

The Conscious of the Presentness as a Critical Attitude towards the Progress: Kant,  
Arendt, Benjamin

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## Abstract

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The main purpose of this thesis is to criticize progressive time conception through highlighting the uniqueness of experience and the autonomy of political judgment. The thesis argues that the particular events cannot be understood in a deterministic and foreseeable perspective contained in the Enlightenment historicism. Empiricist historiography ignores to see the true content of events. For this reason, The thesis considers two of Kant's political writings, 'What is Enlightenment?' and 'The Contest of Faculties'. Stemming from Kant's political writings, the thesis highlights the conscious of the presentness for the criticism of contemporary reality. The conscious of the presentness signifies judgment of the particular events. Kant's third critique, *Critique of Judgment* helps us to formulate the question 'how can we understand the particular events without abolishing their autonomy?'. Then, the thesis focuses on Arendt. By using Arendtian formulation of 'situated impartiality and knowledge' and 'the storytelling', the thesis works to politicize the autonomy

and particularity of events towards the progressive time conception. Thirdly, the thesis highlights Benjamin as a critical thinker of the progressive time conception. Benjamin's re-formulation of early romantic concepts, 'immanent criticism', 'the aura of artwork' and 'emancipation of meaning' offers an alternative way to understand the autonomy of particular events.

## Kısa Özet

İlerleme Anlayışının Eleştirisi olarak Anın Bilinci: Kant, Arendt ve Benjamin

Bu çalışma, deneyimin biricikliği ve politik yargının özerkliği ilkelerinden yola çıkarak, ilerlemeci zaman anlayışının eleştirisini yapmayı hedeflemektedir. Tez, Aydınlanma tarihselciliğinde içerildiği şekliyle, tikel olayların öngörülebilir ve belirlenebilir bir perspektif içinde anlaşılamayacağını öne sürer. Ampirik tarihselcilik olayların hakikatini görmeyi ihmal eder. Bu amaçla tez, Kant'ın politik yazıları olan 'Aydınlanma Nedir?' ve 'Fakülteler Çatışması'ndan hareketle, çağdaş gerçekliğin eleştirisi için şimdiki zamanın bilinci nosyonunu gündeme getirir. Şimdiki zamanın bilinci, tikel olayların yargısı sorununu anlamayı gerektirir. Kant'ın üçüncü eleştirisi, olan *Yargıgücünün Eleştirisi*, 'tikel olayları, otonomilerini terketmeksizin nasıl anlayabiliriz?' sorusunu, ilerlemeci zaman anlayışının eleştirisi olarak formüle etmemize yardımcı olur. Arendt üzerine yoğunlaşarak, ilerlemeci zaman anlayışına karşı, 'yerelleşmiş bilgi ve yansızlık' ile 'hikaye söylemi'ni kullanarak tikel olayların özerkliği ve tikelliği sorununun politikleştirimi üzerinde durur. Üçüncü olarak tez, ilerlemeci zaman kavramına karşı eleştirel bir düşünür olarak Benjamin'i gündeme getirir. Benjamin'in, erken romantik kavramlar olan, 'içkin eleştiri', 'sanat

alışmasının aurası' ve 'anlamın zgrleřtirmesi' ni yeniden biimlendirmesini tikel olayların zerklięini anlamada alternatif bir yol olarak nerir.

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## A. INTRODUCTION

In this thesis, I aim to question the progressive time conception. The progressive time conception understands particular events in a deterministic and foreseeable perspective. The deterministic and foreseeable perspective adopted by the progressive time conception originates from Enlightenment thought. Turgot is the founder of the idea of progress especially embodied in the French Revolution. Progress in Enlightenment thought focused on the idea of global history. This approach integrated social and intellectual achievements into the idea of progress, determined by empiric methods. Condorcet shows the ways to reach an equal and emancipated future by using art, science and philosophy. Condorcet divides history into different periods and he debates the shapes and forms of reason and knowledge for each period. According to Condorcet, each period is determined by the past through eliminating its faults and removing its lacks. This view is systemized by Auguste Comte. In his historical approach, Comte relies on the observation and experiment, testing the data of experience, and using abstract terms merely as the instruments of classification. In this regard, the idea of progress has an epistemological background based on the Cartesian understanding of knowledge in the age of Enlightenment that offers a preliminary solution to the problem of achieving certitude in history.

First of all, in order to question the progressive time conception concretized in Enlightenment thought, this thesis elaborates the definition of experience and judgment in two of Kant's political articles, 'What is Enlightenment?' and 'Contest of Faculties'. Kant demonstrates how we understand particularities in history and how we conceptualize them without abolishing their autonomy. In addition, the Judgment of Taste or Beautiful explained in the *Critique of Judgment* offers a

conceptual framework to understand the nature of particular events. Kant, in his articles, tends to construct a relationship between the political event (French Revolution) and political judgment. The nature of political judgment included in the spectator's view and concretized in the French Revolution, is proof that there is progress. The spectator is another name for the writing and reading public that the ideals of the French Revolution render universal. What makes the judgment of the spectator universal? The answer of this question is to be found in Kant's third critique, *Critique of Judgment*. The notion of 'purposiveness without purpose' expressed in the aesthetic case points to the universality of the spectator's judgment. The notion of subjective universality is crucial in understanding why Kant makes a distinction between the judgment of spectator and judgment of actor. By using the distinction between the determinative judgment and reflexive judgment, Kant works to explain the reason of the distinction between actor and spectator. According to Kant, the subjectively purposive presentation of spectator furthers the harmony of the faculties or the aims of cognition in general, without realizing any further specific purpose. In this sense, the spectator begins with a given particular and searches for the universal. On the other hand, determinative judgment of the actor operates under universal transcendental laws and he/she works to make his/her judgment universal. For this reason, according to Kant, the present is crystallized through the spectator's judgment as proof of progress. Although Kant helps us to see the specific quality of political judgment, his thoughts about judgment are related to the aesthetic domain. Kant does not make an effort to conceptualize the spectator's view in a political domain. As a result of this, political action does not have any place in Kant's interpretations about the spectator. Hence human intervention in history is externalized by the process. The

demand for control in history, according to Kant, accompanied by a simultaneously elevated moral claim, leads to morally justified teleology.<sup>1</sup>

Secondly, this thesis focuses on the Arendtian formulation of presentness. Arendt, as opposed to Kant, carries the present into the political perspective. It can be argued that the Kantian notion of particularized judgment through the spectator is politicized by Arendt as a critical attitude towards history. By highlighting the Benjaminian formulation of 'storytelling' and 'situated knowledge', she tries to exceed the universalized and homogenized concepts of empiricist historiography. In this way, Arendt works to construct the relationship between political judgment and the uniqueness or particularity of events. For Arendt, judgment is an ability to determine our choice in political situations. This determines the structure of her theory of action. In contradistinction to the cyclical time theories, Arendt adopts the judgment of man as a driving force to restart time within an inexorable time continuum. Man's capacity to know his own beginning, and to know that he will as an individual come to an end, is his thinking. Arendt's description of thinking is a creative activity which requires remembrance, storytelling and imagination. In this way, Arendt tends to construct political judgment situated in a particular political condition. By considering situated knowledge in the any historical era, she rejects the discourse of cyclical time theories on progressively and constantly sequenced events. Arendt seeks the proof of political progress in the autonomy of judgment and experience. Like Benjamin, Arendt speaks about 'truth more than fact' in history by focusing on the conditions of possible experience and political judgment.

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<sup>1</sup> Heinz-Dieter Kittsteiner, 'The Allegory of the Philosophy of History in the Nineteenth Century' in *Walter Benjamin and the Demands of History*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996, p.47

Thirdly, Walter Benjamin reflects on the history of experience. Benjamin helps us to trace the autonomy of experience under changing conditions in history. In addition, by using the notions of immanent criticism, emancipation of meaning and the aura of artwork, he tries to produce a theoretical framework and practical knowledge for criticizing progressive time conception. He is a paradigmatic when he deconstructs of the idea of progress. Benjamin discovers the relationship between the consciousness of history and the desire for freedom. He seeks possible conditions of emancipation and freedom in the political sphere by redeeming past events in time. For this reason, he believes that it is necessary to challenge the traditionalist historical approach which adopts empiricist-positivist methodology of cyclical time theories like Marxist and liberal historiography. Hence, Benjamin wishes to highlight the history of oppressed people and hidden possibilities. This means relativizing the present and breaking the belief about the concreteness, certainty and continuity of the present. The desire for continuity in history and representation of history as certainty are elements of the progressive time conception in order to dominate history and people. However, the fate of people can be changed only in the present, but through redeeming the past.

In this thesis, I aim to obtain an alternative time conception that helps us to see the real quality of the political events that signify progress. My main concern is to highlight a debate on the relationship between democracy and experience and judgment. I argue that the main concepts intrinsic to a democratic perspective, such as freedom, equality and justice, are omitted from the idea of progress. Deconstructing these relationships by showing the particularity and autonomy of experience and judgment through the questioning of the progressive time

conception provides us with an opportunity to reconstruct the relations between democracy and freedom, equality and justice.

## **B. KANT: ETHICS OF THE PRESENT**

Kantian conception of Enlightenment offers a productive starting point to highlight the relations between time and politics. It is 'productive' because it reminds us of the fact that politics is an attitude related to the critical and autonomous uses of reason. Critique, in this sense, is an effort to give historical status to political concepts. In that respect, critical and autonomous uses of reason provide a new perspective for thinking on the relations between time, politics, and space in the light of the Kantian notion of Enlightenment. The main argument of this chapter is to emphasize the role of time consciousness in determining the definition and function of politics and political agents.

Liberating time requires abandoning the deterministic logic of empiricism. Reducing history to the level of sequenced events causes misleading results especially in reading world history. This affects our political commitments and projections. The empiricist conception of time accepts politics in a determinable and foreseeable perspective. Thus politics loses its function to be the driving power creating new alternatives and possibilities in history. In Kantian notion of Enlightenment, contrary to the empiricist conception of time, critique supplies an opportunity to conceptualize time in a new agenda that requires thinking about the conditions of experience and of consciousness which determine the quality of political judgment. In the Kantian formula, it is the immanent obligation that requires agreeing with the laws of reason. A time dimension highlighted in the Kantian Enlightenment and contained in the alternatives and possibilities of history is constructed by free thinking and critique. To focus on the conditions that shape our political consciousness is the only way to acquire a better understanding of the

age we belong to and also to emphasize the inadequacy of its political conditions. In other words, all criticism begins by looking at the event which nails the moment. The uniqueness of time is an invention of judgment that stitches consciousness to experience.

This chapter, first of all, considers Kant in order to begin the criticism of the progressive time conception. Kant calls Enlightenment an effort in thinking about the conditions of experience and consciousness. French Revolution according to Kant's essay 'The Contest of Faculties' is the concretization of Enlightenment thought. The relationship between critique and action supplies fundamental points for the critical attitude against progress. Moreover, the Kantian connection between critique and action or Enlightenment and revolution highlights a declination in the direction of a redefinition of politics. Secondly, we will follow Foucault's insight, elaborated in 'What is Enlightenment?' and 'The Art of the Telling the Truth', to explain the Kantian concept of Enlightenment as an ontology of contemporary reality. In this regard, the spectator and actor constructed by Kant in the 'Contest of Faculties' can be used as a guide to define the central actors of politics. While the progressive time conception seems to accept the notion of centralized subject as the main category of politics, Kant tends to define the notion of decentralized subject through the judgment of spectator<sup>2</sup> as the proof of political progress. Vastly Kant analyses the quality of the spectator's judgment in his third critique, *Critique of Judgment*. *Critique of Judgment* will help us to see the political implications of judgment.

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<sup>2</sup> For the political implications of decentralized subject see; Frederick M. Dolan, 'Political Action and the Unconscious: Arendt and Lacan on Decentering the Subject', in *Political Theory*, Vol. 23, No. 2. (May, 1995), pp. 330-352.

## 1. Kantian Conceptualization of Enlightenment as the Possibility of the Present

Kant's definition of Enlightenment is as follows,

Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one's reason own understanding without the guidance of another. This immaturity is self-incurred if its cause is not lack of understanding, but lack of resolution and courage to use it without the guidance of another. The motto of Enlightenment is therefore: *sapere aude!* Have the courage to use your own understanding.<sup>3</sup>

As remarked by Foucault, Kantian Enlightenment is a period in history marked by an awareness of its own presentness and singularity. Kant's essay on the Enlightenment introduces 'a new type of question in the field of philosophical reflection, namely, 'the question of the present, of the contemporary moment which is without precedent in the history of philosophy.'<sup>4</sup> In Kant's essay, Foucault maintains, 'one sees philosophy...problematizing its own discursive contemporaneity: a contemporaneity that it questions as an event, whose meaning, value and philosophical particularity it is its task to bring out, and in which it has to find both at once its own *raison d'être* and the grounds for what it says'<sup>5</sup>

After the 1784 essay 'What is Enlightenment?' Kant writes the 'Contest of Faculties' in 1789. This essay includes a discussion on the French Revolution. Kant's analysis of the French Revolution is pursued in the context of attempting to answer the question 'is the human race continually improving?'

In order to answer this question, one had to identify an event in human history that would indicate, or be a sign of, the existence of a permanent cause which guides mankind in the direction of progress. Such a cause had to be permanent in the sense that it had to be shown to be operative throughout the course of human history. Hence the event that will enable us to decide whether the human race is constantly improving must be sign that remomorative (showing that the

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<sup>3</sup> Immanuel Kant, 'What is Enlightenment?' in *Political Writings*, edit. By H. Reis, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, p.54

<sup>4</sup> Michael Foucault, 'The Art of the Telling the Truth' in *Critique and Power: Recasting the Foucault/Habermas Debate*, edit. By M. Kelly, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1994, p.139

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p.140



alleged cause of progress has been operative in the past), demonstrative (demonstrating that it is active in the present), and prognostic (indicating that it will also operate in the future)<sup>6</sup>

This quotation includes strong criticism of progressive time concept. Contrary to the widespread opinion in positivist thinking, Kant makes an important distinction between action at a particular moment in time and a general tendency of the human race as a whole to show whether human beings really advance in the direction of progress. Kant found the sign of such a progress in the event of the French Revolution, an event which he identified not with 'those momentous deeds or misdeeds of men which make small in their eyes what was formerly great or make great what was formerly small,'<sup>7</sup> but with 'the attitude of onlookers as it reveals itself in public while the drama of great political changes is taking place.'<sup>8</sup> In the 'universal yet disinterested sympathy' that the public openly shows toward one set of protagonists, regardless of the cost it may carry to themselves, Kant finds an evidence of human progress.

Their reaction because of its universality proves that mankind as a whole shares a certain character in common, and it also proves, because of its disinterestedness, that man has a moral character, or at least the making of one. And this does not merely allow us to hope for human improvement; is already a form of improvement in itself, in so far as its influence strong enough for the present.<sup>9</sup>

To sum up, it is not the success or failure of the Revolution, but rather the 'sympathy which borders almost an enthusiasm' with which it was received by the non-participating spectators, that provides a sign that the human race is improving. Focusing on the French Revolution, Kant chooses to interpret the significance of that event for the present. As remarked by Foucault in his essay 'What is Enlightenment?', Kant was not the first philosopher who had sought to affect on his

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<sup>6</sup> Immanuel Kant, 'The Contest of the Faculties' in *Political Writings*, edit. By H. Reis, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, p.181

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p.182

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p.182

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p.182

own present. Foucault argues that throughout western history philosophers have posed the question of the present and their answers have taken three forms: first, the present was seen as belonging to an era of the world marked by inherent characteristics (the present as definite world era, exemplified in Plato's *Statesman*); second, the present was interrogated in order to discover signs of a forthcoming event (the present as a threshold, exemplified in St. Augustine's *The City of God*); The present was conceived as a point of transition toward the dawning of a new world (the present as a point of transition accomplishment, exemplified in Vico's *La Scienza Nuova*). Foucault like Arendt sees that Kant's originality consisted in inaugurating a new way of thinking about the relation between philosophy and the present (politics).<sup>10</sup>

Definition of Enlightenment is conceptualized by Kant in an entirely negative way, 'as an *Ausgang*, an exit, a way out... He is not seeking to understand the present on the basis of a totality or of a future achievement. He is looking for a difference: what difference does today introduce with respect to yesterday?'<sup>11</sup> In Kantian sense, Enlightenment means the striving for responsibility.

## **2. Spectator's Gaze: Bridging Gap Between Experience and Judgment**

One of the most important consequences of the relationship between Kant's essays 'What is Enlightenment?' and 'The Contest of Faculties' is an attempt to bridge a gap between experience and judgment. Enlightenment, as a critical attitude towards the present, in Kant's formula, needs the standpoint of spectator. In other words, Enlightenment is the crystallization of the view in spectator's judgment and

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<sup>10</sup> Michael Foucault, 'What is Enlightenment?' in *Foucault Reader*, Trans. By C. Porter, edit. By Paul Rabinow, New York: Panteon Book, 1984, p.33

the advent of this judgment can be observed on a historical event. The obligatory and necessary relation between judgment and experience in Kant proves whether ‘the human race continually improving.’ French Revolution provides Kant with such a proof. According to Cassirer, Kant sees French Revolution as the actualization of expectations included in the laws of pure reason, because particular problem of any political theory is that how several individual demands can be connected into a common desire. Without abolishing the autonomy of particular demands, this is the difficult question for Kant: how can we reach the right and valid transformation of these demands into a new meaning?<sup>12</sup> It is the tension between theory and practice, critique and action, Enlightenment and revolution, and spectator and actor. The reason why Kant sees spectator’s judgment as a proof of progress in human race is the subject of his third critique, *Critique of Judgment*. In addition, especially the first part of the third critique including the *Analytic of Beautiful* provides us the critique of progressive time concept through the analysis of the spectator’s perspective but he also gives an opportunity to redefine politics on the relationships between consciousness of the present and judgment. Hannah Arendt uses *Critique of Judgment* for developing her political thought, through the notion of ‘enlarged mentality’ and ‘sensus communis.’

