Corrosive Subjectifications: Theorizing Radical Politics of Art Education in the Intersection of Jacques Rancière and Giorgio Agamben

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

Juuso Ville Tervo, M.A.
Graduate Program in Arts Administration, Education and Policy

The Ohio State University
2014

Committee:
Sydney Walker, Advisor
Jack Richardson
Joni Boyd Acuff
Arthur Efland
Kevin Tavin
Abstract

This dissertation is a philosophical inquiry on the possibilities and limitations for radical political theorization in art education. By conducting an analytical reading of passages of the existing art education research that concerns the social and political role of art education in the United States, I construct a critique of the current strategies of politicization and propose an ontological shift in a political imagination; a shift that denotes a radicalization of political theory.

My theoretical framework is rooted in Jacques Rancière’s and Giorgio Agamben’s political philosophies, especially in their critiques of the constitution of a political subjectivity qua subjectification. I conceptualize the theoretical difference between these two thinkers in terms of a radical politics of actualization (Rancière) and a radical politics of potentiality (Agamben); two strategies of radicalization that point to the intricacies of the relationship between potentiality and actuality in the process of subjectification.

The central thesis of this study is that seeing subjectification through art education merely as a process of an actualization of identities and subject positions, art educators construct a linear passage between a human potentiality and its politicized actuality, which makes political theorization highly predetermined, reduces art education itself into an empty threshold between a past and a future, and makes the humanness of human life dependent on
art educators’ pedagogical control. Rancière and Agamben offer tools to disrupt such linearity by rejecting all forms of predetermination, thus opening learning and political action to their potentialities beyond teleological thought.
Acknowledgements

I wish to express my greatest possible gratitude to my wonderful advisor, Sydney Walker, who encouraged me to pursue with this project and helped me to understand my own thinking. You are truly a wonderful human being and a scholar. Thank you.

Similar gratitude belongs to my mentor and former advisor Kevin Tavin. No words can express how thankful I am for having you around.

Thank you Jack Richardson for our wonderful conversations at Cup O Joe's. Arthur Efland and Joni Acuff Boyd, thank you very much for serving in my committee.

Thomas Davis and Brian Rotman, thank you for the encouraging comments and feedback during my candidacy examination.

Matthew O'Malley, thank you for your thoughts and poetry. Also, thank you for sending that William Blake's passage.

All my friends, colleagues, and professors at OSU, especially Michael Kellner, Kate Collins, and Verónica Betancourt, thank you for great discussions, good times, and general amazingness.

My family (Hannele, Pauli, Miia, Martti, and Sakari) and friends in Finland, thank you for everything.
Friends and my extended family (Loren, Brianna, and Ryan) here in Columbus: thank you
for making Ohio feel like home.

Lastly, I am grateful for The American-Scandinavian Foundation for the financial support
during my first year of doctoral studies at OSU.
Vita

2009…………………………………………B.A. Art Education, University of Art and Design, Helsinki, Finland

2011…………………………………………M.A. Art Education, Aalto University, School of Art and Design, Helsinki, Finland

2011 – present……………………………….Graduate Teaching Associate, The Ohio State University

Publications


Fields of Study

Major Field: Arts Administration, Education and Policy

Minor Field: Comparative Cultural Studies
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Introduction

down the winding cavern we groped our tedious way, till a void boundless as the nether sky appeared beneath us and we held by the roots of trees and hung over this immensity; but I said, if you please we will commit ourselves to this void, and see whether providence is here also

William Blake, The Marriage of Heaven and Hell

This study is a politico-philosophical entrance to a conceptual space where a radical politics of art education can be theorized. Instead of trying to construct a neat taxonomy that would help to classify the multiple ways that art education is political, I am interested in pushing political theorization of art education to its limits, that is, to see how we, as art education theorists, tend to conceptualize the sociopolitical relevance of our profession and, then, to trouble such conceptualizations without rendering art education apolitical. In this respect, the relationship between art education and politics in this study is reciprocal: politics serves as an entryway to theorize art education and art education helps to elaborate political thought.

Here, the prefix radical offers a helpful point of reflection when conceptualizing the relationship between art education and politics as well as the idea of taking theorization to its limits. The term radical is not to be understood as it is commonly used in the vernacular: as political action of so-called extremists who are dogmatically fixed in their ideology. On the contrary, I understand radical politics as an attempt to put one's political imagination in
question, not in the level of identification (e.g. liberal vs. conservative politics), but in the level of thought, in an ontological level. Thus, far from establishing a secure middle ground that avoids ideological extremes but tries to ensure that some level of politics still prevails, I am interested in approaching the ambiguous threshold between identifications and classifications; a threshold where the difference between political and apolitical loses its binary status and opens a different perspective on politics itself. In art education, the question of societal presence and absence (i.e. is art education included in the school curriculum or not) takes up such binary status, which means that radicalizing the presence/absence dichotomy means to question the logic that grants art education a political character only on the basis of its recognized and needed presence in the society.

The main motivation to conduct this inquiry is the rather unclear conceptualization of politics in the current art education literature in the United States. Historically, this uncleanness is rather surprising: after all, the claimed paradigm shift from Discipline-Based Art Education (DBAE) to Visual Culture Art Education (VCAE) in the turn of the millennium was explicitly advocated as a political move: the seemingly apolitical (and thus conservative) DBAE was to be rejected or, at least, reframed, by more political (and thus progressive) VCAE. Thus, it is not that art educators would have not explored the political character of their profession; rather, what I find interesting is that the existing theorization seems to always fall short when approaching the ontological level of political thought, which causes the uncleanness I mentioned above: we seem to need art education as much as we need politics, but the very constitution of these needs is left undisputed. It seems that the only way
to approach the need for, and, subsequently, the existence of, art education is to explain it through the existence of seemingly neutral constants such as the individual or the social that art education eventually completes and affirms.

Notably, this specific historical context constitutes the core of my personal relationship with art education. Having started my undergraduate studies in art education in 2006 in Helsinki, Finland, I have been imbued with social justice oriented visual culture art education throughout my higher education. For a person who has been interested in political theory since the middle school and who has been involved in political action both in and outside formal education, this specific historical era for art education has offered a productive environment to explore the relationship between art education and politics. Both my bachelor's and master's theses revolved around the role of art education as a part of Finnish public schooling system and the Finnish society. The fact that art is taught to all students as part of a comprehensive education served as a fascinating starting point for theorization and forced me to think what it is that art education should bring to the table when discussing the societal function of public schooling, what it can accomplish within such institutional frame, and in what ways can art education trouble these institutional confinements.

My take on politics, on the other hand, has been rooted in a desire to constitute and intensify differences within the existing order; differences that, eventually, would change this order. This has led me to explore activism and revolutionary thought from a standpoint that traditionally could be labelled as Leftist; a term that I, nevertheless, find insufficient when describing my political affiliations. As an art education student, my interest toward societal
change manifested in an active engagement with critical pedagogy during my undergraduate studies. That time, I saw that it was teachers' moral obligation to work toward social change that, eventually, would bring up a better society.

However, after starting my graduate studies I became increasingly interested in political discourse as such, especially in terms of what kind of social or political changes art education arguably brings to the society. This meant that what I had previously thought as a self-evident concept, sociopolitical change, had to be put in question: what constitutes the difference that art education introduces to the existing order? What makes a change political? What is the relationship between the society before such change and after it? It is here where art education and its politics started to entwine in my analytics. I noticed that art education’s sociopolitical relevancy is often inseparable from the attempts to describe what art education is as a discipline and what it does. Moreover, I noticed that the difference that it ought to introduce to the existing order is often an expected one: art education is or should be present in the society because there is a need for the change that it will bring. The politics of art education becomes, then, simply an affirmative act that aims at the actualization of predetermined qualities both of art education and the society to which it belongs. Put differently, society seems to need art education as much as art education seems to need society, which requires that both of them are conceived as entities that, together, bring each other’s existence to completion.

From the standpoint of radical politics, that is, politics that pushes its political character to its own limits, the idea that the difference that a political act introduces to the
existing order is always something expected and predetermined means that one has to neglect the ambiguous space and time between the current and the future world; the threshold in which the transformation from one existence to another takes place; the ontological level of change. If the future is always waiting for us as a negation of our present time, the present remains always as a vanishing presupposition of what should take place, leading to a situation where all the attempts to change the existing order demand a constitution of a new one. The problem that such constitution brings is that without an ontological critique of politics, the new order simply reproduces the same conditions of possibility for political acts to take place. The change becomes, then, simply a readjustment of the rules that govern the order that already exists. Thus, societal change carries no mystery within itself: it sustains a level of familiarity between the past and the future.

In art education, the desire to explain the change that its politics brings to the society in terms of the aforementioned constants (e.g. the individual, the social) stems from such willingness to preserve a level of familiarity. The predetermined need for its inclusion in the society is simultaneously a demand for change and a sustainment of the existence of both art education and the society. Thus, art education is never put in question as such: it is constantly reconstituted on the basis of the future that it ought to bring; a future that abolishes any deviations between the present and itself.

In this respect, the main purpose of this study is not to look for a new art education that would constitute a model for a better future for our profession, but, rather, to establish a different relation to what already exists. Considering the challenges of political theorization I
have laid out above, namely the intricacies sociopolitical change that derive from the complex relationship between what is and what could be, I am interested in addressing and elaborating three following themes that, I believe, help to bring forth a different relation to art education and its political theorization:

- Imagining a political existence for art education that does not presuppose predetermined needs or categories, but, on the contrary, challenges them.

- Shifting the focus in political theorization in art education from the construction of political categories to the corrosion of the existing ones.

- Troubling the narrative of progression in both education and politics, thus reframing political theorization in terms of the present.

These themes serve as strategic goals of my dissertation and should be understood as a framework for future academic work I am interested in pursuing. As such, they contextualize the political project of this work and, indeed, give an idea of the change that I wish to bring about in art education research. Like the void that Blake describes in the epigraph above, they do not offer a clear guidance, but through committing oneself to such void it might be possible to unfold a different relationship to the immensity they open.

**Research Questions**

The three themes that I am interested in elaborating throughout this study come together in a guiding question that informs my perspective on the relationship between art education and politics, that of, what does it mean to act politically? This rather abstract and vast question may seem a strange choice for an art education dissertation, especially since it
does not imply any specific connection to art education research. However, the conceptual challenges that its vastness may engender present themselves as challenges only if one tries to give an exhaustive response to it, that is, when pursuing for an answer that would somehow do away with the mystery that it carries within itself; the mystery that, indeed, gives it a status of a question in the first place. In this respect, instead of approaching it as a question that ought to be answered, I treat it as a strategic approach to art education and the conceptual space where, as I argued earlier, a radical politics of art education can be theorized and the general goals of this dissertation addressed.

The reason why I prefer to formulate the question as what does it mean to act politically rather than what is a political act is that it leaves the very event of acting politically open for debate while the act is taking place; an activity that, when put in terms of a political act, is already located in a narrative between a beginning and an end. In this respect, this formulation follows the temporal undertones of the three themes described above; a notion that I will elaborate further and which will be extensively discussed in chapter 5.

While my intention is to commit myself to the void that my guiding goals hopefully open up in art education theory, I acknowledge that what does it mean to act politically does not suffice to give an adequate idea of what is the specific theoretical focus of this study. Thus, in order to situate its problematics both within the theoretical framework that informs my inquiry and the three strategic goals discussed above, I will seek answers to the following two questions:
In what ways can Jacques Rancière’s political philosophy, conceptualized in this study as a radical politics of actualization, inform political theorization in art education research?

In what ways can Giorgio Agamben’s political philosophy, conceptualized in this study as a radical politics of potentiality, inform political theorization in art education research?

Theoretical Framework: Jacques Rancière and Giorgio Agamben

The appearance of two contemporary continental philosophers, Jacques Rancière (b. 1940) and Giorgio Agamben (b. 1942) in the two questions above seems, at first, abrupt considering the fact that neither of them were explicitly mentioned in my discussion above. However, their influence to the entire problematic I have constructed above is tremendous. While both of them cover a great variety of topics in their works, their writings on politics, art, and power have been positioned among the more or less fluid canon of contemporary radical political thought that have stemmed from France and Italy after 1968; a canon that includes thinkers such as Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, Alain Badiou, Antonio Negri, and Paulo Virno. I will discuss Rancière’s and Agamben’s political philosophies in more detailed fashion in throughout this study, but it is worth giving a short overview of their philosophical projects and explain what makes them interesting theorists in terms of my guiding question what does it mean to act politically?

Rancière, a former student of Louis Althusser from whom Rancière radically detached himself after 1968, has dedicated his academic career to troubling the tradition of political philosophy where, according to him, “there are only parts of society – social
majorities and minorities, socioprofessional categories, interest groups, communities, and so on. There are only parts that must be converted into partners.” (Rancière, 1999, p. 14)

Contra such a relational approach, an approach that he sees to traverse Western political thought from antiquity to contemporary times, he argues for politics that is fundamentally non-relational; politics as “the sphere of activity of a common that can only ever be contentious, the relationship between parts that are only parties and credentials or entitlements whose sum never equals the whole.” (p. 14, emphasis mine) Rancière’s aversion toward consensus-driven politics, an idea that is manifested in his concept dissensus that is precisely the contentious relationship between the parts that do not form a social whole, is also present in his aesthetic theory, where he emphasizes the sensory dimensions of the social partition described above. Indeed, especially in his recent works, politics and aesthetics are deeply entwined. Rancière calls the social whole whose totality derives from putting social agents, their thoughts and activities, in their proper places as the distribution of the sensible that governs what seems thinkable, sayable, seeable, and hearable; in short, everything that seems possible to experience.¹ Thus, instead of seeing politics as an act of constituting a political subjectivity that, through its constitution, grants the subject an equal access to the realm of politics, Rancière sees that political subjectification is, in fact, an act of disidentification, an event when all predetermined subject positions unfold their inherent contingency, thus allowing a truly radical politics to take place.

¹ The original French term for the distribution of the sensible is le partage du sensible, which underlines the partitioning effect of this totality.
Agamben, on the other hand, has involved himself with a rather different kind of project when it comes to rethinking the tradition of political philosophy in the West. Drawing heavily from Martin Heidegger and Walter Benjamin, his work takes up an ontological character that finds its core in the philosophy of language and poetics. His references include a wide variety of sources ranging from Guy Debord to the apostle Paul, as well as from obscure Jewish mystics to Hegel, which makes his whole style of writing eclectic and, up to some extent, mystical (contrary to Rancière’s very articulate style of writing). At the core of Agamben’s political theorization is an attempt to rethink the relationship between being and language, which, for him, is a relationship that has been traditionally based on signification that, simultaneously, allows locating things in the realm of communication and, through this communicability, does away with the thing itself. As he writes, “[i]t is possible to ‘take the This’ only if one comes to realize that the significance of the This is, in reality, a Not-this that it contains; that is, an essential negativity.” (Agamben, 1991, p. 14) His attempt to overcome this negative character of language is to theorize “an experience of language as such, … its pure self-reference” (Agamben, 2007, p. 6) which manifests itself in his political theory as a deep suspiciousness toward subject positions and identities that constitute one’s political agency. For him, the problem with identities and subject positions is that they are fully enmeshed in the sovereign power qua Law that, on the one hand, grants subjects appearance and visibility as political subjects, but, on the other hand, turns their singularity into existence that is dependent on the function of the Law.
Here, Agamben’s goal is not to retrieve some originary state of being without language, but, on the contrary, theorize the possibility of occupying the very communicability of language as such without reducing it to an empty site of communication that, as shown above, is rooted in negativity. This is why one does not encounter subjects in Agamben’s political theory, but, instead, political entities that he calls whatever singularities; a concept that “relates to singularity not in its indifference with respect to a common property (to a concept, for example: being red, being French, being Muslim), but only in its being such as it is.” (Agamben, 1993, p. 1, original emphasis) Subsequently, this means means that “[s]ingularity is thus freed from the false dilemma that obliges knowledge to choose between the ineffability of the individual and the intelligibility of the universal.” (p. 1)

As visible from these short introductions to Rancière’s and Agamben’s thought, both of them are heavily invested in political theorization that works on the limits of intelligibility and obscurity, that is, between what makes us able to think politics and the indeterminate remainder of that ability. Whereas for Rancière, the question of the limits of political imagination can be located in the fundamental miscount that comprises the totality of the social order, Agamben points to limits that the very constitution of clearly delineated political subjectivities introduces to the ontology of politics. In terms of my guiding question what does it mean to act politically and the three general goals of this study, it is possible to see how Rancière’s and Agamben’s thought can help to trouble the linear narrative of political change that I discussed earlier. Since both of them reject the idea that a political act is a constitution of a sociopolitical order and/or subject positions that would secure more
inclusive belonging to the social whole, but, on the contrary, put the very terms of inclusion
and belonging in question, the whole narrative of politics (and education, as I will argue in
this study) as a constitution of something new has to be rejected in favor of politics as an
activity that creates a different relation to what already exists. This is also the root of my
understanding of radical politics as I delineated it above: Rancièrean disidentification and
Agambenian whateverness both open, in different ways, a plane of contingency and
indeterminacy in political imagination that, I believe, helps to radicalize political
imagination.

