Chapter 2
The Culture of Philosophical Experience

CULTURE

In the first chapter we have explored ways in which speculative experience is suppressed within various perspectives within the philosophy of education and educational theory. When the speculative experience is comprehended as the broken relation of education and philosophy, not only is the one-sided nature of these perspectives exposed, but also their broken relation is realised philosophically, that is, as an experience of aporia in and for itself. Within this investigation in Chapter 1, we saw the different ways in which this experience is misrecognised, but we also, in brief, described the ways in which philosophy in Hegel, Kierkegaard and Rose re-cognises this misrecognition. This recognition cannot be interpreted as an overcoming of the oppositions that are the substance of its experience. Recognition is tied to misrecognition, and is the relation of philosophy to existing social relations, not its overcoming of them.¹ To be engaged in and by the speculative is to learn to live with, yet in important ways also apart from, the social relations that currently pre-determine both our experience and the thought of our experience. It is to an examination of these relations and pre-determinations that this chapter turns its attention.

These social and political relations are already present, then, in the forms that philosophy of education and educational theorising take. As we saw above, when, for example, moral philosophy posits objectivity or validity as having priority over the dialectic, or negation, or mediation, then it posits itself as a consciousness of the object, but not, also, as a consciousness of itself as object. This is an oft-made critique of such work from within both the emancipatory tradition, which sees it as paying no heed to the universality of modern commodification, as well as for more post-foundationalist outlooks, which see its logos implicated in and by a Western epistemological and rational imperialism. Equally, however, when these critical or deconstructive outlooks give priority to non-objectivity, be it as praxis or pluralism, this, in turn, refuses political experience a grounding in itself and threatens to make it otiose as thinking that lacks objective educational import.

Social relations, specifically universal private property relations, are carried within both of these groups of perspectives and their critiques of each other. This is experienced by us in the repetition of such critiques where each accuses the other of varying degrees of universality or particularity. Our experience of their opposition, and the repetitions of the aporias of those oppositions, is our experience of the social and political relations that they repeat but do not acknowledge. This is not the
education they intend for us, but it is an experience that we have to learn
to take seriously (in all its comic forms) if we are to learn how to learn
about the modern experience.

We have called this political and philosophical experience the broken
middle. Without such a notion, there is no actual significance to our
political experiences. The broken middle remains unrecognised in each of
the examples explored in Chapter 1, yet they are based on attitudes
towards the middle. Moral philosophy in Carr and dialectical (or
dialogical) philosophy in Burbules both sought to find the middle way
between the universal (reason or thought) and the particular or the local
(being). Ethical theory in Noddings also occupies the middle via the
duality of care. None of these desires for unity, however, analyses the
conditions of possibility upon which the desires are dependent. Why is
it the middle that is required? Why is every experience of the middle
reduced to a dualism and an opposition between universal and particular?
Why is modern experience in all its forms—moral, postmodern,
poststructuralist, emancipatory, nihilistic—aporetic? Why do post-foun-
dationalist perspectives have to demand, indeed to assert, that one must
look beneath the dualisms that they repeat—for example, between the
instrumental and aesthetic in education—for the more sophisticated, more
subtle meanings that they intend? Why does modern reason eternally
refuse itself a ground, a home? To address these questions the perspectives
listed here, and especially as they are employed within educational
theorising, are required to confront the illusions that are present in each
formulation of the question to be answered. One could here take a
Heideggerian line, a hermeneutic line, and argue for a notion of Being-
there that has ontological priority over representation. Such an approach
is rejected here, for reasons explored below in Chapter 5 and in a footnote
to Chapter 6. Instead I intend to pursue the question of illusion, of social
and political determination, through some of the work of Max
Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin.

Working with aporia means working with the illusions that are present
by appearing to be absent in modern experience. In Carr, in Burbules and
in Noddings, illusion is present as forms of natural law theorising. Illusion
here is not in the object that is either open or closed. Rather illusion is
present in the relation of thought and the object to its being known, or as
we remarked above, in the thinking of thinking, the relation of the relation.
It is illusion, therefore, that determines both the form of modern
experience and the aporetic nature of its critique. It is illusion that
ensures that we realise the opposition of universal and particular, and that
ensures that this knowing repeats the same opposition. It is from within
illusion, then, that illusion is known, and that social and political relations
can be recognised in our thinking but also recognised as unable to
establish new relations. The ‘difference’ that such recognition makes is the
whole question not only of the philosophy of the teacher but also of the
telos of philosophy in modernity and in its broken relation to education.
The brokenness is the question as to what difference education makes. It
is, therefore, already a political question pregnant with illusion. To ask the
question is to repeat the social and political conditions that construe the question; to learn how to learn from it is to retrieve a notion of the absolute as social critique, or as the education of thought by thought, or, lastly, as the difference that philosophy and education make.