The aim of this section is to set out the main features of Kant’s theory of taste or beautiful in order to see the reasons why Kant prefers spectator’s judgment as an action in the direction of progress. The section does not include an extended analysis of that theory or directly address many of the complex questions of interpretation that is the focus of much of the secondary literature.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p.34

<sup>12</sup> Ernest Cassirer, *Kant’ın Yaşamı ve Öğretisi*, trans. By Doğan Özlem, Istanbul: Inkılap Publication, 1997, p.397; see also David Lloyd, ‘Kant’s Examples’ in *Representations*, No. 28, Special Issue: Essays in Memory of Joel Fineman. (Autumn, 1989), pp. 34-54.

## a. Reflective and Determinative Judgment

Kant makes an important distinction between reflective judgment and determinative judgment in his third critique.<sup>13</sup> Determinative judgment or determinant judgment operates 'under universal transcendental laws by the understanding' and it is merely the capacity to subsume the particular under a rule. Reflective judgment, on the other hand, begins with a given particular and searches for the universal. Kant hints at this distinction between reflexive and determinant judgments in the *Critique of Pure Reason* by drawing a distinction between 'subsuming under a concept' and 'bringing to a concept'. 'Reflecting on particulars in searching for a universal requires judgment, rather than one of the understandings which bring systematic order to empirical process. Furthermore, reflective judgment not only orders empirical concepts, but *generates* them. No empirical determinant judgments are the possible without reflective judgment supplying empirical concepts. Reflective judgment is necessary if we are 'to proceed from the universal analogy of a possible experience as such to the particular one.'<sup>14</sup>

Kant distinguishes reflective judgment from logical reflection by claiming that reflective judgment is guided by a priori principle regarding the suitability of nature to our judgmental capacities. For the accounting of this suitability, Kant highlights the judgment of taste. Kant's analyses of taste constitute an explanation of how judgment that is not guided by specific concepts may claim universal validity, and this is relevant to explaining how we can follow rules without appeal to further rules. This is important for us to see the distinction between spectator and actor, because 'it

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<sup>13</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. By J. H. Bernard, New York: Hafner, 1972, p.179

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p.184

is the clash between the principle according to which you should act and the principle which you should judge.’<sup>15</sup>

## **b. The Analytic of Beautiful or Taste**

Kant relies on his exposition of the main features of judgments of taste in his characterization of the ideal of beauty and fine art. Kant first claims that pure aesthetic judgments are not interested. This characterization is meant to distinguish aesthetic judgments from other sorts of judgment which involve a feeling of pleasure in the experience of an object. Aesthetic judgments do not claim that an object is agreeable. A liking for the agreeable involves an interest in the existence of the object so judged. Aesthetic judgments may be contrasted with judgments of agreeableness in two ways: ‘first, aesthetic judgments do not express pleasure in sensation, which is a pleasure that generates a desire for the existence of the object... second, and relatedly, aesthetic judgments involve a pleasure *in the judgment itself*, not in the sensation taken apart from the act of judgment.’<sup>16</sup> Judgment involves a pleasure in the harmony between the forms of imagination and the rules of understanding- a pleasure in judgment itself. For Kant, another sort of interested liking is the esteem for objects judged to be good. He defines good as that which ‘by means of reason, we like through its mere concept.’ An object is judged to be good if it is useful as a means to some end or if it is good in itself. As with the agreeable, the good implies an interest in the existence of the object, although, in this case, the judgment is not merely an expression of private liking based on sensation, because it

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<sup>15</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, edit. By Ronald Beiner, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982, p.48

<sup>16</sup> Sarah L. Gibbons, *Kant's Theory of Judgment: Bringing Gap in Judgment and Experience*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, New York: Oxford University Press, 1994, p.89

employs the concept of a purpose, thereby representing the good object or act as the object of agent's will.<sup>17</sup>

The second moment of the Analytic deals with the special sort of universality claimed by judgments of taste. The 'beautiful is what is presented without concepts as the object of a universal liking.'<sup>18</sup> Kant describes the universality of an aesthetic judgment as its 'special characteristic' and its 'remarkable feature' to warn the reader that the universality of such judgments must be of a different sort from that possessed by judgments of goodness and other logically universal judgments.<sup>19</sup> This universality is remarkable because it is a merely subjective universality: it is not based on any concept of the object judged, but instead refers the intuition of the object to the subject's feeling of pleasure. The notion of subjective universality is crucial to Kant's attempt to show that aesthetic judgments are a unique sort of judgment possessing their own a priori principle. He describes subjective universality as a 'general validity', or 'the validity that a presentation's reference to the cognitive power'<sup>20</sup> Judgments of taste postulate a universal voice rather than postulating anything about the object.<sup>21</sup> Thus, whereas a logically and empirically universal and objective judgment postulates the agreement of other judges by appeal to the concept that applies to the object, an aesthetically universal judgment only postulates 'the possibility of a judgment that is aesthetic and yet can be considered valid for everyone,'<sup>22</sup> where aesthetic means that the presentation refers to the subject, not the object, of judgment. Thus, the universality of the judgment in aesthetic case is not external to the act of judging, because it is not due to a determinate characteristic of

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<sup>17</sup> I. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, p.208

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p.211

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p.213

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p.214

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p.216

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p.216

the object judged, but rather expresses an indeterminate characteristic of judging subjects recognized in the pleasurable response to objects.

Kant describes the subjective universality of judgments of taste in terms of the universal communicability of the pleasure. He argues that the feeling of pleasure associated with a beautiful object cannot precede the judging of the object, since a non-judgmental feeling of pleasure only constitutes a claim that the object is agreeable in sensation, and this is a private liking rather than a universally communicable representation. In contrast with the case of agreeable objects, in judgments of taste 'it must be the universal communicability of the mental state, in the given presentation, which underlies the judgment of taste as its subjective condition, and the pleasure in the object must be its consequences.'<sup>23</sup> The pleasure felt in apprehending an object as beautiful depends on the universal communicability of the mental state that occurs in that apprehension. Pleasure in the object follows from the pleasurable recognition of universally communicable mental state. In explaining the nature of this universally communicable pleasure, Kant introduces the notion of the harmony of the faculties. This harmony is a harmony between imagination and understanding, and it arises from the play of these faculties in which the activities of imagination harmonize freely with those of the understanding. The faculties are in 'free play' because aesthetic judgments are not determined by any concept, so neither imagination nor understanding is constrained by 'a particular rule of cognition.'<sup>24</sup> The harmony of the faculties, then, expresses their fittedness to each other for the sake of judgment, or 'cognition in general.' Kant names this harmony the 'subjective condition' upon which 'cognition always rests'.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p.217

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p.217

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p.218

Kant claims that the harmonious relation between the faculties ‘can be sensed in the effect it has on the mind’-an effect which he describes as the ‘quicke[ing]’ of the faculties due to their ‘reciprocal harmony.’<sup>26</sup> Since taste judgments do not involve a concept of the object or result in determinant judgment about the object, the harmony of the faculties is recognized through feeling. Although this feeling is merely subjective, the felt awareness of the harmony ‘pertains to recognition’ as the ‘mental state we find in the relation between the presentational powers...insofar as they refer a given presentation to cognition in general’.<sup>27</sup> Kant does not provide much of an explanation as to why the harmony must itself be communicable; he does, however, offer a stronger argument for the felt awareness of the harmony.

In the general comment concluding the *Analytic of the Beautiful*, Kant further elaborates the relationship between imagination and understanding involved in an aesthetic judgment. He begins by saying that ‘in a judgment of taste the imagination must be considered in its freedom.’<sup>28</sup> This means that imagination is productive, not reproductive, and does not merely follow empirical laws of association. Imagination is instead ‘spontaneous’ and ‘the originator of chosen forms of possible intuitions.’<sup>29</sup> Kant initially describes the imagination as possessing ‘free lawfulness’ in aesthetic judgment. Later in the passage, however, Kant rejects this description as contradictory, since only the understanding gives the law for objects of experience. He modifies his claim as follows:

It seems, therefore, that only lawfulness without a law and a subjective harmony of the imagination with the understanding without an objective harmony...is compatible with the free lawfulness of the understanding.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p.219

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p.217

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p.240

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p.240

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p.241



This passage suggests that the free lawfulness is something shared by imagination and understanding, since the former brings ‘chosen forms of possible intuitions’ to the latter as the capacity for lawfulness as such. The imagination’s exhibitions in intuition are not lawless or chaotic, but their order is only recognized as lawful in the harmony produced with the understanding in its recognition of these forms as freely lawful, that is, in their harmonizing with it as the capacity for laws without the provision of any specific law.

Another important point including the quality of spectator’s judgment is related to the third moment of analytic. Kant’s analytic elaborates the notion of the faculties in terms of ‘the relation of purposes that is taken into consideration’ in judgment of taste. This discussion of what Kant calls ‘purposiveness without a purpose’ explains further why the harmony of the faculties is felt to be pleasurable. A purpose is an object which we think of ‘as an effect that is possible only through a concept of that effect.’<sup>31</sup> Purposiveness, on the other hand, is merely ‘a thing’s harmony with that character of things which is possible only through purposes.’<sup>32</sup> A judgment regarding the purposiveness of the form of an object is not a claim about the constitution of the object: that is, it does not assert that the object is in fact a purpose but only that we must judge it according to the idea of purposiveness. In the case of judgment of taste, we take the object to possess ‘purposiveness without purpose.’<sup>33</sup> Such a judgment involves the purposiveness of the object for our judgment, which Kant also calls ‘the mere form of purposiveness.’<sup>34</sup> This subjectively purposive presentation simply furthers the harmony of the faculties or the aims of cognition in general, without realizing any further specific purpose.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p.220

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p.180

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p.220

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p.221

Kant links the harmony of the faculties and purposiveness without a purpose, to pleasure by explaining how a purposive harmony gives to a pleasurable mental state. Any pleasurable mental state, according to Kant, is one of 'consciousness of presentation's causality directed at the subject's state so as to keep him in that state.'<sup>35</sup> In the case of the pleasure experienced in judging objects to be good or agreeable, an interest in the object- a subjective or objective purpose- 'determines the judgment about the object of the pleasure.'<sup>36</sup> In contrast, no interest (and therefore no purpose) determines the judgment in the case of a judgment of taste. The Liking involved in a judgment of taste has an 'inner causality (which is purposive) concerning cognition in general,'<sup>37</sup> and this causality is the capacity 'to keep [us in] the state of [having] the presentation itself, and [keep] the cognitive powers engaged in [in their occupation] without any further aim.'<sup>38</sup> In becoming aware of the 'quickening' of our cognitive presentation of an object, then, we are aware that those faculties are engaged in the activities proper to judgments with no further aim than that of judgment itself. The harmony of the faculties is a mental state which reproduces itself because it expresses the purposiveness of our faculty for each other in judgment and for cognition in general.

The last of the four moments of the *Analytic of the Beautiful* addresses the necessity of the connection of the representation to pleasure in aesthetic judgments. Again Kant wishes to distinguish the necessity involved in determinant judgments, and he describes the necessity as being 'of a special kind.'<sup>39</sup>

It is not a theoretical objective necessity, allowing us to recognize a priori that everyone will feel this liking for the object I can call beautiful. Nor is it a practical objective necessity where,

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p.220

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p.221

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p.222

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p.222.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p.236

through concepts of a pure rational will that serves freely acting as a rule, this liking is the necessary consequence of an objective law.<sup>40</sup>

The alternative to these types of objective necessity is a subjective necessity which Kant calls 'exemplary,' that is, 'a necessity of the assent of everyone to a judgment that is regarded as an example of a universal rule that we are unable to state.' The assent, then, is to the judgment itself, an assent to the universality of the judgment rather than to any claim about the object. Because in an aesthetic judgment no determinant concept compels others to judge as we do, however, the claim that others ought to judge on object beautiful is 'uttered conditionally.'<sup>41</sup>

Kant claims that 'we solicit everyone else's assent because we have a basis for it that is common to all.'<sup>42</sup> The basis 'common to all' is the idea of a common sense, or *sensus communis*, a sense which we must presuppose in order to make judgments of taste. He describes this sense as 'the effect arising from the free play of our cognitive powers,'<sup>43</sup> which suggests that the *sensus communis* is just the felt awareness of the harmony of the faculties. He tentatively justifies the presupposition of the *sensus communis* on the ground that it is necessary for the communicability of cognition,<sup>44</sup> claiming that the universal communicability of cognition 'must be presupposed in any logic and any principle of cognitions that is not skeptical.'<sup>45</sup>

The status of the *sensus communis*, however, remains unclear. In the final section of the fourth moment, Kant states that we cannot decide whether it is 'a constitutive principle of the possibility of experience, or... a regulative principle for us, [in order] to bring forth in us, for higher purposes, a common sense in the first place.'<sup>46</sup> His consciousness suggests that the *Analytic of the Beautiful* does not provide a full

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p.236-237

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p.237

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p.237

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p.238

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p.238

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p.239

characterization of aesthetic judgment. One of the elements missing from the account involves the connection between productive imagination and reason. But, all of these interpretations about the judgment of taste are sufficient to understand the quality of judgment, which spectator's perspective teaches us, including the ethics of the present. The Analytic of Beautiful is related to the many proofs that show the reasons why and how the spectator's judgment signifies universal value without abolishing the autonomy of a particular judgment. Hence, the present is crystallized through the spectator's judgment.

In sum, in his essays 'What is Enlightenment?' and 'The Contest of Faculties,' Kant problematizes the political maxims of the understanding of progress. The question 'is the human race continually progress?' aims to invalidate the proofs of empirical observation as a faculty of reason in order to suggest spectator's judgment as the only measure capable of proving the idea of progress. According to Kant, just as the actor is the subject of empiric observation, he or she, at the same time, is its object. If the self-realization of the subject consists of the empiric quality of thinking, all activities of the subject seem as a moment of progress, because the only source and base of testable data are the movements of the actor. Empirical method of thinking, in Kant's theory, does not provide any proof of progress. Not only it is an attempt to understand nature and events through observations and causalities but it also contradicts the laws of reason. The central place of the subject in history as both subject and object of empirical thought is a chain that ties events to each other. A particular kind of judgment included in the actor causes a conflict among the faculties of reason, because the actor works to regard his judgment as superior to all other particular judgments.

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p.240

According to Kantian aesthetic, harmony between the life of the mind, that includes the knowledge of how the judgment of particular things supply us with a formula about the general tendency, and the political life, that requires an agreement between particular interests and general interests, can be constructed by establishing a harmony in each of them. This is the most important claim of Kantian thought. French Revolution and Enlightenment thought express a crucial stage in the realization of this claim.

To make possible and universal the ideals of revolution requires crystallization in the aimless and spontaneous gaze of spectator. The spectator's gaze undertakes the role of a negative signifier consulted in the criticism of a particular moment in history. Spectator is another name of reading and writing public so that he/she is a symbol of critical thought. Spectator thinks on the age he/she belongs to. Enlightenment as a critical attitude that names itself is constructed by the judgment of spectator. Hence, Enlightenment creates a particular break in chronology and it presents the model for all other breaks. It is an inclination to make new beginnings and choices in history. It is the way of liberating history. This provides an idea about the political implications of critical attitude towards the present.

### **c. Towards the Ethics of the Present: Foucault on Kant**

In a well-known essays 'What is Enlightenment?' and 'The Art of the Telling the Truth' Foucault reflects on Kant's articles and he reaches some surprising results.

Enlightenment is presented by Foucault as the link between a kind of philosophical reflection and the focus on the modernity. The new dimension of philosophy inaugurated by Enlightenment is based on the problematization of a

present, and 'the questioning of the philosopher of this present to which he belongs and in relation to which he has situate himself.'<sup>47</sup> This is 'the discourse of modernity on modernity.' In addition to this, Foucault emphasizes the Enlightenment as the first age which named itself the Enlightenment (*Aufklärung*). By naming of itself, Enlightenment is aware of the cultural and political processes that compose it.

Stressing the connection between Kant's essay on Enlightenment and three critiques, Foucault remarks that 'the critique is necessary, since its role is that of defining the conditions under which the use of reason is legitimate in order to determine what can be known, what must be done, what may be hoped.'<sup>48</sup> It is the reason that 'the critique is a handbook of reason that has grown up in Enlightenment; and, conversely, the Enlightenment is the age of the critique'<sup>49</sup>

In this respect, Foucault points out that Kant's essay on Enlightenment provides the outlines of the attitude of modernity. This means that modernity should be seen as an attitude rather than as a period in history- 'a mode of relating to contemporary reality; a voluntary choice made by certain people; in the end, a way of thinking and feeling.'<sup>50</sup> Such an attitude is a way of 'acting and behaving that at one and the same time marks a relation of belonging and presents itself as a task.'<sup>51</sup> Such an attitude or ethos called by the Greeks, adopted by Baudelaire in his essay 'The Painter of Modern Life.' Baudelaire was one of the first to recognize that modernity meant an awareness of the discontinuity of time, of a break with tradition. The attitude of modernity is called by Foucault as 'the will to heroize the present.'<sup>52</sup> This heroization of the present, Foucault pointedly remarks, is ironical. It does not threat the passing

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p.141

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p.38

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p.38

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p.38

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p.39

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p.40

moment as sacred in order to preserve to it, not it involve collecting as a fleeting and interesting curiosity. Rather, the ironic heroization of the present is an act of transfiguration. Transfiguration 'does not entail an annulling of reality, but difficulty interplay between the truth of what is real and the exercise of freedom.'<sup>53</sup> It is this sense of transfigurative interplay of freedom and reality that Foucault characterizes the attitude of modernity, its heroic ironic heroization of present. Emphasizing Baudelairean notion of modernity Foucault claims that modernity is not simply a form of relationship to the present; it is also 'a mode of relationship that has to be established with oneself.'<sup>54</sup> 'To be modern' he writes, 'is not to accept oneself as one is in the flux of the passing movements; it is to take oneself as object of a complex and difficult elaboration: what Baudelaire, in the vocabulary of his day, calls dandysme.'<sup>55</sup> The deliberate attitude of modernity is tied to an 'indispensable asceticism.' The dandy 'makes of his body, his behaviors, his feelings, and his passions, his very existence, a work of art.'<sup>56</sup> Modern man does not seek 'to discover himself, his secrets and his hidden truth; he is the man who tries to invent himself.' Foucault's attitude to the present is thus closely tied to his attitude to the self: just as the former must take the form of a possible transgression, so the latter must take the form of an original production and invention of the self and self-fashioning.

