in form and yet infinite in their possible interpretation, especially considering pending future evaluation. While artworks are **limited** by their creators in terms of structure and identity—they must have some physical form and follow conventions to be identified as art—they are **unlimited** in terms of their subject matter and content,[831] as well as the materials and relations that are used to create them.[832]

Considering the aforementioned variety of oppositions, separation can be clearly understood as a condition of human life that is reflected in the practice of art. Both the observation and the act of separation in people relate to processes of distinction and communication that inform artistic creation and aesthetic experience. Separation provides instability, dynamism of movement and multiple perspectives that infuse the practice of art with vital energy, while establishing the opportunity for coordination and communion. States of disconnection motivate the action that facilitates life and the perception that founds artistic practice, which makes separation a valuable concept to study the reflection of life in art.

Human Cognition / Aesthetic Thought

Human cognition is the foundation of aesthetic thought. When we experience the unknown, artworks and beauty, the process of judgement is activated in order to establish meaning by associating internal and external references in specific ways and in relation to prior knowledge. Aesthetic experience involves a variety of processes, from the biological basis of autopoietic cognition to the psychological formation of self, and the observation of difference to the attribution of significance. Aesthetic thought ultimately involves the reflexive recognition of feeling yourself feeling, and the result is a subjective judgement that situates the self in a sovereign position of authority.

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[831] Nöe, *Strange Tools*, 134.
[832] Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, 49.

Autopoietic theory establishes two modalities of biological operation in living beings; the molecular level, which establishes biological structure and function, and the molar level, which enables observation and conscious thought.[833] Cognition at the molecular level is the interaction of the organism with its environment, molecules against molecules. Molar cognition is the same interaction but from an observed perspective, considered by the organism as a singular being.[834] This is the process that we usually associate with cognition, which is frequently used as a synonym for conscious thought. The identification of self happens in human beings through the interconnected functioning of body and mind, working together to enable people to reflexively distinguish themselves from their environment.[835]

Communication within human is achieved bodies through the cooperation of the endocrine and nervous systems, which work in tandem using hormones and neurons to facilitate the cognition of our external world.[836] The intercommunicated architecture of the human brain enables the creation and recognition of neural representations; neural pathways that exist as mental images that can be called forth and manipulated in thought.[837] They are created to form new thoughts and reused to generate recognition and association, which are vital processes in the formation of memory.[838] Thoughts combine a variety of neural images simultaneously, from internal and external sources of stimulation, with neural representations often being shared amongst distinct senses.[839] Despite the fallacy of human memory, it provides a consistent perspective that enables learning and the formation of individual identity.[840] Our conception of self is strengthened by our ability to reflexively recognize

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[833] Maturana, "Autopoiesis…", 13.
[834] Varela, *Autopoiesis*, 5.
[835] Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, 242-243.
[836] Ibid., 88-89
[837] Ibid., 89.
[838] Ibid., 93-94.
[839] Starr, *Feeling Beauty*, 79.
[840] Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, 238-39.

ourselves as both subjects and objects at the same time, which is reinforced in language.[841]

The neural images that form self provide a persistent backdrop against which we compare our current body state in relation to internal/external and past/present associations.[842] The relational nature of our individual development as people demonstrates the self as an indeterminate process in relation to context, where our changing bodies and minds continually inform our self-conception as we interact within the world.

Perception enables us to engage and experience the world in a variety of ways, which includes the internal perception we have of our own bodies. Perception is achieved through active engagement with the world combined with internal feelings as the brain receives signals from multiple sources concurrently.[843] Perception thus involves processes of action and reception that are inextricably combined when internal feelings are associated with external stimuli.[844] Emotion thus becomes a frame of reference through which all perception is considered. As we perceive, we construct specific experiences by separating them from the flow of general experience and marking them with a felt emotion or quality.[845] Perception thus intrinsically imbues experience with a sense of meaning, and an experience stands out by being easily differentiated or distinguished by a strongly associated emotion.

Aesthetic thought is based upon the reflexive experience of self, and differs from other kinds of thought through its reliance on subjective judgement. Our capacity to think provides us with reason, understanding and judgement, and we use these faculties of thought to relate with our selves and our environment.[846] While understanding helps us to think about things of the world in terms of knowledge, and reason helps us to think about ideas in terms of desire, judgement helps us to think about the unknown in relation to our feelings of pleasure or

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[841] Ibid., 242-243.
[842] Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, 152.
[843] Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 38.
[844] Luhmann, *Art as a Social System*, 8-9.
[845] Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 37.
[846] Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, 13-15.

displeasure.[847] Our judgement depends on whether the object of judgment is known or not. A determinant judgement uses a universal concept to determine a particular object, and a reflective judgement considers a particular object in the absence of a universal concept.[848] As mentioned previously, we make reflective judgements when we discern beauty, the unknown and artworks, which are ascertained according to the pleasure or displeasure that we reflexively feel as a result of the experience. Since aesthetic judgements cannot be based on determinant concepts, and desire is based on pleasure related to a concept, the thing being judged cannot be desired.[849] For a reflective judgement to become an aesthetic judgement, the judging subject must be indifferent to the object or event being judged.[850] Aesthetic judgement is based on reflective subjective experience, when your awareness of feeling pleasure as a result of sensory interaction pleases yourself.[851] Since aesthetic judgement is based on disinterested pleasure, when you judge something as beautiful it implies that everyone will agree.[852] This moves the subjective aesthetic judgement into a position of objectivity, as a particular opinion is projected as a generalized universal truth.[853] In these various ways, aesthetic thought can be understood as a system of distinguished relationships between internal and external sense, and particular and universal concepts.