Despite this common interest toward limits, it is important to underline that
Rancière’s and Agamben’s theorizations take very different paths in terms of political
strategies: in fact, so different that trying to conflate their views into one coherent political
theory would not only be unproductive, but would also require that one neglects central
differences between their thoughts. This does not mean that it would not be useful to read
them against each other. Indeed, I see that their fundamental incompatibility offers an
interesting theoretical milieu where the politics of art education can be theorized.

Going back to my two research questions above, I construct the central difference
between Rancière’s and Agamben’s political theories in terms of a radical politics of
actualization (Rancière) and a radical politics of potentiality (Agamben); two theoretical
strategies that aim at a reconceptualization of what does it mean to act politically and shift the
political theorization in art education from constitution of future goals to the immanence of
the political/educational act itself. Indeed, actualization and potentiality are important
categories when trying to understand the change that political action introduces in the society. I see that the passage from potentiality to actuality is one of the central narratives in current political theorization in art education. For example, the idea that through art, students are able to actualize their full potential as humans and citizens (discussed more in-depth in chapters 1, 2, and 3) means that art education is positioned directly in this passageway, thus making its politics dependent on the actualization of these predetermined qualities.

This is why I prefer to use the prefix *radical* when discussing Rancière's and Agamben's take on the relationship between potentiality and actualization. Having the same function that I have already discussed in terms of political imagination, the *radicalness* of both Rancière and Agamben means that they offer theoretical tools that challenge the relation between actuality and potentiality as an always linear and inevitable passage that, at the end, constitutes a predetermined set of social roles and positions. In Rancière, *radical actualization* brings up *dissensus* that, subsequently, engenders a political event that changes the order in which this actualization takes place (the distribution of the sensible). This means that actualization is uncoupled from predetermination and thus opened to a radical unpredictability. Agamben helps to conceptualize *radical potentiality* where the demand to actualize as always already recognized political subjectivities is confronted with the potential not to actualize; a modality that Agamben, following Aristotle, understands as the impotential side of potentiality, which renders the Law inoperative because the sovereign rule does not recognize such life. Impotentiality is, then, not the same thing as incapability: it is a
radicalized form of potentiality that has the capability to stay in potential. In this respect, both radical politics of actualization and radical politics of potentiality offer, in their own ways, an entryway to political theorization that resists demands to constitute politicized subjectivities that have to adapt themselves to a political sphere that governs what is counted as political or apolitical activity.

At this point, it is worth underlining the fact that both Rancière and Agamben are theorists that strongly oppose politics that is tied to parties, nation-states, or juridical systems. This means that their theories are not directly applicable to the institutional frame in which majority of formal art education takes place. However, this is the very strength of their theorization: they force to put seemingly self-evident truths that guide political theorization in question. I see that Rancière’s and Agamben’s writings on politics are extremely welcome in the field of art education, since they do not offer tools to work with the existing structures of power. As discussed above, if politics is thought only in terms of the continuation of the social sphere, it becomes increasingly difficult to think politics in any other way than as mere adjustments of a totalizing sphere that governs one’s political imagination. In this respect, by conceptualizing politics of art education from Rancièrean and Agambenian perspective, I hope to open up a theoretical standpoint that is intentionally antagonistic toward political theory that relies on predetermined categories and reduces the very event of art education qua a political act to a fleeting presupposition toward a future goal.
Methodology

As an intervention to the conceptual space where the politics of art education can be theorized, the methodological task of this study is to grasp the process of political theorization as such. Since I approach art education theoretically, that is, as an object of thought that art educators are entitled to talk about, my intention is not to describe what happens in art classrooms or analyze how art education is represented in professional literature, but examine what kind of concept art education becomes when it is assumed to act politically. Thus, the outcomes of this study will not be descriptive, but, hopefully, unfold a political thought that helps to approach politics of art education in a way that avoids the shortcomings of political theorization that I have discussed above.

How, then, to turn this into a methodology? As shortly mentioned above, the guiding question of this study, what does it mean to act politically, entails a temporality that does not settle in a clearly delineated event, but opens a political act to its eventness, to the process during which its politics unfolds. It is this temporal character that I wish to put forward as the central characteristic of my methodology; an attempt to reach a thought, develop it, and take it to its limits. Here, the methodological difference to a question what is a political act may help to refine this characterization. The question what is a political act requires that one identifies, analyzes, and represents a political act; in this case, a change that art education might introduce in the existing order. This, however, means that a political act becomes grasped as a completed event, an event that can be located in a linear timeline as a threshold between the two worlds it divides. As such, it becomes a completed image, a
representation of activity that has already passed or an act that waits for us in the future. When the event of politics is approached through the question *what does it mean to act politically*, its activity is still *taking place*; it is developing, thus possible to enter while its political character is still evolving.

To take a step away from representation and description means that my methodology is inherently speculative. In the context of this study, I understand speculation as a mode of theorization that allows one to imagine what does not yet exist and what do we not yet understand without offering a signifying closure that ends thought in a completed image of reality. Rather that trying to negate or deconstruct thought, I am interested in seeing how it functions and, eventually, stops functioning. This means that as an inherently speculative question, *what does it mean to act politically* should be understood as both productive and corrosive: productive, because it allows an unfoldment of a different kind of thought that already exists; corrosive, because it can help to disrupt existing discursive categories that inform our political imagination and theorization.

In terms of political theorization in art education, this means that I have to locate an entryway to its politicization; to the change that it introduces in the existing order. Then, by reading it against radical politics of actualization and radical politics of potentiality, I follow the development of this strategy until it reaches its limits, that is, where it does not function in the way that it ought to function; to the point where the change it ought to bring turns out to be merely a reproduction of the same. These limits, then, are surpassed toward other kind of thought; a political thought that functions differently.
In this study, I use the notion of *subjectification*, which denotes a constitution of subjectivity that has a social/societal agency, as my central entryway to the strategies of politicization in art education. Following my emphasis on speculation, my intention is neither to affirm nor negate the idea that art and education, both together and separate, constitute political subjectivities, but examine what kind of understanding of politics governs the processes of subjectification in the existing art education literature and how might one think beyond the confinements that such politics introduces to the political imagination. Most importantly, subjectification underlines the connection between politics and education in my theorization. I see education as an activity that constructs learned subjects akin to subjects with sociopolitical agency. In fact, the difference between these two conceptualizations of subjectivities is nominal: it is fair to say that the political dimension of educational thought often conflates the learned subject with the politicized one. In this respect, I am interested in seeing how could radical politics of actualization and radical politics of potentiality help to further elaborate the relationship between education and politics in terms of subjectification.

Going back to the question *what does it mean to act politically*, subjectification can be seen both as a precondition for political action and its desired outcome. The right to vote offers a point of reflection when trying to grasp what I mean by this. On the one hand, to have the right to vote means that an individual is recognized as a political subject and thus has the entry to the realm of State politics (a realm that often excludes children and, historically, has excluded women and/or minorities). Thus, their existence as political subjects
is governed by State legislation. On the other hand, the right to vote does not guarantee that the individual automatically acts politically: the ideal of liberal democracy where informed citizens make informed decisions means that in addition to right to vote, subjectification requires that the citizens are, indeed, informed; that their potential to act politically becomes fully actualized in decisions that reflect their true values. What makes the question of subjectification interesting for art education is that while art education does not offer a similar legislative precondition for political action that the right to vote does, it may nevertheless partake in the process of actualizing one’s potential for political action; potential that allows subjects to act within and/or against the institutional frame of State politics. Like discussed above, this passage from potentiality to actuality is central for my attempt to rethink subjectification in terms of radical politics, which means that the very passage from political potential to political action is exposed to critical examination.

In terms of the temporal perspective that the question what does it mean to act politically opens, I am interested in entering the very process of subjectification and follow it until it reaches its limit. In other words, I examine how politicization comes to an end, how it completes itself, that is, how it becomes settled in concepts that give it intelligibility and thus do away with its radically political character; character that, as discussed above, opens politics to the event where it is in the process of unfolding. Contra attempts to constitute or construct a political subject of art education, I interfere in the process of its making, thus critiquing politics from the level of the agency it ought to actualize in subjects. As mentioned above, one encounters similar suspicion toward predetermined subject positions that grant
political agency to humans from both Rancière and Agamben, but for different reasons. While Rancière helps to reframe the conditions of possibility for actualization, that is, to interfere in the process of actualization by taking it further than the existing understanding allows, Agamben offers tools to reclaim the radical political character of not actualizing, that is, to radicalize the seemingly apolitical decision to not participate in the function of liberal democracy.

The methodological emphasis on speculation has its effect in the way that I have collected my research material. Each of the chapters rely on a different archive that offers a specific perspective on the question of subjectification in art education. The material that I am working with should be understood as a milieu where my political theorization takes place, not as a seemingly objective sampling of existing theories and practices in art education. For example, in chapter 3, I have gathered a variety of text from two professional journals, *Studies in Art Education* and *Visual Arts Research* by focusing on passages that, for me, articulate a possibility to understand how subjectification works in art education; passages that I also see to constitute limits for political imagination. Thus, by emphasizing the position of this study as a space where politics of art education *can* be theorized, I simultaneously bring forward my own position as a theorist and question my initial understanding of the political characteristics of art education. I do not see that this personal perspective challenges the significance of my theorization, since my goal is to formulate an *entryway* for theorizing politics of art education *differently*, not to offer a general political theory for art educators.
In this respect, my speculative approach to political theorization in art education offers a methodology that challenges the ontological premises of politicization by interfering with thought that allows it to appear as political. It is the temporal structure of the leading question *what does it mean to act politically* that opens political thought to its development: neither by trying to delineate a politics nor condemn art education to being apolitical, my approach tries to halt the thought in its forming and then derail it to other direction. This is what I initially mean by pushing the politics of art education to its limits: it is an acknowledgement that art education *can act politically*, but that this ability can be put in question without turning it to inability. By focusing on subjectification as a process where the potential and actualization of politics of art education is manifested, I am interested in examining what kind of ways subjects are seen to actualize their potentiality for politics through art education and what kind of understanding of politics does such passage from potentiality to actuality entail.

Since the goal of my theorization is not to come up with new models for political organization but, on the contrary, offer a corrosive perspective to the existing ones, the methodological challenge for this study is to not simply replace one thought with another, but to embrace both corrosive and productive qualities of a political act, that is, the process of introducing a difference in the existing order. It is this corrosive characteristic of my thought that unfolds the limits of change that political events such the paradigmatic shift from DBAE to VCAE assumably have introduced to the field of art education: despite that contents and practices might have changed, the totality of art education as a sociopolitical
practice has not been exposed to an ontological critique. Thus, neither producing a neat synthesis nor dissolving into nothingness, I hope to keep my approach to politics in tension; a tension that, eventually, manifests itself in the radical politics of actualization and radical politics of potentiality.

**The Design of the Study**

Following my methodological approach, this study is divided in two parts. Part I, consisting of chapters 1, 2, and 3, is a penetration to the existing literature of art education research where subjectification is articulated and then read these articulations against Rancière’s and Agamben’s political theory. I theorize and apply radical politics of actualization and radical politics of potentiality as analytic tools that help me to grasp logic of politicization that grants art education its status as a passage to subjectification. By taking this logic to its limits, I show its confinements, that is, the presuppositions that one must follow in order to keep the political thought functional, and, subsequently, point to the possible strategies for overcoming these confinements with Rancière and Agamben. Part II, consisting of chapters 4 and 5, is an attempt to further elaborate the analytical space that radical politics of actualization and radical politics of potentiality open when theorizing alternative understanding of subjectification through art education. In terms of my guiding question *what does it mean to act politically*, this part aims at halting the political and educational act by relocating subjectification from a linear timeline to its *eventness*, that is, to the time during which politics and learning takes place.
In this respect, the structure of this study is following:

**Part I: Subjectification as a Political Act: Constructing and Corroding Politics of Art Education**

Chapter 1: Subjectification as a Necessity: The Problem with Art Education as a Universal Human Right

Chapter 2: Historicizing Subjectification in Art Education: The Entwinement of Life, Art, and Education in the Progressive Era

Chapter 3: Subjectification and Belonging in Visual Culture Art Education

**Part II: Corrosive Radicalizations: Disrupting the Ontologies of Subjectification in Art Education**

Chapter 4: The Precarious Life of an Obscure Subject: Pilvi Takala’s “The Trainee”

Chapter 5: Taking Place of Learning: Toward a Radical Politicization of Art Education

These five chapters constitute five vignettes that open up different but deeply interconnected perspectives to the three central goals of this study that I laid out earlier, that of, imagining a political existence for art education that does not presuppose predetermined needs or categories, but, on the contrary, challenges them, shifting the focus in political theorization in art education from the construction of political categories to the corrosion of the existing ones, and troubling the narrative of progression in both education and politics, thus reframing theorization in terms of the present. As milieus for speculation, they each add another layer of problematics to the political theorization and partake in both the construction and corrosion of thought that allows art education to be considered as political.
In chapter 1, I set the basis for political theorization in this study by conducting a reading of two passages, one from Unesco’s report from 2006 where art education is claimed to be a universal human right and another one from the National Art Education Association where art granted a status of a necessity, and discuss them in the light of Rancière’s and Agamben’s political ontologies. The reason for choosing these specific passages is that, for me, they both stand as calls for subjectification through art education: as a needed human right, art education makes full actualization of human life dependent on its presence in the society. By troubling this thought through Rancière’s and Agamben’s writings, I simultaneously trace the connection that it constructs between subjectification and human life and build the conceptual basis for a radical politics of actualization and a radical politics of potentiality. In terms of my guiding question what does it mean to act politically, this chapter takes a look at what constitutes a political event, that is, what makes politics take place.

In chapter 2, I historicize the connection between human life and subjectification through art education by examining what kind of relationship between life, art, and education unfolds from the critiques of formal schooling during the progressive era in the United States. What I find interesting about progressive education in terms of subjectification is that it was then when art educators, according to Arthur Efland (1990), became increasingly interested in the “cultural purposes” for art education instead of merely seeing it as a preparation for either academic art and/or industrial work (p. 184). This meant that the politicization of art education, its political act, was framed in terms of human life and
its development, which positions art education between the potentialities and actualizations of truly human life. When examining the question *what does it mean to act politically*, this chapter helps to examine how political agency, that is, the actualization of one’s potential for political acts, is historically constituted in art education.

Chapter 3 continues the examination of the relationship between human life and subjectification by looking at some contemporary strategies of subjectification that one can find from art education literature. Here, I focus my analysis on two professional journals, *Studies in Art Education* and *Visual Arts Research* published after 1998; that is, around and after the acclaimed paradigm shift from DBAE to VCAE. Following the lead from the two previous chapters, I examine how the call for a closer relationship between art education and students' lives, an idea that can be seen to constitute both Unesco's claim about art education and human rights as well as the core of progressive education, fixes the logic of subjectification into a very specific understanding of politics, namely the ideal of liberal democracy that presupposes a constitution of a shared sociopolitical order and predetermined subject positions that secure one's belonging to the social whole. It is here where the question *what does it mean to act politically* is answered, but only in an unsatisfactory way: the change that political act ought to bring becomes tied to a teleological thought that reduces the process of subjectification to a movement from one predetermined position to another; a thought that cannot put the very logic that governs its politics in question.