If we are to realise such a philosophy of the teacher, then, we have to find ways of exploring this issue of how social and political relations are carried within the experiences of teachers. I intend to present these experiences in Part II. As a prolegomena I want to address two complementary accounts of why it is that modern societies are so successful in determining thinking in the ways just described. What is it about modernity that abstracts education from itself in our experiences? I want to answer such questions in two ways. First, I will explore how representation—taken here to refer to the way our thoughts are made known to us—hides within itself the ways in which representation is both constructed within particular social formations and realises that construction. We have already come across this idea as the illusion that experience carries but does not acknowledge. Second, I will argue that the real defect—misrecognition is better here—with representation or with modern experience, is that it has no idea of itself as a ‘culture’. Culture here has a specific educational meaning and import within speculative philosophy. It refers to the way in which an idea or an experience, in being known, re-forms itself in this being known. Ideas without such a notion of culture or re-formation tend towards dogma because they are asserted without philosophical or educative significance. Applied to the perspectives explored above in Chapter 1, this enables us to say that the philosophies of Carr, Burbules and Noddings lacked a philosophical comprehension of culture. Each, in different ways, suppressed the experience of aporia as culture, and each, in turn, refused the experience its subjectivity and its substance in and as philosophy. It is this re-formation of ideas in being known and in being practised that is the culture of the dualism of theory and practice (as of other dualisms). It is a truism that the philosophy of education and educational theory are haunted by the duality, the bifurcation, of theory and practice. Ideas in practice always have unintended consequences, and practice made theoretical often appears to lose its uniqueness to the desire for abstraction. However, to recognise the culture of theory and practice is to comprehend the broken middle of their relation as both necessary and educative. The difficulty of their relation can then be seen not as the endless repetition of the dead end of their endless repetition; rather it can be comprehended as the experience of aporia as both form and content. It is the case that speculative experience retrieves the truth of culture itself, and is the site whereupon the culture, the re-formation, inherent in experience can be known without new modes of suppression or domination.

What we will now explore, on the one hand, are two of the ways in which critical theory has tried to reveal the illusions carried with representation and the ways that this is manifested in the domination by abstract reason of philosophy and the notion of culture. On the other hand, but equally important, we will look briefly at the fate of the epistemology
of culture within modernity and its relation to the separation of philosophy and education. This work is necessary in order to explore the ways in which teachers work within a modern régime of representation that opposes particular forms of education and releases others. This régime lies well hidden behind the ordinary experience of teachers and students alike, but dominates them. Most significant perhaps is its appearance as the idea of the end of philosophy, where ‘end’ refers to the termination of philosophy as a political or philosophically educational experience. Such claims in fact represent the total abstraction of experience from culture. If teachers cannot see how they are re-formed in their struggles with theory and practice, then not only are they destined to repeat the abstraction of culture, they are also denied the means to learn from these difficulties. In short, denied of the notion of education as culture, as their formation and re-formation, they are denied themselves as an object of philosophical thinking. As we will now see, the political stakes of such denial are very high indeed, for the suppression of the relation of formation and re-formation can and perhaps does leave the way open for forms of totalitarianism. The philosophy of the teacher aims to retrieve the culture of the teacher, not least in response to the appearance of their work as increasingly apolitical.

The following sections, then, trace the arguments concerning representation and culture made by Adorno and Horkheimer and by Benjamin largely in the first half of the twentieth century. This explains their preoccupation with the technology of the time and its impact on culture. But their work is still significant for it testifies to the ways in which experience is formed in and by modernity. The logic of their arguments concerning the structure of experience is still valid, not least for understanding the (lack of a) culture of teaching.

ADORNO AND HORKHEIMER

In Adorno’s collaborations with Horkheimer and in his single authored work, the idea that culture has become detached from its educational and reformative import in and for modern consciousness is a major theme. However, I will concentrate on the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* published in 1947, and shorter essays by Adorno written both before and after the *Dialectic*.

In their essay on the culture industry Adorno and Horkheimer demonstrate not only ‘the regression of enlightenment to ideology’ (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1979, p. xvi) but also how the ‘technological rationale is the rationale of domination itself’ (p. 121). The dialectical sophistication of their argument is not to be found merely in the mantra that the culture industry determines individual consciousness. There are times, of course, when Adorno and Horkheimer reflect on the total reification under the ‘totality of the culture industry’ (p. 136). For example they note that ‘the whole world is made to pass through the filter of the culture industry’ (p. 126); that ‘real life is becoming indistinguishable from the movies’ (ibid.); that the culture industry has ‘moulded men as a type unfailingly reproduced in every product’ (p. 127) and has, therefore, inaugurated ‘total harmony’ (p. 134). They tell us that ‘no independent
thinking must be expected from the audience: the product prescribes every reaction’ (p. 137).

In general terms, though, they identify three determinate results that can be ascribed to the culture industry, each contributing to both the conformity of thinking to the rationality of the technological and to the resignation of thinking that such conformity is inevitable and inescapable. First, they point out that both thought and the very way things are in class-based societies are reduced to conformity and equivalence. Films, or rather movie stars, show success is possible. Yet in this very representation of success the audience, as a mass, is reminded in a surreptitious but forceful way, of the fact that they cannot succeed. The singular, the one, exemplifies the sameness of everyone else. ‘Ironically, man as a member of a species has been made a reality by the culture industry. Now any person signifies only those attributes by which he can replace everybody else: he is interchangeable, a copy. As an individual he is completely expendable and utterly insignificant’ (pp. 145–146). Here, being brought nearer to the stars that one can identify with also vastly increases the distance that one feels from them. Stars do not, by definition, represent those who have not made it.