The separate processes that comprise aesthetic judgement are described by Rancière as the transformation from 'sense to sense,' which is the first aspect of his conception of aesthetic separation. Aesthetic experience involves an array of interconnected cognitive capacities that determine our subjective position in relation to a particular or an unknown. The modality between subject and object, which enables a reflexive conception of self, forms the

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[847] Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, 15-16.
[848] Ibid., 18.
[849] Ibid., 31.
[850] Ibid., 49.
[851] Derrida, "The Parergon," 14.
[852] Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, 51.
[853] Derrida, *The Parergon*, 13.

basis upon which aesthetic judgements are made. The capacity to combine external and internal reference in relation to emotion is also a key factor in determining a subjective decision. In the absence of determinant concepts and desire for the object being judged, the subject must rely on their own cognitive powers to independently determine their verdict. The result is an aesthetic judgement, which positions the self unequivocally in relation to truth.

Artworks

Artworks are singular human products that are defined in terms of formal integrity and contextual relationships. As specific manifestations that represent the concept of art, artworks are indelibly associated with the tradition of art that informs their production and interpretation. Artworks are identified as art through their embodiment of artistic conventions, which constitute their internal formal structure and inform their external associations. Functioning in contrast with societal norms, artworks establish a unique use-value that generates a sovereign space for the practice of art within human culture, where the generation of sensations and meaning are absolute.

Artworks are recognized through their association with the concept of art, which places artworks in perpetual relation with tradition.[854] This tradition is infused in artworks during their creation, which can be summarized as a transformation of material to form. Artworks are recognized through their incorporation or use of artistic conventions, which adhere to the tradition of art. These conventions are varied and relate to the qualities of the artwork, the process of its creation, the conditions of its exhibition, and/or its effect on the participant.[855] Artworks are differentiated from other human products through formal appraisals that reveal their unique intentionality, functionality, and use-value. As such, the

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[854] Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, 50-51.
[855] Waters, *Sweat, Feel, Think, Art*, 100-105.

evaluation of artworks involves aesthetic and conceptual considerations, and demonstrates the influence of external contextual reference on the meaning associated to an integral form.

The conventions, traditions, and concept of art inherently transform in relation to practical and societal change. Artworks strive to be innovative in order to function more effectively as beings of truth. Novelty establishes the singular individuality of an artwork and enables it to produce meaning,[856] which is generated through the recognition of difference. The distinction of an artwork as a particular being allows it to become a proxy for a subject— an Other—and opens the door for communicative interpretations of intentionality to begin.[857] Furthermore, an artwork's capacity to produce meaning ensures the contemplative use-value that is associated with it. The perpetual innovation of artistic creation inevitably transforms the concept of art, which is established through subjective and collective processes of generalization. As a result, artistic experimentation inevitably moves the practice of art into non-art realms by crossing boundaries, surpassing limits, and engaging with the unknown.

The reflexive transformation of artistic practice over time reflects the inherent distortion that defines artifice. This is obvious in the ways that representational and symbolic practices of art embody deceptive acts of mimicry, while conceptual and relational traditions of art involve the subversion of established societal norms. This is most obvious in art's resistance to practical functionality, which stands out in contrast to the purposefulness of all other technological production.[858] Artworks are impractical and negate determined use. While they are most certainly used by people, their *unusual* nature assures that their usability is a matter of interpretation.[859] Art's dissent is also evident in comparison with standard economic practices. Unlike other commodities, the use-value of artworks cannot be directly associated

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[856] Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, 85.
[857] Ibid.
[858] Ibid., 156.
[859] Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, 26.

with their exchange-value.[860] By subverting established societal norms, artworks generate a contemplative space where common sense (i.e. logic) is brought into focus and openly questioned through the formal integrity of the artworks.[861] This ironically determines a unique functionality and use-value for artworks, and establishes the foundation for art's autonomy as a social practice. Artworks function by being 'out of context,' which accentuates their singularity while differentiating them from the usual and the usable.[862]

The practice of art in general is a tradition of creating meaning by establishing difference. Through formal and contextual relations, artworks represent the principles of artistic tradition through the use of conventions. These standards of art call attention to the compositional singularity of the artwork while positioning it in contrast to the society from which it came and in which it is evaluated. The sovereignty of art is established through the difference that every artwork must inherently generate, which inevitably exists in contrast to a common sense of intentionality and functionality that dominates human society. Combined with their interpretive indetermination, artworks represent an indisputable source of freedom.

<u>Art, Society & Tradition</u>

Since artworks are identified in relation to the concept of art, the tradition that defines artistic practice is a vital aspect of art's conceptual nature. Tradition unites the transformative concept of art and provides it with continuity over time. While art exists as a generalization beyond any particular manifestation of artwork, it also exists within artworks as a generally recognizable attribute. The relationship of artworks to art thus reflects the distinction of an individual to society, demonstrating a counterpoint between specificity and universality. An artwork is art in itself, but also in relation to other artworks and to tradition, just like

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[860] Roberts, *Revolutionary Time and the Avant-Garde*, 83.
[861] Ibid., 85.
[862] Nöe, *Strange Tools*, 30.

individuals identify themselves in relation to society. A generalization is an abstract grouping of particular examples, and the tradition of art is organized by categorizing specific examples according to their integral compositional qualities and their association to temporal and social relations. Current practices of art evince this act of distinction through their consideration of aesthetic and conceptual concerns. The contemporary tradition of art is based upon principles of integrity and insurgency, where core ideology is supported and challenged from within through practice in relation to external social relations. Just as art changes in relation to society, so too does society change in relation to art. The transformative nature of aesthetic experience stimulates societal change through the practice of art. The potential of artworks to transform individuals is what makes art such a loved and powerful cultural tradition.