The philosophical ethos, highlighted by Foucault considering Kant's notion of Enlightenment based on the consciousness of the present, can be described as 'permanent critique of our historical era,' or 'permanent reactivation of attitude of modernity.' Such a philosophical ethos 'may be characterized as a limit-attitude...Criticism indeed consists of analyzing and reflection upon limits. But if the

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p.41

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p.41

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p.41

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p.41

Kantian question was that of knowing what limits knowledge had to renounce transgressing, it seems to me that the critical question today has to be turned back into a positive one: in what is given to us as universal, necessary, obligatory, what place is occupied by whatever is singular, contingent, and the product of arbitrary constraints?'<sup>57</sup> And, the main emphasis on Enlightenment of Foucault, he asserts that the point is 'to transform the critique conducted in the form of necessary limitation into a practical critique that takes the form of a possible transgression.'<sup>58</sup>

In the context of Foucault's reflections on Kant and the Enlightenment, criticism is the most central concept to the Enlightenment. Criticism is defined by Foucault as a historical investigation into the events that have led us to constitute ourselves and to recognize ourselves as subjects of what we are doing, thinking, saying.<sup>59</sup> Such criticism is genealogical in its design and archeological in its method. Archeological, 'in the sense that it will not seek to identify the universal structures of all knowledge or of all possible moral action, but will seek to threat the instances of discourse that articulate what we think, and do as so many historical events.'<sup>60</sup> Genealogical, 'in the sense that it will do not deduce from the form of what we are what it is possible for us to do and to know; but it will separate out, from the contingency that has made us what we are, the possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do, or think.'<sup>61</sup> In this respect criticism 'is seeking to give new impetus, as far and wide as possible, to the undefined work of freedom.'<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p.42

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p.45

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p.45-6

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p.46

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p.46

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p.46



### 3. Conclusion

In this chapter, we tried to conceptualize a particular definition of experience and judgment. Following Kant's essays about the Enlightenment and French Revolution, we worked to connect the relations between experience and judgment. In this respect, our main concern is to emphasize the quality of experience as a proof of political progress considering both the Enlightenment as the critical attitude towards the present and revolution as the particular and historical judgement. Kant, in his article on revolution, signifies the spectator of an historical event as an only source of judgment for defining the experience in itself. The qualification of spectator's judgment is constructed in Kant's third critique, *Critique of Judgment*. We can find the possible answers of some difficult questions about the quality of political judgment included in spectator. For example, how can we reach the right and valid transformation of political demands into new meaning without abolishing the autonomy of them? In other words, how can we avoid subsuming the particular under a rule or a concept? How can we understand particularities without introducing total and universalistic definitions? Political implication of this debate is that especially to re-conceptualize democracy on the multi-culturalist perspective in the modern world requires problematizing the idea of experience influenced by determinism and this necessitates ignoring optimism of Fukuyama on the liberal democratic definition of experience. In this regard, Kantian reformulation of Enlightenment is related to the freedom of man's capacity to fulfill his experience in a particularistic perspective. It is conceptualized in Kant as *maturation*.

On the other hand, Kant may be heroic in facing the impossibility of grounding human experience in metaphysical reality, but he sought to reground it in

epistemology.<sup>63</sup> Although Kant saw that a philosopher must respond to his historical situation, 'he sought to reground experience a way to reconcile human dignity with the current social arrangements rather than face their dangers.'<sup>64</sup> Kant's heroic break with natural law and the cosmic order shifted the debate to the search for the structure of human finitude which would provide universal norms for human action. Moreover, Terry Eagleton criticizes Kantian understanding of experience based on the analytic of aesthetic judgment. According to Eagleton, Kantian experience is constructed only in the aesthetic field, for this reason, it gives us the paradigm of the ideological. For Eagleton, this signifies the ideological quality of bourgeois and liberal understanding of experience through the conceptualization of subject and freedom in their theoretical framework. By considering liberal outlook about the notion of subject Eagleton argues 'that the individual subject should come to occupy centre stage, reinterpreting the world with reference to itself, follows logically enough from bourgeois economic and political practice.'<sup>65</sup> But subjectivization of the world causes to 'undermine the very conditions of its own preeminence.' The bourgeois or liberal subject would seem in this sense 'a tragically self-defeating creature. One whose very self-affirmation turns inexorably back upon itself to eat away at its own enabling conditions,'<sup>66</sup> because 'a certain objectivity is the very condition of subjecthood.'<sup>67</sup> An important solution to this problem comes from the Kantian understanding of subject and object relations. For Eagleton, Kant 'will strive to repair the subjectivist damage...by restoring the objective order of things, but

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<sup>63</sup> Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, 'What is Maturity? Habermas and Foucault on 'What is Enlightenment?' in *Foucault: A Critical Reader*, edit. By David Couzens Hoy, Oxford, UK; New York, NY, USA : B. Blackwell, 1986, p.111

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p.118

<sup>65</sup> Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of Aesthetic*, Oxford UK: Blackwell, 2001, p.70

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p.70

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p.71

restoring it...from within the standpoint of the subject itself.'<sup>68</sup> Kant tries to make this transformation in *Critique of Judgment*. For Kant, when we find ourselves concurring spontaneously in aesthetic judgments, able to agree that a certain phenomenon is sublime or beautiful, 'we exercise a precious form of intersubjectivity, establishing ourselves as a community of feeling subjects linked by a quick sense of our shared capacities.'<sup>69</sup> Eagleton points out that 'to be free and rational or to be a subject means to be entirely self-determining, obeying only such laws as I propose to myself, and treating myself and my action as an end rather than a means. Free subjectivity is ... noumenal affair, quite absent from the phenomenal world. Freedom cannot be directly captured in a concept or image, and must be known practically rather than theoretically.'<sup>70</sup> Hence, Eagleton summarizes Kantian understandings of freedom and subject arguing that he/she 'is everywhere free and everywhere in chains.'<sup>71</sup> Eagleton's very provocative position on Kant signifies that 'freedom is so deeply the essence of everything that is nowhere to be empirically found. It is not so much a *praxis* in the world as a transcendental viewpoint upon it, a way of describing one's condition which at once makes all the difference and seems to leave everything exactly as it was.'<sup>72</sup> For Eagleton, the aesthetic judgment is the very paradigm of the ideological.

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p.72

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p.75

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p.79

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p.79

## C. ARENDT: POLITICS OF THE PRESENT

It could be argued that Arendtian reformulation of Kantian aesthetic provides a theory which includes empirically constructed of politics, that a theory of action demands. Arendt's concept of action in this sense is not reducible to aesthetic elements like 'communicability' and 'intersubjectivity' in Kant's theory. In Arendt's theory of action, judgment is an ability to determine our choice in political situations. *Between Past and Future* can be seen as an introduction to Arendt's political philosophy, especially to make a distinction between Arendt and Kant. A reflection on the relation of philosophy to politics, thinking to action, being- with-oneself to being-with-others provides some clues for such a distinction. But, as remarked by some commentators, Arendt's theory shifts away from a view of action itself as something lost since the Greeks, toward seeing it as an ever-present possibility.<sup>73</sup> To her concern for the relation of thinking and action, this chapter first of all considers the conception of critical thinking from personal experience that is implicit in Arendt's remarks on storytelling. Arendt's storytelling proposes an alternative to the model of historical understanding of progressive time concept and also it is critical to making sense of appropriation of Kant's *Critique of Judgment*.

### 1. Beyond Kant: 'Aestheticization of Political Action'

In her essay 'What is Freedom?' Arendt questions the western philosophical tradition's tendency to make freedom an attribute of the will and thought rather than

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p.82

<sup>73</sup> Margaret Canovan, 'The Contradictions of Hannah Arendt's Political Thought' in *Political Theory*, Vol. 6, No. 1. (Feb., 1978), pp. 5-26.

of action.<sup>74</sup> She rejects our almost automatic tendency to equate freedom with free will. This equation degrades the freedom of the public sphere and erects a nonpolitical standard over the realm of human affairs.<sup>75</sup> Kant, his affirmation of 'spontaneous' freedom notwithstanding, clearly falls within the traditional paradigm: he displays the same bias against plurality, the same contempt for the realm of human affairs, as his political brethren.<sup>76</sup> Kant's practical philosophy is centered on the reduction of freedom to will. This fact, according to Dana Villa, 'is combined with his conception of will as a rational faculty whose freedom is the spontaneity of reason, renders his practical philosophy irrelevant of thinking about action and politics.'<sup>77</sup>

By discussing the questions with which Kant framed his practical philosophy, Arendt draws out his essential individualist and non political orientation:

Kant repeatedly formulated what he held to be the three central questions that make men philosophize and to which his own philosophy tried to give an answer, and none of these questions concerns man as a *zoön politicon*, a political being. Of these questions- What can I know? What ought I to do? What may I hope? - two deal with the traditional topics of metaphysics, God and immortality. It would a serious error to believe that the second question- What ought I to do? - and its correlate, the idea of freedom, could in any way be relied on to help us in our inquiry... The second question does not deal with action at all, and Kant nowhere takes action into account. He spelled out man's basic sociability and enumerated as elements of it communicability, the need of men to communicate, and publicity, the public freedom not just to think but to publish... but he does not know either a faculty or a need for action. Thus, in Kant the question what I ought to do? concerns the conduct of the self in its independence from others- the same self that wants to know what is knowable for human beings...the same self that wants to know what it may reasonably hope for in matters of immortality.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Hannah Arendt, 'What is Freedom?' in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought*, New York: Viking Press, 1968, pp.143-173

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p.180

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p.181

<sup>77</sup> Dana R. Villa, *Arendt and Heidegger: The Fate of the Political*, Princeton, N.J. : Princeton University Press, 1996, p.96; and also see, Dana R. Villa, 'Beyond Good and Evil: Arendt, Nietzsche, and the Aestheticization of Political Action' in *Political Theory*, Vol. 20, No. 2. (May, 1992), pp. 274-308.

<sup>78</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Lectures*, p.19

Arendt sees Kant's philosophy as circumscribed by concerns that are narrowly individualist; that center on a self detached from others and the realm of human affairs. The action and freedom of this self are different from the action and freedom of the political actor who moves in the realm of plurality and appearance. It is significant, in this regard that Arendt sees Kant's political writings like 'Perpetual Peace' and 'What is Enlightenment?' as the conditions for action, not action itself. Kant's political writings are the pre-political. Kantian reduction of action and freedom to will leads to 'a curious evaluation of meaning from the realm of human affairs.' The realm of human affairs is governed not by reason, or even instinct, but by the clash of interest and inclination arising from the empirical wills. Thus Kant, in his 'the Idea for a Universal History with Cosmopolitan Intent', underlines Nature employing in order to fully cultivate human capacities- a *civilizing* process that propels the species mankind toward greater peace and freedom.<sup>79</sup> Without the assumption of such a 'ruse of nature' at work behind men's back, the realm of human affairs is characterized by a 'melancholy haphazardness' and appears, in Kant's view senseless. As Kant's reply to Moses Mendelssohn makes clear, the particular actions of individuals are incapable of redeeming a 'spectacle' in which the human race does not constantly progress.

From Arendt's perspective, the redemptive strategy adopted by Kant has important but largely negative implications for modern political thought. 'Kant escapes what he considers to be the self-evident meaninglessness of the particular by ascending to the level of *whole*.'<sup>80</sup> Conflicting empirical wills and actions reveal an unsuspected meaning to the spectator who is able to frame human history as a

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<sup>79</sup> Dana R. Villa, op.cit. p.66

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p.66

process of species maturation.<sup>81</sup> According to Villa this supremacy of the spectator over the actor in Kant is ambiguous. 'On the one hand, it links up with themes from his aesthetic theory, and has important consequences for the activity of judgment. On the other hand, it sets the stage for a return to teleological explanation and for the subsumption of politics by History.'<sup>82</sup> Hence, Kant's positing of a transsubjective actor (the species mankind) as the subject of history creates 'the pattern that the Hegelian and Marxian philosophies of history will emulate. Moreover, by positing peace and freedom as the telos that gives the whole of the historical process meaning. Kant opens the possibility of construing history as a kind of fabrication process, whose *product* is meaning itself.'<sup>83</sup> Arendt's central theoretical objections to Kant and also Hegel and Marx, is that their assumption of a 'movement of history' eliminates the possibility of a 'radically new beginning.' The notion of progress that underlies their theories is substantialist: it homogenizes time and ensures that in Hegel's words 'nothing else will come out but what was already there.'

Following Karl Jaspers, Arendt understands 'the unity of mankind' as a 'present reality,' the present result of the 'one world' which modern technology ushered in. In her essay, 'Karl Jaspers: Citizen of the World?' Arendt puts the maxims for judging and action: 'nothing, according to the implications of Jaspers' philosophy, should happen today in politics which would be contrary to the actually existing solidarity of mankind.'<sup>84</sup> What she does in her lectures and in 'judging' was to consider how we experience the solidarity of mankind –in and through judging's activity. Our empirical interest in communicating our judgments is the sign of a present human compact.

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p.66

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p.66

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p.66

A philosophy of mankind is distinguished from a philosophy of man by its insistence on the fact that not man, talking to himself in the dialogue of solitude, but men talking and communicating with each other, inhabit the earth.<sup>85</sup>

To see how such a link between political action and mankind's solidarity comes about in practice, we should look at her thoughts about thinking and judging relations.

### a. Thinking and Judgment

Confronted with the cyclical time theories, Arendt asks: 'who shall be the judge, History or Man?' and answers: Man. It is not difficult to say that Arendt seeks an image of *how to restart time within an inexorable time continuum*. In a cyclical time conception, each free action turns immediately into a cause in the process; explanations are sought which link the action to what preceded it, and thus deny its freedom. Drawing upon Augustine's notion that man and time were created together, Arendt suggests that man was created 'to make possible a beginning.' She speaks of 'the novel creature who as something entirely new appears in the midst of the time continuum of the world.'<sup>86</sup> The creation of the world and of man is an absolute beginning as Augustine imagines it, but each individual's birth is a beginning in the sense that it interrupts a causal chain and begins a new series of events. Man is that creature, unlike all other creatures, who lives in time and is able to reach into the past and into the future, to bind together his beginning and his end. Man's capacity to know his own beginning and to know that he will as an individual come to an end is

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<sup>84</sup> Hannah Arendt, 'Karl Jaspers: Citizen of the World?' in *Men in Dark Times*, New York : Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968, 1983, p.85-90

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p.90-91

<sup>86</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Life of The Mind*, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981, p.217; see also for Arendt's views on judgment, Maurizio Passerin D'entrèves, 'Arendt's Theory of Judgment' in *The Cambridge Companion to Hannah Arendt*, edit. By Dona Villa, Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1996, pp. 245-258



his thinking. Thinking, she tells us, is 'another mode of moving in the world of freedom.' When human beings are deprived of public space in dark times 'they retreat into the freedom of their thought.'<sup>87</sup> Such independent thinking is 'a new kind of thinking that needs no pillars and props, no standards and traditions to move freely without crutches over unfamiliar terrain.'<sup>88</sup> Such a freedom of movement is also the indispensable conditions for action, and it is in action that men primarily experience freedom in the world.<sup>89</sup> Thinking, for Arendt, is the dialectical. It is the 'soundless dialogue between me and myself.' The actualization of our internal plurality has the effect of liberating us not only from conventional 'truths' but from the conventional rules of the conduct.