Second, the culture industry is iatrogenic, producing conditions it pretends to overcome. In general terms amusement, which is sold as a rest from work, is in fact ‘the prolongation of work’ (p. 137). In his essay Free Time, Adorno notes that where people are led to think that they act freely, i.e., in their free time, such actions are ‘shaped by the very same forces which they are seeking to escape in their hours without work’ (Adorno, 1991, p. 162). This idea is reinforced by Adorno and Horkheimer, in that ‘mechanization has such power over a man’s leisure and happiness, and so profoundly determines the manufacture of amusement goods, that his experiences are inevitably after-images of the work process itself’ (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1979, p. 137). Here they are clearly showing the relation between the ways in which individuals think and the forms of representation that dominate culture. The representation is taken into thought and becomes the form and the content of thought. Furthermore, they argue that laughter and fun, rather than providing happiness, in fact corrupt it by being employed ‘at the expense of everyone else’ (p. 141). They argue here that the readiness of the audience to laugh as an audience is ‘a parody of humanity’ because it represents the liberation of laughter ‘from any scruple when the social occasion arises’ (ibid.). Behind this laughter is not happiness but only ‘the echo of power as something inescapable’ (p. 140). All aspects of the amusement industry are pornographic in the sense that like pornography they deny fulfilment to the desires they arouse; ‘the diner must be satisfied with the menu’ (p. 139).

Third, Adorno also draws attention to the way the pseudo-happiness of conformity is represented in and by music. The division between ‘serious’ music and ‘light’ music is symptomatic of the separation of thought from being, and of the intellectual from ‘real life’. In each case the latter absolves the former from ‘the thought of the whole’ (1991, p. 29). Famously, Adorno described their relationship as ‘torn halves of an
integral freedom, to which, however, they do not add up’ (Adorno, 1999, p. 130). Elsewhere he notes that the ‘unity of the two spheres of music is thus that of an unresolved contradiction’ (1991, p. 30).

In these three ways then, through equivalence, reproduction and conformity, Adorno and Horkheimer show how thought comes to represent the ways in which culture is represented to thought. Clearly for our discussions on the relation between representation and culture these arguments are significant. They amount to saying that culture in modern bourgeois society has, in its technological form, become so abstracted from consciousness that it now represents abstraction as culture. As such, consciousness is robbed of the concept by which critical thinking can comprehend itself. The element of learning, of re-formation, is claimed now by a notion of (modern, abstract, instrumental) culture that is separated from its educational significance. There is, in short, no way left for critique to be meaningful.

The melancholy of this perspective is well-known, particularly in Adorno’s work. However, the gloom deepens further when Adorno explores the representation of music. He notes a development, here, in the nature of the fetishism of commodities. Whereas in the original formulation fetishism required the concrete production of the object in order to realise its homogeneity with all objects in exchange value, now cultural goods seem to be exempt from the need for exchange and thus from any actual attachment to the object itself. Representation here is freed from the object it represents. Without an object all objects are (only) representation, and as such are the same object for all. This increases the power of culture as conformity in that equivalence is now granted an aesthetic reality. When representation can replace objects with feelings, then the whole world is cast adrift from its being known; or, as Adorno puts it, mass culture, as the representation of a completely reified world, can worship the ticket to the game more than the game itself. This abstraction of exchange value even from the object is now the fetishism of pure exchange; not exchange in and of itself, but its aesthetic, made possible by the standardisation of both object and consumer.

For the teacher, here, we might say that, since representation has become all culture, all forms of thinking that might recognise re-formation in and of themselves—in other words, all critical thinking—become impossible. Since all thoughts are now representations that are the same in terms of their ‘value’, the idea of thinking as culture, as re-formation, has itself been re-formed as having no relation. In the absence of relation, indeed, where representation claims to be relation, the broken middle of experience, of culture, is otiose. It signifies nothing. It rules out a philosophy of the teacher. It ‘corresponds to the behaviour of the prisoner who loves his cell because he has been left nothing else’ (p. 35).

This is brought out again in Adorno’s critique of the culture industry functioning as the ideology of ideology. There are three aspects to this. First, it is the politicisation of the dialectic between image and reality. On the one hand, ‘reality becomes its own ideology through the spell cast by its faithful duplication’ (p. 55). On the other hand, ‘if the real becomes
an image insofar as in its particularity it becomes as equivalent to the whole as one Ford car is to all the others of the same range, then the image... turns into immediate reality’ (ibid.). This relation of image and reality has dissolved the recognition of illusion and is now a total relation where each is all of the other. Representation here is the nullity of the distinction between appearance and what is, or is the ‘liquidation of its opposition’ (p. 56).

Second, this liquidation both creates and feeds its own needs. Every product is always already a representation of the needs of empirical reality, or of the various empirical categories of the consumer. Thus determined, the consumer ‘cannot digest anything not already pre-digested’ (p. 58). The culture industry is the ideology of ‘baby-food’ (ibid.)—that is, it is directed towards the needs that it creates precisely in the appearance of trying to satisfy those needs. The ideology of ideology here is the dialectic of nihilism: a feeling of a desire that is fuelled by the feeding and that it is thus never able to satisfy. This dialectic of nihilism is not just another technological domination of nature; it is the ‘pure domination of nature’ (p. 61) in that it is emancipated from all ends, all objects, save its own fulfilling and self-denying reproduction. Objects pass ‘impotently by’ (p. 62). ‘Nothing happens any more’ (pp. 62–63).

Adorno also remarks that ‘the liquidation of conflict in mass culture is not merely an arbitrary matter of manipulation’ (p. 65). The real beauty of the culture industry, its sublime excess even of its own manipulation, is that it co-opts individuals to collaborate in the pleasure of their desertion by the universal and their consequent destruction. ‘Conformity has replaced consciousness’ (p. 90) not merely in some vulgar over-deterministic way. On the contrary, the masses come to ‘desire a deception that is nonetheless transparent to them’ (p. 89). It is not just in the sense of a distraction from objectivity that the masses ‘choose’, within the ideology of ideology, to opt for ideology; ‘they insist on the very ideology which enslaves them’ (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1979, p. 134). They know ‘as soon as the film begins... how it will end, and who will be rewarded, punished or forgotten’ (p. 125). The formula replaces the thinking that would be required genuinely to experience, to think about, the event as a whole. But it is the formula, in which ‘the whole and the parts are alike[,] there is no antithesis and no connection’ (p. 126), that precisely defines the viewer as within the mass.