As mentioned earlier, the second part of this study is dedicated to elaboration of a radical politics of actualization and a radical politics of potentiality as analytic tools that can
help to overcome the shortcomings of political theorization that I have identified above. In
this respect, chapter 4 constitutes break in thought that has, at this point, already exhausted
itself; namely subjectification \emph{qua} constitution of secured and recognized identities and
subject positions. In order to create this break, I take a step away from art education
literature and turn to a contemporary artwork, Pilvi Takala’s \textit{The Trainee} from 2008, as a
point of reflection through which I elaborate the strategies of Rancièrean radical actualization
and Agambenian radical potentiality. Here, the question \textit{what does it mean to act politically}
becomes radically rethought: Takala’s seemingly \textit{passive} and \textit{ambiguous} intervention in an
international account firm Deloitte challenges a political thought that sees active
participation and recognition as the \textit{primus motor} of political activity and agency.

I end this study with chapter 5, where, based on the remarks made in previous
chapters, I articulate my central suggestion concerning the three goals that I set to this study:
a shift in the \textit{temporality} of political and educational imagination in art education research.
By drawing from Rancière’s and Agamben’s critiques of chronological and linear time, I
bring forward a conceptualization of learning as a political event that \textit{takes place}, that is, as a
political activity that gains its corrosive radicalness from its ability to interfere in the \textit{time} that
it takes to complete a political thought, not from an already completed image of political
subjectivity.
Significance of the Study

The primary audience of my study are art educators in the academic research community, especially researchers who are working within the theoretical intersections of social and cultural studies, critical theory, education philosophy, and art education. There are a few North American scholars who are working with similar problematics than I put forward in this research. For example, Jan Jagodzinski (2008; 2009) and Jason Wallin (2010; 2011; 2013) have done extensive work with the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari and tried to relocate politics of art education away from “interpretive, representational, and identitarian strategies of control” (Wallin, 2013, p. 6) toward aesthetico-political action that, as jagodzinski (2009) puts it, “confronts the 'society of control' anamorphically, in an oblique way and not head on.” (jagodzinski, 2009, p. 341, original formatting) In addition, Charles Garoian (2010; 2013; collaborating with Yvonne Gaudelius, 2008) as well as Jack Richardson (2010) have written about the relationship between contemporary artistic practices and educational/political action, thus opening political theorization in art education to its aesthetic dimensions.

What differentiates this study from the existing research is that while the aforementioned scholars mainly draw from Deleuze and Guattari, I construct my theorization on the intersection of Rancière and Agamben that opens a yet unexplored perspective to political action in art education theory. Indeed, despite that Rancière and Agamben have gained increasing attention among artists, art theorists, and educational theorists especially in Europe (e.g. Nollert et al. 2006; O’Neill & Wilson, 2010; Wappler,
2012), their presence in North American art education theory is very limited.\textsuperscript{2} What makes these two theorists important additions to political theorization in art education research is that they open a perspective to politics that, I believe, helps to further elaborate the complex relationship between potentiality and actuality in both political action and subjectification. In this perspective, I am not writing \textit{against} the aforementioned Deleuzo-Guattarian readings; rather, I am interested in expanding the theoretical archive that art educators can draw from in their work.

Currently, the growing interest toward community-based, participatory, and socially engaged practices in art education among art educators in the United States requires that the sociopolitical position and function of art education is continuously refined and rethought. My contribution to that discussion is to offer a philosophical perspective that helps to develop understanding of the ontological premises of both sociopolitical agency and the social in which this agency occurs. In this respect, this study stands as an example of the possibilities that a change in perspective from \textit{social theory} to \textit{political philosophy} opens up for art education theory.

\textbf{Limitations}

Since the aim of this study is to affect the way that art education is \textit{understood} as a political action, the limitations of this study are mainly connected to its inherently speculative character.

\textsuperscript{2} Rancière is discussed by Trafi-Prats, 2012; Siegesmund, 2013; and Hughes, 2013 (in UK, Atkinson, 2012) and Agamben is referred in Jagodzinski, 2010; and Wallin, 2011.
Firstly, as mentioned earlier, the research material that I work with is not intended to represent an overarching sampling of all possible ways that art education can be understood as political, but as a collection of texts that, for me, open a way to conceptualize the political character of our profession. This inevitably leads to a theorization where my personal position as a researcher becomes emphasized. While I acknowledge the dangers of highly subjective research strategies (e.g. self-fulfilling hypotheses and lack of self-criticism), I see that since I do not wish to build a general theory of politics of art education but a collection of perspectives that, hopefully, can help art education theorists approach their own perceptions of the sociopolitical relevancy of the field, this subjective character does not constitute an unsurmountable problem to the validity of this study.

Secondly, due to the highly theoretical nature of my work, the outcomes of this study are more applicable to art education theorists than to practitioners in K-12 levels. This excludes a vast array of practicing teachers from my audience, who, after all, constitute the majority of the professional field of art education. However, instead of providing direct applications to art teachers, I see that this work can influence the field indirectly through art teacher training programs, where art educators working in higher education may find it helpful in their theoretical work.

Thirdly, this study is deeply situated in a specific historical and geopolitical context. I acknowledge that my choice to focus solely on research done in North America leaves out a number of different cultural, political, and social contexts that, as such, may challenge and
complicate some of the findings of this study. This is certainly an important limitation that needs to be addressed in future research.
PART I

SUBJECTIFICATION AS A POLITICAL ACT: CONSTRUCTING AND CORRODING POLITICS OF ART EDUCATION

Every now and then, he wakes up in a different body, a body that was handed to him in a dream, a dream that, in its pleasantness, abolishes the haunting doubt about whether it was worth waking up or not.
Chapter 1: Subjectification as a Necessity:
The Problem with Art Education as a Universal Human Right

Culture and the arts are essential components of a comprehensive education leading to the full development of the individual. Therefore, Arts Education is a universal human right, for all learners, including those who are often excluded from education, such as immigrants, cultural minority groups, and people with disabilities. (Unesco, 2006, p. 3)

You Gotta Have Art (National Art Education Association)

My inquiry on the political ontologies of art education starts with the two rather powerful statements above. The first one, which was part of Unesco’s “Road Map for Arts Education – Building Creative Capacities for the 21st Century” report from 2006, depicts arts education as a “universal human right” that leads to “the full development of the individual.” The second, much more succinct one, is one of the National Art Education Association’s official slogans; slogans that appear in everything from T-shirts and bags to bumper stickers. The reason why I find these statements tremendously interesting is that they express, in their own ways, something elementary about political discourse. Short as they are, they still manage to articulate a fundamental need for something and, most importantly, answer to that need. Moreover, the peculiar abstractness of “You Gotta Have Art” offers an interesting pair to Unesco’s claim for universal human rights, which, for many, represents the foundation for political thought in contemporary times. After all, human rights are
something “you gotta have;” a thought that has justified various political decisions from
military interventions to humanitarian aid; a thought that, despite these very concrete
actions that it has engendered, sustains a strangely abstract quality.

In terms of politicization of art education, the necessity that the passages above
unfold a close relationship between subjectification and the sociopolitical function of art
education. Interestingly, this relationship points to one of the most debated issues in the
history of political philosophy, that of, what constitutes a good life and what kind of society
makes such good life possible. Unesco’s declaration seems to offer a clear answer: a good life
is human life that has been cultured through arts, which, then, means that a just society is
one where the access to arts education has been secured by the juridical order. However, this
logic brings about a bundle of complex questions about relationship between singular human
life and the Law that governs its existence. If, as the Unesco passage suggests, art education is
a universal human right that secures the “full development of the individual,” it means that
the right to art education precedes the subject of this right. In other words, the need for art
education is always already established by the existing social and political order. The image of
a fully developed individual hovers before the singular human existence as a model, as a
predetermined goal that can be attained through the same universal right that establishes this
image. The political function of art education is, then, to serve as a passageway from a
predetermined right to its predetermined goal, that is, as an actualization of the model that
governs one’s existence as a fully developed individual.
To problematize such predetermination, one could reject the very idea of need for art in toto, that is, simply disagree with the statement “You Gotta Have Art.” Judging from the rather precarious position that art education occupies in the schooling system in the United States, this stance has very powerful proponents: indeed, there always seem to be more important school subjects that need stronger financial support. In terms of political action, this precarious position has also an upside: it has taught art teachers to stand up for themselves and demand more respect, recognition, and resources; a process that requires critical reevaluation of the profession itself.

However, the binary logic between needing and not needing art education unfolds a fundamental shortcoming of both sides of the argument: neither affirming nor negating this need helps to understand what does it actually mean to need art education? In this respect, I see that a more difficult but much more productive way to tackle this aporia is to examine how to understand the need for art education without having to accept predetermined future outcomes such as “the full development of the individual;” that is, without seeing this need as a self-annihilating steppingstone to its own fulfillment that reduces the very event of art education into an empty passageway between potentiality and actuality. Going back to the question about politics and its relation to good life and just society, this means that one has to approach politics from a different angle: rather than seeing politics as a way to secure a future fulfillment of a predetermined set of universal concepts such as human and her/his rights, it becomes a ground where such narratives and concepts can be put radically in question.
In this respect, the main goal of this chapter is to offer a basis for the further inquiry on the relationship between art education, subjectification, and the radical politics of Rancière and Agamben by colliding the two passages above with Rancièrean radical actualization and Agambenian radical potentiality. In terms of the question *what does it mean to act politically*, this chapter allows an entrance to the ontological premises of thought that governs the understanding of art education as a political act of subjectification and, most importantly, puts the very idea of subjectification in question through Rancière’s and Agamben’s writings.

This chapter is organized in four parts. First, I examine the ontological premises for politics in Jacques Rancière’s and Giorgio Agamben’s writings. I am interested in understanding what are, according to these two theorists, the conditions of possibility for politics to take place and how does their thought challenge the premises for subjectification that assumes a linear passage between constitution of abstract rights and their actualization in one’s life. Secondly, I elaborate the question *what does it mean to act politically* in the light of Rancière and Agamben and flesh out the difference between their theoretical positions in terms of a radical politics of actualization and a radical politics of potentiality. Thirdly, I revisit the question of art education as a universal human right through Rancière’s and Agamben’s political theory, especially focusing on their quite different critiques of the notion of human rights. I am particularly interested in seeing what are the advantages and disadvantages of framing the need for art education as a human right and what kind of ontological frame does it lay out for its politics. Fourthly, I go back to the slogan “You Gotta
Have Art” in the light of Rancière’s and Agamben’s understanding of political action and see what is, for these two theorists, the need for politics and draw together their critique of subjectification.

Constituting the Political in Rancière and Agamben

The foundation of politics is not in fact more a matter of convention than of nature: it is the lack of foundation, the sheer contingency of any social order. Politics exists simply because no social order is based on nature, no divine law regulates human society. (Rancière, 1999, p. 16)

What is a man, if he is always the place—and, at the same time, the result—of ceaseless divisions and caesurae? It is more urgent to work on these divisions, to ask in what way—within man—has man been separated from non-man, and the animal from the human, than it is to take positions on the great issues, on so-called human rights and values. (Agamben, 2004, p. 16)

In one of the founding texts of Western political philosophy, Aristotle's *Politics*, Aristotle famously argues that humans are political animals whose life is distinguished from other living beings by their natural interest and capability in communal life (Aristotle, 1995). At the center of this capability Aristotle posits language, which allows humans to communicate and contemplate communal issues of the *polis*; issues such as justice and injustice, good life, and social order. In other words, it is language that serves as the prerequisite for politics, thus also making it the essential quality that separates humans from other animals and living beings. This means also that human life within the public realm of the *polis* is inherently political, which Aristotle contrasts with the private sphere of *oikos*, home, and natural life that denotes mere biological existence. The existence of politics in
Aristotle is, in this respect, tied to the existence of human communities: we need politics in order to live with each other as a community of speaking beings.

This Aristotelean scheme offers a theoretical starting point for Rancière’s and Agamben’s critique of political philosophy and helps to understand the constitutive difference between their take on politics. Rancière takes up Aristotle’s distinction between *speech* and *voice*, which constitutes the difference between forms of communication; after all, although animals do not speak, they can still express themselves. For Rancière, “[t]he supremely political destiny of man is attested by a *sign*: the possession of the logos, that is, of speech, which *expresses*, while the voice simply *indicates*. What speech expresses, what it makes evident for a community of subjects who understand it, is the useful and the harmful and, consequently, the just and the unjust.” (Rancière, 1999, p. 2, original emphasis) This leads him to investigate the limits of one’s belonging to the community of logos; that is, whose voice is counted within the political sphere of *polis*. Agamben, on the other hand, wants to understand what does this fundamental division between human and non-human life means for politics itself. He points out that the separation between these two modalities of life is already present in the ancient Greek vocabulary. Instead of having only one word for *life*, there were two: *bios* and *zoe*. While the former denotes the life “peculiar to a single individual or group,” the latter “expressed the simple fact of living to all living beings (animals, humans, or gods).” (Agamben, 2000, p. 3). This leads Agamben to examine the ontological premises for human life as inherently political and its connections to distribution of legislative power.
Interestingly, despite these quite different points of entry to Aristotle’s political philosophy, they both initially point to the intricate relationship between language and singular beings. What is common in their understanding of this relationship is the aim is to disrupt a system of thought that is constructed on fixed categories that, subsequently, make every singular existence dependent on a universal system that gives them a specific appearance as a politicized subject. Their political theories point to the arbitrary relationship between human life and its signification, that, nevertheless, is governed by the power to name and to leave nameless, the power to make visible and condemn to invisibility, and the power to grant rights and leave outside the distribution of rights.

In terms of subjectification, this does not mean that Rancière’s and Agamben’s goal is to turn everything merely into a play of signifiers where fixed identities and subject positions are replaced with fluid ones, since for both, it is a human life without a predetermined concept or identity that constitutes a starting point for their radical politics. Thus, their goal is to introduce a fracture in the totalizing system of politics takes the political character of human life for granted and neglects the limitations that subjectification qua actualization of this political character introduces to thought.

In order to lay out Rancière’s and Agamben’s different ways to approach politics and subjectification, I take a closer look at Rancière’s notion of equality and Agamben’s concept bare life; both of which are central concepts for understanding their political ontologies. By reading Rancièrean equality and Agambenian bare life against each other, I also set the basis
for my understanding of a radical politics of actualization and a radical politics of potentiality; concepts that work as central analytic tools of this study.

**Rancière and Equality**

The foundational element of Rancière’s political theorization is the notion of equality, which, unlike in more traditional political theory that aims for an equal distribution of power in the society, functions as the starting point for his theory of inequality. According to him,

> equality is what I have called a presupposition. It is not, let it be understood, a founding ontological principle but a condition that only functions when it is put into action. … Equality is actually the condition required for being able to think politics. However, equality is not, to begin with, political in itself. (Rancière, 2012, p. 52)

Rancière’s seemingly paradoxical claim that equality is the precondition for politics but is not political in itself means that he draws a constitutive difference between his understanding of equality and liberal humanistic assumptions about equality as a quality that, firstly, is assigned to humans by a social contract (such as the legal system), and secondly, works as a general equivalence between human singularities. Rather, he insists that equality is an active (*contra* descriptive) category that points to the very conditions of possibility that constitute inequality between modes of existence, enunciation, and experience. Rancière insists that inequality is not a natural quality of human beings, like one finds from Hobbes’ understanding of a pre-societal state of nature, but derives from an active dismissal of a constitutive equality between speaking beings. To put it shortly, there could
not be inequality without a fundamental, barred equality. What is important to underline about Rancière's understanding of equality is that it is not equality between subject positions and identities, but between all human singularities. Since equality is not political in itself, human singularities are not inherently political either: instead, what constitutes politics for Rancière is a partition of equality into a system of proper names and societal positions that constitute the fabric of the socius. Thus, for Rancière, political systems that have traditionally been thought as guarantors of social equality (such as civil societies) are, in fact, the very source of inequality.