Arendt argues that the 'thinking ego' is not the self others perceive in the world, not the commonsense reasoning of everyday life, not science's reasoning. Thinking does not appear in the world or concerns itself with appearances. For Arendt, thinking presents the other two autonomous and not hierarchically related faculties - willing and judging, with 'desensed' thought objects, invisibles, afterthoughts; it presents the will with images of the future and it presents judgments with the image of the past.<sup>90</sup> In comparison to the other two faculties, judging remains close to the particulars. And the judging person stays in the company of others, a spectator among spectators. Willing 'takes a position' near but radically free from objects. 'The radicalism of its freedom is that it affirms or denies the very existence of the objects.'<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Men in Dark Times*, New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968, p.9

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p.9

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p.8

<sup>90</sup> Elizabeth Young-Bruehl, 'Reflections on Hannah Arendt's the Life of the Mind' in *Political Theory*, Vol. 10, No. 2. (May, 1982), p.281

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. 281

Thinking itself withdraws most completely from the world. Thinking is linked to the world by language, and particularly by metaphor. Arendt seeks a metaphor, 'presupposing a link to the world, to present thinking its withdrawn condition, for example, present thinking as a process coming to end in a passive, contemplative beholding or intuition rather than as a resultless activity.'<sup>92</sup> Arendt places where the anonymous, natureless, *he* of Kafka's parable between clashing waves of the past and future and comments that this 'seems to me the perfect metaphor for the activity of thought.' Kafka's parable is as follows:

He has two antagonists: the first presses him from behind, from the origin. The second blocks the road ahead. He gives battle to both. To be sure, the first supports him in his fight with the second, for he wants to push him forward, and in the same way the second supports him in his fight with the first, since he derives him back. But it is only theoretically so. For it is not only the two antagonists who are there, but he himself as well, and who really knows his intentions? His dream, though, is that some time in an unguarded moment-and this would require a night darkened than any might be has ever been yet- he will jump of his experience in fighting, to the position of umpire over his antagonists in their fight with each other.<sup>93</sup>

Commenting on a parable of Kafka and an aphorism of René Char, '*Notre heritage n'est précédé d'aucun testament*,' Arendt links thinking together with remembrance and storytelling.<sup>94</sup> Remembrance, as argued by Bernstein, is one of the most important components of thought and it 'requires storytelling in order to preserve those 'small hidden islands of freedom.'<sup>95</sup> In Kafka's parable, thinking or *he* takes place in the gap between past and future and he is not to be identical with 'such mental processes as deducing, inducing, and drawing conclusions whose logical rules of non-contradiction and inner consistency can be learned once and for all and then

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p.281

<sup>93</sup> Hannah Arendt, 'Between Past and Future' in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought*, New York: Viking Press, 1968, p.7

<sup>94</sup> Richard J. Bernstein, 'Arendt on Thinking' in *The Cambridge Companion to Hannah Arendt*, edit. By Dana R. Villa, Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1996, p.279

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p.279

need only to be applied.<sup>96</sup> According to Bernstein, Arendt has highlighted a debate between traditionally thinking and new thinking. Although traditionally thinking is aware of the mental processes, 'these are irrelevant to thinking.'<sup>97</sup> On the other hand, 'we miss what Arendt takes to be distinctive about the new thinking that is now demanded if we simply identify it with the mental processes of ratiocination.'<sup>98</sup> Arendt's description of thinking is 'a creative activity which requires remembrance, storytelling and imagination.'<sup>99</sup> In the revised version of Kafka's parable, according to Young-Bruehl, Arendt makes a final statement and she challenges to reconsider thinking's relation to the self, for she says that 'the thinking ego moves between past and future which have nothing to do with historical biographical time, the self's domains.'<sup>100</sup> Arendt's metaphor of past and future flowing toward each other is a time construct totally different from the time sequence of ordinary life.

It is the because the thinking ego is ageless that past and future can be become manifest to it as such, emptied, as it were, of their concrete content and liberated from all spatial categories. What the thinking ego senses in 'in his dual antagonists are time and the constant change it implies, the relentless motion that transforms all being into becoming instead of letting it be, and thus incessantly destroys its being presents.'<sup>101</sup>

Mental activities cannot be described except in metaphors which draw upon everyday life and worldly appearance. But in this metaphor between past and future, which presents thinking not as a response to Being but as a response to Time, we have Time emptied of concrete content and liberated from spatial time sequences of everyday life. The metaphor has escaped the world of perceptible phenomena; and Arendt uses this for the explanation of the argument that the metaphor is *valid only within realm of mental phenomena*. This is the realm of invisibles, of things only

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<sup>96</sup> Hannah Arendt, 'Between Past and Future', p.14

<sup>97</sup> Richard Bernstein, op.cit., p.279

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., p.279

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p.279

<sup>100</sup> Elizabeth Young-Bruehl, op.cit., p.284

metaphorically phenomenal. For this reason, 'thought itself arises out of incidents of living experience and must remain bound to them as the only guidespots by which to take its bearings.'<sup>102</sup> Although thinking is related to invisibles and it requires a withdrawal from everyday life, 'one of the greatest dangers of thinking is the illusion that human beings can escape from the everyday world of appearances.'<sup>103</sup> This is a temptation that has long been inherent in the philosophical tradition. According to Arendt while philosophers originated from Plato's views aims to impose the 'absolute standards' of philosophy upon politics, philosophers who follow Socrates' views do not want to rule the polis. Socrates seeks to provoke his fellow citizens into becoming thinking persons and this thinking manifests itself in speech. Thinking for Socrates requires a dialogue with oneself. But even in this internal dialogue in which I am a two-in-one, 'I am not altogether separated from that plurality which is the world of men.' In Socrates' formula, the two-in-one of thinking is the activation of a 'me and you (plural).' Thinking is essential for testing one's *doxai* and making them more truthful. However, the mental faculty we have which extends to the political sphere is not thinking but judging and this is why acting and judging can have the same principle.<sup>104</sup>

In Arendt's terms, thought in the service of political action comes to be identified as judgment. In her lecture on 'Thinking and Moral Considerations,' she appears to distinguish two: thinking deals with 'invisibles'; judging, with particular things that are 'close at hand.'<sup>105</sup> But she also insists that they are profoundly 'interrelated,' that judging is 'the by-product of the liberating effect of thinking' and that it 'realizes

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<sup>101</sup> Hannah Arendt, 'The Concept of History' in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought*, New York : Viking Press, 1968, p.206

<sup>102</sup> Hannah Arendt, 'Between Past and Future,' p.14

<sup>103</sup> Richard J. Bernstein, op.cit., 289

<sup>104</sup> Elizabeth Young-Bruehl, op.cit., p.299

thinking [and] makes it manifest in the world of appearances.’<sup>106</sup> As pointed out by Peter J. Steinberger, ‘judging is in fact a particular species of thinking, the form that thinking takes in the political world.’<sup>107</sup> Judgment like thought is not oriented to the discovery of truth. Indeed, to judge is not to assert a truth claim at all but, rather, to make a meaningful assertion that asks only for the assertion of others. Just as the aim of thought in general is to create structures of meaning, so the aim of judgment is to establish for any society a common conceptual apparatus on the basis of which social actors can come to share the kinds of understandings and discriminations that allow for intelligent collective action. This means that the aim of judgment is not the universal certainty or rational truth but only ‘a general communicability’ and agreement. For Arendt, ‘the power of judgment rests on potential agreement with others, and the thinking process which is active in judging something is not, like the thought process of pure reasoning, a dialogue between me and myself, but finds itself always and primarily, even if I am quite alone in making up my mind in an anticipated communication with others with whom I know I must finally come to some agreement.’<sup>108</sup> Logical or factual truths can, in principle, be discovered by the single individual in isolation; logical reasoning and cognition, as underlined by Steinberger, do not presuppose a political world.<sup>109</sup> But agreement does. This implies that validity of judgment is quite different from that logic or cognition. Logical and cognitive validity means truth, and that in turn involves notions of proof and

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<sup>105</sup> Hannah Arendt, ‘Thinking and Moral Considerations’ in *Social Research*, Vol. 51, No. 1. (Spring, 1984)

<sup>106</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, p.446

<sup>107</sup> Peter J. Steinberger, ‘Hannah Arendt on Judgment’ in *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 34, No. 3. (Aug., 1990), p.812

<sup>108</sup> Hannah Arendt, ‘The Crisis in Culture: Its Social and Political Significance’ in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought*, New York: Viking Press, 1968, p.220

<sup>109</sup> Peter J. Steinberger, *op.cit.*, p.813

universality. 'To have established truth is to have provided an ironclad demonstration of it such that it can be thought of as always and undeniably true.'<sup>110</sup>

But, as we have seen, judgment is not primarily concerned with truth at all. The validity of judgment thus involves not proof or demonstration but rather, the possible and actual assent of others. Being able to choose our company by communicating our choices and wooing the consent of others is, for Arendt, a manifestation of *humanitas*.

This realm, in which Jaspers is at home and to which he was opened the ways for us, does not lie in the beyond and is not utopian: it is not of yesterday nor of tomorrow; it is of the present and of this world. Reason has created it and freedom reigns in it, it is not something to locate and organize; it reaches into all the countries of the globe and their pasts. And although it is worldly, it is invisible. It is the realm of *humanitas*, which everyone can come to out of his own origins.<sup>111</sup>

According to Arendt, my judgment is valid if I can persuade others to subscribe to it. This means that the validity of judgment is necessarily specific and particular, rather than universal. As a result of this, two aspects can be discriminated. First, judgment is always of a thing –an object, person, or event- and 'implies nothing about any other single thing. Since we are outside the realm of proof demonstration, to judge something is neither to employ a universal theory or principle nor to provide a basis for such a theory or principle; it is merely to make a particular claim about a particular object.'<sup>112</sup> We need a particular which contains in itself a generality, what Arendt called 'representative figures,' or what Kant called examples, of humanity in men. Thinking's gift to judgment is these absent-made-present exemplary figures, which meaningfully for us, 'that which otherwise could not be defined.' The opposite of 'binding authority and universal validity' is guidance and exemplary validity. The

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., p.813

<sup>111</sup> Hannah Arendt, 'Karl Jaspers: A Laudatio' in *Men in Dark Times*, New York : Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968, p.80

<sup>112</sup> Peter J. Steinberger, op.cit., p.813

‘presence’ of humanity in the Judger, what Kant called ‘esteem for self, for humanity in us,’ is the precondition of our ability to choose our examples.

Second, as a persuasive rather than demonstrative endeavor, judgment operates exclusively and explicitly in the light of the particular views and dispositions of those who would be persuaded. Arendt concludes from this that judgment inherently requires ‘common sense’- a set of shared intuitions, assumptions, concepts, and understandings on the basis of which persuasion might be possible. In Arendt’s notion, ‘the commonness of common sense is generally limited by particular social and historical contexts.’<sup>113</sup> To judge something well is simple to know it in the light of a particular context. This is the only kind of knowledge that we have, but it is thereby insubstantial. ‘It is a knowledge in our common sense, and this does indeed provide us with a kind of truth or wisdom eminently suitable for achieving in the public realm.’<sup>114</sup>

## **2. ‘More Truth Than Fact’: Storytelling as Critical Understanding**

It is possible to say that historical understanding of politics, which determines the quality of Arendt’s political judgment, is highlighted in the *Origins of Totalitarianism*. According to Arendt totalitarianism ‘cannot be comprehended through the usual categories of political thought’ or ‘judged by traditional moral standards or punished within the legal framework of our civilization.’<sup>115</sup> Arendt points out that totalitarianism was not just a moral crisis but an unprecedented problem of understanding. That problem of understanding is to find a way to make a

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., p.814

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., p.814

<sup>115</sup> Hannah Arendt, ‘Thinking and Moral Considerations’, op.cit., p.26

spontaneous but principled response to the phenomenon of total domination.<sup>116</sup> In the absence of the traditional categories and standards that ordinarily serve as 'guidespots' to critical thought, she argues that such a response must take its bearings from the 'personal experience' of the thinker.<sup>117</sup> Storytelling is the term she uses to describe critical understanding from experience.

As Richard Bernstein has argued, what makes Hannah Arendt distinctive is that she is neither a subjectivist nor a foundationalist but rather, attempts to move 'beyond objectivism and relativism.'<sup>118</sup> In addition, Arendt's storytelling follows from her account of the conditions of politics, 'plurality' in particular. Plurality names the condition of human multiplicity, interconnectedness, and perspectival differentiation that is, according to Arendt, *the sine qua non* of political life. Because of the interconnectedness, storytelling must take the place of abstract analysis; for Arendt, no political thinker can claim to step outside the 'the web of human relationships'<sup>119</sup> that constitutes the public realm without violating the 'phenomenal nature as well as the political status of political phenomena.' As Luban and Vollrath has suggested totalitarianism might have provoked Arendt's turn to storytelling, 'but situated criticism is not unique to the study of that phenomenon; rather, totalitarianism accentuates the features of politics that require the political theorist to be a storyteller.'<sup>120</sup>

According to Disch, in general, storytelling signals her resistance against the dictate that the political thinker must withdraw to a vantage point beyond the social world in order to understand its relations of power and adjudicate its conflict of

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<sup>116</sup> Lisa J. Disch, 'More Truth Than Fact: Storytelling as Critical Understanding in the Writings of Hannah Arendt' in *Political Theory*, Vol. 21, No. 4. (Nov., 1993), p.666

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., p.666

<sup>118</sup> Richard J. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983

<sup>119</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Lectures*, *op.cit*



interest.<sup>121</sup> Arendt argues that the western political tradition was constrained by Plato's theory of forms; it opened an 'abyss between philosophy and politics' that left that tradition without the conceptual and ethical resources to understand totalitarianism and resist it. Storytelling is the way to bridge this abyss and to dispel the pretense of the Archimedean vantage point. Storytelling both situates our theories in the experiences from which they came and engages an audience in a different kind of critical thinking than an argument does. A story invites the kind of situated critical thinking that is necessary when we are called upon, in Arendt's words, to think 'without banisters.' Arendt does not approach the past in order to illuminate the coming to be of the ontological features of our shared moral existence but seeks to tell stories about fragments of the past that enhance our ability to 'think without a banister.'<sup>122</sup> Banisters provide people with safe guiding lines, a set of values that supply a durable context for thought. Given the loss of these banisters, 'one has to go to start thinking as though nobody had thought before.'<sup>123</sup> This means developing a capacity for 'entirely free thinking, which employs neither history nor coercive logic as crutches.' Arendt develops her model of the theorist as storyteller in contrast to the modern forms of history in which particular events derive their individual meanings from a larger narrative. To Arendt, the concept of history has been transformed from 'a task to save human deeds from oblivion,' into a man-made process that has rendered human existence meaningless.<sup>124</sup> Despite their differences, Greek and Roman historiography 'both took it for granted that the meaning or, as the Romans would say, the lesson of each event, deed, or occurrence is revealed in and by

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<sup>120</sup> Quoted by Disch, op.cit., p.667

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., p.668

<sup>122</sup> Mark Redhead, 'Making the Past Useful for a Pluralistic Present: Taylor, Arendt, and a Problem for Historical Reasoning' in *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 46, No. 4. (Oct., 2002), p.811

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., p.811

itself...causality and context were seen in a light provided by the event itself...they were not envisaged as having an independent existence...everything that was done or happened contained and disclosed its share of *general meaning* within the confines of its individual shape and did not need a developing and enfolding process to become significant.'<sup>125</sup> However, on Arendt's account, modern historians from Hegel and Marx to Taylor with his map of modernity create models in which larger historical narratives enslave all tangible things, or, in the case of Taylor, cultural phenomena like Nietzsche's thoughts, 'degrading process (all tangible things) into functions of an overall process'<sup>126</sup> that bestows 'upon mere time-sequence an importance and dignity it never had before.'<sup>127</sup> For the modern historian, 'meaning is contained in the process as a whole, from which the particular occurrence derives its intelligibility.'<sup>128</sup>

Though modern history only works to destroy banisters, Arendt maintains that we still have the right to expect some insight into our present dilemmas from the past. 'The key to deriving insight from the past is reorienting our historical focus toward the momentary actions and deeds that goes on between men for it is these events that establish a common space for men to dwell in and it is these events that since the Greeks, we have always had the need to bestow meaning upon.'<sup>129</sup> The reason why past stories can be of vital importance to Arendt comes from distinct places in her thought. First, to her 'thought itself arises out of incidents of living to take its bearings.'<sup>130</sup> Thought can only be developed out of an assortment of lived experiences. In order for thought to be developed fully it must allow itself to be

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<sup>124</sup> Hannah Arendt, 'The Concept of History,' p.71

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., p.64

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., p.63

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., p.65

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., p.87

<sup>129</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958, p.58

informed or illuminated by the unique experiences that constitute the particular lives of people. Second, humans inherently live their active lives within the 'web of human relationships which exists wherever men live together. The disclosure of the *who* through speech and the setting of a new beginning through action, always fall into an already existing web where their immediate consequences can be felt.'<sup>131</sup> Redhead points out that it is the web of human relationships that forms the context out of which we construct our own unique life stories.<sup>132</sup> Since these activities are lived out within the web, they will affect all those whose actions and stories also shape this web. While the web always appears to present subjects as 'already existing' these subjects find their own life stories play a role in determining the context for future life stories that will emerge out of the web. Their own life story is thus a unique story within 'the great story without beginning or end.'<sup>133</sup>

Hence, we are shaped by the past actions of people. Our life stories are of vital importance to us if we want to develop our capacity for thought. 'How then is one to proceed with approaching the past and telling these stories when...discerning the meaning of these events of the past within an overarching historical map has become an unfruitful pursuit?'<sup>134</sup> For Arendt, the solution begins by recognizing, along with Walter Benjamin, that in the modern age, 'what has been lost is the continuity of past...what you are then left with is still the past, but a fragmented past, which has lost its certainty of evaluation.'<sup>135</sup> Once the past has been recognized as a collection of fragments the storyteller can assume the form of a metaphorical 'pearl diver.' 'The storyteller is like the pearl diver, 'who descends to the bottom of the sea, not to

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<sup>130</sup> Hannah Arendt, 'The Concept of History', p.14

<sup>131</sup> Hannah Arendt, *op.cit.*, p.184

<sup>132</sup> Mark Redhead, *op.cit.*, p.812

<sup>133</sup> Hannah Arendt, *op.cit.*, p.184

<sup>134</sup> Mark Redhead, *op.cit.*, p.812

<sup>135</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, p.212

excavate the bottom and bring it to light but to pry loose...the pearls and the coral in the depths and to carry them to the surface.'<sup>136</sup> The sea of time has not faded these pearls but has instead transformed them into something 'rich and strange.'<sup>137</sup> One can bring pearls up to the surface of the present by telling a story about the actions, deeds, and sufferings contained within these pearls in such a way that one can capture the original meaning of the events that are being narrated.<sup>138</sup>

Arendt's discussion on storytelling is the distinctive between embodied objectivity and situated knowledge or political understanding and philosophical attitude. In her writings on history and epistemology, Arendt offers the Peloponnesian War as a model of the kind of historical writing she wants to achieve. According to Arendt, Thucydides' work is not grounded in abstract universals but in experience. Arendt makes a distinction between Archimedes and Thucydides as the vehicle for a critique of objectivist impartiality.<sup>139</sup> She argues that the Archimedean model of knowledge is apolitical 'because of its objectivity, its disinterestedness, its impartiality in the consequences which its pursuit of truth might have.'<sup>140</sup>

Thucydides on the other hand, 'strives for political understanding in that he attempts to inspire his readers to engage in critical thinking.'<sup>141</sup> Thucydides' position on history is no conventional model of objective reporting, as it neither consists in writing style nor in an attempt to avoid selectivity 'but, rather, in the fact that Thucydides leaves reader with the task of interpreting the various conflicts he represents.'<sup>142</sup> Disch attempts to explain how stories work as a critique of Archimedean thinking by quoting from Martha Nussbaum's book *The Fragility of*

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<sup>136</sup> Hannah Arendt, 'The Crisis in Culture: Its Social and its Political Significance,' op.cit. p.205

<sup>137</sup> Redhead, op.cit., p.812

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., p.812

<sup>139</sup> Mark Disch, op.cit., p.680

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., p.680

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., p.680

*Goodness.* Nussbaum contrasts the abstract, rule-governed model of critical understanding in rationalist philosophy with the particularist method of tragedy.<sup>143</sup> She argues that 'where rationalist philosophy aims to rule out irreconcilable ethical conflict by rendering all values commensurable in terms of a single coin,'<sup>144</sup> tragedy presents unique situations in which 'the choice is among values that cannot be cabrated against a common standard of measure.'<sup>145</sup> These two modes of thinking both require an altogether different way of telling stories. The Archimedean thinker is not really engaged in storytelling but in illustration, treating a story as 'a schematic philosophical example of an abstract principle.' In contrast, the tragic story traces 'the history of a complex pattern of deliberation' and so lays 'open to view the complexity, the indeterminacy, the sheer difficulty of actual human deliberation.'<sup>146</sup> As argued by Arendt in 'Thoughts about Lessing,' 'the tragic hero becomes knowledgeable, by experiencing what has been done in the way of suffering and in its pathos, in resuffering the past, the network of individual acts is transformed into an event, a significant whole.'<sup>147</sup> The dramatic climax of tragedy occurs when the actor turns into a sufferer.