To speak about the tradition of art is to move from the particular to the universal—from the artwork to art, and the subject to society. This movement of cognitive generalization establishes art as a concept that exists within individuals, and beyond individuality within collective social recognition. While the aesthetic experience of artworks can always be connected to subjectivity, the tradition of art surpasses this condition temporally and relationally. In this way, the tradition of art is as unstable and indeterminate as the artworks and individuals that comprise it. While its evidence can be traced through collective memory and historical record, art perpetually points towards the future as a promise for generations to come. The drift of old traditions to new ones, and the contextual shift that this implies as artworks are experienced in distinct times from their creation, is the second separation that Rancière uses to define his concept of aesthetic separation. The impending reception of art's future can never be ascertained given the inevitable social change that precedes and informs it. The tradition of art to come depends on the immanent revelations of those who continue to practice it, and art's unique autonomy as a valued source of meaning for human society.

There are as many traditions of art as there are societies, despite the general acceptance of dominant traditions as all encompassing. Our current tradition of art falls under the aesthetic regime, which is fundamentally informed by Kant's aesthetic theory. In the mimetic regime that came before it, artworks were understood as purely representative in nature.[863] In the aesthetic regime, however, every artwork is seen as a singularity of truth, and every subject is positioned as its sole interpreter. Within the aesthetic regime, the Modernist epoch defines the past century of tradition. Modernism has demonstrated an explosion of creativity that has expanded the tradition of art in remarkable ways, through the bravery of artists to take risks and innovate in their practices, which have established a renewed autonomy and tradition of art within society. Within the Modernist epoch, a growing awareness of the conceptual ontology of artworks has created an apparent duality of artistic traditions, which is based upon the internal/external division that determines every artwork as an integrally composed form within a distinct yet influential context. The *aesthetic* lineage of art focuses on the formal aspect of artworks—their sensual material composition—while the *conceptual* lineage emphasizes the contextual relations that also determine artworks—their interaction and association with society.[864] Despite the ruptured tradition, every artwork inherently demonstrates aesthetic and conceptual qualities, both of which evoke sensations that lead to aesthetic significance.[865] The current focus of art practices on more conceptual and socially engaged methodologies can be defined as postconceptual art, an ontology that calls attention to the procedural and relational experience of artworks.[866] Two examples of this are the art projects presented as practical research for this thesis—*uncover RECOVER*, and *Cover Your Tracks*—both of which explore material transformation in relation to conceptual significance and social interaction. Postconceptual artworks adopt and expose the

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[863] Tanke, "What is the Aesthetic Regime?", 73.
[864] Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, 47-49.
[865] Ibid., 49.
[866] Ibid., 85.

inherent connections between the practice of art and the society within which it functions and attains its significance for the aesthetic enjoyment of its participants.

Art is political because it transforms the people who practice it—the individuals who create artworks and the community that appreciates art. Interacting with artworks is an exercise in observation that prioritizes reflexive thought and subjective awareness. The distinctions that an observer makes during the aesthetic experience of artworks have the potential to be reflexively destabilizing.[867] As singularities, artworks inevitably incorporate some aspect of the unknown, and the cognitive movement that is necessary to reveal their enigma and uncover their truth is potentially infinite.[868] This is compounded with the indeterminate functionality and the paradoxical nature of artworks, which provide the illusion of intentionality in the form of an impossible subject that is an object. The artwork communicates its lack, its need and its vulnerability, and reflects the observer back to their own eyes.[869] The observing subject disconnects for an aesthetic moment to become with the object in front of it, the self released and undone in inter-objective exploration. As the moment passes, the self is restored with new knowledge of a singular experience and the associated reflexive emotion that this aesthetic encounter evoked. The freshly felt subjective awareness and sensibility enables the observer to understand and position their self anew.[870] The potential difference that results from the reflexive disconnection of aesthetic experience is how the practice of art changes people. Through its latent power to affect social transformation, the practice of art is a political and life-changing experience.

Tradition is much larger than individuals, and the tradition of art entails creation as much as transformation. While tradition is much bigger than any one person or artwork, every artist and artwork informs the meaning that artistic tradition has within society. The tradition

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[867] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 72.
[868] Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, 173.
[869] Ibid., 85.
[870] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 72.

of aesthetics is based upon the differentiation between particulars and universals, and the movement from subjective opinion to objective truth in aesthetic judgement is one of the mystical communal aspects of aesthetic experience. Through specific instances of feeling and thought, individuals become reflexively aware of their position in relation to themselves and society by momentarily liberating their subjectivity and disrupting the certainty of self. The shared experience of art allows us yet another opportunity to consider and nurture our selves collectively; a social becoming that is reflected in the practice of art. The tradition of art is evidence of the incessant search for self-knowledge and meaning that defines our being human, and the pleasure that we share in connecting with others through sensation.

7.2.2. Recommendations for Future Research

To correlate the practice of art with biological operation, further research is needed into the organizational principles that form the foundation of both. Discovering how biological order functions at the molecular level and tracing it to higher levels of operation and understanding would be necessary to properly connect our organizational tendencies at the molar level to some biological imperative. Nöe's organizational theory of art could be used as a template to explore the artistic and social relations of order. Nonetheless, future studies need to take into account art's dependence on social factors to define itself, which suggests that a purely biological understanding of art is not feasible. There is a lot of potential that could result from extended research into this broad overview of aesthetic experience in relation to human cognition and contextual influence. While autopoiesis has provided numerous insightful ways to connect the practice of art with the functioning of life, further studies into the source and operation of intentionality would be useful in exploring the dissonant relationship that art has with purpose and use. Another autopoietic idea to be further explored is the relationship of difference and significance, which would further develop

understanding of the functioning of observation, and expand the methodologies of artistic practice to create significance through difference.

While we still lack a detailed understanding of how our molecular bodies inform our molar perception, it is our basic conception of human consciousness that is the biggest obstacle for research into how human thought and notions of self influence aesthetic experience. An exploration of the inherent lack or incompleteness that correlates human beings and artworks would be very promising to research, especially in relation to the potential for empathy between living and non-living beings. Focusing on the fallacy of perception and the supplementary ways that consciousness creates a smooth and continuous sense of human reality would be a perfect psychological starting point, which would also be useful for connecting our self-deceptive nature to the practice of art. I suspect there are interesting correlations between our fraudulent belief in self-control and absolute reality, and the artificial underpinnings of artistic tradition through its ubiquitous use of mimesis, representation and subversion.