In *Disagreement* (1999), one of his central books about politics, Rancière argues that the constitutive political and historical division that splits the fundamental equality is the division between the rich and the poor: between those who have the access to cultural, social, and economic power and those who do not, but, nevertheless, are always affected by the distribution of this access. The poor, the people that Rancière calls “the part that has no part” in more general terms, is the very prerequisite not only for the power of the rich, but also for the existence of politics as such. According to Rancière,

> [t]he party of the poor embodies nothing other than politics itself as the setting-up of a part of those who have no part. Symmetrically, the party of the rich embodies nothing other than the antipolitical, From Athens in the fifth century B.C. up until our own governments, the party of the rich has only ever said one thing, which is most precisely the negation of politics: there is no part of those who have no part. (Rancière, 1999, p. 14)

The active denial of equality, or better, its control through inequality, becomes manifested in the conceptual distinction that Rancière draws between politics and police.
Whereas the former denotes the active coexistence of these two parties, the latter (which should not be confused with police officers) sustains the totality of the distribution of the sensible; that is, one’s experience of a society where “there is no part of those who have no part.” This means that every social order where some people rule and others are being ruled is always based on the unequal distribution of power that, paradoxically, governs equality.

For Rancière, this is true for democracy as well, at least in the sense that it is commonly understood in Western political philosophy. Going back to Aristotle’s claim that human is a political animal due to the ability to use language, Rancière demonstrates how the right to participate in the affairs of the polis in the Greek Antiquity, a right that was reserved only for free men, meant that the people outside of those rights (women, children, immigrants, slaves) occupied a liminal space between speaking (that is, political) beings and living beings. As he states,

[t]he slave is the one who has the capacity to understand a logos without having the capacity of the logos. He is the specific transition from animality to humanity that Aristotle defines most precisely as participating in the linguistic community by way of comprehension but not understanding. (Rancière, 1999, p. 17)

Here, it is important to underline that the exclusion from the linguistic community (and, subsequently, human community) is not total: a slave, having the “capacity to understand a logos without having the capacity of the logos,” is present but barred from participating in the community of logos. One could say, then, that since a slave (and others who were not treated as free men), being neither an animal nor a citizen, lacked full qualifications for being a speaking being; her/his speech did not make sense in the same way
as those who had the credentials to be included in the community of speech. For Rancière, such act of exclusion stands for the constitutive “wrong” (a term that he uses to describe the expulsion of the constitutive equality) that grounds the entire political history of Western thought. It is this wrong that Rancière’s whole political project is targeted against:

What is usually lumped together under the name of political history or political science in fact stems more often than not from other mechanisms concerned with holding on to the exercise of majesty, the curacy of divinity, the command of armies, and the management of interests. Politics only occurs when these mechanisms are stopped in their tracks by the effect of a presupposition that is totally foreign to them yet without which none of them could ultimately function: the presupposition of the equality of anyone and everyone, or the paradoxical effectiveness of the sheer contingency of any order. (Rancière, 1999, p. 17)

In other words, instead of trying to come up with a more effective societal mechanisms that would secure a given social order, Rancière wants to underline that all societies that position subjects in predetermined subject positions and proper societal places are always based on the abolishment of the “equality of anyone and everyone.” This means that pointing to the “sheer contingency of any order” becomes a political act par excellence, since like the inherently ambivalent but yet socially governed relationship between the signifier and the signified, social roles are not natural occurrences but created and actively sustained in the social. So, since “[p]olitics arises from a count of community ‘parts,’ which is always a false count, a double count, or a miscount” (p. 6) Rancièrean politics is not about trying to come up with a correct count, but about disrupting the mechanisms that make such counting possible. This disruption is what he calls dissensus, which is a “demonstration (manifestation) of a gap in the sensible itself.” (Rancière, 2010, p. 38)
Thus far, what Rancière’s concept of equality offers to the inquiry on the ontologies of politics and subjectification is a critical intervention to the the means of inclusion in the seemingly universal community of logos. Notably, Rancière reframes the relationship between equality and politics: politics does not bring equality, it demonstrates it. Thus, mere presence of human beings in the society does not constitute political action if this presence is governed by predetermined positions that marks one’s participation in the socius. In terms of subjectification, this means that Rancièrean politics does not offer tools to become a fully developed and thus equal individual of liberal democracy, but, on the contrary, helps to put the predetermined requirements for such full development in question.

**Agamben and Bare Life**

As I mentioned shortly above, Agambenian reading of the history of Western political history is, like in Rancière, based on a constitutive exclusion. Whereas in Rancière, one encounters the chiasma inclusion/exclusion in terms of speaking beings, Agamben takes the Aristotelean division between political life and natural life under scrutiny. This means that for Agamben, politics is deeply entwined with the ontologies of human life.

In Agamben’s political theory, one repetitively encounters concepts such as sovereignty (which he links to Carl Schmitt’s understanding of sovereign as the one who decides on the state of exception) and state of exception (which he draws from Walter Benjamin’s idea that the state of emergency has become the rule in modernity); both concepts that lead him to state that concentration camp serves as the “nomos of the modern”
(Agamben, 1998, p. 166). While it is important to acknowledge the centrality of state of exception and the camp in Agamben’s political lexicon, I see that for the purposes of this study, an exhaustive discussion of these concepts might derail my focus to issues that do not directly relate to art education research. Thus, I will concentrate on Agamben’s understanding of sovereign power and its relation to biopolitics, a concept that he draws from Michel Foucault, since they help to unfold his take on ontologies of politics and, most importantly, his critique of political subjects.

What does, then, constitute the relationship between human life and politics for Agamben? By expanding on Foucault’s understanding of modernity as an era of biopolitics where “species and the individual as a simple living body become what is at stake in a society’s political strategies,” (p. 3) Agamben tries to understand how Western political tradition, founded on the exclusion of natural life from the sphere of politics, has come to the point where, indeed, this fundamental separation becomes to crumble. In Homo Sacer (1998), Agamben makes the argument that biopolitics is not, unlike Foucault thought, solely a modern phenomenon but a fundamental logic that has made sovereign power possible in Western political thought. After all, the constitutive division between zoë and bios, that is, biological existence and political presence, cannot be total: a speaking being is also a living being. This means that the exclusion of zoë from bios is always simultaneously an inclusion: for example, the ban to kill a human being (to be precise, a fellow citizen), in its foundational level, posits juridical power over singular human life. In other words, it is juridical power that assigns human life its value and, most importantly, its non-value (as in
the case of death penalty), which leads Agamben to examine the ban as a fundamental division between zoë and bios that grounds politics. For him, “[t]he ban is the force of simultaneous attraction and repulsion that ties together the two poles of the sovereign exception: bare life and power, homo sacer and the sovereign.” (p. 110)

Here, one encounters two terms, bare life and homo sacer, which are similarly foundational to Agamben’s political theorization as equality is for Rancière. Notably, bare life is a concept in Agambenian lexicon that is rather easy to misunderstand. It does not refer neither to a particular (subjective) human life (bios) nor natural life (zoë), but to the “zone of irreducible indistinction” (p. 9) between these two modalities of life. For Agamben, life that is subjected to a sovereign power as bare biological life unfolds the very constitution of sovereignty in Western political thought in a same way as, for Rancière, the slave unfolds the exclusive function of the logos. Agamben sees that

\[\text{[t]he fundamental categorical pair of Western politics is not that of friend/enemy but that of bare life /political existence, zoë/bios, exclusion/inclusion. There is politics because man is the living being who, in language, separates and opposes himself to his own bare life, and, at the same time, maintains himself in relation to that bare life in an inclusive exclusion. (p. 8)}\]

This is why he sees that

\[\text{[p]olitics ... appears as the truly fundamental structure of Western metaphysics insofar as it occupies the threshold on which the relation between the living being and logos is realized. In the “politicization” of bare life—the metaphysical task par excellence—the humanity of living man is decided. (p. 8)}\]
Agamben historicizes bare life through the concept *homo sacer*, a juridical term in the Roman Antiquity that referred to a person “who may be killed and yet not sacrificed.” (p. 8) Like the figure of the slave for Rancière (the one who had “capacity to understand a logos without having the capacity of the logos”), *homo sacer* is an important limit concept for Agamben that, as an exception of the rule, unfolds the very constitution of the system of thought that governs its own totality. What Agamben is interested in *homo sacer* is the fact that the killing of *homo sacer* did not result in anything except the termination of their life: there were no divine nor secular laws that would have reprimanded nor rewarded someone for such act of killing. *Hombres sacri* were, then, both excluded from the law (they could not be sacrificed since their life was not governed by the law) and, for that very reason, completely subjected to its command (they could be killed). In Agambenian terms, the life of *homo sacer*, their very biological existence, was fully abandoned to sovereign power, transforming their existence into bare life.

In terms of subjectification, Agamben’s discussion on bare life suggests that human life becomes *human* (thus, biological existence turns into political subjectivity) only through its politicization, which means that life (the excluded *zoe*) becomes *sacred* (that is, protected by the Law, *bios*) only by being subjected to a sovereign power; power that, fundamentally, marks the distinction between life and death. This is why Agamben sees that “[l]ife is sacred only insofar as it is taken into the sovereign exception.” (p. 85)

If, as Agamben seems to say here, political subjectification in all existing political systems necessarily entails a subjection to a sovereign power that governs their existence as
political, then the whole ontology of political agency in Western philosophy needs to be rethought. As he describes the contemporary condition of politics,

“everywhere on earth men live today in the ban of a law and a tradition that are maintained solely as the “zero point” of their own content, and that include men within them in the form of a pure relation of abandonment. All societies and all cultures today (it does not matter whether they are democratic or totalitarian, conservative or progressive) have entered into a legitimation crisis in which law (we mean by this term the entire text tradition in its regulative form, whether the Jewish Torah or the Islamic Shariah, Christian dogma or the profane nomos) is in force as the pure “Nothing of Revelation.” But this is precisely the structure of the sovereign relation, and the nihilism in which we are living is, from this perspective, nothing other than the coming to light of this relation as such. (p. 51)

This rather stern image that Agamben constructs of the challenges of political thinking today can be read as a call for a completely new political ontology. In times when “only bare life is authentically political,” (p. 106, original emphasis) and “all societies and all cultures … have entered into a legitimation crisis,” (a statement that should be approached quite carefully) what is needed is a form of politics that is not based on the separation between bios and zoe, or between divine law and secular (singular) being. Since bare life is neither natural nor political life, but still embodies the distinction between them, Agamben's solution to this aporia is to think life without the constitutive separation between bios and zoe.

Before going into details on Agamben's theorization of political action, it is worth drawing together some of his remarks on what, for him, constitutes politics and subjectification. Whereas Rancière claims that the community of logos is founded on a wrong that discards the fundamental equality of all speaking beings, Agamben sees that the
very *bios politikos* where logos takes place is already enmeshed in the sovereign rule that constitutes it. According to him, “today… we are all virtually *hominès sacri*” (p. 155) because the very heart of a sovereign rule that traverses Western politics has been unfolded in contemporary (Western) societies, thus abandoning all political subjects in bare life, that is, in the “zone of indistinction” between Law and life. This is why basing political theory on the production of subjectivities is, for Agamben, always simply a reaffirmation of the sovereign rule.

Next, I discuss how Rancière and Agamben respond to the problems that they identify in political thought and examine what does it mean for Rancière and Agamben to act politically. By conceptualizing their theoretical differences in terms of a radical politics of actualization (Rancière) and a radical politics of potentiality (Agamben), I lay out the basis for my further analysis on political action and subjectification.

**Radical Actualization, Radical Potentiality**

As visible from the relatively dense introductions to Rancière’s and Agamben’s ontologies of politics, they both see that politics is based on a fundamental chiasma of exclusion/inclusion. For Rancière, it is the exclusion of speaking beings from an equal participation in the community of speech that brings about politics while for Agamben, it is the inclusive exclusion of natural life from the *polis* that leads to the exposure of life to the sovereign power and, subsequently, constitutes the political sphere. What follows is a closer
comparison between these approaches and their take on the intricacies of the passage from potentiality to actuality.

As Jean-Philippe Deranty (2003) notes about Rancière,

Rancière’s philosophy could be described as methodological or practical materialism. … A consistent materialism must not limit itself to a materialistic epistemology. It has to be materialistic all the way, in its ontology, in its principles and its methods, in its philosophy of history, in its sociology and its poetics, and finally in its model for a good life. It must believe in the material nature and the material effect of language and discourse. It must approach social and political reality in terms of material, that is practical, effective, modes of domination and exploitation, and not limit itself to the denunciation of the ideological reproduction of underlying relations of production. Consequently it cannot reduce the fight against those relations of domination to forms of alienated consciousness. (Deranty, 2003, p. 139)

Here, Deranty is able to lay out something very elementary about Rancière’s politics, namely his insistence on the concrete actualizations of the existing order and its political counterpart, that is, the part that has no part. This sets a definitive tone to Rancière’s take on political action: it must deal with the “practical, effective, modes of domination and exploitation” that are already in place and constantly actualizing in the society. From this perspective, the problem that he identifies with the tradition of Western philosophy, namely its tendency to reduce politics into activity between already existing subject positions, has to be confronted with counter-actualizations, that is, concrete appearances of the part that has no part; appearances that effect the relations of power that govern the societal order in which subjects are partitioned to their proper places. Since the police order has always a material presence that is enacted not only in the relations between people but also between people and
their material surroundings (hence, Rancière’s interest in the politics of aesthetics), the goal of political action is to interfere with the very materiality of this presence and its limits.

This is essentially what I call Rancièrean radical politics of actualization: it denotes an act and/or an event that does not simply actualize a predetermined potentiality (e.g. a subject position or an identity), but brings forward the very limits of actualization by disrupting the totality of the distribution of the sensible. What such politics actualizes is, then, something incomprehensible in terms of the existing order, since it puts the (mis)count that comprises the totality (that is, comprehensibility) of the distribution of the sensible in question. In short, it forces to constitute a different relation to actuality. This change in reality, a change that Rancière calls *redistribution of the sensible*, is not a simple passageway from a potential to an actuality (for example, from a potential citizen to a full member of the society) but an event that uncouples both past and present existences from their possible futures, thus opening politics and the change that it brings to a radical unpredictability.

In this respect, to approach the question *what does it mean to act politically* from Rancièrean perspective means that the passage from potentiality to actuality, a passage that is inherent in the idea that a political act brings up a change in the existing order, needs to be uncoupled from a narrative of progression. Indeed, since the redistribution of the sensible remains inaccessible through the existing conceptual framework, one finds neither blueprints for revolution nor attempts to ameliorate the current society from Rancière: rather, a political act is, for him, a rupture in the logic that ties the potentialities of existence to actualized (signified) presence. In terms of political agency and subjectification, this means that there is
no predetermined knowledge and/or skills that one has to acquire in order to act politically, but, on the contrary, a political act unfolds the contingency of such requirements. In this respect, the constitutive exclusion that brings about politics, that is, the barred existence of the part that does not have part, is not merely a paralyzing force that does away with all political agency, but an order that always carries a seed of its own destruction within itself. Rancièrean political action qua radical actualization is, then, action that actualizes this destructive seed within the order: it is a coming-into-presence that fundamentally changes the sphere in which this presence takes place.

For Rancière, potentiality for politics stems, then, from the constitutive, non-subjective equality between speaking beings, not from a potentiality to become a signified subject (e.g. a fully developed individual). This makes Rancière’s understanding of political subjectivity anti-essentialist and, most importantly, removed from demands to be recognized as an individual who has a certain set of predetermined qualities that ought to actualize in a certain way. Non-actualized human potentiality is, then, a barred capability for equality, which means that in order for politics to take place, this capability has to be subjected to counter-actualization that unfolds its inherent contingency.

It is important to note that Rancièrean radical actualization as a dissensual relationship between the actualized totality of the social and the political potentiality of the part that has no part has also its theoretical limitations. Since every genuine difference (an introduction of the part that does not have a part in the totality of the society) is always already an actualization of politics, it seems that the part that has no part cannot escape its
political character. Of course, they can remain silent and invisible (policed, in Rancière’s terms), but this silence and invisibility seems, for Rancière, always to be imposed on them by the partition of the social. Moreover, such silence and invisibility stands only for a deferral of the inevitable, that is, of the ephemeral restoration of the fundamental barred equality to the system that restrains it. Here, it is possible to see the the telos of Rancière's politics: the simultaneous actualization of the excluded and the order that excludes, dissensus, “putting two worlds in one and the same world.” (Rancière, 2004, p. 304) Thus, despite his political theorization has a distinct empowering quality that positions those who are often excluded from traditional politics at the center of genuinely political action, there does not seem to be place for a part that has no part that is capable of its own exclusion (thus, not merely excluded by the existing order). In short, the political potential that the excluded have is a capability that they cannot not have, or, to be more precise, a capability that they inevitably actualize.