Before turning our attention to Benjamin, it is important to illustrate clearly the political implications here of representation and its colonising of culture. For Adorno it is the totality of such representation that casts the most significant shadow. Against the possibility of critical thinking, where a relation to the object can realise a re-forming of the relation, the totality of representation as technological culture leaves or creates no such productive gaps between thought and being. Not only does culture now become mass production of conformity and equivalence, even time itself is suppressed. Lacking a relation to an event, time never passes, for there is nothing against which change, movement and
development—education—can register. Time, says Adorno, like critique, is in stasis because the culture machine ‘rotates on the same spot’ (p. 134).

From these observations, Adorno concludes that culture, in its modern, abstract, technological and undialectical form, is if not the production of Fascism itself then certainly a very significant aid to its development. When the possibility of critical thinking, of re-formation, and the possibility of establishing a relation between the particular and the universal, the whole, are subsumed within a culture of abstract representation, then domination characterises both society at large and the (im)possibility of its being thought and known. Thus, Adorno concludes, ‘the new fetish is the flawlessly functioning, metallically brilliant apparatus as such, in which all the cogwheels mesh so perfectly that not the slightest hole remains open for the meaning of the whole’ (Adorno, 1991, p. 39). Curiosity, the ground of resistance, falls victim to the ideology of ideology and is socialised by the mass production of information. Fascism is aided negatively by a lack of resistance and also positively by the way that thinking not only comes to terms with reality but also perpetuates it.

Given Adorno’s political experiences through the 1930s and 1940s, his concern with the conditions of the possibility of Fascism are not surprising. But his work carries deep significance for the new century. It is precisely where we think that the danger of a slide into fascistic forms of domination and rule are least problematic that, from Adorno’s point of view, those forms are at their most effective and opaque. The teacher who, to coin a phrase, says ‘there is no problem here’ may well not recognise or know how to recognise the elision of political experience that her statement represents.

WALTER BENJAMIN

The critique of culture and representation is exemplified in two of Benjamin’s most famous pieces: The Origin of German Tragic Drama (Trauerspiel) (1985), written between May 1924 and April 1925, and the shorter essay The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction (1992), written between 1936 and 1969. Both works, among other things, offer critiques of ‘representation’ or, in a Kantian sense, of the way that intuitions are shaped and ordered in the mind by concepts. Both works acknowledge that philosophical critique ‘must continually confront the question of representation’ (Benjamin, 1985, p. 27). This confrontation of philosophy and representation in Benjamin’s Trauerspiel is, at first glance, centred around ideas and styles that seem to have little relevance today. Trauerspiel is the mourning play or play of lamentation that originated in the Counter-Reformation in Germany as in several other countries in the seventeenth century. Rose explains here that Benjamin is arguing in this text that baroque Trauerspiel represents nature according to ‘the predominant myth of the time’ (Rose, 1978, p. 38). She states that Trauerspiel means a ‘melancholy’ or ‘mourning’ play; ‘funereal pageant’ would be a less literal rendering. The myth comprises the history of the
significance which the society of the time has given to nature, and, as a myth, presents that significance as eternal. In seventeenth-century German drama, historical events are the subject of the plays which are thus apparently secular. However, Benjamin shows that the historical life of the time is presented through the contemporary theological situation and that the emblems of ruin, relics, death-heads, have an allegorical or religious significance (ibid.).

We will unpack the importance of allegorical representation in a moment. The relevance of the text for understanding modernity and the relation of representation and culture we are exploring may not at first be apparent. However, as Simon Jarvis has recently argued, ‘Benjamin’s critique of allegory implies nothing less than a critique of modernity itself’ (Jarvis, 1998, p. 10). He justifies this claim in terms that will be immediately recognisable from the preceding study of Adorno. The relationship, says Jarvis, ‘between signifier and signified in allegory is arbitrary’ (ibid.). Thus, and quoting Benjamin directly from the Trauerspiel, ‘any person, any object, any relationship can mean absolutely anything else’ (ibid.; Benjamin, 1985, p. 175). It is this theme of equivalence in representation that ties Benjamin’s study directly to that of Adorno presented above. What melancholy is to Adorno, the nihilism of representation is for Benjamin.