Tragic storytelling serves not to settle questions but to unsettle them and to inspire spontaneous critical thinking in its audience. Political impartiality is the essence of Thucydidesian model of critical thinking. Thucydides' works, according to Disch, 'fosters political impartiality by an artistic creation of plurality by his representation of speeches from the multiple, divergent perspectives that constitute

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid., p.681

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., p.670

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., p.670

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., p.670

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., p.670

<sup>147</sup> Hannah Arendt, 'Thoughts About Leasing' in *Men in Dark Times*, New York : Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968, p.20-21

the public realm.’<sup>148</sup> This account of political impartiality, characterized not by abstraction but by impartiality that Arendt can discern in Kant's description of the ‘enlarged mentality’ in the *Critique of Judgment*. This is the reason why Arendt admires Thucydides because ‘his imaginative history makes it possible for the reader to think as if engaged in the debates of his time.’<sup>149</sup>

#### a. Situated Impartiality

In considering the *Third Critique*, Arendt aims to explain her political thinking including a formulation of impartiality that accords with plurality. Arendt appropriates Kant's description of taste as ‘enlarged mentality’ to explain how one gets from experience to criticism: ‘the critical move entails a shift from thinking from a private perspective to thinking from a public vantage point. Arendt's version of enlarged thought makes a bridge between storytelling and situated impartial critical understanding.’<sup>150</sup> Arendt's relation with Kant's *Third Critique* can be seen in her early works like *Origins*. Arendt, in *Origin's* preface uses the term ‘crystallization.’ One of the most important reasons of such a using the term ‘crystallization’ is that she wants, like Walter Benjamin, ‘to break the chain of narrative continuity, to shatter chronology as the natural structure of narrative, to stress fragmentariness, historical dead ends, failures and ruptures.’<sup>151</sup> The crystallization metaphor is used by Arendt, according to Disch, brings Benjamin to mind, but ‘it is also an allusion to Kant's account of taste.’<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Mark Disch, op.cit., p.681

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., p.682

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., p.682

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., p.183

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., p.184

The Analytic of the Beautiful provides Arendt an analytical vehicle to argue that political events are contingent and so cannot be named or known in terms of existing conceptual categories. In *Third Critique*, Kant emphasizes 'crystallization' as a metaphor for contingency which he calls 'the form of the purposiveness of a purpose.'<sup>153</sup> Crystallization describes the formation of objects that come into being not by a gradual, evolutionary process but suddenly and unpredictably 'by a shooting together i.e. by a sudden solidification, not by gradual transition...but all at once by a saltus, which transition is also called crystallization.'<sup>154</sup> Arendt remarks that political events, like aesthetic objects, can neither be explained in evolutionary terms nor judged with reference to an external purpose or principle. Even so, 'we are bound to discern their meaning or else to relinquish our freedom by reacting without thinking against forces we do not understand.'<sup>155</sup> Arendt is related to the *Third Critique* because of the fact that political judgment is not a kind of practical reason or moral judgment but a kind of taste. Moral judgment, according to Kant, is 'determinant,' which means it functions by subsuming a particular instance under a general rule that is rationally derived prior to that instance. Taste, on the other hand, is 'reflective.' It operates in a contingent situation; it has no pre-determined principle so that a thinker takes her bearings not from the universal but from the particular. Leaving technical language behind, the implication of reflective judgment is that it is primarily concerned with question of meaning.

According to Disch, 'the paradox that Kant sustains in defining taste as a judgment takes its bearings not from transcendental concepts but from feeling is analogous to Arendt's attempt to define political judgment as critical understanding that does not withdraw to an abstract vantage point but takes its bearings from

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<sup>153</sup> I. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, p.93

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, p.93

experience.’<sup>156</sup> Kant’s position on taste depends both on the ground of intersubjectivity, that a judgment about beauty is imputed to everyone else, and on the grounds of communicability, that it actually secures the assent of others in public exchange. According to Paul Guyer quoted by Disch that although Kant appears to suggest that intersubjectivity is both necessary and sufficient to communicability, one could impute as judgment to others without communicating it to them or defeating it to their satisfaction. Guyer claims that intersubjectivity take precedence over communicability in Kant’s argument. However, Arendt makes a creative appropriation of taste by suggesting a significantly different ground of validity.<sup>157</sup> Arendt politicizes Kant’s concept of taste by arguing that its validity turns on ‘publicity.’ Publicity means openness to contestation, which she describes as ‘the testing that arises from contact with other people’s thinking.’ This claim that critical thinking involves contestation suggests that neither intersubjectivity nor communicability adequately account for the possibility of reflective judgment.<sup>158</sup> In contrast to intersubjectivity, publicity requires that a judgment come into ‘contact’ with others’ perspectives; it cannot simply be imputed to them. Thus Arendt politicizes Kant’s taste by eschewing its tendency toward consensus in favor of contestation.<sup>159</sup> Another objection of Arendt on Kant’s *Third Critique* can be seen on the notion of ‘enlarged mentality.’ Arendt writes that the general validity of taste is ‘closely connected with particulars, with the particular conditions of the standpoint one has to go through in order to arrive one’s own ‘general standpoint.’<sup>160</sup> Disch has pointed out that where enlarged thinking involves, abstracting from the limitations of

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<sup>155</sup> Mark Disch, op. cit., 683

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., p.685

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., p.685

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., p.685

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., p.687

<sup>160</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Lectures*, p.42



a contingent situation to think in the place of any other man, Arendt speaks explicitly of a general standpoint that is achieved not by abstraction but by considered attention to particularity. Thus enlarged thought, in her terms, is situated rather than abstract. Enlarged thought is Arendt's answer to the question of how one moves from experienced to critical understanding, but 'is not the Kantian enlarged thought that she has in mind.' Arendt conceals her innovation by failing to mark the distinction between situated impartial thinking and Kant's enlarged mentality.<sup>161</sup> 'Where enlarged thinking is a consequence of either securing assent to one's judgment or simply imputing it to others, situated impartial thinking involves taking divergent opinions into account in the process of making up one's mind and ultimately, locating one's judgment in relation to those views.'<sup>162</sup> Although Arendt conceals it, she makes a significant break with the universalizing assumptions of Kant's thought.

The departure from Kant's taste is even more pronounced, as Arendt argues that it is not the philosopher but the storyteller who possesses an extraordinary talent for enlarged thinking. Arendt describes storytelling as an art that needs 'a certain detachment from the heady, intoxicating business of sheer living that, perhaps, only the born artist can manage in the midst of living.'<sup>163</sup> As Benjamin describes storytelling, the capacity for situated impartial thinking is not the storyteller's exclusive privilege, and the storyteller is not the kind of teacher who imparts a lesson to craft an account that is 'free from explanation,' thereby the practice of situated impartial vision.<sup>164</sup> Disch notes that a skillful storyteller teaches her readers to see as he does, not what she does 'affording them the intoxicating experience of seeing from multiple perspectives but leaving them with the responsibility to undertake the

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<sup>161</sup> Disch, op.cit., p.686

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., p.686

<sup>163</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Men in Dark Times*, p.55

critical task of interpretation for themselves.’<sup>165</sup> In sum, the kind of story that Arendt and Benjamin have in mind invites us to ‘go visiting,’ asking ‘how would the world look to you if you saw it from this position?’<sup>166</sup> The critical perspective that one achieves by visiting is neither disinterested like Kant's taste nor empathic. Arendt writes that ‘this process of representation does not blindly adopt the actual views of those who stand somewhere else, and hence look upon the world from a different perspective; this is not a question of ...empathy, as though I tried to be or to feel like something else...but of being and thinking in my own identity where I am not.’<sup>167</sup> Visiting means ‘imagining what the world would looked like to me from another position, imagining how I would look to myself from within a different world, and coming to understand that I might define my principles differently if I did not stand where I am accustomed to.’<sup>168</sup> Storytelling is a means by which one *visits* different perspectives. It is also a narrative form that lends itself to giving a multiperspectival account of a situation that, in turn, invites others to *visit* those perspectives.

### 3. Conclusion

Arendt's discussion of presentness is the important from two angles. First of all, Arendt questions the present in the political context. According to her, there is a relationship between the particularities of things and political judgment. In other words, the invention of the present requires thinking on the events or particulars that determine our historical experience. Political judgment is the judgment of any

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<sup>164</sup> Walter Benjamin, ‘The Storyteller’ in *Illuminations*, edited and with an introduction by Hannah Arendt, trans. By Harry Zohn, London: Fontana, 1973, p.85

<sup>165</sup> Disch, op.cit., p.687

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., p.687

<sup>167</sup> Hannah Arendt, ‘Truth and Politics’ in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought*, New York: Viking Press, 1968, p.241

particular thing. In this way, we can understand what have constitutes our experience today. Universal concepts, causalities or empirical interpretations of events do not provide us with the knowledge of the present. In that respect, Arendt works to understand the reasons of totalitarianism in a particular context by questioning the universal conceptualization of any event in history. Situated impartiality or knowledge and the discourse of storytelling are the ways of introducing the world of experience. Only if we focus on the situated knowledge in time, we can see whether the human race constantly improves in the direction of progress. This means to abolish the homogenized and integrated conceptualization of knowledge in a universal perspective. Walter Benjamin reflects on the history of fabricated experience through the criticism of the idea of progress and he offers to understand the present as a creative activity.

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<sup>168</sup> Disch, *op.cit.*, p.687

## **D. WALTER BENJAMIN: IMAGE OF THE PRESENT**

Contrary to the idealist version of history that cannot be occupied by human action in Kant, Benjaminian use of history accepts human action as a driving force to redeem the past and simultaneously to make the present. In this sense, Benjamin's thought, in general, is both traditionalist and critical. It is even critical precisely to the extent that it lays claim to a tradition of the forgotten and the oppressed. It seeks to give voice to oppressed people and hidden truth. For this reason, the ontology of contemporary reality in Benjaminian sense means an ethics of universal solidarity with oppressed people. The whole of his aesthetic criticism and his philosophy of history bears the significance of this ethics. Firstly, this section aims to provide aesthetic views of Benjamin in order to understand his theory of history. In this aesthetic context, Benjamin seems to explain his general tendencies towards historical time. By showing the fundamental differences of Benjamin's idea of history from positivist and Marxist historicism, we will aim to provide an epistemological perspective to construct a critical attitude towards the present stemming from the relations between the consciousness of history or in particular the present and politics.

### **1. The Aesthetic Context as the Precondition of Politics**

#### **a. Immanent Criticism**

Benjamin's importance as a modern thinker is paradigmatic. His intellectual career parallels a transformation of philosophical temper that extends from Romanticism and idealism to the postmodern. It is obvious that Benjamin's thinking

and manner might easily embody some main features claimed (-disclaimed) as typical of the so-called postmodern turn, for examples, the antiprogessist polemic, the practice of ironic fragmentation and allegorical destruction, the use of quotation.<sup>169</sup> Especially, Benjamin's aesthetic theory provides an opportunity to trace of these postmodern notions. The doctoral thesis, far from being only a historical exposition of Romantic theory is an important stage in Benjamin's evolving conception of aesthetic criticism and in fact a forceful presentation of the Romantic sources for the modernist conception of art.<sup>170</sup> Benjamin sees the early German Romantics' criterion of immanent form not only as the basis of aesthetic judgment but as the point of departure for a reflexive process underlying the status of criticism itself. What is now claimed as central to criticism is not its evaluative function but its agency in realizing the historical destiny of the work of art. This means that the early Romantics' understanding of reflection has important effects on Benjamin's thought. Gilloch distinguishes three consequences that affect Benjamin.<sup>171</sup> Firstly, it means the centrality of immanent critique: 'the work of criticism must be in closest accord with the work of art which is its object.' Secondly, 'it envisages the work of art as a monadological fragment of the idea of art, as a minute part of a greater whole into which it is ultimately to be dissolved.' Thirdly, 'it requires the objective positivity of criticism, as opposed to the subjectivity of judgment.'<sup>172</sup> For Benjamin, the early Romantics' concept of criticism is nothing other than the moment of reflection in the medium of art, in which knowledge of the artwork is extended. Immanent criticism seeks to awaken the tendencies and potentialities which lie dormant within the work

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<sup>169</sup> Jacques Rancière, 'The Archaeomodern Turn' in *Walter Benjamin and the Demands of History*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996, p.24

<sup>170</sup> Alexander Gelley, 'Contexts of the Aesthetic in Walter Benjamin' in *MLN*, Vol. 114, No. 5, Comparative Literature Issue. (Dec., 1999), p.937

<sup>171</sup> Graeme Gilloch, *Walter Benjamin: Critical Constellations*, Cambridge, UK: Polity Press; Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2002, p.33,

of art. It involves an intensification of consciousness, an ever-greater realization of the actual meaning of a work of art. According to Benjamin, the critic seeks to bring to light the secret of the artwork, its inherent but hidden possibilities.

Benjamin's engagement with the work of the early Romantics is the decisive intellectual encounter that affects his subsequent writings like 'Theses on the Concept of History'. Benjamin adopts Romantics' view that the 'object' of inquiry is not discovered but constituted in the moment of perception or reflection. This argument determines his understanding of History in 'Theses on the Concept of History'. Hence the image of the past is formed only in the moment of present recognition, through the interaction of what was and what is. We are never concerned with the past *per se*, but with how the past appears in the present, with its contemporary significance. Thus, indefinite and indeterminate, the past is ever open to re-construction, re-appropriation and contestation. Such an understanding becomes the key to the historiographical and epistemological principles elaborated in the 'Theses on the Concept of History.'

Immanent critique seeks to unfold the innermost tendencies and truths of the artwork from within, to allow it to now and speak for itself. The erasure of the critic's voice becomes an essential principle for Benjamin, and explains his later emphasizes upon the use of quotation and his concern to achieve the greatest 'facticity' and 'concreteness.' Most significantly, it accounts in part for Benjamin's subsequent fascination with imagistic forms of representation- in the mosaic, the constellation and montage; meaning is generated in the juxtaposing of individual fragments, rather than in theoretical overlay.

The contingency and transience of truth are the key concepts in Benjamin and the Romantics. Truth is not pursued and grasped by an intentional subject, but unfolded from the within under the patient critical gaze. This notion of the observer as a recipient becomes an important motif for Benjamin particularly in his later fascination with the Proustian *mémoire involuntaire*.<sup>173</sup> Truth appears only, like memory. Moreover, the moment of such recognition is always transient. Given its endless and perpetual transformation, the past, or the artwork is perceptible and legible only fleetingly. Critical insight is possible only in the instant in which this motion is momentarily frozen. Criticism thus both facilitates and interrupts the becoming of the work of art. This moment of passing recognition is that in which the work of art comes reveal itself as a fragment of the idea of art: namely, at the instant of its final dissolution and absorption. Truth appears at the last moment, as the object or work of art is about to disintegrate. The demise of the object is the precondition for the liberation of its inherent truth content.<sup>174</sup> The 'completion' of the work of art paradoxically occurs at the moment of its extinction. Immanent criticism here becomes the ruination or 'mortification,' of the artwork. This notion of critique is crucial for the emancipation of meaning.