It is here where Agamben’s focus on potentialities becomes an important addition to the inquiry on the question what does it mean to act politically. His critique of sovereign power as the ultimate guarantor of all processes of subjectification means that a simple event counter-actualization is not enough: it does not put the very process of production of actualized subjectivities in question. For Agamben, the entwinement of Law and life, that is, bare life and its intensification in biopolitics, leads him to think humanness without the Law, without the sovereign power that constitutes its political subjectivity. This would be life that is not simply excluded from the political sphere (which, then, abolishes all political agency),
but a life that is simply inapplicable to it; a life that is capable of its own exclusion since it does not need sovereign power to constitute its agency.

At the center of such capability one finds Agamben’s reading of Aristotle’s notion of potentiality that “is not simply the potential to do this of that thing but potential to not-do, potential not to pass into actuality.” (1999b, pp. 179–180) Agamben’s own example of this logic is an architect who has the potential to build and poet that has the potential to write poems, but since they both possess knowledge and the ability to engage themselves in these activities, they can also “not bring [their] knowledge into actuality … by not making a work.” (p. 179, original emphasis) This is why

\[\text{[e]very human power is } \textit{adynamia}, \text{ impotentiality; every human potentiality is in relation to its own privation. This is the origin (and the abyss) of human power, which is so violent and limitless with respect to other living beings. Other living beings are capable only of their specific potentiality; they can only do this or that. But human beings are the animals who are capable of their own impotentiality. The greatness of human potentiality is measured by the abyss of human impotentiality.} \]

(p. 182, original emphasis)

This is, then, what I call Agambenian radical politics of potentiality: it means political action that is connected its own impotentiality, that is, potentiality to not pass itself to actuality where its presence is only “this or that.” In terms of subjectification, it means that instead of actualizing one’s potential for predetermined subject positions such as a fully developed individuality (position that, then, grants subject its political agency), a radical politics of potentiality finds political agency from non-participation and non-recognition, that is, from the sustainment of the impotential character of one’s ability to actualize.
Here, Agamben seems to come close to Rancière’s constitutive equality that becomes partitioned and thus controlled the moment it is fixed in relations between specific subject positions. Agamben even uses quite similar language when he talks about the problems that derive from the demand to actualize one’s presence in the society:

[am]ong beings who would always already be enacted, who would always already be this or that thing, this or that identity, and who would have entirely exhausted their power in these things and identities—among such beings there could not be any community but only coincidences and factual partitions. (Agamben, 2000, p. 10)

However, despite these similarities, Agamben’s theorization leads him to a very different political strategy than Rancière. Instead of radicalizing the passage from potentiality to actuality, Agamben sees that “[t]hose who are separated from their own impotentiality lose … first of all the capacity to resist.” (Agamben, 2010, p. 45) Neither an affirmation nor a negation of the Law that governs one’s appearance as a political (or apolitical) subject, this capacity to resist is, for Agamben, simply a “relation to one’s own privation” (Agamben, 1999b, p. 183) that is, the ability not to be present to the rule that either grants or denies one’s existence its political character. Subsequently, this impotential side of potentiality uncouples life from the seemingly unavoidable link between particularity and universality (singular human existence vs. the concept of human), thus opening life to all of its possibilities:

the single ways, acts, and processes of living are never simply facts but always and above all possibilities of life, always and above all power. Each behavior and each form of human living is never prescribed by a specific biological vocation, nor it is assigned by whatever necessity; instead, no matter how customary, repeated, and socially compulsory, it always retains a character of
possibility; that is, it always puts at stake living itself. (Agamben, 2000, p. 4, original emphasis)

From the perspective of a radical politics of potentiality, the question *what does it mean to act politically* becomes understood as an exercise of the impotential side of one's potentiality for political subjectification. Thus, where Rancière argues for the appearance of heterogeneity within the seemingly homogenous sphere of politics, Agamben sees that such sphere of politics needs to be rejected *in toto*; an understanding that takes him rather far from the ideals of liberal democracy that sees humans as speaking, political animals. As Rene ten Bos (2005) writes, “[c]ontrary to classical definitions of man as the speaking animal, Agamben insists that it is not the capacity for language that makes him/her a unique creature but rather the *ability to make language visible by silencing it,*” (p. 26, original emphasis) which is why it is the *ability* not to speak or not to participate that lies in the center of Agamben’s political theorization. In other words, since silence is not merely a deprivation of the participation in the community of speech (like in the case of women and slaves in the Antiquity), but a manifestation of one’s capability of being silent, it contains a possibility to render the rule that is based on always already actualized participation inoperative.

Like Rancière’s strong emphasis on actualization, Agamben’s focus on potentiality constitutes some limitations to his theorization. Notably, his insistence on silence and non-participation becomes easily turned into abstract idealism where actual political struggles are neglected in favor of pure politics that takes place only in the realm of thought. Subsequently, this creates a danger of slipping into a philosophical despotism where the
philosopher (in this case, Agamben) is the one who has the ability to reach the pure level of politics and thus criticize people who demand good life in wrong ways (by, for example, demanding equal participation in the community of speech). This is why one should be cautious when approaching the question of impotentiality. My intention is certainly not to fetishize silence or non-participation, but to use them to point to the limits of actualization. Thus, while keeping these possible shortcomings in mind, I see that Agamben’s political theorization needs to be further examined in order to judge its relevancy to fields like art education; a task that this and the following chapters take.

Given these characterizations of actuality and potentiality in Rancière and Agamben, it is important to summarize the tension between politics of radical actualization and radical potentialities in terms of subjectification and delineate their application to my further theorization. Since Rancière and Agamben are suspicious of political theory that presumes a shared sphere of politics in which all political action ought to take place, politics is not reduced to a relationship between singular existence and the context where this existence takes place, but it denotes a radical act of reframing the conditions of possibility for a singular existence to have a political agency. On the one hand, the Rancièrean radical politics of actualization helps to rethink the appearance that a singular existence makes in the sphere of politics; that is, how a singular coming-into-presence is being policed within the distribution of the sensible and how such police order can be disrupted by making fundamentally incomparable appearance within it. Such radical appearance, an appearance that Rancière calls disidentification, fundamentally alters the distribution of the sensible by
not conforming to its policed logic. Here, subjectification turns to disidentification: rather than being an actualization of predetermined potentialities, political action becomes an act of letting go from such predeterminations. The Agambenian radical politics of potentiality, on the other hand, rethinks this relationship in terms of disappearance, that is, how to disappear from the seemingly inevitable recognition by the sovereign power that allows subjectification only by exposing singular existence to its bare life. Against the always already actualized political subjectivity, Agamben positions whatever singularity that is capable of its own disappearance; singularity that “has no identity, it is not determinate with respect to a concept, but neither it is simply indeterminate; rather it is determined only through its relation to an idea, that is, to the totality of its possibilities.” (Agamben, 1993, p. 67, original emphasis) Like Rancière’s disidentification is an act of a radical appearance of the non-subjective equality, whatever singularity can be considered as radical disappearance from the sovereign power. It is important to underline that this disappearance is not simply invisibility or, as Agamben notes above, pure indeterminacy: rather, as Thomas Carl Wall (1999) argues, whatever singularity “is not representable or thematizable, not because it is withdrawn, silent, negative, or removed, but because it is too common.” (p. 123, original emphasis) For subjectification, this means that political existence retains its impotentiality, that is, its capability for politics without entering into a contractual relationship with sovereign power that actualizes one’s potential for predetermined subject positions.

Now, it is possible to go back to the original task of this chapter, that is, the examination of the ontologies of politics of art education as a universal human right. The
underlying idea of Unesco’s passage above, that is, that a human life that has been cultured through arts is a life of a fully developed human individual and, for that very reason, a just society is one where the access to arts education has been secured by the juridical order, points to the very problems that both Rancière and Agamben raise in their critiques of Western political philosophy. Unlike Unesco, they both uncouple, in their own ways, human life from its overdetermined actualizations as subject positions and identities, thus opening political (human) life to radical actualization qua disidentification (Rancière) and radical potentiality qua whateverness (Agamben).

In order to further analyze the difference between Unesco’s passage and a radical politics of actualization and a radical politics of potentiality, I take a closer look at Rancière’s and Agamben’s critique of human rights and see what kind of challenges do they pose for subjectification that entwines singular human life with its appearance within the juridical order. Specifically, I am interested in seeing what kind of relationship between singular life and its political existence does Unesco’s passage suggest and what is the function of art education in that relationship.

Art Education as a Universal Human Right Revisited

Here, it is worth re-quoting Unesco’s passage:

Culture and the arts are essential components of a comprehensive education leading to the full development of the individual. Therefore, Arts Education is a universal human right, for all learners, including those who are often excluded from education, such as immigrants, cultural minority groups, and people with disabilities. (Unesco, 2006, p. 3)
While the purpose of such declaration is clearly to secure the societal position of art education and a universal and equal access to it, my discussion above helps to unfold some of the central shortcomings of this logic. In order to function, the right for art education needs to be constituted upon an image of subjectivity that can be completed (i.e. its potential for full development actualized) by a power that grants it its political agency. For political theorization in art education, subjects’ dependency on such power means that the goal of politics of art education becomes articulated in terms of securing the existence of not only the subject that needs this power, but also the need itself, thus leading to a situation where art education itself is never put in question. How, then, to understand the political potential of art education without simultaneously asserting a teleological need for it; a need that finds its shape from a future actualizations of subject positions such as a fully developed individual?

What should be clear at this point is that a radical politics of actualization and a radical politics of potentiality provide rather different yet critical responses to Unesco’s provocation. What makes this passage interesting in terms of Rancière’s and Agamben's writings is that both of them have, indeed, written about the question of human rights; a topic that has led Rancière fiercely attack Agamben’s political theory. Most importantly, Rancière's critique is tied directly on his own emphasis on actualization and appearance, accusing Agamben of reasserting “the division between those who are worthy or not worthy of doing politics that was presupposed at the very beginning.” (Rancière, 2004, p. 306) In this respect, not only do Rancière’s and Agamben’s writings of human rights offer tools to
reevaluate Unesco’s passage above, they also open an opportunity to further examine the possible limitations of their theorization, especially in terms of subjectification. Since Rancière’s text on human rights is a commentary on Agamben’s writings, it is worth reversing the order I have examined these writers above and discuss Agamben’s view on human rights first and then introduce Rancière’s critique.

In a short essay called “Beyond Human Rights” in his book *Means Without End* (2000) Agamben takes Hannah Arendt’s critique of human rights as his conceptual starting point when he tries to understand what do human rights mean in biopolitics. Arendt’s views, articulated for example in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, (1962) are rooted in the precarious position that refugees were located in the turmoils of the two World Wars in Europe. Many refugees who had left their native country without the desire to go back found themselves in a difficult situation: the international law only protected the rights of legal citizens of nation-states, but since these people were inherently “stateless,” they opened up a void in the seemingly universal *Rights of Man*. As Arendt describes the situation in Europe that time,

> [e]very attempt by international conferences to establish some legal status for stateless people failed because no agreement could possibly replace the territory to which an alien, within the framework of existing law, must be deportable. All discussions about the refugee problems revolved around this one question: How can the refugee be made deportable again? The second World War and the [displaced persons] camps were not necessary to show that the only practical substitute for a nonexistent homeland was an internment camp. Indeed, as early as the thirties this was the only “country” the world had to offer the stateless. (Arendt, 1962, p. 284)
Agamben, who sees that Arendt’s writings on refugees has “after fifty … lost none of its relevance,” (Agamben, 2000, p. 16) claims that, like *homo sacer*, the figure of a refugee offers an important “limit concept” that radically calls into question the fundamental categories of the nation-state, from the birth-nation to the man-citizen link, and that thereby makes it possible to clear the way for a long-overdue renewal of categories in the service of a politics in which bare life is no longer separated and excepted, either in the state order or in the figure of human rights. (Agamben, 1998, p. 134)

Here, it is possible to see connections to Agamben’s critique of subjectification that I discussed earlier, namely to the problems that derive from the need to tie singular existence to a predetermined political presence in the society. The common denominator in Arendt’s and Agamben’s theoretical position is the Aristotelean separation of *zōē* from *bios* and the perplexities that it engenders in politics. Unlike Agamben, however, Arendt argues for a full and genuine inclusion of all humans in the sphere of *bios politikos*. As Schaap (2011) puts it, Arendt sees that “human beings can realize a fully human life by distinguishing themselves through public action.” (Schaap, 2011, p. 26) While Arendt’s critique of human rights points to the inability of nation-states to solve the tension between *zōē* and *bios* due to the exclusionary link between state, people, and territory (thus leaving people like stateless refugees completely out from the sphere of politics), Agamben sees that *bios* is possible only through the inclusive exclusion of *zōē*, which means that merely extending the *bios* to include all humans (a sphere of politics that Arendt famously calls “the space of appearance”) still
requires the originary Aristotelean split between speaking and non-speaking animals. As

Agamben puts it,

[h]uman rights, in fact, represent first of all the originary figure for the inscription of natural naked life in the political-juridical order of the nation-state. Naked life (the human being), which in antiquity belonged to God and in the classical world was clearly distinct (as zoē) from political life (bios), comes to the forefront in the management of the state and becomes, so to speak, its earthly foundation. … Rights, in other words, are attributed to the human being only to the degree to which he or she is the immediately vanishing presupposition (and, in fact, the presupposition that must never come to light as such) of the citizen. (Agamben, 2000, pp. 20-21)

This is why, for Agamben, the figure of refugee (a modern day homo sacer) is simultaneously a symptom par excellence of political system that is based on bare life and a limit concept that can also disrupt the foundations of this system:

[o]nly in a world in which the spaces of states have been thus perforated and topologically deformed and in which the citizen has been able to recognize the refugee that he or she is—only in such a world is the political survival of the humankind today thinkable. (p. 26)

As visible, Agamben’s skepticism toward human rights is founded on the very inscription of these rights on singular existences; that is, on the problem of subjectification discussed earlier. For him, the price one has to pay for the assumably equal presence that human rights provide to its subjects is the subjection to a Law that turns a singular existence into a “vanishing presupposition” of the human of human rights. Following his conceptualization of whatever singularities, Agamben’s response to this disappearance into the juridical power is a disappearance from it: instead of seeing the refugee merely as a flaw in
the logic of human rights, it can also provide a way out from the totalizing sphere of juridical recognition.

This does not mean that Agamben romanticizes the difficult position where refugees nowadays are living in; for example, his book *State of Exception* (2005b) is a fierce critique of the precarious life that refugees and so-called paperless immigrants are forced to live in the contemporary political landscape that is immersed in the post-9/11 fear of terrorism and the increasingly controlled borders of European Union. Rather, what Agamben makes wants to make clear is that in the era of biopolitics, radical politics does not stem from attempts to rethink the ways that universal human rights would be *truly* universal (like in Unesco’s passage that emphasizes “those who are often excluded from education, such as immigrants, cultural minority groups, and people with disabilities”), since this universality cannot put its own constitution in question.

From Agamben’s perspective, to understand art education as a human right raises some important questions that Unesco’s passage cannot fully answer. If the societal presence of art education is understood as a question of subjectification that, subsequently, engenders a necessity which ties art education to the humanness of human life (leading to “the full development of the individual”), politics of art education becomes merely a strategy of governing the actualization of abstract concepts of *human rights* and *fully developed individual*; concepts that not only remain abstract but also expose singular human life to a conceptual apparatus that grants this life its appearance as human and, moreover, as life that, from its very beginning, steps into a contract with the society that secures the function of this
apparatus. This means that the fully developed individual as the outcome of art education stands not for a singular life, but as a politicized subject whose potentialities for a truly genuine human life are tied to the presence of art education. From Agambenian perspective, the image of a fully developed individual qua politicized subject is an outcome of a logic that finds its basis on bare life, that is, on sovereign rule that ties the continuation of life to its governance. The discourse of necessity that positions art education as a universal human right is, then, more about sustaining the presence of art education as an initiation to full humanness; a humanness that is marked by subject’s belonging to the sovereign rule. In this respect, the very constitution of a politicized subject of art education is inherently tied to the image of life deprived of art education, an existence that needs to be done away with in order to reach the telos of politics that demands actualized and recognizable participation in the society.