Future research into language would strengthen the role of semiotics in this thesis, and inform our understanding of systems theory, observation and 'carriers of significance.' Research into technology could clarify the subversive relationship that artistic practice has with purpose and functionality, while further exploring how the ontology of the model, or sample, could be related to the capacity of artworks to act as subjects. Understanding how artworks function as proxies for subjects should focus on exploring the source of agency of artworks, which would strengthen the empathetic line of research suggested earlier.

Further research into the limits of artworks and the thresholds of art would be beneficial to understanding the recognition and subversion of artistic conventions. To what extent must artworks conform in order to be considered art? This is an inevitable product of any future artistic research in the form of artworks, which create new knowledge naturally

through their unique existence. Moving completely outside of artistic institutions is one way to more fully appreciate the scope of the two projects that I have presented in this thesis, which would undoubtedly highlight the question of accessibility and dissemination that most artists struggle to resolve. Nonetheless, escaping artistic contexts would increase the surprise and incredulity for participants, while providing a distinct assessment of the affect of contextual relations on the aesthetic experience on participants.

7.2.3. New Contributions of Knowledge

This thesis finds that the concept of separation is a valuable way to define and consider the practice of art in relation to human life, cognition and experience. Two key separations inform artworks and people; an internal division between matter and form, and an external division that defines individuality in relation to a group. Artworks are integrally defined by a distinction between material and form, and extrinsically in terms of the context in which they are evaluated. Artworks are inevitably related to the tradition and/or concept of art that is applied to them during their evaluation, and the artistic conventions that this tradition or concept entails. People, on the other hand, are defined in relation to nature and culture, which reflect their neutral, material physiology and their formed, composite psychology. The separation between an individual person and the society in which they live reflects the distinction between subjective and objective determinations. These two divisions establish connections through which artworks can be evaluated in relation with human nature, and correlations can be made between the practice of art and the meaning associated to life.

A confirmation of knowledge of this thesis is the clarification of the separation between artistic cause and biological effect, which eliminates the possibility of a biological determinism for artistic practice and the aesthetic experience of artworks. The social and conceptual factors that inform artistic significance cannot be quantified or reduced to levels of

cellular (i.e. neuronal) operation without losing their relevance to the artistic conception or social tradition they relate to. The practice of art is perceptual, which means that it functions on the level of human individuals who are capable of relating contextual and conceptual information through conscious thought in conjunction with internal feelings related to their experience. Exploring aesthetic processes at the neurological level is moving out of the jurisdiction of art, and as such, has minimal repercussions on the practice of art at the beginning of the 21st Century. The practice of art reflexively distinguishes its unique tradition and autonomic function on its own terms.

A practical contribution to knowledge that was developed for this thesis is the art project *Cover Your Tracks*, which provided a unique aesthetic experience for participants and a practical means of exploring my theoretical research, specifically regarding the influence of social engagement and contextual relations on artistic significance. *Cover Your Tracks* focused on shifts in cognitive awareness that highlighted participants' reflexive modalities of inter-objectivity, while accentuating the sensations aroused by the experience within the botanical garden. The project alluded to the clandestine social relations inherent in the practice of art by emphasizing the act of covering tracks, where the presence of an Other is surmised and yet absent, which reflects Rancière's notion of 'being apart together.' Furthermore, the dry garden installations that comprised the project questioned the recogntion and autonomy of the artwork by fading into the institutional infrastructure of the botanical garden, which in turn helped to establish the unfamiliar and subversive elements that aligned it with artistic tradition, as subtle as they were.

Perhaps the most affecting contribution to knowledge that this thesis has found is how artworks reflect who we are, acting as paradoxical mirrors that reveal ourselves to ourselves through transformations, sensations and relations. One example of this reflection is the vulnerability that both people and artworks demonstrate through their inherent states of lack

and incompleteness. Our individual survival depends on being cared for, and learning to care for our self and others. We accomplish this through our cognition and interaction with the world, which involves both integration and extension. These actions of internalization and externalization reflect physiological and psychological needs that are as relevant to artworks as they are to human beings. Artworks need to be cared for and validated by human beings, which they achieve through the production of significance that their singularity evokes. Artworks reveal their lack in part through their reliance on *parerga*, which supplement them structurally and aesthetically. Apart from our physical inadequacies, which illness and time make perfectly apparent, human perception is also incomplete and buttressed by our consciousness, which functions transparently and disguises its supplementary manoeuvring. The correspondence between the inadequacies and weaknesses of people and artworks supports the existence of an empathic connection during aesthetic experience, and consolidates the claim that artworks function as subjects. The artificial nature of artworks demonstrates our acknowledgement and pleasure in self-duplicity, which is experienced in the inter-objective movement between subject and object that artistic encounters imply. As we alternate between our reflexive masks, we subject artworks to do the same. Through the engagement and recognition of our volatile selfhood during aesthetic experience, artworks provide us with moments of reflexive clarity and truth. Forcing us to question our isolated and binary conceptions of self in relation to our society and world, artworks help to demonstrate the vital role of external relations in establishing and nurturing our integral identity.

APPENDIX 1.