We must now try to extract from Benjamin’s Trauerspiel the significance of allegory for our own critique of the relation between culture and representation. According to Rose, the Counter-Reformation represents in Benjamin’s work ‘the unintended psychological and political consequences of Protestant Innerlichkeit (inwardness) and worldly asceticism’ (Rose, 1993, p. 180). As Luther’s doctrine moved the presence of God from the idolatry of good works to the suffering of personal sin such that ‘works contribute nothing to justification’ (Luther, 1989, p. 47), so the experience of God was one of desertion. The representation of this experience, its form and content, is the mourning play in which desertion by God becomes the myth of the world’s suffering. This, says Benjamin, is ‘the heart of the allegorical way of seeing, of the baroque, secular explanation of history as the Passion of the world; its importance resides solely in the stations of its decline’ (1985, p. 166). As such, through the Counter-Reformation of both Protestantism and Catholicism, the inward anxiety of salvation is related to the ruin of an external world to produce inward asceticism and outward political ruthlessness. This bifurcation of the one theological situation is represented in the duality of human hopelessness and the decay of the world. But it is here that we begin to see the role of representation not as a representation of the metaphysical import of such events, but as the way in which the medium becomes the message. Culture, stripped of its relationship to an object in which education or re-formation can be realised, becomes instead the form and the content of experience itself. ‘Anything can be made to stand for anything else only because nothing is absolute’ (Jarvis, 1998, p. 10). Thus, culture here is myth without enlightenment.
The allegory of baroque *Trauerspiel* represents theological crisis in the two different faces of power—internally the martyr to events and externally the intriguer who can use the emergency to justify his own political ruthlessness. It is in the figure of the Monarch, or the Prince, that the height of human power, deserted by God, most clearly exemplifies ‘the humble state of his humanity’ (Benjamin, 1985, p. 70). Indeed, ‘the German *Trauerspiel* is taken up entirely with the hopelessness of the earthly condition’ (p. 81). The Baroque ethic, then, is not just the representation of the content of the fallen world; as myth it is itself the form of the separation between earth and heaven, or between creature and divine redemption. Allegory both represents the aestheticisation of a world without salvation and encloses this experience within itself. The consequence, says Jarvis, is that without a perspective outside of this aesthetic representation of the absolute, ‘the context cannot be interpreted’ (1998, p. 10). In our terms, for the philosophy of the teacher, it is wherein philosophical experience ceases to be educational. Hence, in representing fallen nature as politics without salvation (and here we can begin to see links with Adorno’s concerns with Fascism), allegory lends itself to political ruthlessness and violence. In the merely civil society of the Baroque ethic, power must protect itself in myth, secure that there is no revelation, no enlightenment, which will restore its critical dialectic. Mythical representation of the universal in ornamentation not only suppresses critique; most significantly it both fixes the world as without metaphysics and grants to itself emergency powers to restore (and repeatedly fail to restore) the universal. This representation of state and religion is ‘the spirit of fascism, or, what fascism means’ (Rose, 1993, p. 196)—namely, the aesthetic of destruction, a ‘godless spirituality, bound to the material as its counterpart, such as can only be concretely experienced through evil’ (Benjamin, 1985, p. 230).

If the allegory of the baroque ethic is one form of the aestheticisation of politics, Benjamin’s study of the technology of mechanical representation is an even more celebrated second form. Like allegory, the movie camera is not just determinative of the content of experience; it represents an aestheticisation of politics, or is itself also a form of experience. The loss of intimacy between object and observer, called the loss of aura by Benjamin, is brought about by the mechanical reproducibility of those objects. Reproduction, as representation, is politically significant here as the representation of the same for the viewing of all. This has obvious links to Adorno’s argument concerning the way representation can command mass experience. Where distance from the original object—for example, a holy relic—provides unique experience, the illusion of intimacy made possible by the mass reproduction of the object destroys aura. The closer the masses get to the reproduction of the object, the less intimate is their experience. Equally, the more the actor performs for the camera, the greater is his alienation from the audience. The dialectic of aura, significant politically, concerns the distance and the relation between object and viewer. In the movie, however, the distance is abolished and the reproduction of the actor is turned into ‘common property’ (Benjamin, 1992, p. 225). As Baroque
allegory cradled the spirit of Fascism in the representation of the loss of
dialectical relation to the universal, so, now, reproduction serves the spirit of
Fascism in the destruction of dialectical relation.

The response to this ‘shrivelling’ (p. 224) of aura by the film industry is
twofold, says Benjamin: it involves not only the commodification of the
personality of the actor but also the fragmentation of reality by the camera,
which then assembles the pieces ‘under a new law’ (p. 227). Appearing
free of mechanical interference, this new law opens up for us the
distraction of new and ‘unexpected field[s] of action’ (p. 229). The more
‘closely’ we are enabled to adventure into our cultural life by the movie,
the more is aura destroyed. The more closely we are able to dissect,
analyse and learn about our lives, our neighbourhoods, and our cultures
from films, the more our relation through distance to each other, to
tradition, to law and to the universal is destroyed. The illusion of relation
is contained in the representation of a relation, a distance, between
individual and mass. ‘Individual relations,’ says Benjamin, ‘are pre-
determined by the mass audience response they are about to produce . . .
[T]he moment these responses become manifest they control each other’
(pp. 227–228). In short, the more particularly our lives are represented, the
more quantitatively and qualitatively the same we become. This is Fascist
‘universality’. Allegory, which represented creatureliness aesthetically, is
replaced by technology, which represents bourgeois social relations
aesthetically. In both cases the distance, the relation, to the universal
is destroyed and replaced by a pseudo-universality, viz., the represent-
ation of this destruction as enjoyment. As Benjamin comments,
mankind’s ‘self-alienation has reached such a degree that it can experience
its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order. This is
the situation of politics that Fascism is rendering aesthetic’ (p. 235).
The Baroque ethic and mechanical reproduction, desertion and distraction,
are the representation of the loss of the universal and the opportunity
for its reproduction as aesthetic—in Trauerspiel as the absolute intrigue
of politics, and in mechanical art as the absolute enjoyment of art
as free from politics or the universal. Fascism and representation in
Benjamin are both the effect and the determination of a dialectic denuded
of its own law.