It is here where Rancière’s critique of Agamben becomes useful. What Rancière finds problematic in Agamben’s political theory is his totalizing understanding of sovereign power. In his essay “Who Is the Subject of the Rights of Man?” (2004) Rancière takes a critical stance toward Arendt’s and, subsequently, Agamben’s critique of human rights. For him, Arendt’s and Agamben’s conceptualization of state power is overly totalizing; there seems to be no space for politics between the subject and sovereign power. Rancière sees that they both fall into an “ontological trap” (Rancière, 2004, p. 302) that prevents them from discussing politics beyond the sovereign ban. As he writes,
he will to preserve the realm of pure politics ultimately makes it vanish in the sheer relation of state power and individual life. Politics thus is equated with power, a power that is increasingly taken as an overwhelming historico-ontological destiny from which only a God is likely to save us. (p. 302)

Here, it is important to keep in mind Rancière's take on Aristotle's conceptualization of humans as speaking, political animals. Rancière reminds that the community of logos of *bios politikos* is never total; it always excludes the part that has no part (for example, the slaves who had the capability to understand language but not to use it), which means that despite the seemingly totalizing nature of state power and logos, it always has a remainder that, in fact, brings about politics. So, for Rancière, politics is always an active category that has no essence nor sphere; it only takes place through action *qua* the appearance of the part that has no part. Here, one can discern a clear division between Rancière and Arendt: while Arendt argues for an access to *bios politikos* that makes societal equality possible, Rancière's conceptual reversal that posits equality *before* politics allows him to point out the totalizing character of logos in Arendt's conceptualization of politics. However, this critique is not fully adaptable to Agamben, which is an issue that Rancière does not to address adequately in his essay. Before examining the difference between Arendt and Agamben, however, it is worth explaining Rancière's own critique of human rights based on his critique of Arendt.

Rancière's main argument is that human rights carry a radical political potential due to the very universal frame that they build up. His own rather cryptic expression what human rights mean in his political theory is: “the Rights of Man are the rights of those who have not the rights that they have and have the rights that they have not.” (p. 302) Rancière
himself opens this conceptualization by laying out two forms of existence of rights: rights in a written form and rights as lived relations in the society. What is important about this distinction is that the rights that are enacted in the society are not fully dependent on the written ones; in fact, they belong to subjects that can act on these rights. As he writes, “[m]an and citizen do not designate collections of individuals. Man and citizen are political subjects. Political subjects are not definite collectivities. They are surplus names, names that set out a question or a dispute (litige) about who is included in their count.” (p. 303, original emphasis) By accusing Arendt and Agamben of dismissing the whole question of political subjectivity, Rancière sees that Arendtian (and Agambenian) political theory constructs too fixed relationship between singular existence and the concept that names it (human, citizen, illegal immigrant…). For him, “[p]olitical names are litigious names, names whose extension and comprehension are uncertain and which open for that reason the space of a test or verification. Political subjects build such cases of verification. They put to test the power of political names, their extension and comprehension.” (p. 304)

Notably, Rancière’s approach to human rights makes the dialectical structure of his political thought unfold. By stressing the difference between recognition by the rights and recognition of the rights, he is able to construct a dialectical pair that not only shows the contingency of the law that assigns these rights, but the subject that this law brings about. In this scheme, human rights are understood as an important backdrop for a societal contestation due to their assumably universal nature. Schaap’s (2011) example on the so-called sans papiers, the “paperless” immigrants who live and work illegally (a term that, in
itself, shows the sovereign power of the nation-state to say who is *legal* and who is *illegal*) in France, demonstrates well Rancièrean dialectics that bring about disidentification:

On the one hand, the *sans papiers* demonstrate that they have not the rights that they have. They do not enjoy the rights that they are supposed to have according to the various human rights treaties to which France is a signatory. By publicizing their political exclusion, the *sans papiers* draw attention to their plight and the ways in which they are denied the same universal human rights from which the French state claims to derive its legitimacy. On the other hand, they demonstrate that they have the rights that they have not. They demonstrate their equality as speaking beings despite being deprived of legal personhood. The *sans papiers* enact the right to have rights when they speak as if they had the same rights as the French nationals they address. They occupy a church to draw attention to their economic participation within French society rather than remaining unseen and unheard on threat of deportation. Instead of hiding from the police they turn up to police headquarters and say ‘we are the *sans papiers* of Saint-Bernard and we have business in this building’. (Schaap, 2011, p. 34)

In this respect, for Rancière, sovereign power is never a fundamental political problem, since it always finds its counterforce in the people that it excludes. This means that human rights *qua* an inscription of juridical power over singular existences is never as total as Arendt and Agamben seem to articulate. Rancière argues that “[t]he strength of [human rights] lies in the back-and-forth movement between the first inscription of the right and the dissensual stage on which it is put to test.” (Rancière, 2004, p. 305) just like the *sans papiers* in Schaap’s example demonstrate.

Thus, when the question of art education as a human right is examined from Rancièrean perspective, such declaration does not constitute a problem in itself; on the contrary, it allows a direct confrontation with the written Law and its understanding of human life. This does not mean that Rancière would simply embrace Unesco’s declaration.
The acknowledgement of “those who are often excluded from education, such as immigrants, cultural minority groups, and people with disabilities” can be seen as an excellent example of the societal roles and positions that the distribution of the sensible assigns to singular existences. Such act of inclusion of the excluded as immigrants, cultural minority groups and people with disabilities does not, for Rancière, constitute a political event, since it is first and foremost a consensual strategy: it simply adds more subject positions to a system of distribution of social roles without questioning the system itself. However, since for Rancière such distribution is never total, the political potential of art education as a human right is dependent on the possibilities of enacting the right to “the full development of the individual” in a way that creates a dissensus in the very frame that assigns these rights. In other words, in Rancière, there is always a possibility of becoming human through art; this becoming qua disidentification just has to put the very definition of what does it mean to be a fully developed individual in question along with the very definition of art that ought to bring such development. Thus, human rights does not prevent a radical politics of actualization to take place; on the contrary, they make it possible to radicalize the very notion of appearance.

Here, it is worth summarizing the critical perspectives on human rights by both writers. Agamben sees that human rights represent an inscription of the sovereign Law in the body of singular beings, thus making them a strategy of preserving the circulation of power. Rancière, on the other hand, stresses the inherently partial character of power of identification; character that a radical appearance of political subjectivity can point out.
This is where the difference between a radical politics of potentiality and a radical politics of actualization becomes articulated most visibly: the Agambenian disappearance from the Law meets Rancièrcean direct confrontation with it. For art education, these two perspectives mean that its position as a human right creates either a political deadlock that merely reproduces function of the sovereign rule (Agamben) or an important site of contestation that allows concrete confrontations with the Law (Rancière).

It can be said, then, that the notion of human rights offers a contested ground for political theorization of art education. In terms of the question I posed earlier, that of, how to understand the political potential of art education without simultaneously asserting a teleological need that finds its shape from a future actualizations of subject positions, human rights can work either as a such teleological goal (Unesco), a reinstatement of legislative power over human life (Agamben), or a possibility to confront societal power in its own grounds (Rancière).

Going back to the question *what does it mean to act politically*, these different perspectives open rather different conceptualizations of political action and the agency it both grants and requires. When they are opened to the temporal dimensions that I put forward in the introduction, it is the Unesco's passage that fixes the political activity of art education most tightly between the confinements between a beginning and an end. The need for art education and its politics is inherently based on a logic that makes subjectification a goal that, eventually, annihilates the very event of politics, thus making the political imagination dependent on a diametrical relationship between the past and the future. This
derives from the willingness to see human rights as rights that are actualized through the “essential components of a comprehensive education” (as Unesco's passage suggests) and manifested in the figure of a fully developed individual. Here, the passage from potentiality to actuality is linear: it is manifested in a self-annihilating need that, when met, completes the political function of art education.

Both radical politics of actualization and radical politics of potentiality trouble such linearity by uncoupling both actualization and potentiality from any predetermine characters, which forces to rethink subjectification beyond the confinements that the need for a fully developed individuality sets for a political imagination. The rejection of teleological thought and predetermined goals does not mean that there would not be a need for the change that politics ought to introduce in the existing order: vice versa, both Rancière's and Agamben's strong involvement with radical politics shows that they are very much interested in creating a change; a change that, in different ways, could trouble the circulation of societal power that constitutes an isomorphic relationship between life and the concept that signifies it. For political theorization in art education, this means that the political agency that art education ought to constitute should be thought separate from its signification and identification.

Along these lines, I conclude this chapter by sketching out how might one think of the need for art education and its politics from the perspective of a radical politics of actualization and a radical politics of potentiality, especially in terms of the political agency that these two political strategies may unfold. I approach this problematic through the phrase
“You Gotta Have Art” and see why, indeed, we might need art when trying to understand what does it mean to act politically.

“You Gotta Have Art”: Necessity Reframed

Based on my discussion above, it is possible to state that both for Rancière and Agamben, the need for politics is a need for a disfunction in a circulation of power; a need for a coming-into-presence of human life that does not play by the same rules as the order where it initially is situated and in which it becomes identified as a political (or apolitical) subject. The question *what does it mean to act politically* becomes, then, a quest for such disfunction, but, unlike the search for a fully developed individuality, such disfunction does not present itself as a completion of politics (i.e. an actualization of one's potential for political existence), but it denotes the very activity of politics, its *eventness*, that grasps politics in its making, in its passage from potentiality to actuality. For political theorization in art education, this quest poses an intriguing question: in what ways could art education be understood as political activity that has the potential to bring out such disfunction and thus trouble subjectification whose agency is solely dependent on an affirmation of the existing circulation of power? What follows is an attempt to understand this question in the context of “You Gotta Have Art” and use it to reframe the need for politics of art education beyond predetermined goals. First, I discuss the need for politics in Rancièren and Agambenian through and then see how might these ideas help to reframe the (political) need for art education.
In Rancière, dissensus, that is, the radical appearance of “two worlds in one,” offers a fertile starting point for examining why there is a need for politics. Going back to his statement “[p]olitics arises from a count of community ’parts,’ which is always a false count, a double count, or a miscount,” (Rancière, 1999, p. 6) it is this mismatch between social order and the fundamental equality of speaking beings that constitutes politics for him. Hence, “[i]f there is something ’proper’ to politics, it consists entirely in [a] relationship, which is not a relationship between subjects, but between two contradictory terms that define the subject.” (Rancière, 2010, p. 28) In other words, a consensus within the distribution of the sensible, the consensus that is governed by the police, finds its dialectical pair in the part that has no part, which, however, remains silent and invisible in terms of the existing order. Dissensus as “the demonstration (manifestation) of a gap in the sensible itself” (p. 38) is, then, simply a process of actualizing the dialectic between these two worlds. If this dialectic does not unfold, if the part that has no part does not appear, the very conditions of possibility of social order as such remains unquestioned. Here, it is important to note that such appearance is not an appearance of the working class, of the women, of the illegal immigrants (any more than social order is equivalent to police officers or politicians), but an appearance of the contingency of all social roles and positions.

In terms of necessity, the need to pointing out this contingency is tied to the halted dialectic between the totality and the excluded part that every social order always already embodies. As Rancière argues, “[p]olitical conflict does not involve an opposition between groups with different interests. It forms an opposition between logics that count the parties
and parts of the community in different ways.” (Rancière, 2012, p. 35) In this respect, the necessity of politics can be understood as an inevitable appearance of the dialectics that makes social order and hierarchies possible; an order that naturalizes everything that keeps it in place. In terms of subjectification, it is a need for disidentification; an disruption of the system of signification that does away with the contingency of all subject positions.

A Rancièrean reading of “You Gotta Have Art” unfolds, then, a specific kind of politics of art education that, instead of offering tools for identification or predetermined subjectification, would open human life to a process of disidentification. Instead of constituting a need for a fully developed individuality, a radical politics of actualization points to the need to disengage oneself from such needs in order to unfold the constitutive equality between speaking beings; an equality that the partition of the social inhibits.

Notably, Rancière’s call for disidentification is not restrained to subjectivities or identities, but it traverses his whole political theorization. This means that the “art” that one needs is paradoxically something that necessarily does not present itself as art, but opens up a gap in the sensible that assigns art a particular function and place in the society. This dynamic becomes even more clear in Rancière’s writings on education and hierarchies of knowledge in The Ignorant Schoolmaster (1991). As Jan Voelker (2011) notes about Rancière’s educational theorization, “the loss of the social link [between teacher and students] is … one of the central moments of the emancipation. The emancipatory process consists primarily of a practice of dis-identification: don’t be a knowing teacher anymore, don’t be an unknowing student anymore.” (Voelker, 2011, p. 69) In other words, Rancière’s educational theory
(drawing from early 1800s educator Joseph Jacotot) shifts the focus of education from dynamics between knowledge and non-knowledge to the very hierarchy that makes such dynamics possible.

Thus, the Rancièrean need for art and its education has always a double-content: on the one hand, it can be understood as a necessity of the appearance of the dialectic that gives rise to the distribution of the sensible. On the other hand, it is a necessity of disappearance of the familiar and the already-known. This underlines the fact that Rancièrean radical actualization is not simply a replacement of one order with another, but starts a dialectical movement that puts the foundation of every social order in question. Moreover, this double-movement between appearance and disappearance cuts the linear temporal narrative that connects present political action to fixed future outcomes: the future that unfolds from radical appearance sustains a fundamental potential character to be something else.

Here, the disappearance of the already-known provides an important link between Rancière’s and Agamben’s views on the need for politics. Whereas in Rancière, disidentification sets off the dialectic between the distribution of the sensible and the part that has not part, Agamben’s insistence on whateverness “emphasizes the necessity of a politics that renders the current biopolitical machine inoperative through play and profanation.” (Mills, 2008, p. 123) Although this goal seems to share similarities with Rancière, Agamben’s call for inoperativity and profanation shifts the discussion from the need for radical appearance of the part that has no part to the disappearance of singular being from the “biopolitical machine.” How, then, to understand the necessity in “You Gotta Have
Art” through this inoperative framework? What kind of political activity does inoperativity constitute, if, as suggested earlier, a radical politics of potentiality retains its potential not to act?

Notably, Agamben’s call for inoperativity is directly related to his understanding of potentiality. If sovereign control works on the plane of determinacy, that is, only beings that are present as determinate beings can be fully controlled, the first step for inoperativity would be to occupy an indeterminate position in relation to control (not totally indeterminate, as Wall’s passage above suggests). While Rancière’s remarks on the contingency of all subject positions points to a similar direction, the dialectical nature of his thought makes politics a simultaneous actualization of the distribution of the sensible and the part that has not part. Inoperativity, however, is an attempt to restore the impotential character of potentiality to political action and occupy the corrosive middle-ground where the boundary between determinacy and indeterminacy remains unclear. This is why Kishik (2012) writes:

Agamben’s point … is not that we need to do away with all classes or identities … by repressing or dissipating or transcending them. Since no identity is sacred, the ethical task is actually to profane it, use it, play with it, examine it, struggle for and against it, or even render it completely inoperative within our life, but without trying to resolve the matter once and for all. (Kishik, 2012, p. 83)

For Agamben, the need for politics is, then, rooted in the need for the appropriation of the split that marks the distinction between inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion, or political and apolitical life. Indeed, his whole theoretical work navigates within such in-between spaces that he calls zones of indistinction. Instead of trying to turn this indeterminacy
to determinacy (politics of recognition, human rights) or push determinacy in dialectical
class movement with indeterminacy (Rancière), Agamben’s response to bare life *qua* a zone of
indistinction is to imagine indeterminacy whose indeterminate character is not externally
imposed (for example, left out from the distribution of the sensible) but establishes a
“relation to one's own privation.” (Agamben, 1999b, p. 183) In other words, unlike
Rancière’s politics, Agamben does not allow a dialectical structure to unfold; a structure that
would clearly separate one mode of being from another: the point is rather the *ability* to
occupy the threshold, that is, the *ability* to refuse both sides of dialectics, thus corroding the
dependency on negativity as the *primus motor* in politics. This is initially what his call for
whatever singularities means: by being “too common” (Wall, 1999, p. 123), whatever
singularities render identification inoperative by being “determined only through [their]
relation to an *idea*, that is, to the totality of [their] possibilities” (The Coming Community,
p. 67, original emphasis); not in relation to another identity or subject position.