The early Romantic idea of 'emancipation of meaning,' Ranciere argues, is more or less summarized in the concept of fantasy (*phantasie*). It entails the availability of languages, meaning, and narratives and the free play among them: the possibility, for example, 'for the writer to decontextualise and recontextualise old stories; to construct and deconstruct the plot of his story, setting characters forth and aside; to give way to representation and to make the plot vanish in the infinities of authorial subjectivity. The emancipation of meaning embodied in Schlegel's theoretical texts

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<sup>173</sup> Alexander Gelley, op.cit., p.939

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., p.939

or Jean Paul's literary practice entails all the features that have come in our time to be regarded as constitutive of the Postmodern paradigm: fragmentation, indeterminacy, randomness, equitem parity, and so forth.<sup>175</sup>

Emancipation of meaning through contextualization of a work of art means to show how it breaks with chronology. The critic intervenes, gets in the way of chronology, and thereby accentuates the work's own peculiar mode of intervention. Reinserting the work within its context, he explodes it out of its age.<sup>176</sup> Breaking the chronology is possible on the work of art only through immanent criticism. It is, Benjamin argues, a 'philological' or 'historical experiment' which exposes its inner nature; so that it is brought to consciousness and to knowledge of itself.<sup>177</sup> This notion of the 'self-knowledge' and 'self-judgment' of the artwork is fundamental. In its continual self-realization through critical reflection, the artwork comes to transgress its own limitations as a solitary, isolated entity. The work comes to point beyond itself, to recognize its relationships with, and proximity to, other works, genres and forms. Two important concepts are distinguished here: the Idea of Art as *Gesamtkunstwerk*, and the individual work of art as monad. The Romantics see art as a unity or totality of all works of art, as the Absolute, or the Idea of Art.<sup>178</sup> The idea of work of art here becomes the total work of art, the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, which is both constituted and constitutes individual works of art. The individual work of art is simply a particular moment, a concrete manifestation, and an indicative fragment of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*. 'Each individual work of art is nothing other than a monad in which the idea of art is encapsulated and from which it may be distilled.'<sup>179</sup> Criticism

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<sup>175</sup> Jacques Rancière, op.cit. p.26

<sup>176</sup> Irving Wohlfarth, 'Smashing the Kaleidoscope: Walter Benjamin's Critique of Cultural History' in *Walter Benjamin and the Demands of History*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996, p.14

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., p.14

<sup>178</sup> Graeme Gilloch, op.cit., p.36

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., p.36



simultaneously recognizes the idea of art as it is refracted in the monadological fragments of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, and completes them by assimilation in this totality. In completing/dissolving the individual work of art, criticism adds to, and further 'completes,' the *Gesamtkunstwerk* occur.

Hannah Arendt argues that 'critique', for Benjamin, 'is concerned with the truth content of a work of art, the commentary with its subject matter.'<sup>180</sup> Subject matter and truth content united in the work's early period 'come apart during its afterlife; the subject matter becomes more striking while the truth content retains its original concealment.'<sup>181</sup> The truth is discerned by the critic and it is ultimately manifest on the Day of Judgment, the moment of redemption. According to Benjamin, Goethe's *Elective Affinities* is a philosophical inquiry including the relationships between beauty, truth and redemption. Rochlitz distinguishes in 4 schemata in Benjamin's essay on *Elective Affinities*: first, the philosophical problem of the work of art's validity is linked to idea of truth defined in theological terms.<sup>182</sup> Philosophical schema grounded in the relation between the idea, intuition, and the concept. It is the task of criticism to relate theological truth both to the inaccessible horizon of philosophical inquiry and to the truth content of the work of art. Art and philosophy relate to each other according to the Kantian complementarity of the concept and intuition, united in the idea which is inaccessible to knowledge.<sup>183</sup> Secondly, there is critical schema founded in the relation between components of the work of art and the human subjects- the creator and the receiver- who relate to it. The critic addresses the truth content and the form of the work of art through a commentary on its subject

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<sup>180</sup> Hannah Arendt, 'Walter Benjamin: 1892-1940' in *Illuminations*, trans. By Harry Zohn. London: Fontana, 1973, p.4-5

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., p.5

<sup>182</sup> Rainer Rochlitz, *The Disenchantment of Art: The Philosophy of Walter Benjamin*, trans. By Jane Marie Todd, New York: Guilford Press, 1996, p.69

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., p.69

matter; the artists' technique addresses only the subject matter. Thirdly, there is an aesthetic schema of the relation between appearance and essence in beauty. Appearance and essence are united in the work of art, but are dissociated through criticism, 'which grounds beauty in the truth content, whereas the authentic writer corrects the beauty of mere appearance through the sublime caesura of the inexpressive.'<sup>184</sup> Finally, there is a historical schema that anchors relation among men in the religious, since criticism's task is, in the modernity of Enlightenment- a false emancipation placed under the sign of myth and appearance- to assure the continuity of tradition through the truth content contained within the act that gives form to the authentic work of art.

According to Rochlitz, Benjamin's claim tends to argue that modern consciousness is alienated from both truth and tradition. Just as the image and the concept do not immediately have access to theological truth, the artists' technique does not immediately have access to the work's form and truth content. And just as modern beauty is dissociated from its anchorage in truth, modern freedom is cut off its anchorage in tradition and ritual. Criticism plays a determinant role in overcoming such alienation. It always holds the key to the enigma. 'Whether they be truth or freedom, art or beauty, criticism is responsible for the founding values of culture. This privilege is tied to the fact that only criticism can act as a link between the image and the concept, the two aspect of a technological truth that has been split in two.'<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid., p.70

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., p.70

## b. The Experience of Storyteller

At the beginning of the 1930s, Benjamin grants a theoretical status to the concept of aura by announcing its decline in the restricted field of photography. In 'the Work of Art,' film seems to provoke a crisis of art in general. And, in his 1936 essay 'The Storyteller: Reflections on the Work of Nicolai Reskov,' Benjamin continues main themes of 'The Work of Art' essay. Walter Benjamin problematizes the loss of past experience and the serious impairment of the present-day capacity to assimilate experience altogether in these essays.<sup>186</sup> 'The decline of aura' and the 'end of the art of storytelling' are linked to the problem of the dissolution of man's capacity for experience, the decline of his capacity to live a meaningful and fulfilled existence. These themes reflect the Hegelian idea of the 'end of art.' For Hegel, art is not desacralized; rather, it can no longer claim to be the supreme expression of metaphysical truth defended by philosophy, which preserves the connotations of rational theology. In the works of Weber and George Simmel, modern rationalization provokes a general disenchantment of the world, 'so much so that art, now without effect on public life, survives only in the private sphere. It is this decline that Benjamin is reacting.'<sup>187</sup> Inasmuch as the beautiful appearance of art is now mere lies and artifice, it is no longer appropriate to celebrate pure and simple appearance, the vital lie that brings us intense experiences: 'Rather, we must sacrifice art in the traditional sense to preserve the public status and the pragmatic role of its productions.'<sup>188</sup> Unlike Weber, Benjamin is not the part of the tradition of a 'protestant' and rationalist critique of the image, 'nor does he can fine himself to

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<sup>186</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' in *Illuminations*, edited and with an introduction by Hannah Arendt, trans. By Harry Zohn, London: Fontana, 1973, pp.219-255; and 'The Storyteller,' op.cit., pp.83-111

<sup>187</sup> Rainer Rochlitz, op.cit., p.150

observing in a general way the desacralization of art; he undertakes to precisely show the modifications the certain arts have undergone, according to their technical composition, their relation to reality, and the social context of their reception.<sup>189</sup>

‘What is aura actually?’ Benjamin asks. ‘A strange wave of space and time: the unique appearance of sequence of semblance or distance, no matter how close the object may be.’<sup>190</sup> According to Benjamin, two negative qualities seem to define aura: the uniqueness of a moment of temporal apparition and its inapproachability, its distancing despite a possible spatial proximity. Like the decline of aura, the theme of mourning for the riches of the lost experience continues in the ‘Storyteller.’ In ‘Storyteller’ Benjamin asserts that ‘the art of storytelling is coming to an end’ because of the loss of our ability to tell stories, to exchange our experiences. According to him, two complementary phenomena account for this incapacity: the boundless development of technology and the privatization of life that it brings. Traditional storytelling is linked to the conditions of an artisanal, preindustrial society: first, the oral transmission of experience, the bearer of ancestral wisdom; second, a spatial or temporal distance that confers on the story the aura of faraway places; and third, the authority of death of a ‘natural history’ where the destiny of creatures is written. The artisan class represents the fusion of the two great traditional schools of oral storytelling, the trading seamen and the resident tiller of the soil. One transmits the experience of distant voyages, the other that of dissent times. The storyteller remains faithful to the age of ‘naïve poetry,’ in which man could believe himself to be in harmony with nature.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid., p.150

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., p.150

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., p.150

<sup>191</sup> Walter Benjamin, ‘The Storyteller’, p.83

According to Benjamin, 'the knowledge of story acquires an immediate self-evidence bespeaks of a situation in which there exists a continuity and flow to the continuum of experience, where time has the character of meaningfully ordered, organic sequence of events, and where even the phenomenon of death fits 'meaningfully' within this sequence.'<sup>192</sup> Under such conditions advice and counsel are readily communicable and seemingly step forth from life of their own accord. However, these conditions are under attack in modern life, which is dominated by the need for proximity and immediate interest, communication through technical or literary media, and the hygienic dissimulation of death.<sup>193</sup>

Benjamin insists this development is not merely a symptom of 'decaying values' or the 'crisis of modernity.' Rather, it has a determinate social origin as a 'concomitant symptom of the secular productive forces of history.'<sup>194</sup> The demise of storytelling signals a corresponding loss of meaning in life itself. The obverse side of the demise of storytelling is the rise of the novel. Benjamin points out that ' what differentiates the novel from all other forms of prose literature -the fairy tale, the legend, even the novella- is that it neither comes from oral tradition nor goes into it.'<sup>195</sup> Insofar as stories are handed down orally from generation to generation, they become the property of the community. They represent the primary means of recording experience in those societies where handcraft is the dominant mode of production. Indeed, the distinct imprint of craftsmanship inheres in the process of storytelling. In the case of the novel, however, the 'communal' aspect of the artistic process -both in term of the conditions of its production as well as its reception- has disappeared: 'The novelist has isolated himself. The birthplace of the novel is the

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<sup>192</sup> Richard Wolin, 'Benjamin's Materialist Theory of Experience' in *Theory and Society*, Vol. 11, No. 1. (Jan., 1982), p.22

<sup>193</sup> Rainer Rochlitz, op.cit., p.189

<sup>194</sup> Walter Benjamin, op.cit., p.86

solitary individual, who is no longer able to express himself by giving examples of his most important concerns, is himself uncounseled, and cannot counsel others...In the midst of life's fullness, and through the representation of this fullness, the novel gives evidence of the profound perplexity of the living.'<sup>196</sup> The novel is produced by 'solitary individuals' and read by 'solitary individuals'

Next to the novel, the second form of modern communication to put an end to storytelling is the press, or information. In showcasing the news story, in mixing in the private lives of individuals, and in clinging to the idea of satisfying the most immediate interests of readers, the press attacks both the public status of experience and the authority of tradition. 'Information strips traditional storytelling of its sobriety by introducing psychological explanations. At the same time, the story can no longer be repeated and reinterpreted forever. It loses its properly narrative character, constitutive of its life across the ages. From 'aesthetic truth,' it falls to the level of discursive truth.'<sup>197</sup>

Thus, we know 'more' about everything, but this knowledge is poorer in quality; it has ceased to be concerned directly with those ultimate questions concerned with the meaning of life. The increase in quality of knowledge remains forever incapable of compensating for the decrease in quality of knowledge. The emergence of 'information' as the dominant form in which experience is stored is thus a primary symptom of the crisis of experience, of our inability to communicate experiences in other than the most shallow and truncated fashion. For Benjamin, the press by reducing to a minimum number of superficial facts and statistics, aims to destroy the public's capacity for independent judgment. Benjamin notes that 'by now almost

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<sup>195</sup> Ibid., p.87

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., p.92

<sup>197</sup> Rainer Rochlitz, op.cit., p.191

nothing that happen benefits storytelling; almost everything benefits information.'<sup>198</sup> Thus, the fragmentary character of contemporary social life meets the desultory journalistic processing of experience halfway. 'The story, in contrast, was devoid of all such insidious psychological intentions, permitting the material richness of life to step forth unprocessed, in all its fullness, and thus allowing the listeners to judge for themselves.'<sup>199</sup> In this way each story retained a meaning for the community of listeners that was inexhaustible and lasting. 'In the form of information, experience no longer has anything lasting to teach us; it has simply become another hallow facet of modern life, an item of momentary interest which will soon cease to be topical and then be promptly discarded.'<sup>200</sup>

On the other hand, because of the lack of a readily apparent meaning to life, the novel assumes the form of a search for meaning whereas in the world of story, the problem of meaning never needs to become explicitly thematized. The conscious recasting of experience, an integral part of the creative process for the novelist, is different from the activity of Storyteller. But, according to Benjamin, in Proust, the power of remembrance invests the events of life with the aura of significance they lacked as occurred in mere life, life in facticity. 'For an experienced event is finite – at any rate, confined to one sphere of experience; a remembered event is infinite, because it is only a key to everything that happened before and after it.'<sup>201</sup> The loneliness of the reader of the novel corresponds to the loneliness of a world of experience that remains opaque and unintelligible to the subject that will not lend itself to being readily shared.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> Walter Benjamin, op.cit., p.89

<sup>199</sup> Rainer Rochlitz, op.cit., p.24

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., p.24

<sup>201</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'The Image of Proust' in *Illuminations*, edited and with an introduction by Hannah Arendt, trans. By Harry Zohn, London: Fontana, 1973, p.202

<sup>202</sup> Rainer Rochlitz, op.cit., p.25

Benjamin's interpretation of the structural transformation of traditional, integrated fabric of experience, using the story and the novel as prism to view this process opens a new perspective to understand the experience of modern society.

### c. The Experience of *Flâneur*

In his essay 'Some Motifs in Baudelaire' Benjamin pursues similar themes like the fragmentation of the continuum of experience in modern times.<sup>203</sup> However he considers these themes from a different point of view. For Benjamin, the tendency toward the privatization of existence seems to be linked with the development of technologies of reproduction that bring the individual face to face with the mechanism while cutting him off from the community. 'The Work of Art' essay shows the powerlessness of any attempt aimed at restoring ritual within the framework of modern society, but, at the same time, it opens the perspective of a society reconciled with technology. Benjamin sees his own undertaking in 'The Work of Art' essay as the new model for a politicization of the aesthetic.

According to Gelley, Benjamin's larger argument is about the history of perception and experience of the level of the public collectivity.<sup>204</sup> 'Benjamin offers a telescoped history of consciousness designated to lay the groundwork for a new conception of the social collectivity'.<sup>205</sup> In Benjamin's argument, 'the new collectivity would be capable of participation in the emergent technological media for its own advantage rather than, in the fascist sense, becoming subject to their

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<sup>203</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire' in *Illuminations*, edited and with an introduction by Hannah Arendt, trans. By Harry Zohn, London: Fontana, 1973, pp.157-203

<sup>204</sup> Alexander Gelley, op.cit., p.640

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.



control.’<sup>206</sup> This argument ‘puts into play a series of categories that are epistemological and historical: aura, shock, distance-proximity, contemplation-distractedness, and singularity-reproduction. Art and specifically film and photography serve as an exemplary instance for the mutation of consciousness that Benjamin is charting.’<sup>207</sup>

Film and photography undermine the notions of originality and uniqueness. While ‘in principle a work of art has always been reproducible,’ the advent of the ‘mechanical reproduction of a work of art’ in film, photography and sound recording ‘represents something new’ in film and radically transforms the aesthetic domain. Hence, the singularity, uniqueness, and exclusiveness of the auratic art give way to the multiplicity, ubiquity and availability of the art reproduced. Benjamin writes: ‘By making many reproductions, it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence. And in permitting the reproduction to meet the beholder or listener in his own particular situation, it reactivates the object reproduced. These two processes lead to a tremendous shattering of tradition which is the obverse of the contemporary crisis and renewal of mankind.’<sup>208</sup> Reproducibility leads to the demise of the artwork’s ‘cult value’, but it possesses an ‘exhibition value,’ a ‘readiness’ and ‘fitness’ to be seen and heard, a ‘public presentability.’ In displacing the notion of authenticity, the inherent reproducibility of film reconfigures and reorients the aesthetic sphere: ‘the instant the criterion of authenticity ceases to be applicable to artistic production, the total function of art is reversed. Instead of being based on ritual, it begins to be based on another practice- politics.’<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> Walter Benjamin, ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’, p.223

<sup>209</sup> Graeme Gilloch, *op.cit.*, p.185

Reproduction disenchant the work of art through the displacement of cult value by exhibition value, and through the liquidation of ritual and tradition by politics. As argued by Agamben, this is to say that 'the work of art loses the authority and guarantees it derived from belonging to a tradition for which it built the places and objects that incessantly weld past and present together. However, far from giving up to its authenticity in order to become reproducible... the work of art instead becomes the locus of the most ineffable of mysteries, the epiphany of aesthetic beauty.'<sup>210</sup> This phenomenon is particularly evident in Baudelaire. Baudelaire is the poet who faces the dissolution of the authority of tradition in the new industrial society and therefore invents a new authority. He fulfills this task by making the very transmissibility of culture a new value and putting the experience of shock at the center of his artistic labor.