The significance of Benjamin’s critique here is that culture becomes
the reproduction of an experience that hides itself in the experience.
Culture becomes a pre-determined way of relating to objects, to each other
and to notions of the eternal and the universal, in such a way as to mask its
pre-determination. Those within this culture are left to surmise that culture
is their experience, realised by them and through them. They are not
invited to comprehend how their experience is really the distortion of
culture. Nor, therefore, are they able to learn of the political forms that
underpin their experiences and their cultures. As such, the relation
between culture and experience can only be experienced according to the
culture that shapes the experience. The only experience that can contain
this contradiction in and as its own form and content is speculative or
philosophical.
THE END OF CULTURE

Before assessing the implications for theory and practice of the forms of representation and their relation to culture explored here, I want to offer a further analysis of culture in terms of its epistemology. Inside the now commonplace observation of Enlightenment rationality as characterised by teleological imperialism and totality, there lies another form of the relation between representation and culture that is relevant to the way we are constructing the philosophy of the teacher. In essence, and masked by the critique of the absolute as dogmatic, there is a domination of philosophical relation here that we can call the end of culture—where ‘culture’ is taken in the sense that we have been using it, as the philosophical recognition of thought’s own re-formation in and for itself.

‘End’ here carries two related meanings. First, the end of culture means that the re-presentation of experience and its social, political and philosophical re-formation is exhausted. It is no longer capable of carrying any import as critical thinking. This is not just a different way of describing the theory of total reification. It is to realise the impotence that lies within such a realisation. As thought and critical thinking no longer have a relation to their being known, they are no longer of any educational or philosophical import. This end of culture must mean the end of philosophy, for experience is never allowed to become subject and substance. Another way of describing this end of culture is as the dialectic of nihilism. Second, the end of culture refers to its own telos—that of representing social and political relations as separate from experience. Put together, the end of culture represents its victory of abstraction over philosophical education as without philosophical significance. In this ‘end’ of culture, then, is the unification of the separation of abstraction from experience, with the (modern, political) experience of abstraction. The end of culture is culture’s own end, as exhaustion and telos.

Within the field of education, the end of culture manifests itself where it is least observed, in the ubiquitous arguments for education as non-totalising, pluralistic and non-teleological. In a word, in the assertions that education must be ‘open’. This openness refers not just to the learning of new things or to being open to new experiences, but also to the idea that education must not close itself down with any definition or systematic knowledge of itself. The claim for education as openness can be made on two grounds. First, it can be asserted epistemologically as the universality of possibility. Education here is deemed as not true to itself if it is seen to close down possibility. Second, and in ethical terms, education is deemed to be domination and imperialism if it is seen to rule out of court things that are different from itself. Possibility and tolerance are posited as the theory and practice of openness. However, this epistemology and ethics suppress the philosophical character of openness. As we saw above, both Carr and Burbules suppress the experience of the difficult relation of philosophy and education, or the broken middle, by positing, respectively, objectivity and aporia abstractly and without a notion of culture. Both practise the end of culture in the abstract opposition of education and
philosophy. Noddings posits a relation of care against its formation and reformation in experience, or against philosophy itself. She, therefore, practises the end of culture as the suppression of spirit. In all three cases, as in many others within the philosophy of education and educational theory, there is here a fetishism of education as openness. Experience is freed from its social and political determination in order to claim freedom for itself. Openness is here the re-presentation of bourgeois freedom freed from re-presentation. Its openness is precisely its fetishism. It is a fetishism that ensures stasis in the opposition between theory and practice.

What kind of representation of the true and of the relation of consciousness to the true, does this concept of openness reflect? How is it now de rigueur to argue for—to assert—the absolute impossibility of knowing the absolute? The answer lies, I think, in the way that representation has assumed for itself the new form and content that marks the high point of the culture of Verstand or abstract reason. This new form of representation is the form and content of the end of culture. Put differently, representation has as one of its dominant and current features a form of epistemology that can be termed ‘pure culture’. This is, I think, to be distinguished even from Adorno’s, Horkheimer’s and Benjamin’s critique of technological culture. Pure culture expresses a freedom from culture that even the movies cannot attain. Its distinguishing characteristic lies in its total refusal (contra notions of totality) of culture as the (self-) determination of philosophy: that is, as thought able to participate in its own act of thinking about itself; as able to present those acts as the science or doctrine of this work—its own culture; or as able to know that in this work it has come to know itself differently. In short, philosophy is stripped of its ability to learn about itself, from itself. It is denied the truth of itself as culture because the concept of culture (and, therefore, the concept itself) has become totally abstracted from such participation in its own work. Where culture is denied self-determination, not only is philosophy rendered nugatory as education, but culture itself becomes the final form of representation where any experience is equivalent to any other experience.