Resumen Breve en castellano – Separación estética y el reflejo de la vida en el arte

Esta tesis tiene como objetivo definir la práctica del arte, que se entiende entendida como la creación y apreciación de las obras de arte, en términos de separación. Además, intenta determinar cómo se puede usar el concepto de separación para relacionar los aspectos biológicos y cognitivos de la vida humana con la experiencia estética y la comprensión de las obras de arte. Propone establecer correlaciones directas entre la funcionalidad biológica y artística, mientras demuestra cómo la separación inherente en la práctica artística limita una concepción puramente biológica. La investigación teórica se centra en importantes teorías estéticas de los últimos doscientos años y en estudios recientes sobre la cognición humana. La investigación práctica incorpora dos proyectos de arte social postconceptual que implican la investigación teórica. Los resultados muestran dos tipos de separaciones principales que las cuales definen las obras de arte y las personas en relación con la tradición y la sociedad, respectivamente. La primera implica una división interna de objeto y sujeto, o material y forma. La segunda distingue el interior del exterior, lo integral de lo relacional, o lo individual del grupo. Las oposiciones que generan estas divisiones desempeñan papeles vitales en la identificación reflexiva del yo—la base de la teoría estética—y el reconocimiento de los productos humanos como obras de arte. No obstante, esta tesis encuentra que las distintas fuentes de significado interno y externo durante la experiencia estética impiden una correlación directa entre la causa artística y el efecto biológico, y viceversa. Las obras de arte reflejan la vida humana, pero su capacidad para producir significado está influenciada por las relaciones sociales y conceptuales que escapan al determinismo biológico. La práctica del arte distingue su autonomía y tradición en sus propios términos.

Palabras llave: estética; arte; obra; biología; cognición; vida; postconceptual; separación; tradición.

Resumen ampliado en castellano – La separación estética y el reflejo de la vida en el arte

Tema e intenciones de la tesis

El tema principal de esta tesis es la experiencia estética de las obras de arte, que es posible gracias a las habilidades cognitivas y experienciales de los seres humanos dentro de un contexto de tradición social. Si bien un enfoque biológico para comprender la práctica del arte se basa en los requisitos sensoriales y cognitivos para reconocer y apreciar las obras de arte, las tradiciones sociales y culturales en las que basamos nuestro concepto de arte escapan al alcance de la validez biológica. Uno de los objetivos de esta tesis es apreciar mejor cómo los campos de la ciencia y la filosofía influyen en la práctica del arte. Si bien la biología se entiende como el estudio científico de la vida, nuestra comprensión filosófica de la vida en términos existenciales es igualmente esencial para determinar el verdadero significado de la práctica artística. Esta tesis pretende demostrar que la práctica del arte es importante para comprender y apreciar la vida al proporcionar a las personas oportunidades y perspectivas únicas para darse cuenta de las condiciones y contradicciones que constituyen inherentemente sus vidas.

Esta investigación sobre la experiencia estética se centra en el estado y el acto de separación como tema principal. Como un concepto que es aplicable a los ámbitos de pensamiento científico, filosófico y artístico, mi intención es utilizar el concepto de separación para definir la práctica artística en asociación y distinción de la ciencia y la filosofía. Como un campo autónomo que utiliza verdades científicas y filosóficas para funcionar, la autonomía del arte se reflejará aún más en la autonomía de la obra de arte, que debe distinguirse de otros seres para funcionar como arte. La separación se convierte así en un concepto clave para ayudar a establecer la naturaleza de las obras de arte y la naturaleza de nuestra observación, las cuales están constituidas en términos de forma. El concepto de

Rancière de "separación estética" plantea dos ejemplos de división en el seno de las prácticas artísticas contemporáneas. Una es la división cognitiva entre la sensación física y el significado conceptual o metafórico que evoca. Otra es la división entre las obras de arte y la tradición social que las establecen. Estas dos separaciones distintas, una basada en la experiencia estética subjetiva y la otra basada en concepciones sociales objetivas, unifican esta tesis a medida que se explora la práctica del arte en relación con la vida.

Con esta investigación teórica en mente, un objetivo final de esta tesis es explorar cómo la creación de obras de arte contemporáneas puede ayudar a identificar los límites ontológicos y operativos que definen la experiencia estética. Rancière se desarrolló su concepto de "separación estética" en relación con las ambiciones políticas de los artistas de principios del siglo XXI que escapan cada vez más de los contextos institucionales y operan dentro de las prácticas no artísticas, utilizando la "vida cotidiana" como contexto y materia prima para sus obras de arte. Como artista que se ajusta a esta descripción metodológica, mi investigación práctica para esta tesis se centra en el desarrollo de un proyecto de arte socialmente comprometido. Tanto el tema del proyecto como su procedimiento reflejan la investigación teórica sobre el concepto de separación estética y el reflejo de la vida en el arte.

Interrogantes de la investigación

Las preguntas que estoy abordando con esta tesis son las siguientes:

1. ¿Cómo se conecta la práctica del arte con la vida, y se puede determinar biológicamente la práctica del arte? La vida en esta pregunta debe entenderse como la condición general que distingue a los seres vivos de la materia no viva, y la existencia específica de un ser vivo individual.

2. ¿Cómo influye la separación en la funcionalidad de la vida, la cognición, la experiencia estética y las obras de arte? ¿Puede el concepto de separación demostrar las formas en que el

arte reflaja la vida? Quiero saber si la separación que es inherente al funcionamiento de la vida biológica y cognitiva puede entenderse como una base para las distinciones que el arte emplea para funcionar.

3. ¿Cómo facilita el pensamiento humano el pensamiento estético, y cómo es distinto de otro pensamiento? ¿Por qué los seres humanos son la única especie animal que practica el arte? Me gustaría explorar cómo las capacidades cognitivas que nos hacen únicos influyen en el funcionamiento de la práctica artística. Este es el tema de la estética, y esta tesis es en gran parte una exploración del funcionamiento del pensamiento humano en relación con la práctica del arte.

4. ¿Qué es una obra de arte? ¿ En qué se diferencian las obras de arte de otros productos humanos? La respuesta a esta pregunta se basa en gran medida en los resultados de la pregunta anterior, aunque introduce la existencia del objeto de arte físico como un problema en relación con la función, el valor de uso y la intencionalidad del autor.