The shock, as an inalienable feature of modern urban life, is a primary indication of the decline of the traditional fabric experience. Whereas the experience is traditionally governed by the principles of continuity and repetition, the shocks of city life disrupt these familiar patterns of experience. The predominance of the experience of shocks is bound up with the emergence of the crowd as the constant factor to be reckoned with. Benjamin remarks the facts that 'fear, revulsion, and honor were the emotions which the big city crowd aroused in those who first observed it.'<sup>211</sup> Walking in the city streets, 'which was a new phenomenon in nineteenth-century life, involves the individual in a series of shocks and collisions, which are only partially registered by the conscious mind.'<sup>212</sup> Hence, integrated, intelligible experience (Erfahrung) is replaced by a plethora of discontinuous,

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<sup>210</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *The Man Without Content*, trans. By Georgia Albert Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999, p.106

<sup>211</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'Lyric Poet in the Era of high Capitalism' in *One-Way Street and Other Writings*, trans. By Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter. London; New York: Verso, 1997 p.132

disparate, disorderly particles of experience (Erlebnis).<sup>213</sup> Benjamin's claim is that with the advent of shock experience as an elemental force in everyday life in the mid-nineteenth century the entire structure of human experience is transformed. In support, Benjamin cites the Freudian thesis from *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* to determine the relation between experienced event or voluntary memory (identified with consciousness) and remembered events or involuntary memory (identified with the unconscious). Here, Freud acknowledges that consciousness's role in the protection against stimuli has become infinitely more important than its reception of stimuli:

Becoming consciousness and leaving behind a meaning trace are processes incompatible with each other within one and the same system. Rather memory fragments are 'often most powerful and most enduring when the incident which left them behind was one that never entered consciousness.' Put in Proustian terms, this means that only what has not been experienced explicitly and consciously, what has not happened to the subject of an experience, can become a component of the *mémoire involontaire*.<sup>214</sup>

According to Benjamin, 'in modern life consciousness must make itself highly protective vis-à-vis the proliferation of aversive stimuli or shocks that the majority of 'memory traces' previously registered as experience in a direct and natural way now fail to do so.'<sup>215</sup> Today, experience has been so thoroughly reduced by and filtered through consciousness that what remains is an experience reduced to its barest essentials, an experience for the task of mere survival.<sup>216</sup> In consequence, not only has the human apparatus of perception itself been significantly altered, but the very cornerstone of the traditional connection of experience, the idea of remembrance has also been destroyed. As Benjamin explains:

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<sup>212</sup> Ibid., p.132

<sup>213</sup> Ibid., p.132

<sup>214</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire' p.159-16

<sup>215</sup> Richard Wolin, op.cit., p.28

<sup>216</sup> Ibid., p.28

The greater the character of the shock factor in particular impressions, the more consciously consciousness has to be as a screen against stimuli; the more efficiently it is so, the less do these impressions enter experience (Erfahrung), tending to remain in the sphere of a certain hour of one's life (Erlebnis). Perhaps the special achievement of shock defense may be seen in its function of assigning to an incident a precise point in time consciousness at the cost of the integrity of its contents.<sup>217</sup>

Gilloch emphasizes that the *Flâneur* both revels in this transformation and ultimately falls victim to it.<sup>218</sup> The *Flâneur*, like the prostitute and the gambler, serves as a figure of the intensification and disintegration of experience in the modern city. Moreover, the *Flâneur*, provides Benjamin with a heuristic device for exploring the experiences and memories of the cityscape, 'with a model and method for his own reading of the contemporary metropolitan environment.'<sup>219</sup> The *Flâneur* is heroic in exemplifying contradictory moments in the city: on the one hand, the ruination of experience and the fragmentation of memory; on the other, the decipherment of meaning and the recollection of last moments.<sup>220</sup>

For Benjamin, Baudelaire is an important thinker here in two respects. First, 'his embeddedness in, and imprint on, the nineteenth-century are legible only in the present moment; second, Baudelaire is preoccupied with capturing and articulating the contemporary itself.'<sup>221</sup> Baudelaire insists that the principle duty of the genuine modern artist is to depict the ephemeral beauty of the passing moment. 'The Painter of Modern Life' abandons the studio, and taking to the metropolitan streets,

goes and watches the river of life flow past him in all its majesty and splendor. He marvels of the eternal beauty and amazing harmony of life in the capital cities, a harmony so providentially amid the turmoil of human freedom. He gazes upon the landscapes of the great city –landscapes of stone, caressed by the mist or buffered by the sun.<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism', p.131

<sup>218</sup> Graeme Gilloch, op.cit., p.215

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., p.215

<sup>220</sup> Ibid., p.214

<sup>221</sup> Ibid., p.213

<sup>222</sup> Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans. and edit. By Jonathan Mayne London: Phaidon Press, 1995, p.11

In so doing, this figure becomes the observer and recorder of beauty in its most minute manifestations and most modern form. Baudelaire explains: 'by *modernité* I mean the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal, the immutable.'<sup>223</sup> Each era, Baudelaire claims, has its own *modernité*, its own beauty, which the authentic contemporary artist must endeavor to capture. This is the achievement of the great works of art of the past: they have succeeded in rendering the beauty of their time, their own *modernité*. The genuine painter of modern life may learn from the techniques of earliest masters, but must not imitate the styles and subjects of the past. Rather, he must endeavor to 'distill the eternal from the prehistory'<sup>224</sup> that is to say, to give form to the subject of his own time, in the hope that 'his works will survive and eventually be counted among the masterpieces.'<sup>225</sup>

Through the idea of correspondences, Baudelaire has a notion of true experience that is linked to ritual. These *correspondences* writes Benjamin

record a concept of experience which includes ritual elements. Only by appropriating these elements was Baudelaire able to fathom the full meaning of the breakdown which he, a modern man, was witnessing. Only in this way was he able to recognize in it the challenge meant for him alone, the challenge which he incorporated in the *Fleurs du mal*.<sup>226</sup>

This passage announces the reversal of the 'Storyteller.' To be modern within a traditional form that has any hold on contemporary reality, one must have a notion, a memory of the aura and the experience that are broken down by modern reality.<sup>227</sup> According to Benjamin, the experience of Baudelairean correspondences 'attempts to establish itself in crisis-proof form. This is the possible only within the realm of the ritual. If it transcends this realm, it presents itself as the beautiful. In the beautiful,

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<sup>223</sup> Ibid., p.12

<sup>224</sup> Ibid., p.12

<sup>225</sup> Rainer Rochlitz, op.cit., p.214

<sup>226</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'Some Motifs in Baudelaire', p.183

<sup>227</sup> Rainer Rochlitz, op.cit., p.214

the ritual value of art appears.'<sup>228</sup> The beautiful, and in particular the artistic beautiful, appears only when experience no longer represents itself within ritual.

## **2. *Angelus Novus*: Prophesizing the Present**

### **a. Messianism and Historical Materialism**

In Benjamin's later works, the theory of history occupies an important place. Especially, *Paris Arcades Project* is an attempt to provoke a 'historical awakening' through criticism of the nineteenth century. In letters to Scholem and Adorno, Benjamin speaks of the need for an epistemological underpinning for his most ambitious project, the major work on the Paris Arcades, and several commentators view the 'theses' as supplying the required epistemology.<sup>229</sup> In the words of Susan Buck-Morss, 'it was intended as a methodological introduction to the *Arcades Project*, and as such, it instructs the reading of his own work.'<sup>230</sup> In the *Arcades Project*, Benjamin writes as a cultural historian and addresses several questions: what is cultural history? What political justification can it have? How can the activity of the historian be reconciled with any kind of revolutionary political commitment? How can preoccupation with a past that cannot be changed contribute anything to the task of changing the world?

In *Arcades Project*, the figure of historian resembles 'The Storyteller' when Benjamin reintroduces the concepts of tradition and memory. The historian thus emerges bearing the 'theological' features of the 'chronicler,' who is the precursor of modern historiography. Far from converting to an explanatory approach, the

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<sup>228</sup> Walter Benjamin, op.cit., p.185

<sup>229</sup> Ronald Beiner, 'Walter Benjamin's Philosophy of History' in *Political Theory*, Vol. 12, No. 3. (Aug., 1984), p.430

<sup>230</sup> Ibid., p.430

historian of the 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' inherits certain qualities from the chronicler:

A chronicler who recites events without distinguishing between major and minor ones acts in accordance with the following truth: nothing that has ever happened should be regarded as lost for history. To be sure, only a redeemed mankind receives the fullness of its past –which is to say, only for a redeemed mankind has its past become citable in all its moments. Each moment it has lived becomes a *citation à l'ordre du jour* and that day is Judgment Day.<sup>231</sup>

For Benjamin, the chronicler remains the model for the historian: both epistemological and materialist history considers events from the point of view of a decisive deliverance. In giving narrative history precedence over explanatory history, Benjamin emancipates historiography from any scientific character, since he suspects the 'science' of history of systematic complacency with regard to the victor. Between historicism and a history written from a messianic perspective, he sees little place for a critical historiography. According to Scholem, the 'Theses on the Concept of History' mark Benjamin's decisive break with historical materialism and a return to the metaphysical-theological concern of his early thought. The secret ruse of the 'Theses on the Concept of the History' is in fact, for Scholem, the hope of a leap into transcendence.<sup>232</sup> In support of his interpretation, Scholem cites the first thesis, where Benjamin proposes an alliance between historical materialism and theology. In general, 'Theses on the Concept of History' explicitly bring together Judaic and Marxist motifs to form a series of 'theologico-political' fragments. Benjamin begins with the memorable image of a chess playing 'puppet in Turkish attire,' an automaton who is secretly guided by a 'little hunchback,' an 'expert chess player' who hides within. Benjamin comments: 'one can imagine a philosophical counterpart to this device. The puppet called historical materialism is to win all the time. It can

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<sup>231</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'Theses On Philosophy of History' in *Illuminations*, edited and with an introduction by Hannah Arendt, trans. By Harry Zohn, London: Fontana, 1973, p.256

<sup>232</sup> Gerhard Scholem, *On Jews and Judaism in Crisis*, New York: Schocken, 1976, pp.172-197

easily be a match for anyone if it enlists the services of theology, which today, as we know, is wizened and has to keep out of sight.'<sup>233</sup> Messianism and historical materialism are strangely complicit in a clandestine conspiracy. This goes beyond theological and political motifs serving as necessary correctives to each other. Benjamin's reflections involve an interpenetration, rather than a juxtaposition, of the language of revolution and that of redemption.<sup>234</sup> In this way, 'Benjamin aligns the revolutionary punctuation of history by the proletariat with the messianic cessation of happening occasioned by the advent of messiah.'<sup>235</sup> Following Lotze, Benjamin tries to explain the notion of theology as his messianism. Fundamentally, Lotze speaks of the trivial and widespread idea that 'true' progress belongs not to humanity as a whole but only to the fulfilled individual, whatever his era.<sup>236</sup> According to Lotze, such 'spiritual' fulfillment does not stem from a linear progress of history but from a 'vertical' progression that everyone should seek to realize by his or her own means. Like Lotze, Benjamin is convinced that fulfillment, the happiness of each individual in every age, is independent of progress. But unlike Lotze, Benjamin thinks that 'fulfillment is the object of a messianic expectation for redemption that each generation transmits to the following one, without its progressive realization being possible.'<sup>237</sup> As Benjamin explains 'There is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one. Our coming was expected on earth. Like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with a *weak* messianic power, a power to which the past has a claim.'<sup>238</sup> If we were expected by our ancestors, according to Benjamin, it is to redeem a part of the happiness they could not achieve.

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<sup>233</sup> Walter Benjamin, op.cit., p.255

<sup>234</sup> Graeme Gilloch, p.227

<sup>235</sup> Ibid., p.227

<sup>236</sup> Rainer Rochlitz, op.cit., p.232

<sup>237</sup> Ibid., p.232

<sup>238</sup> Walter Benjamin, op.cit., p.256



Every human generation is confronted with the same quest for fulfillment. The preceding generation does not envy us because it cannot imagine what happiness would be in a different context, but it expects something from us; it even has a right to our redemptive power, according to Benjamin. As emphasized by Balfour, Benjamin clearly understands the messianic as intervenes in history.<sup>239</sup>

In this messianic context, Benjamin seems to be defining the stance of the self-conscious historical materialist, as opposed to the false historicism of those who lack a genuine historical consciousness. Benjamin tends to redefine materialist categories and to clarify the nature of his allegiance to them.

#### **b. Against the Positivist and Marxist Historiography**

Benjamin's critique of historicism possesses both a destructive and constructive moment.<sup>240</sup> First of all, it seeks to engage critically with conventional historical practices and, in particular, to unmask the fabrications and phantasmagoria of historicism, exemplified by the principles of Keller and Ranke. Secondly, it is concerned with the elaboration of a radically new set of imperatives and techniques which provide for the genuine, materialist comprehension and representation of the past. The historiographical principles thus bearing together in a powerful conjunction two of Benjamin's most important motifs: 'the continual ruination and

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<sup>239</sup> Ian Balfour, 'Reversal, Quotation' (Benjamin's History) in *MLN*, Vol. 106, No. 3, German Issue. (Apr., 1991), p.632

<sup>240</sup> Benjamin discusses fundamental differences between Greek tragedy and German Mourning Play and thus he works to conceptualise his philosophy of history. For a detailed debate on this issue see: Samuel Weber 'Genealogy of Modernity: History, Myth and Allegory in Benjamin's Origin of the German Mourning Play' in *MLN*, Vol. 106, No. 3, German Issue. (Apr., 1991), pp. 465-500

reconfiguration of the past in the present and the techniques of imagistic construction and composition undertaken by the polytechnic engineer.’<sup>241</sup>

Benjamin identifies the three erroneous axioms upon which the historicist vision is based: first, the claim of a universal history; secondly, the privileging of historical narration –that is, history as ‘something which permits itself to be recounted’; thirdly, the insistence upon historical ‘empathy.’ For the historicist, the past is readily identifiable, comprehensive and unambiguously given. For historicism, the duty of the historian is to describe the past in a way that is supposedly uncontaminated by present interests, to ‘tell it like it was.’ The historian establishes a ‘causal connection’ between events, and sequencing them according to a linear logic, relates them as a simple narrative.<sup>242</sup> History is understood as a teleological process, as a continuum characterized by accumulation, development and advance, as benign human progress. For historicism, the past appears ‘perfect’ –it is finished, complete and free of contemporary impurities; it is readily and impartially open to narration; and it consists in uninterrupted improvement culminating in the enlightened present.<sup>243</sup>

Benjamin’s critique of historicism tends also to problematizes a sort of kind of historical materialism that defines himself in terms of revolutionary expectations for the future. Accordingly historical past is analyzed in terms of *what is to be*.<sup>244</sup> However, Benjamin’s idea of historical materialism reverses this perspective: historical materialism is to be defined by a certain relation *to the past*, namely, a redemptive relation. In general, historical materialist approach associates with the idea of history as a rational process, as a dialectical movement, ordered by a purpose. Historical materialism, under the influence of Hegel, is an effort to conceive history

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<sup>241</sup> Graeme Gilloch, op.cit., p.224

<sup>242</sup> Walter Benjamin, op.cit., p.264

<sup>243</sup> Gareme Gilloch, op.cit., p.225

<sup>244</sup> Ronald Beiner, op.cit., p.424

as rationally intelligible. However, for Benjamin, history is radically fragmented; task of the historian is to establish a redemptive relation to the fragments. In Marx's theory, vengeance and hatred are not the driving power for revolution. However, Benjamin tends to argue that 'revolution' or redeeming the past is only possible if the rights of past generations extend to vengeance for past suffering. Benjamin formulates his idea of vengeance within the perspective of a 'permanent state of emergency',<sup>245</sup>

The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the 'state of emergency' in which we live is not the exception but the rule. We must attain to a conception of history that is keeping with this insight. Then we shall clearly realize that it is our task to bring about a real state of emergency, and this will improve our position in the struggle against Fascism.<sup>246</sup>

Bringing the 'real state of emergency' through the viewpoint of oppressed, Benjamin aims to break not only with historicist thought but also with Marxism. In envisaging human history as a teleological process based on the logic of technological change and class conflict society, historical materialism colludes in the notion of progress. For Benjamin, revolutionary transformation is an interruption of history, rather than its culmination. In his notes the 'Theses,' Benjamin captures this using a rather different metaphor: 'Marx said revolutions are the locomotives of world history. But perhaps it is quite different. Perhaps revolutions are the grab for the emergency brakes by the generations of humanity traveling in this train.'<sup>247</sup> In this respect, Benjamin's interpretation of Marxism is, also radically opposed to the evolutionist and positivistic brand of 'scientific socialism' dominant in the Social Democratic and Communist Labor Movement.<sup>248</sup> The leftist politics of Benjamin's age appears to Benjamin as the continuation of a confidence in progress that went back to

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<sup>245</sup> Ibid., p.283

<sup>246</sup> Walter Benjamin, op.cit., p.258

<sup>247</sup> Graeme Gilloch, op.cit., p.226

nineteenth-century historicism. What Benjamin criticizes is the notion of time that underlies the social democrat ideology: 'technological development would automatically bring about social progress owing to a boundless exploitation of nature, and as a result, it allows the hope of a better future for one's grandchildren.' It is to this conception of history that Benjamin opposes his ideas. According to Benjamin, 'the concept of historical progress of mankind cannot be sundered from the concept of its progression through a homogeneous, empty time. A critique of the concept of such a progression must be the basis of any criticism of the concept of progress itself.'<sup>249</sup> Benjamin's essential thesis is that the concept of 'homogeneous, empty time,' the linear time of immanence, is opposite to the idea of 'fulfilled time,' which historical materialism itself must borrow from 'theology.' Benjamin identifies the act of historian who redeems a past threatened with forgetting and misunderstanding, with revolutionary action of itself. Not only Benjamin's interpretation of historicism includes the critique of orthodox Marxism, but it also tends towards the critique of Nietzsche's view of cultural history. Although Benjamin's approach on history is inspired by Nietzschean conception of historical knowledge ('we need history, but not the way a spoiled loafer in the garden of knowledge needs it') Benjamin's purpose of historical materialism is very different. Whereas Nietzsche's critique of historicism and cultural history is made in the name of 'life,' 'youth,' or the heroic individual, Benjamin's is in the name of the defeated.<sup>250</sup> Historicism sees history as a glorious succession of cultural achievements, each one building on the previous results, an accumulation of 'cultural treasures.' As argued by Benjamin, historicism celebrates the cultures of the former

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<sup>248</sup> Michael Löwy, 'Against the Grain: The Dialectical Conception of Culture in Walter Benjamin's *Theses of 1940*' in *Walter Benjamin and the Demands of History*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996, p.208

<sup>249</sup> Walter Benjamin, op.cit., p.261

and present masters. It praises and honors today's rulers as legitimate 'heirs' of past culture. Nietzsche and some version of Marxism like Stalinism are inspired by this understanding of history that identifies itself emphatically with the dominant classes.