It is ironic, is it not, that in the destruction of the science of philosophical education, in the name, often, of difference, there is, in fact, no difference left at all. The philosophies of openness that characterise post-foundationalist and post-enlightenment thought, as well as those of pragmatism, ethics and even moral objectivity, are a relatively new and perfidious form of the abstraction of culture from experience that Adorno, Horkheimer and Benjamin highlighted. This new abstract mastery has succeeded in re-forming the notion of culture by separating it absolutely from an idea of itself as re-formative. For culture, now, all content is seen as unessential, assuming therein the identity of pure possibility for itself. When re-formation, or culture, is re-formed without in turn being re-formed by the contradictions of this experience, the absolute significance of philosophy and education is comprehensively eschewed. The end of culture is thus the end of philosophical education, yet even this is a telos that the end of culture must suppress.
This can be expressed in another way. Reason has become culture as the form (but not the content) of its own universality. It re-presents itself not as art or religion or philosophy, which seek to re-present relation, but as culture per se, as the re-presentation of relation as the lack of relation. Thus reason here, as culture, is rationalism, turning diasporic reason into a reproduction of itself as self-satisfaction. That this rationalism is often called ‘post’-modern or ‘post’-foundational reveals the emptiness of the form for itself. To be after reason is rationally to be of reason but without reason. Here representation posits that universalistic illusions—for example, grand narratives, imperialism, colonialism, discrimination, power-régimes—are known now as merely local contingencies dressed in imperial uniforms. But precisely therein they are not known. It is this lack of learning about the formative significance of illusion, or about how reason must educate itself about the way it distorts even its own critique of itself, that defines culture as the scepticism of an empty circle of rationalism. Rationalism is the grave of its own life and is despairing at its destruction of itself. In moments of bad faith it celebrates its despair, claiming the grave of its life as heralding new ethical relations and new possibilities.

Reason as pure culture or as rationalism is, therefore, the apotheosis of bourgeois property relations. It is the triumph of the relation to other as thing over the work that sees relation to other as self. Post-foundational culture expresses completely and comprehensively the illusion that defending contingency from unity means protecting reason from a self-determining relation. In fact, such culture is relation robbed of significance, or is no substantial relation at all, and is thus the very essence of bourgeois freedom.

Rose has met this challenge head on and has offered one of the most powerful and insightful critiques of pure culture in all its ‘post’ manifestations. An example of this is her critique of pure culture in philosophy as the overcoming of representation with respect to the Holocaust, or the Shoah. Against the piety of those who mystify the Shoah, who deem it ineffable and un-representable, Rose offers the chiasmus of the fascism of representation and the representation of fascism. Mirroring Benjamin’s working of the aestheticisation of the political and the politicisation of the aesthetic, Rose is insisting upon the dialectic between power and its forms. The representation of fascism is fascist when its own power is effaced, or when its mediation between object and subject spares the audience its ‘encounter with the indecency of their position’ (Rose, 1996, p. 45)—that is, when relation and the experience of relation are suppressed. She distinguishes between the educational value of Schindler’s List as informative—at this level it succeeds—and its refusal to implicate the audience in the crisis, a crisis that it makes ‘external’ (p. 47).

Such representation of fascism is fascist in two related ways. First, she argues, sentimentality—in the form of the Talmudic blessing that ‘he who saves the life of one man saves the entire world’ (Keneally, 1983, p. 52)—overcomes our complicity within the ambivalence of this ‘pitiless
immorality’ (Rose, 1996, p. 45). Thus, and second, Schindler’s dilemma becomes self-congratulatory of its morality, and therein the audience views the whole representation from the view of ‘the ultimate predator’ (p. 47) who can survey the cycle of life as voyeur. In this case, the fascism of the representation of fascism ensures not just a distance from the events portrayed but a lordly overview of them. Any emotion generated is for the myth of the heroes rather than for the sadness that is the condition of the whole. The fascism of the representation of fascism, as such, is our own fascism, that of the civil bourgeois whose relation to the universal is found in the commodity but not in the otherness of himself.

Rose does not make this critique in order to illustrate that the representation of fascism, in this case the Shoah, is impossible or in some sense beyond the scope of our experience or our thinking. On the contrary, those who traduce modern metaphysics into ontology, seeing in it the overcoming of ‘the imperium of the modern philosophical subject and . . . the false promise of universal politics’ (p. 55), converge ‘with the inner tendency of Fascism itself’ (p. 41). Rather, Rose argues, ‘let us make a film in which the representation of Fascism would engage with the fascism of representation’ (p. 50), or, where the dialectic of the aestheticisation of the political and the politicisation of the aesthetic is not suppressed. Reworked, Rose is arguing for a dialectic of representation in which our separation from the object is recognised as the condition of the possibility of its critique. The extent to which this is transformative (in terms of the teacher) will be returned to below.\(^8\) Without the dialectic of representation, without the ‘persistence of always fallible and contestable representation [which] opens the possibility for our acknowledgement of mutual implication in the fascism of our cultural rights and rituals’ (p. 41), there will be no dialectic of enlightenment. Without its representation as philosophy and its implication in the universal, enlightenment will fail to ‘examine itself’ (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1979, p. xv). In Rose’s terms, taking ‘the risk of the universal interest [i.e., politics] . . . requires representation, the critique of representation, and the critique of the critique of representation’ (1996, p. 62).

**CONCLUSION**

Such thoughts serve to remind us of why and how philosophy and representation must continue to challenge the forms of culture that denude such work of educational and absolute significance. For Adorno, in an age of mass production where thinking is determined always and everywhere as information only, experience conforms to the iron law that ‘the information in question shall never touch the essential, shall never degenerate into thought’ (1991, p. 73). The refusal to reproduce culture in this form leads, he says, to the suspicion of being ‘an idiot or an intellectual’ (p. 79). But he is absolutely clear that resistance to the totality of mechanical culture, and I would add now, to the totality of epistemology as the end of culture, is both necessary and possible.