5. ¿Cuál es la existencia de las obras de arte en relación con el concepto y la tradición del arte? ¿Cuán autónomas son las obras de arte respecto a la tradición del arte? Esta pregunta nos devuelve a la teoría estética y las capacidades de los seres humanos para transformar el pensamiento particular en pensamiento universal, y relacionar el pensamiento subjetivo con el pensamiento objetivo. Además, coloca las obras de arte dentro de una lógica temporal de práctica y tradición social, y plantea preguntas sobre la importancia de la contextualización y la accesibilidad de las obras de arte.

<u>Hipótesis</u>

Mi hipótesis es que la práctica del arte se puede definir en términos de separación, lo que relaciona directamente el arte con la vida humana en términos de función biológica y concepción existencial. Los componentes necesarios que definen la práctica del arte (obras de

arte, personas y contextos) demuestran separaciones inherentes que se pueden rastrear hasta la acción y el pensamiento humanos, que están sujetos a las condiciones de vida. No obstante, anticipo que las separaciones inherentes a la práctica del arte niegan su posibilidad de ser determinadas de manera puramente biológica debido a la importante influencia de los factores sociales en la función y el significado de la práctica artística.

Hallazgos principales

Esta tesis sostiene que el concepto de separación es una forma valiosa de definir y considerar la práctica del arte en relación con la cognición y la experiencia humana. Dos separaciones claves informan tanto a las obras de arte como a los seres humanos; una división interna (entre objeto/sujeto o materia/forma), y una separación externa que define la individualidad en relación con un grupo. Las obras de arte se definen por una distinción entre material y forma en términos de su composición fundamental y el contexto en el que se evalúan. Además, las obras de arte están inevitablemente relacionadas con la tradición y el concepto de arte que se les aplica durante su evaluación, y las convenciones artísticas que conlleva esta tradición o concepto. Las personas, por otro lado, se definen en relación con la naturaleza y la cultura. La separación entre una persona individual y la sociedad refleja la distinción entre determinaciones subjetivas y objetivas. Hay muchas otras separaciones que influyen en la experiencia estética, pero estas dos divisiones establecen la base sobre la cual se pueden hacer correlaciones entre arte, filosofía y ciencia.

Mis hallazgos más importantes en relación con las obras de arte se relacionan con la influencia vital de las relaciones contextuales externas. Las obras de arte se reconocen a través de una asociación externa con el concepto de arte, que coloca las obras de arte en relación perpetua con la tradición del arte. Las obras de arte se reconocen a través de su incorporación o uso de convenciones artísticas, que se adhieren a esa tradición a la vez que la

desafían. Las obras de arte se diferencian de otros productos humanos por medio de evaluaciones formales de intencionalidad, funcionalidad y valor de uso. Las obras de arte subvierten la aplicabilidad determinada y, por lo tanto, abren un espacio para su contemplación e interpretación. Como tal, la evaluación de las obras de arte implica consideraciones estéticas y conceptuales, lo que demuestra la influencia de la referencia contextual externa sobre el significado asociado a la forma integral que encarna una obra de arte.

Otro hallazgo importante se relaciona con la motivación para la originalidad artística. La novedad no solo establece la individualidad de una obra de arte, sino que también le permite producir significado, que se genera a través del reconocimiento de la diferencia. La distinción de una obra de arte como un ser particular le permite convertirse en un representante de un sujeto, el Otro, y abre la puerta a la interpretación estética. Como tal, la originalidad artística asegura el valor de uso contemplativo asociado con la práctica artística. La innovación perpetua de la creación artística, sin embargo, transforma inevitablemente la práctica y la concepción del arte. La experimentación artística se traslada a campos no artísticos cruzando límites, superando barreras e interactuando con lo desconocido en un esfuerzo incansable para mantener la capacidad de producir significado.

Un hallazgo final es la vulnerabilidad que las obras de arte reflejan a través de sus estados inherentes de falta e incompletitud, lo que refleja nuestra condición humana. Nuestra supervivencia individual depende en gran medida de nuestras capacidades para integrar el mundo y contribuir a la sociedad, que son acciones que involucran necesidades internas y externas que son tan relevantes para las obras de arte como lo son para los humanos. Las obras de arte necesitan seres humanos para validarlas, lo que logran a través de la producción de significado que evocan a través de su singularidad. La percepción humana es incompleta y está respaldada por nuestra conciencia, que en sí misma funciona de manera transparente y

evita mostrar sus manipulaciones complementarias. Las obras de arte demuestran su incompletitud a través de su dependencia de *parerga*, que las complementan estructuralmente y estéticamente. La correspondencia entre la debilidad humana y artística respalda la existencia de una conexión empática durante la experiencia estética, lo que consolida la noción de que las obras de arte funcionan como sujetos.

<u>Diseño de tesis</u>

La organización de esta tesis se basa en un dibujo simple que hice en un intento de separar los diversos elementos esenciales de la experiencia estética; contexto, obra de arte, sujeto, pensamiento y arte (ver apéndice 3). El resultado son cuatro capítulos que exploran las formas en que los contextos, las personas, el pensamiento y las obras de arte funcionan en relación con la experiencia estética con la intención de comprender mejor la noción de separación estética y la práctica del arte a principios del siglo XXI. Estos capítulos teóricos van acompañados de un capítulo de investigación práctica que explora dos proyectos de arte en relación con las condiciones de la experiencia estética.

El **Capítulo 2. Vida / Contexto** se centra en la teoría de la autopoiesis y las formas en que los organismos vivos se separan fundamentalmente de la materia no orgánica para poder vivir. Una separación secundaria de la autopoiesis implica la distinción entre el nivel molecular de la función estructural de los organismos vivos y el nivel molar—el nivel de un ser entero—de la observación e intención de un ser vivo dentro de su entorno. Estas dos separaciones informan la intencionalidad de los seres vivos y las capacidades de observación que permiten la experiencia estética en los humanos. Se comparan con las nociones de Rancière de "estar separados juntos" y "separación estética" para describir el funcionamiento básico de la experiencia estética y establecer un punto de conexión entre la práctica del arte y el funcionamiento de la vida humana.