In terms of a radical politics of potentiality, the Agambenian reading of “You Gotta
Have Art” affiliates the need for politics of art education with the attempts to unfold a zone
of indistinction between life and its signification. Thus, instead of being an activity that
constructs and reconstructs subjectivities, art education becomes a practice of profanation
and play with subjectification that, as Kishik’s passage above suggests, is a process that is not
resolved “once and for all.” This allows to think art education beyond a linear passage from a
potentiality to an actuality and relocate its political potential in whateverness, that is, in the
“all *possibilities* of life [that are] always and above all power.” (Agamben, 2000, p. 4, original
emphasis) Most importantly, when art education is uncoupled from such linearity, it is opened to its own whateverness: its politics would no longer revolve around the attempts to sustain art education as an institution that has to grant political agency to students (a sustainment that, as discussed earlier, is more about sustaining the governance of life than the life itself), but it becomes an activity that embodies all of its potentialities and impotentialities; its ability to do and not to do. Like with Rancière’s disidentification, this would mean that art education would not have a clear identity as a political force, but it is precisely this non-identity that would open its political acts to their radicalness.

**Conclusion**

The central thesis that I have tried to articulate and elaborate throughout this chapter is that if political theorization in art education is based on constituting a clear passage from potentiality to actuality (e.g. from an individual to a fully developed individual) and position art education as the central guarantor of such development (a development that I have called subjectification), the only function left for political theorization is to make this logic more efficient and more predicable. Moreover, this constitutes a linear temporal relationship between the past and the future, which means that the change that art education and its politics ought to introduce in the society are always merely an adjustment of the Same: art education retains its social function while keeping the society operative as well. Unesco’s passage where art education is granted the status of a universal human right is an interesting
articulation of this logic: there is something essential about humans that only art education can bring to life; there is something essential about art that makes human life *truly* human.

What both Rancière and Agamben bring into this problematic is a critique of the inherent predetermination that a linear passage between potentiality and actuality and the temporal linearity between the past and the present are pregnant with. For them, in different ways, the outcome of truly radical politics remains beyond risk management or predictability, that is, beyond the control that the present sets up for the future. In terms of subjectification, both Rancièrean radical politics of actualization and Agambenian radical politics of potentiality pose an important challenge for political theorization that is constituted in securing the existence of seemingly neutral and universal concepts such as a *fully developed individuality*. For them, human life is not destined to find its completion in such concepts, but, on the contrary, it is life that can actualize multiple potentialities (Rancière) or stay connected to its impotentiality (Agamben).

When human life is uncoupled from its teleological actualization through art education, the very concept of subjectification has to be rethought. In terms of the question *what does it mean to act politically*, a radical politics of actualization and a radical politics of potentiality force to ask what would it mean to think the political action and agency of art education through disidentification, through whatever? What unites these two perspective is that they both see politics not only as a change from one modality of life or society to another, but as a disruption of causality that reduces change to an empty passageway between two poles: from a potentiality to an actuality, from an individual to a fully developed one.
In order to understand what would this mean for political theorization, the relationship between subjectification and human life needs to be further elaborated. After all, by making a direct relationship between a fully developed individuality and art education, Unesco's passage sees human life and education as deeply entwined entities; that is, that art education is vital for students’ development. In the next two chapters, I will take a look at how has the entwinement of human life and education become an essential component for subjectification in art education and what does that mean for political imagination of art education.
Chapter 2: Historicizing Subjectification in Art Education: 
The Entwinement of Life, Art, and Education in the Progressive Era

In this chapter, I historicize the connection between politicization of art education and subjectification by examining how the post World War I progressivism shaped the understanding of the educational function of art and the societal position of art education. By choosing to focus on progressive education I follow Efland’s (1990) remark that World War I stands as a watershed between more industrially orientated art education and art education that was taught for “cultural purposes.” (p. 184) What makes these “cultural purposes” interesting for the examination of subjectification qua the entwinement of life and education is that in order to teach art for “cultural purposes,” it was necessary to decrease the seeming gap between one’s (everyday) life and education; a gap that education qua preparation for alienated labor in the increasingly industrializing society had introduced in the 1800s.

It is notable that responding to the discontents of human life by stressing the value of individual’s life-experiences in education was not, in the 1920s, nothing new: as William J. Reese (2001) notes, child-centered approaches to education and the growing beliefs in human capacities to understand the world in progressive education were firmly based on the eighteenth century philosophy (e.g. Rousseau) and science (e.g. Newton) and further
developed by Pestalozzi and Froebel in the early nineteenth century. To understand education as a direct and active relationship between the child and her/his surroundings meant that life was something that could be *improved* by education, thus not merely *controlled* by it.³

Following the lead from the previous chapter, I will examine the centrality of human life for progressive education in terms of subjectification and the passage from the potentiality to actualization of a *genuinely* human life by analyzing how was *life* introduced in the realm of art education as a strategy of subjectification. In terms of actualization and potentiality, it is important to understand what kind of potentialities were affiliated with human life, how were these potentialities ought to be actualized through education and, what turned such actualization into a sociopolitical activity. As in the previous chapter, a radical politics of actualization and a radical politics of potentiality serve as analytical points of reflection: if for Rancière, politics derives from an entrance of non-subjective life in the distribution of the sensible, a mode of governance that shatters the predetermined division of singular beings into known identities and subject positions (i.e. radical actualization) and for Agamben, life is to be uncoupled from the system of governance that renders it always already actualized and thus governable mode of being (i.e. radical potentiality), what is the life that unfolds from the educational critique of the progressive era and what is its function in the political theorization in art education?

³ However, as Reese (2001) points out, this active conceptualization of individuality was first and foremost tied to the middle-class bourgeoisie. The working class still needed discipline and social correction.
As Reese (2001) makes clear, progressive education was extremely variegated social phenomenon that was not limited merely to the epochal and disciplinary frame that this chapter is concerned with. Thus, in order to focus my argument specifically on art education, I use Efland’s (1990) distinction between two major streams of progressive art education, that of reconstructionist and expressionist, that approached the question of life from more or less overlapping but still different viewpoints. They both tried to step out from the role that art had had in the society during the 1800s; that of, as an esoteric practice that was guided by transcendental Spirit and practiced only within its own immanent logic. Moreover, they also wanted to move away from educational theory that saw art as a preparation for industrial labor; a perspective that, as I will discuss later, served as the initial reason for the emergence of art education in the American public schooling system in the first place. The “art” that progressive art educators promoted was not a separate sphere of practices and knowledge that one had to be initiated through a particular kind of education; it was the very opposite. By underlining the psychological and social foundations of art, progressive educators wanted to break the seemingly artificial barriers that made artistic practices and experiences something that belonged only to those who had a seemingly innate gift, a right kind of social background, or reduced it to mere labor preparation that reinstalled the existing class divisions. I see that this call for a democratization of art, either by psychological or sociological means, marks an important strategical move in terms of the entwinement of life and education. Indeed, if art was something that everybody could benefit from, this universal function for a singular life opens a plane of subjectification that needs to be examined closely.
It is worth noting that this chapter is situated in the history of public schooling in the United States, which means that progressivism is analyzed strictly in this specific context. The focus on public schooling (thus, not on art academies or higher education) is tied to the universal function that I mentioned above: public schooling helps me to examine how the need for art becomes understood in a general societal context, that is, that art is useful for everybody.

This chapter is divided in three parts. Firstly, I discuss the historical and theoretical context of progressive education by examining the historical developments of art education in the turn of the century. I start by giving an historical overview of the position of art education in the American schooling system prior to the progressive era, which helps to understand how did the shift from the demands of industry to “cultural purposes” effect the way that life was seen as part of art education curriculum. In order to give a theoretical background for progressive education, I discuss John Dewey’s book *The School and Society* (originally published in 1900 and revised in 1915), which offers an intriguing entry to his critique of schooling; a project that was highly influential for art educators during the progressive era and beyond. Secondly, I analyze the entwinement of life and education by investigating how life became one of the central political categories in art education curricula for reconstructionist and expressionist streams of progressive education. As an example of the reconstructionist art education, I discuss the Owatonna Art Education project that was based on the conceptualization of “art as a way of life” (Ziegfeld & Smith, 1944, p. 5). Expressionist stream of progressive art education is examined through Harold Rugg’s and
Ann Shumaker’s book *The Child-Centered School* (originally published in 1928), which sees art as one of the central strategies for enhancing students’ lives and their social agency.

Thirdly, I conclude this chapter by reading these strategies of subjectification against a radical politics of actualization and a radical politics of potentiality.

**The Institutional Context of Art Education Before the Progressive Era**

The Massachusetts Free Instruction Drawing Act of 1870 was the first legislative action in the United States that made drawing education an obligatory part of public schooling system. Originally petitioned by the most important industrialists of Boston (Smith, 1996), the Drawing Act of 1870 established a form expertise in public schooling that made it possible to talk about art education as a professional field separate from both fine arts and general education. Interestingly, nine years later, the National Association of School Superintendents proclaimed that “industrial drawing should form one of the fundamental branches of study in all grades.” (Haney, 1908, p. 45) Since this institutional setting made it possible to consider art education *qua* drawing education as its own “branch of study,” the field itself could be organized both academically and professionally. Indeed, throughout the last decades of the nineteenth century, academically trained supervisors, large scale student work exhibitions, professional associations, and publications had helped art education to be considered as a somewhat cohesive field of study with its own educational specificities.

Haney (1908), writing in the early 1900s, saw that it was the work of professional

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4 Notably, it also required “free instruction in industrial and mechanical drawing to persons over fifteen years of age” in cities and town with over ten thousand inhabitants (Massachusetts Board of Education, 1871 as cited in Efland, 1990, pp. 99–100)
supervisors that “has lent more and more to the development of a body of professional knowledge and to a professional attitude and standing on the part of the specialists” (p. 63) since their training did not merely include lessons in drawing and design, but also curriculum theory, psychology, and organizational and administrative work.

The emergence of art supervisors was part of the general standardization of American schools in the late 1800s and the number of supervisors raised rapidly during these years: while in 1870 there were only 26 school supervisors, in 1890 the number had risen to 2900 (Rugg & Shumaker, 1928). At the same time, first local associations for art teachers were established and eventually merged into two major associations, Eastern and Western Art Teachers' Association by the 1890s. These associations published professional literature (magazines such as The Manual Training Magazine and The Applied Arts Book, later The School Arts Book) that offered “much excellent material to teachers in the smaller towns who have not the assistance of special or supervisory teachers” (Haney, 1908, p. 67). For the art supervisors, the Year Book of the Council of Supervisors of the Manual Arts served as a forum to read and publish articles on their work.

Notably, the emergence and development of art education as a school subject in the late 1800s was tied to the broader societal developments that took place during the so-called Second Industrial Revolution and gave birth to the idea of an industrialized civil society. On the one hand, the expanding industrial production, increasingly globalizing competition and the demand of efficiency required standardized training that secured the availability of technically-skilled workforce. On the other, the requirement for standardized outcomes
meant that teaching itself had to be organized so that these goals were actually met, which led to the establishment of the professional field that was governed by supervisors, supported by associations, and guided by books and journals; an organizational structure that can be found from other civil movements such as labor unions that were emerging at the same time in the United States. It is possible to see, then, that the while a few decades later progressive educators would attack this highly standardized education that was driven by the needs of industry and business, it was this very system that allowed art education to emerge in the public schooling system in the first place.

In a matter of a few decades the internal developments in art supervisor training, guided by recent academic work in education, psychology and sociology, started to move the focus from purely technical training that would prepare students for factory-centered labor to forms of education that served more humanistic purposes. During the late 1800s, child art had already received attention among psychologists, educators, and artists (Barnes, 1908) and the first progressive schools were opened in the United States by Francis Wayland Parker and John Dewey (Efland, 1990). James P. Haney, writing in 1908, points to this shift when he identified “two distinct forces” that had shaped public schooling and art education with it:

On the one hand there has been an insistent economic pressure urging the development of skill and technical knowledge useful to industry. On the other has been the desire for beauty and the wish to teach a curriculum giving culture. The first of these forces is a reflection of the industrial spirit of the age; the second, and expression of that idealism unacknowledged, even unsuspected by its possessors, but none the less an inherent element of American character. (Haney, 1908, p. 76)
One of the first examples of the latter, that is, a “curriculum giving culture” can be found from Arthur Wesley Dow’s writings on composition and elements and principles of design, articulated in his book *Composition* (originally published in 1899). The skills that he was interested in teaching were first and foremost *artistic* and were to be appreciated as expressions of beauty, not efficiency. Although Dow did not engage himself in a similar pedagogical theorization as one finds from scholars like Dewey, it is possible to discern a same kind of emphasis on active student agency that progressive educators were promoting. Instead of teaching children to perform somewhat alienated and mechanical labor (i.e. technical drawing), Dow was interested in the refinement of visual perception and skills that lead to appreciation of art.

At the center of Dow’s approach was a formalistic understanding of elements and principles that guided all art making and appreciation. According to Dow (1929), “[o]nly through the appreciation does the composer recognize a harmony. … This faculty is a common human possession but may remain inactive. A way must be found to lay hold upon it and cause it to grow.” (p. 3) Most importantly, such understanding of harmony and art appreciation was an important step toward art education that would not train only for skills required in industry, but also in life in general. According to him, his method of study “offers a means of training for the creative arts, for the teacher of for one who studies art for the sake of culture.” (p. 3, emphasis mine) Thus, for Dow, composition *qua* harmony was not only an aesthetic concept, but also an ability to experience and organize one’s relation to visual surrounding and, eventually, one’s life.
As Smith (1996) points out, Dow rejected the idea that artistic practice that was centered around mimesis and imitation, but he was also suspicious of views that saw artistic work as guided by individual emotions. In this respect, Dow’s formalistic approach was simultaneously a step away from practices that do not leave room for individual agency and from romantic individualism that sees art making purely as a work of divine genius. The product of Dow’s art education was an individual, but not in an esoteric sense, since individual expression had its limits in formalism based on a universal principle of harmony. In terms of subjectification, one could say that such educated subject was an individual but not too individual, one that can activate their individuality by learning the elements and principles that structure the realm in which this individuality emerges. Here, the linear passage from potentiality from actuality discussed in the previous chapter is strongly present: as a practice of subjectification, art education actualizes one’s potential for recognizing and appreciating universal harmony. This was also an important step toward the democratization of art discussed earlier: the secrets of art and its appreciation could be now taught to everyone through this universal logic.

In this respect, the idea that formal artistic appreciation and expression could be taught to everyone meant that art education was not merely seen as a preparation for work or as a secured place for esotericism, but as way to practice skills that students could use in their life outside work. A “curriculum giving culture” was, then, an attempt to break off from two sets of institutional requirements that had shaped the social role of art education earlier: the requirement of social efficiency and the requirement of the classic traditions of art-making.
Although Dow’s instruction was focused mainly on the formal aspects of drawing, his practice could be seen as an important toward individual life-skills that affected the quality of students’ lives.

Notably, the connection that Dow made between students and their culture was, as noted above, based harmony that led to the appreciation of beauty. Indeed, it was the idea of beauty that served as the central source of “enrichment of human life” (Bailey, 1914, p. v). In Bailey’s book *Art Education*, published fifteen years after *Composition*, Dow’s influence is still visible in Bailey’s strong emphasis on “the development of appreciation for the beautiful and of power to produce beautiful things” (p. 1) as the primary and unique function of art and its education in the society. Here, the beautiful occupies an empowering function: it establishes more meaningful relationship between the student and her/his social and material surroundings. Thus, a proper art education could undo the constraints that hindered the development of student’s abilities to experience and take part in the world. Like in Unesco’s passage in the previous chapter, such proper art education could actualize students’ full potential for human experience, which, then, functions as a strategy of subjectification.

It is possible to say, then, that from its emergence in the public schooling system in the 1870s to the early decades of the 1900s, art education moved from skills-based practices to more humanistic approaches to education. Before World War I, this humanism was present in Dow’s and Bailey’s calls for skills in producing and experiencing beauty, which served as a central bridge between education and properly human, good life. This already assigns art education in a similar sociopolitical function as one finds from Unesco’s passage:
it serves as a vital passageway between the potentialities of human life and their actualization in students' lives.