\(^8\) The Culture of Philosophical Experience 231

Resignation belongs to the consciousness in which ‘the feeling of a new security is purchased with the sacrifice of autonomous thinking’ (p. 174). It is this act, says Adorno, that is resignation. This dialectic of myth and enlightenment dominates even the desire for resistance, not in any visibly brutal imposition where resistance can manifest itself, but in the enjoyment of free time wherein conformity parades as freedom. Our complicity here is not in question. On the contrary, ‘the society that confronts human beings in such an impenetrable manner is these humans themselves’ (p. 173). What is forced upon them is what they want, and ‘what they want is forced upon them once again’ (p. 165). As such, on representation and Fascism, Adorno concludes that ‘it may well be the secret of fascist propaganda that it simply takes men for what they are . . . [It] has only to reproduce the existent mentality for its own purposes; it need not induce a change’ (p. 129); and change, as education within the end of culture, is exactly what is suppressed.

What, then, is the teacher, in all sectors of educational provision, to make of these problems, which seem endemic to modernity? If the critiques of representation outlined above—as mythical, mechanical, technological and epistemological—are in any way correct, then in some senses it is true to say that we have long since passed through the end of education as a reforming of consciousness and of the world. Adorno rehearses this dilemma through the idea of resignation. In the Dialectic of Enlightenment, he and Horkheimer stage a brief dialogue between A and B in which B outlines his reasons for not becoming a doctor. He remarks that it is almost inevitable that the doctor will come to represent ‘the establishment and its hierarchy’ (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1979, p. 238), which will mean, in turn, that he must become the administrator, the controller, of ‘life and death’ (ibid.). B is challenged by A that he is being somewhat hypocritical. After all, says A, B relies on the work of doctors and yet he criticises them and refuses, as it were, ‘to get his hands dirty’ (Adorno, 1991, p. 171). B agrees that it is better for doctors and hospitals to exist than for the sick to be left to die. Nevertheless, he says, he must face this seemingly hypocritical stance if he is to commit himself to trying to understand the dilemma of the doctor better, and indeed if he is to ‘explain more clearly . . . the terrible state in which everyone lives today’ (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1979, p. 239). It is the person who capitulates to the demand that something be done who is ‘spared the cognition of his impotence . . . It is this act—not unconfused thinking—which is resignation’ (Adorno, 1991, p. 174). By contrast, ‘the uncompromisingly critical thinker, who neither subscribes his conscience nor permits himself to be terrorised into action, is in truth the one who does not give up’ (ibid.). To engage in such critical thinking, he concludes, ‘the contradiction is necessary’ (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1979, p. 238). In our terms, the aporia of theory and practice is necessary. Of course, we have met this same contradiction between theory and practice in the difficulty of thinking the truth of education and learning, and we saw it above reproduced in the work of Carr, Burbules and Noddings. What we must now take from Adorno and Horkheimer is not a fatalism regarding the possibility of reconciling theory and practice in education, but rather their
unfailing commitment to thinking critically about what teachers do and the conditions under which they do it. Even if these conditions make such thinking extremely difficult, and even if it appears that such thinking can change nothing, nevertheless, they say, our thinking ‘must examine itself’ (p. xv).

But is there any philosophical education possible after the usurpation by post-foundationalist thinking of the concept of relation as all possibility and without a necessity—an education—of its own? The answer is already in the question. This is the philosophy of education and the education of philosophy that I want to bring to bear in order to articulate a philosophy of the teacher. Part II, which follows now is, for the reasons described above in the Introduction to this book, written with a different voice and, at least potentially, to a different audience. It concerns the contradictions and oppositions that teachers face and the theoretical interventions that are available to them in trying to comprehend these experiences. It is an attempt to broach these difficult matters in an idiom that will address the concerns and experience of the practising teacher. As stated at the outset, Part II is written in anticipation of a reader who is not familiar with any of the material that will be drawn upon. The more usual academic style will return later in Part III.

NOTES

1. I know from experience that such statements arouse the criticism that this can be nothing more than a kind of quietism, a ‘conservative hermeneutics’ as one reviewer put it. We will see below in Chapter 6 that Hegel lamented the ways he had been interpreted but also predicted such ‘fates’ as inevitable within existing social relations.

2. There are three versions of this essay. The one translated in *Illuminations* is the third version, written between Spring 1936 and Spring 1939.

3. This article is also reprinted in Rose, 1998.

4. Rose writes about this in relation to the Judaic concept of agunah (desertion). She says that her intention is to deal comprehensively with Benjamin’s work such that it will ‘yield the difficulty of his relation to Judaism’. For Rose this means reading Judaism and modernity in and out of each other.

5. Rose translates this slightly differently: ‘This is the kernel of the allegorical view, the baroque, earth-bound exposition of history as the story of the world’s suffering; it is only significant in the stations of its decay’ (Rose, 1978, p. 38).

6. This is the title of a book by Rose, 1984.

7. It can be added here that all *isms* are re-presentations of cultures but that they lack a notion of culture that can speak of their formation and re-formation within modern culture itself.

8. Perhaps we should remain mindful of the fact that Adorno stated that no matter how barbarian and lacking universality culture becomes, ‘in the West, at least one is allowed to say so’ (Adorno, 1973, p. 367). This represents the ambivalence of the commodification of critique.

9. Elsewhere Adorno examines the way that the ethos of administration also works to undermine the agency of doctors. He records the fallen alcoholic (Paul Verlaine) who, ‘even when he was down and out, found friendly and understanding doctors in Paris hospitals who supported him in the midst of the most extreme of situations. Anything similar would be unthinkable today . . . such doctors—with an eye towards their administration—would probably no longer have the right to give shelter to the vagabond genius, to honour him and to protect him from humiliation’ (1991, pp. 103–104).