El **Capítulo 3. Pensamiento / Yo** examina las diversas funciones cognitivas que facilitan la experiencia estética. Comienza demostrando cómo el cuerpo y la mente trabajan juntos para determinar la concepción del yo en los sujetos humanos gracias al pensamiento reflexivo, antes de pasar a examinar las formas en que nuestra percepción y acción habilitan nuestra capacidad de realizar el mundo. Esto es seguido por una exploración de la conciencia humana y las formas en que nuestra comprensión distintiva configura la realidad. Todas estas ideas están relacionadas con la teoría de la autopoiesis para explorar cómo nuestra separación percibida de lo externo y lo interno determina los procesos de pensamiento que facilitan la experiencia estética.

El **Capítulo 4. El Humano / Intención** explora los temas del lenguaje y la tecnología como las dos características y métodos principales que usamos para separarnos a nosotros mismos y nuestra especie de otros animales. Tanto el lenguaje como la tecnología se exploran en relación con la construcción del pensamiento humano, la sociedad y la práctica del arte. Si bien el lenguaje se examina en términos de establecer nuestra capacidad de pensamiento reflexivo y simbólico, que son esenciales para la experiencia estética, la tecnología se explora en términos de función e intencionalidad para proporcionar un contrapunto a la indeterminación especial de las obras de arte.

El **Capítulo 5. Obras de arte / El arte** se centra en dos conceptos que informan el proceso de contextualización de las obras de arte. El *parergon* es un concepto que Derrida aísla de la teoría estética de Kant para explorar los límites entre una obra de arte y su contexto, al tiempo que deconstruye la imposición formal de la teoría estética sobre la experiencia de las obras de arte. La segunda idea, "el fragmento," es una forma filosófica que Osborne localiza en el trabajo de Friedrich Schlegel y los filósofos románticos de Jena, utilizándola para explorar la experiencia estética y la ontología de las prácticas artísticas postconceptuales. El "fragmento" ayuda a considerar las obras de arte como seres autónomos

en relación con la tradición artística, que posiciona las obras de arte en relación con los contextos históricos y sociales.

El **Capítulo 6. Investigación práctica** presenta mi práctica artística a través de dos proyectos de arte; *uncover RECOVER* [*destapar RECUPERAR*], y *Cover Your Tracks* [*borra tus huellas*]. El primer proyecto se basa en el cultivo de plantas medicinales usando tierra extraída de una fosa común de la guerra civil española. Se explora en relación con el concepto de 'separación estética' propuesto por Rancière y la teoría organizacional del arte propuesta por Nöe. Además de mostrar las diversas formas en que desarrollo mis proyectos de arte en relación con los materiales, el significado, las personas y la transformación, el subcapítulo (que es un artículo pendiente de publicación)[871] proporciona una introducción práctica al trabajo de Rancière y, en particular, a su afirmación del potencial político del experimentar obras de arte. El proyecto *Cover Your Tracks* se desarrolló en relación con mi investigación teórica sobre la separación estética y el reflejo de la vida en el arte. El proyecto comenzó a desarrollarse en 2017 y se exhibió en 2018 en el Jardín Botánico de Barcelona. La obra de arte estaba compuesta por tres jardines japoneses de *karesansui* (montaña seca) ubicados en senderos a lo largo de los terrenos. Los visitantes fueron invitados a participar en la creación y el borrado de marcas simbólicas, proporcionando un encuentro inesperado que ponía de relieve las capacidades cognitivas que distinguen a los seres humanos de otros animales.

El **Capítulo 7. Conclusión** cierra la tesis observando las respuestas a mis principales preguntas de investigación, recomendaciones para futuras investigaciones y dando cuenta del nuevo conocimiento que he aportado.

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[871] Instituto Franklin-UAH, Toward an Eco-social Transition: Transatlantic Environmental Humanities / Hacia una Transición Eco-social: Humanidades Medioambientales desde una perspectiva Transatlántica, (Alcalá, España: Colección CLYMA, Biblioteca Benjamin Franklin, publicación pendiente 2019/2020).

APPENDIX 2
Timeline of Referenced Periods and Source Material

Periodization of **Western Art History**	**Chronology of Source Material** (Philosophical and Biological)	
1600 Baroque (1600-1750)	1637	*Discourse on the Method*, Rene Descartes (1596-1650)
1650	1677	*Ethics*, Benedict de Spinoza (1632-1677)
1700		
	1735	*Systema Naturae*, Carl Linnaeus (1707-1778)
1750 Neoclassicism (1750-1850)		
	1790	**The Critique of Judgement, Immanuel Kant** (1724-1804) ———
	1794	*The Aesthetic Education of Man*, Friedrich Schiller (1759-1805)
1800 Romanticism (1800-1850)	1798	*Athenaeum Fragements*, Friedrich Schlegel (1772-1829)
1850 Aestheticism (1850-1900)	1859	*The Origin of the Species*, Charles Darwin (1809-1882)
	1865	*Mendelian Inheritence*, Gregor Mendel (1822-1884)
Modernism (1880-)	1899	*The Interpretation of Dreams*, Sigmund Freud (1856-1939)
1900		
	1926	*Theoretical Biology*, Jakob von Uexküll (1864-1944)
	1927	*Being and Time*, Martin Heidegger (1889-1976)
	1934	*Art as Experience*, John Dewey (1859-1952)
1950 Contemporary Art (1945-)	1953	*Double-Helix Model of DNA Structure*, James Watson (1928-) & Francis Crick (1916-2004)
	1970	*Aesthetic Theory*, Theodore Adorno (1903-1969)
	1973	*Autopoiesis and Cognition*, Humberto Maturana (1928-) & Francisco Varela (1946-2001)
	1979	*The Parergon*, Jacques Derrida (1930-)
	1991	*What is Philosophy?* Deleuze (1925-95) & Guattari (1930-92)
	1994	*Descarte's Error*, Antonio Damasio (1944-)
	1995	*Art as a Social System*, Niklas Luhmann (1927-1998)
2000 CE		
	2003	*The Human Genome Project* (completion)
	2010	*The Emancipated Spectator*, Jacques Rancière (1940-)
	2013	*Anywhere or Not at All*, Peter Osborne (1958-)
	2015	*Strange Tools*, Alva Nöe (1964-)
	2019	