In this context, we can draw important analogies between Benjamin's philosophy of history and Arendtian notion of judgment. Like Kafka's parable of 'He' emphasized in the *Between Past and Future*, Benjamin's revised version of Klee's painting *Angelus Novus* expresses subversive quality of judgment.

His faced turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angels can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. The storm is what we call progress.<sup>251</sup>

The angel is a model for the historical materialist or a prototype for that figure. Ian Balfour argues that like the historical materialist, who is to be a distanced observer, 'the process of being distanced from the object of its gaze; indeed this otherwise passive actor is said to be about to distance himself from something.'<sup>252</sup> And like the historical materialist or the oppressed subject of historical knowledge in general, the angel is threatened. Its knowledge occurs in a moment of danger, the moment which for Benjamin designates the instant possible knowledge. As pointed out by Balfour, 'the angel is not yet the historical materialist, but its precarious position and its singular insight are the necessary to the revisionary materialist Benjamin designates.'<sup>253</sup>

The uniqueness of judgment presents itself in the moment of danger. This historical conjuncture provides discriminative feature for Arendtian concept of

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<sup>250</sup> Rainer Rochlitz, op.cit., p.237

<sup>251</sup> Walter Benjamin, op.cit., p.259

<sup>252</sup> Ian Balfour, op.cit., p.640

<sup>253</sup> Ibid., p.640

judgment. Although Arendt's reflections are presented as a general account of judging as a mental faculty, what she really offers is a theory of historical judgment. Arendt is concerned with the judgment of the political spectator reflecting on 'what has been,' a capacity of reflective judgment exemplified preeminently in the activity of the historian.<sup>254</sup> 'An adequate theory of historical judgment, she implies, depends upon defeating the assumptions, which she associates with Hegel and Marx, that there is such thing as progress of the human race and that all things should be measured by the criterion of success.'<sup>255</sup> Against such historicist assumptions, Arendt appeals to the autonomy of the judging spectator. Autonomous judgment is identified with what she calls the 'backward glance' of the historian as opposed to Hegel's *Weltgeschichte* as *Weltgericht*: judgment pronounced by the course of world history. Historiography, in Arendt, redeems those who left behind by the historical process. For this reason, Benjamin and Arendt appeal judgment as historically constructed that includes thinking upon the conditions of possible experience and knowledge. Hence, political judgment is identified in the light of historical knowledge and conscious.

### **c. Benjamin's Method of History**

The interest of Benjamin's philosophy of history can be distinguished three moments in his writings such as 'Theses' and *Paris Arcades*: first, the analysis of the conditions of the instant, 'the 'now,' when historical knowledge is possible, conditions that stem from a Freudian or Proustian theory of memory and a Marxian theory of class consciousness; second, the analysis of the nature of the dialectical

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<sup>254</sup> Ronald Beiner, op.cit., p.433

<sup>255</sup> Ibid., p.433

image, as it is presented to the historian who fulfills these conditions; and third, the construction of historical object as monad.

### *i. The Sociopsychological Condition of Historical Knowledge*

Benjamin's historical reflection is founded on the idea of a reawakening a form of disenchantment that the dream, the nightmare, or the myth of the past into a knowledge allowing one to confront the present and the future. This operation is designated 'the Copernican revolution in the vision of history' and thus, according to the sense of the Kantian expression, as the recentring of history around the subjective conditions of knowledge:

We considered the 'Then' a fixed point and we thought the present was tiptoeing toward the knowledge of that fixed element. Now this relation must reverse itself and the Then become a dialectical reversal and an irruption of awakened consciousness. Politics now takes precedence over history. Facts become something that have only just struck us this very instant, and establishing them is the stuff of remembrance.<sup>256</sup>

That Copernican revolution in the vision of history thus frees us from the requirement of establishing a chimerical 'truth' and past events. 'Copernican revolution in the vision of history' is once more placed under the double sign of messianic remembrance of the expectations of the past and a surrealist gaze on a past that has prematurely fallen into ruins through the decline of progress, determiner the instantaneous nature of remembrance. According to Thesis 5,

The true picture of the past flits by. The past can only be seized as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again...For every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably.<sup>257</sup>

This conception is linked to that of involuntary memory. It presupposes that the instant of possible knowledge is extremely fleeting, both because of the continuity of

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<sup>256</sup> Quotation from Benjamin, Rainer Rochlitz, op.cit., p.240

<sup>257</sup> Walter Benjamin, op.cit., p.255

forgetting and oppression and because of the modern discontinuity with tradition. It is the important to note here that Benjamin links the truth of knowledge to the form of the fleeting image, not to the concept: 'That in which the past and the present join to form a constellation is an image.'<sup>258</sup> The privilege of the image lies in its capacity to enter into correspondence with other images. Furthermore, the image possesses the power to speak to everyone, while the concept is addressed only to the educated classes. Knowledge through images is more accessible, more universal, but it is also more ambiguous. An image can be interpreted in more ways than a concept. What primarily legitimates and motivates the interest in knowledge is the danger that makes the image of the past flash up: That is the theme of Thesis 6:

To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it 'the way it really was (Ranke).' It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up in a moment of danger. Historical materialism wishes to retain that image of the past which unexpectedly appears to man singled out by history at a moment of danger. The danger affects both the content of the tradition and its receivers. The same threat hangs over both: that of becoming anew to wrest tradition away from a conformism that is about to over power it. The Messiah comes not only as the redeemer, he comes as the subduer of Antichrist. Only that historian will have the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past who is firmly convinced that *even the death* will not be safe from the enemy if he wins. And this has not ceased to be victorious.<sup>259</sup>

The psychological constellation that conditions the method of historical thought for Benjamin is as follows: involuntary memory, the instantaneous seizing of a fleeting image; a rescue operation called for by imminent danger; the oppressed class as the subject of history.<sup>260</sup> For Rochlitz in the spirit of the philosophy of the subject, 'Benjamin's own political project consists in bringing humanity to acceded in a single leap to a transparent knowledge of self and to rediscover the origin from which it has been alienated.'<sup>261</sup> The antinomies within which the philosophy of consciousness evolved from Hegel to Husserl to Freud to Foucault, are also found in

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<sup>258</sup> Rainer Rochlitz, op.cit., p.242

<sup>259</sup> Walter Benjamin, op.cit., p.255



Benjamin's philosophy of history<sup>262</sup>: a finite subject that is seeking to transcend itself; empirical continuity of oppression to which is opposed a transcendental subject of history, in this case, a struggling class that inherits all the aborted revolts of the past; the tension between the mythic opacity of history and the transparency of reawakening, and finally, the opposition between an alienated origin and a final reconquest of the past.<sup>263</sup>

Rochlitz points out that these antinomies whether instantaneous or progressive one due to the uncrossable gulf between a subject and an object that can never come together. Truth, for Benjamin, is linked to 'a time-kernel' that is planted in both the knower and the known.' The historical object and the knowing subject are tied precisely by the force of truth that calls for their correspondence: to reveal one through the other. Benjamin is opposed to the idea that truth, as a stable and immobile object, 'will not run off and leave us.'<sup>264</sup> He does not wish to relativize the idea of truth in that way; 'rather, he wishes to link it to the current imperative for truth that must always again be proved, that cannot be stabilized in the form of a proposition that would be truly independent of its assertion.'<sup>265</sup> Hence, for Benjamin, historian's homage to the object (world) has nothing to do with a positivistic claim of objectivity or transparency; because, truth of historical knowledge is an epistemological as well as ethical challenge.<sup>266</sup>

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<sup>260</sup> Rainer Rochlitz, *op.cit.*, p.244

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*, p.244

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid.*, p.244

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid.*, p.244

<sup>264</sup> Walter Benjamin, *op.cit.*, p.245

<sup>265</sup> Rainer Rochlitz, *op.cit.*, p.245

## *ii. The Nature of the Dialectical Image*

The dialectical image is opposed to any representation of a historical process and it equates with a particular form of remembrance, that is sudden and spontaneous, - the *mémoire involuntaire*. Benjamin writes that historical knowledge is only possible in a historical moment. Knowledge in a historical moment is, however, always knowledge from a particular moment. 'As the past coalesce in such a moment - forms a dialectical image- it enters the *mémoire involuntaire* of humanity.'<sup>267</sup> The dialectical image, like the *mémoire involuntaire*, 'is a moment of redemption, one prompted by the most transient and trivial of traces: a glimpse, a scent, a taste, a phrase.'<sup>268</sup> Benjamin speaks of 'the dialectic at a standstill' and the dialectic at a standstill slices across the historical process, in order to extract from it an image of revealing ambiguities: both dream of happiness and mythic phantasmagoria. 'It is identical with the historical object; it justified its being blasted out of the continuum of the historical process.'

Thesis 16 underscores the unique and nonreiterable character of the moment when the historian discovers that the dialectical image is destined for him and for the historical moment when he can save such a constellation of memory.

A historical materialist cannot do without the notion of a present which is not a transition, but in which time stands still and has come to a stop. For this notion defines the present in which he himself is writing history. Historicism gives the 'eternal' image of the past; historical materialism supplies a unique experience with the past. The historical materialist leaves it to others to be drained by the whore called 'once upon a time' in historicism's bordello. He remains in control of his powers, man enough to blast open the continuum of history.'<sup>269</sup>

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<sup>266</sup> Michael P. Steinberg, 'Introduction: Benjamin and the Critique of Allegorical Reason' in *Walter Benjamin and the Demands of History*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996, p.3

<sup>267</sup> Graeme Gilloch, *op.cit.*, p.230

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid.*, p.230

<sup>269</sup> Walter Benjamin, *op.cit.*, p.262

Benjamin focuses on a notion of the present's weight of responsibility not only for the future but also for the past, inasmuch as, through suffering and unfulfilled expectations, we owe to the past to remember.

### *iii. The Construction of the Historical Object as Monad*

In addition to the psychosocial conditions of historical knowledge and the fleeting nature of the dialectical image—a constellation formed between a past and a present—Benjamin includes the work of historian. The purpose of historian, according to Benjamin, is to bring together shards and fragments of experience into constellation he called the monad that froze or stalled the dialectic into a momentary and unique image.<sup>270</sup> That entails a constructive aspect and a destructive aspect. The constructive aspect is the act performed by historical materialist historian and constituted an intervention in the current situation. The destructive aspect obeys a critical impulse and it is directed against the false continuities of history. In that way, the historian knows he is in solidarity with revolutionary movements.

The awareness that they are about to make the continuum of history explode is characteristic of the revolutionary classes at the moment of their action. The great revolution introduced a new calendar. The initial day of calendar serves as a historical time—lapse camera. And, basically, it is the same day that keeps recurring in the guise of holidays, which are days of remembrance. That the calendars do not measure time as clocks do; they are movements of a historical consciousness of which not the slight has been apparent in Europe in the past hundred years.<sup>271</sup>

Here, Benjamin establishes a direct relation between the aesthetic reflections on time that he develops in 'Some Motifs on Baudelaire' and the time of history, especially the time of revolutions. The days that matter for Benjamin 'are days of

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<sup>270</sup> Harry D. Harootunian, 'The Benjamin Effect: Modernism, Repetition, and the Path to Different Cultural Imaginaries' in *Walter Benjamin and the Demands of History*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996, p.66; see also Michael P. Steinberg, 'The Collector as Allegorist: Goods, Gods, and the Objects of History' in *Walter Benjamin and the Demands of History*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996, p.89

completing time, to paraphrase Joubert. They are days of recollection.<sup>272</sup> They are linked to the 'rituals with their ceremonies' and to festivals.<sup>273</sup> Like Arendt Benjamin confers an implicitly aesthetic quality on these inaugural moments of history, that is, on revolutions. Revolutions have density of a full and fulfilled time that characterizes works of art and celebrations. 'In them, an origin is renewed, without any dissociation between signifier, signified and referent, without homogenous and empty time.'<sup>274</sup> The calendar, the reiterated memory of an inaugural moment, points to a problem that risks annulling the break in continuity. Benjamin formulates it as a 'fundamental uporia': 'The history of the oppressed is a discontinuum.' 'The task of history consists in seizing hold of the tradition of the oppressed.'<sup>275</sup> He seeks to solve this problem by asserting that 'the representation of the continuum ends with a leveling and the representation of the discontinuous is at the foundation of any authentic tradition.'<sup>276</sup> Hence, 'the authenticity of tradition lies in the fact that a representation is wrenched from a historical continuity placed under the sign of oppression, conformism, and falsifications: continuity levels out both suffering and revolt.'<sup>277</sup> The French Revolution is the example of this.

History is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogeneous empty time, but filled by the presence of the now (Jetztzeit). Thus, to Robespierre ancient Rome was a past charged with the time of the now which he blasted out of the continuum of history. The French Revolution viewed itself as Rome reincarnate. It evoked ancient Rome the way fashion evokes costumes of the past. Fashion has a flair for the topical, no matter where it stirs in the tickets of long ago; it is a tiger's leap in to the Past.<sup>278</sup>

What interests Benjamin about the French Revolution is not institutional innovations and their consequences in the field of values, but the very experience of

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<sup>271</sup> Walter Benjamin, op.cit., p.263

<sup>272</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'Some Motifs in Baudelaire', p.183

<sup>273</sup> Ibid., p.161

<sup>274</sup> Rainer Rochlitz, op.cit., p.248

<sup>275</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'Eduard Fuchs: Historian and Collector' in *One-Way Street and Other Writings*, translators, Edmund Jephcott, Kingsley Shorter. London; New York: Verso, 1997 p.352

<sup>276</sup> Ibid., p.352

<sup>277</sup> Rainer Rochlitz, op.cit., p.248

revolutionary discontinuity, which cannot be lost. What is important for Benjamin in the French Revolution is the fact that a present can abruptly recognize itself in the past and 'through that dazzling discovery' can create the new. Here again, aesthetic innovation provides the model for historical action. This analysis is confirmed by the lost concept that Benjamin introduces in presenting his theory of history that of the monad figured in 'Theses.'

Thinking involves not only the flow of thoughts, but their arrest as well. Where thinking suddenly stops in a configuration pregnant with tensions, it gives that configuration as shock, by which it crystallizes into a monad. A historical materialist approaches a historical subject only where he encounters it as a monad. In this structure he recognizes the sign of a Messianic cessation of happening, or, put differently, a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past.<sup>279</sup>

According to Benjamin, the monad is a structure, constitutive of a 'vision of the world.' The number of these visions is limited and each monad possesses a 'prehistory' and a 'posthistory,' through the repeated themes and variations of these ideas over the course of history.<sup>280</sup> The particularity of the Benjaminian monad resides in the fact that on each occasion it incarnates the 'revolutionary chance' to redeem a part of the forgotten past and in the fact that the monad in itself sums up the whole of history: 'the conflict between an awakening and the forgetting of messianic chance.'<sup>281</sup> The aesthetic element of this philosophy of history is not simply confusion of categories. Benjamin insists unilaterally on an aspect neglected by objectivist historiography. He emphasizes the fact that the historian is never indifferent to his or to her objects that they belong to the historian's own irreplaceable experience and that he or she is responsible for a past always threatened by the interests of the present.

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<sup>278</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on Philosophy of History', p.263

<sup>279</sup> Walter Benjamin, *op.cit.*, p.265

<sup>280</sup> Rainer Rochlitz, *op.cit.*, p.250

### 3. Conclusion

Benjamin's theory provides the image of the present. Images, which signify the present, provide the real time of the world. According to Benjamin, images are the ingredients of possible judgment because through images, we identify the hidden possibilities of history or another possible time process. Hence, by concretizing another present through the images forgotten in the past, we intervene cyclical time sequences in history. History, in Benjaminian sense, is made by the people's judgment in *the present*. All of Benjamin's works maintain the same themes around the present. His attitude towards the present is not the same with the traditional historicist approach. In historicism, the general tendency about the past events is the historian's or critic's insight of research and his/her results on the research reflects his/her opinion in the present. The past is seen as a reflection of the historian's outlook. Hence the interpretations of past events are determined by historian's social and political ideas in the age he/she lives in. In this view, the most important point is that truth about the past is relativized necessarily by the historian. On the other hand, Benjamin relativizes the present. In order to construct a new present, Benjamin considers the past as the source of hidden possibilities and truth. According to him the present has been constructed although the hidden expectations of oppressed people. In this respect, besides the existing present there are many other presents hidden in the past.

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<sup>281</sup> Ibid., p.250

## CONCLUSION

The thesis offers a critique that highlights the importance of experience and judgment for the political through the criticism of the progressive time conception. To see events in their particularity and autonomy emancipates their meaning from the grip of the homogenized historical outlook. This helps us to see the real quality of political events that qualify as progress. In this thesis, my main insight was to understand how the idea of progress determined the quality of experience and judgment. To see the relationship between the idea of progress and experience and judgment stimulates a debate on the concepts of democracy, freedom and right. Although the progressive outlook conceptualizes democracy in its material conditions and uses quantitative and statistical proofs, the critical attitude towards progress focuses on the requirements of experience and political judgment. The consciousness of presentness problematizes the authority of homogenized and generalized knowledge about experience and it offers situated knowledge that emphasizes the priorities of particularities for understanding the direction of progress. The political implication of this debate is that re-conceptualizing democracy on the multiculturalist perspective in the modern world requires problematizing the idea of experience influenced by determinism. This necessitates rejecting the optimism of Fukuyama on the liberal democratic definition of experience. In this regard, the Kantian reformulation of Enlightenment is related to the freedom of man's capacity to fulfill his experience in a particularistic perspective. The debate on progress highlighted by the criticism of modernization theories adopts the progressive outlook. It offers alternative developmental theories that accept the progressive perspective ignoring the autonomy of experience. Hence new democratic experiences can be constructed outside of the west. However, I believe that experience

cannot be defined in a progressive and developmental perspective. The debate on autonomy and uniqueness of experience about progress reconstructs our concepts on democracy while we question the hegemony of modernization theories.



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