| Periodization of **Aesthetic Modernisms****	Periodization of **Conceptual Modernisms****	
		The Mimetic Regime of Art *
Early Modernism (1880-1900)	Russian Avant-garde (1890-1930)	The Aesthetic Regime of Art *
High Modernism (1900-1930)	Constructivism (1915-1930)	
Late Modernism (1930-1950)	Dadaism (1915-1920)	
	Surrealism (1917-1950)	
Abstract Expressionism (1940-50)		
Pop Art / Op Art (1950-1960)	Situationism (1957-1972)	
	Fluxus (1960-1980)	
Arte Povera (1960-70)	Land Art (1960-1980)	
Minimalism (1970-80)	Conceptual Art (1965-1975)	
Postmodernism (1980-)	Postconceptual Art (1975-)	

* Jacques Ranciere, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, (London, U.K.: Continuum, 2011), 23.
** Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All*, (London, U.K.: Verso, 2013), 71-98.

APPENDIX 3

Aesthetic Separation Collage

Image 13: Robert Waters, *The Essential Elements of Aesthetic Experience*, 2019, digitally manipulated paper collage (detail), 29.7 x 21 cm.
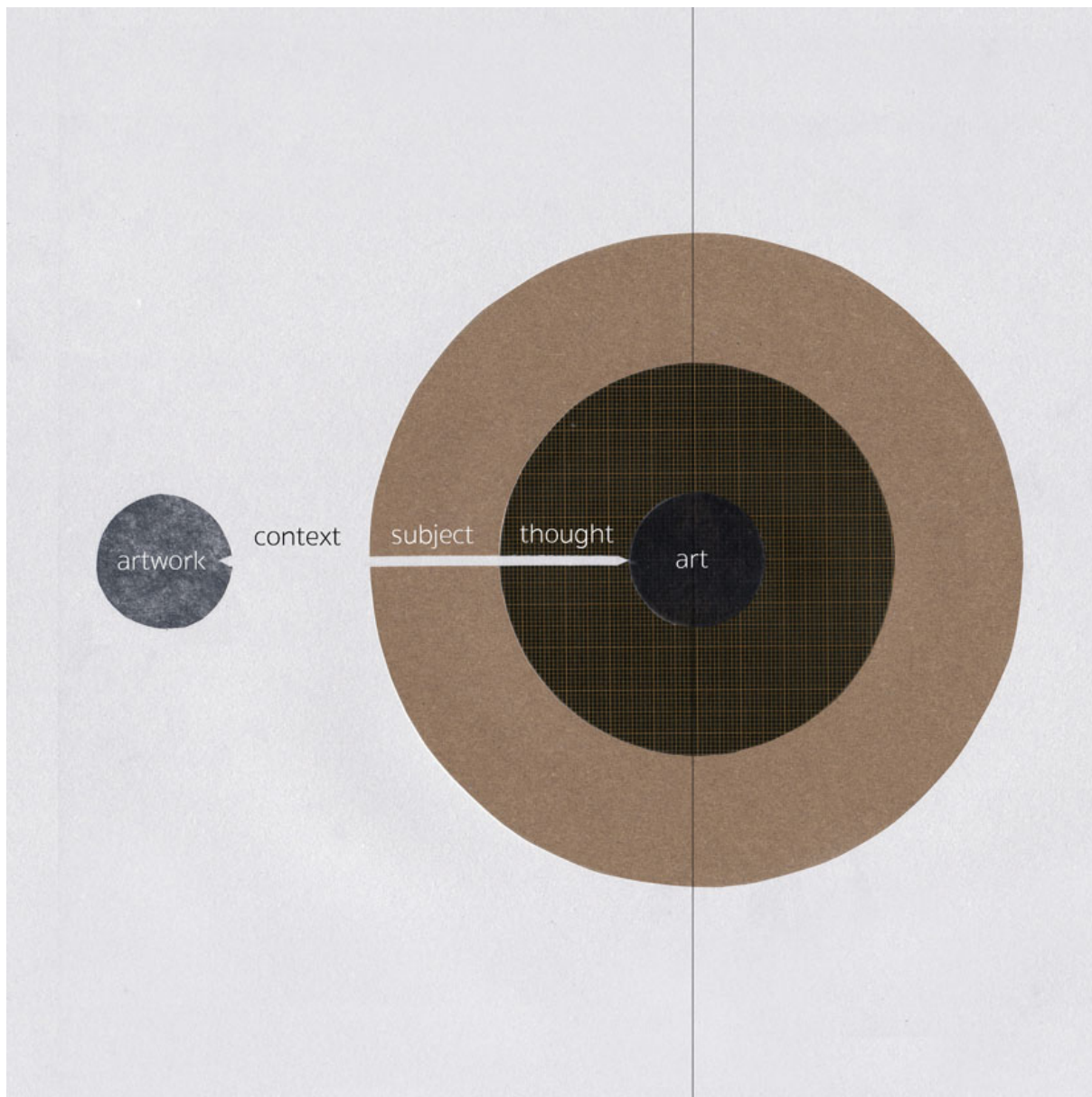
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