In order to give theoretical background for such conceptualizations of the relationship between education and life, I turn to John Dewey and his book *The School and Society*, where he explicitly demands a closer connection between students’ everyday lives and their schooling; a demand that is strongly present in later literature on progressive education and, subsequently, in contemporary strategies of subjectification that will be discussed in the next chapter.

**Theoretical Undercurrents of Progressivism: John Dewey's *The School and Society***

John Dewey's *The School and Society*, originally presented as three lectures in 1899 and published in 1900, provides an important treatise of the theoretical roots of progressive education. In addition to its historical importance as an early intervention to the debates on the social function of American schooling system, what makes *The School and Society* particularly interesting for this study is that it presents a detailed analysis of the importance of education that does not merely transfer knowledge and skills but prepares the child for life. As Dewey writes

[i]t is our present education which is highly specialized, one-sided, and narrow. It is an education dominated almost entirely by the medieval conception of learning. It is something which appeals for the most part simply to the intellectual aspect of our natures, our desire to learn, to accumulate information, and to get control of the symbols of learning; not to our impulses and tendencies to make, to do, to create, to produce, whether in the form of utility or of art. (Dewey, 1990, p. 26)
As a book that envisions an education where “the child becomes the sun about which the appliances of education revolve; he is the center about which they are organized” (p. 34) and organizes curriculum around subjects that “represent the tools which society has evolved in the past as the instruments of its intellectual pursuits [and] … represent the keys which will unlock to the child the wealth of social capital which lies beyond the possible range of his limited individual experience” (p. 111) its influence in both expressive and reconstructionist traits of progressive art education is clearly visible. Moreover, Dewey’s emphasis on the arts as an integral part of the curriculum ties his thinking firmly to the history of art education. This is why I see that in order to lay out the theoretical background for the entwinement of life and education within art education theory, it is useful to examine some of the main claims of *The School and Society*.

Dewey starts *The School and Society* posing a question about a “New Education” that ought to “meet the needs of the new society that is forming.” (p. 8) For him, this new society stands for the social, technological, and economic changes that the nineteenth century had introduced to societies all around the world: industrialization and the increasingly globalizing markets, formation of nation-states, urbanization, scientific development, and secularization. However, “[b]ack of the factory system” Dewey states, “lies the household and neighborhood system” (p. 9) which, for him, stands for an educational environment that had been strictly separated from the schooling system in the course of these societal changes. After all, the schooling system of that time had been designed under similar scientific methods as the
factory system. Earlier, the domestic space had provided a possibility to partake in activities that connected people not only to each other, but to their immediate surroundings:

Instead of pressing a button and flooding the house with electric light, the whole process of getting illumination was followed in its toilsome length from the killing of the animal and the trying of fat to the making of wicks and dipping candles. The supply of flour, of lumber, of foods, of building materials, of household furniture, even of metal ware, of nails, hinges, hammers, etc., was produced in the immediate neighborhood, in shops which were constantly open to inspection and often centers of neighborhood congregation. (p. 10)

In Dewey’s domestic and neighborhood system, the central aspects of human activity are closely tied to the social and sensory dimensions of human life: one’s activities are integrally connected to the knowledge and practices that sustains the community and individual’s part in it. In this respect, the education that one received in such communities was, in fact, inseparable from life. In his example on candle-making, the knowledge and skills to perform such activity are not merely about candles *per se*, but about situating oneself in the conditions that govern both individual and social life. This means that participating in the daily activities of the community was a way to make sense, consciously or unconsciously, of the world and one’s position in it. Despite this seemingly nostalgic image of pre-industrial community life, Dewey does not long for the past; on the contrary, he sees that “[i]t is radical conditions which have changed, and only an equally radical change in education suffices.” (p. 12) Instead of rejecting scientific development, he argues that the schooling system had not fully embraced the possibilities of this development; or better, these developments were adopted only as means to increase standardization and efficiency.
Dewey argues that school as a site of learning had been removed from the immediate conditions for learning (the community) to its own sphere of activity where knowledge was “isolated and made an end in itself,” (p. 101) thus making a school “a place set apart in which to learn lessons.” (p. 14, emphasis mine) His spatial discourse that focuses on the distance between various spheres of human activity (home, work, school) unfolds his views on human agency. When describing the isolated character of schooling, Dewey talks about the “attitude of listening” that, for him, means “passivity, absorption; that there are certain ready-made materials which are there, which have been prepared by the school superintendent, the board, the teacher, and of which the child is to take in as much as possible in the least possible time.” (p. 32) In other words, when learning is understood as a transformation of knowledge that can be standardized and pre-packaged in educational publications and curricula, it is possible to radically expand the spatial and temporal distance between the learner and what that is learned about. Going back to his understanding of pre-industrial communities, the immediate relation to everything that the community needed and/or produced meant that the knowledge that circulated within these communities was always tied to the very activity that it stemmed from. When knowledge is separated from such activity, that is, abstracted and transformed into a set of instructions that are distributed via lessons and books, knowledge becomes, in Dewey’s terms, symbolic. Instead of learning through one’s relationship with one’s surroundings, abstracted instructions become the privileged domain of knowledge in education. This is why Dewey argues that “the child shall have in his own personal and vital experience a varied background of contact and
acquaintance with realities, social and physical. This is necessary to prevent symbols from becoming a purely second-hand and conventional substitute for reality.” (p. 112)

Here, it is important to point out that Dewey is not arguing for simple replacement of abstract knowledge with concrete one. As discussed above, his critique is targeted toward a schooling system where there is no place for the latter one. The “radical change” that he talks about is, then, a change in the way that knowledge and learning are perceived in the society where the social, political, and economic landscape was changing rapidly. As he writes, “[k]nowledge is no longer an immobile solid; it has been liquefied [and] is actively moving in all the currents of society itself.” (p. 25) This means it was impossible for students in this new societal situation to understand their surroundings in the same way as the earlier generations (Dewey’s example on electric light is quite telling). Despite this impossibility, Dewey sees that such knowledge had not lost its importance for the members of the society; vice versa, the distance that industrialization had introduced between (urban) individual and the objects and phenomena that her/his life is comprised of is exactly what school in Dewey’s views should respond to by putting the everyday life experiences back to the center of learning and knowledge production; experiences that, then, would bridge the gap between increasingly abstracting habitat of modernity and (inherently social) human life.

Dewey’s central strategy for placing student’s everyday life in the center of education is to make connections between the concrete microlevel of one’s immediate activities (e.g. cooking) and the abstract macro-level of conceptual understanding (e.g. theory of atoms). When learning starts from the familiar and things that are close to the life-world of students,
the conceptual knowledge is always put in the test of reality, thus making students active agents in their learning. It is notable that these levels do not represent end in themselves but construct a continuous dialectic movement between knowledge and practice. When discussing art education in the “ideal school,” Dewey states that “art work might be considered to be that of the shops, passed through the alembic of library and museum into action again.” (p. 89) Notably, this movement from one form of knowledge production to another (as in the case of artistic practices that Dewey describes above) means that epistemic boundaries between school subjects are also to be put to the test of student’s initial relationship with the world:

Experience has its geographical aspect, its artistic and its literary, its scientific and its historical sides. All studies rise from aspects of the one earth and the one life lived upon it. We do not have series of stratified earths, one of which is mathematical, another physical, another historical, and so on. We should not be able to live very long in any one taken by itself. We live in a world where all sides are bound together. All studies grow out of relations in the one great common world. (p. 91)

It is possible to say that in *The School and Society*, Dewey’s argument for the integration of students’ everyday lives into educational settings is grounded in the exclusion of the former from the latter. This exclusion was manifested in classrooms where “everything is arranged for handling as large numbers of children as possible; for dealing with children *en masse*, as an *aggregate of units*.” (p. 32, emphasis mine) A transformation of human lives into an “aggregate of units” that were merely passive objects of the power that enacted such transformation was, as noted above, a spatial rearrangement of the relationship between knowledge and learner. Since the experience of unity that pre-industrial communities were
based on, a unity that grounded one’s belonging to the social and natural environment that surrounded her/him, was shattered by social and economic developments in modernity (including urbanization, wage labor, and increasingly international markets), there seemed to be a need to restore this unity without having to reject scientific development (e.g. isolating oneself to utopian communities). To put it shortly, the re-integration of life into education was an attempt to restore the unity that modernity had disrupted. Instead of going back to old ways of life, Dewey wanted to update this unity to meet the social context of his time. It is important to note that this unity was not merely a goal to be achieved, but a precondition for the function of democracy.

Here, Dewey follows the political promise of democratic civil society: once the equal participation in the society is truly secured, that is, everyone has the capability to become an equal speaking being (not merely a passive unit), one’s life is no longer separated from the conditions of its own possibility. This is why Dewey sees that the knowledge in the ideal school becomes an indispensable instrument of free and active participation in modern social life. Plato somewhere speaks of the slave as one who in his actions does not express his own ideas, but those of another man. It is our social problem now, even more urgent than in the time of Plato, that method, purpose, understanding, shall exist in the consciousness of the one who does the work, that his activity shall have meaning to himself. (p. 23)

When applied to the field of art education, Dewey’s call for experiential learning means that art is something that helps to bring the life back to education. It is this reinstatement of life in the center of educational practices that can be seen to constitute
Deweyan take on subjectification through education. Human life *qua* an immediate relation to the world is, then, approached as site where the potentialities for truly human and thus political life (c.f. Dewey’s reference to Plato above) can be grasped and actualized through curriculum. When compared to Dow’s writings on aesthetic appreciation and harmony (notably written the same year as *The School and Society*), Dewey does not offer similar formalistic strategies for acquiring human agency, but similarly sees that education plays a central role in subjectification in modernity.

Before discussing progressive streams of art education, it should be stated that Deweyan call for integration of life with education was not the only way to understand the relationship between life and education. In fact, scientific progressivism of the 1920s and 1930s, exemplified in Franklin Bobbit’s book *How to Make a Curriculum* (published in 1924) approached this question from the standpoint of scientific measurability. According to Cremin (1964), Bobbit’s *How to Make a Curriculum* was based on the idea that “the job of curriculum-maker was to classify and detail the full range of human experience with a view of building a curriculum that would prepare [students for adulthood].” (p. 199, emphasis mine) Although one finds the idea of preparation from Dewey as well, scientific progressivism can be seen to emphasize adaptation over the creation of “new education” (as Dewey called it).

In this respect, the call for a multifaceted understanding of human life in education (beyond a simple job preparation) was not only limited to radical calls for educational reform: it also allowed theorists with more conservative aims to have sociological validity for
their research. As Cremin puts it, scientific progressivism “enabled [education theorists] to be ‘progressive' without incurring the stigma of radicalism, an opportunity that must have been appealing in an era when the average board of education was a group of businessmen, lawyers, and farmers little interested in schemes to reform society, however moderate, gradual, or utopian they might have been.” (Cremin, p. 200) Thus, contra Deweyan progressivism that saw the relationship between individual life and formal education dialectically, that is, as an opportunity to put the singular experiential knowledge and knowledge of the schooling system in a critical discourse with each other, scientific progressivism such as Bobbit’s was leaning more toward “life-adjustment theory” (Cremin, 1964, p. 200) that did not put the society nor its relations of power in itself in question.

**Progressivism in Art Education**

If, for Dow, art appreciation opened up a space for individual life in art education, the progressive educators of the 1920s and 1930s found further connections between the individual and the world in which she/he lives in. Efland’s (1990) distinction between reconstructionist and expressionist streams of progressive art education offers two perspectives to the attempts to bridge the gap between education and life; a central thesis in Dewey’s critique of the the schooling system of the time. Indeed, if, as Dewey suggested, problem with modernity is its inclination to make human life more abstract in terms of production, consumption, communication, and social co-operation, these two streams of art education can be seen as responses to this dilemma by seeking to restore the central position
of art education in processes of subjectification. Whereas the former approach centered on pragmatic potentialities of art education for social well-being by bridging the gap between schooling system and students’ everyday lives, the latter focused mainly on creative self-expression and child-centered education as means to release the individual potential of students, thus stepping out from the increasingly standardized forms of schooling.

Thus, it is important to examine how did these two streams of progressive art education step out from the logic of efficiency that dominated the birth of institutionalized art education and what did this new humanistic and cultural approach with a heavy emphasis on the immediacy of students' lives bring to the narrative of subjectification through art education.

Reconstructionism: Art for (Beautiful) Life

Whereas Dow had already expressed his suspiciousness toward esoteric knowledge and practices of artists and art academies of the late 1800s, the social reconstructionists of the 1920s and 1930s saw that the esotericism that was strongly affiliated with modernist art was one of the central curricular problems that art educators had to uproot from their teaching. The idea that art had become separated from the realm of everyday practices and was concerned mainly with its own internal developments meant that art did not participate in the attempts to better people's lives but, on the contrary, was seen, as Eugene Savage put it, deeply “ineffectual, leaving our world as ugly as before.” (Savage, 1929, p. 6) According to Savage,
The greater part of the existence of the average man of today is devoid of form, line or pattern. Herein our wealth but accentuates our poverty. The first principles of aesthetics are flagrantly violated by ninety percent of our building, interior or exterior, by a greater proportion of our printed matter, both as literature and as typography, by all male attire, and by most of our entertainment. Rarely being exposed to it, the average person looks upon art as a think foreign and remote, and upon the artist as a worker of mysteries with which most people have no concern. Some artists actually pride themselves upon this negation of all that art should stand for. But there are others who deplore it and who look to the schools to restore the old conception of what the creative worker can and should be. (Savage, 1929, p. 4)

Savage’s pamphlet On Art Education provides an interesting backdrop for the further developments of reconstructionist practices in art education in the 1930s. Savage had written a report for the Carnegie Foundation on the current state of art education in the United States, and On Art Education presents his findings in a succinct, 20-page booklet. The text itself is a fierce attack against the idea that art is valuable only for its own sake; an idea that, for Savage, was the great error of modernist art. The primacy of painting, individual expression, and originality as well as the division of art-making into separate fields (painting, sculpture, and architecture) were taking art further from “all that art should stand for,” that is, from its direct application to human life and its environment. Savage saw that for art education, the “cure is a real workshop system” (p. 14) where students would learn art in similar settings than the Renaissance apprenticeship practices were based on: a wide range of concrete practices that taught the “impersonal” basics of art-making, which consisted of “the purpose, elements, order, scale, angle, and distance of view, material and changes of material, color and value range, structural association and plastic consistencies.” (p. 15) By mastering
these “impersonal” basic elements of aesthetics, artists (and students) could connect their individual activity to the societal frame in which this activity was inevitably situated. The connection to Dow’s notion of elements and principles of design are strong: like Dow, Savage saw that mastering such “impersonal skills” provides keys for individual agency.

Thus, the critique of art’s relationship to the everyday life should not be understood only as an aesthetic critique, but as an attempt to reframe individual agency in relation to its societal surroundings. It was not only art world that was to become more connected to its social surroundings, but also the individual who produced and consumed art had to do her/his part in the general development of the society. In Savage’s text as well as in Owatonna Art Education Project later in the 1930s, a direct link was made between the “impersonal” foundations of aesthetics, individual agency, and democratic society: it was only by consciously applying these assumably objective skills in one’s (artistic) activity that one could participate in the building of the common good. Without these skills and/or goals, art education was to seclude itself into elitism and total uselessness.

Like with Dow, Savage envisioned art education that had a two-fold approach to subjectification: on the one hand, one should not be too individual (the failure of modernist art), and on the other, not be completely controlled by external forces that one has no capabilities to understand (the failure of uninformed aesthetic experiences). In other words, individual agency was simultaneously a constitution of one’s unique subjectivity, but this subjectivity had to be adaptable to the norms of the existing order. This means that the limits of subjectification were drawn on the basis of a productive participation in the society: the
development of students’ individual lives was to be in line with the development of the society.

It is notable that although Savage’s argumentation seems to be, at first, merely an updated version of the logic that ties the presence of art education in the schooling system more closely to the economic development of the society (like industrial drawing in the 1800s), reconstructionist understanding of art and art education was explicitly concerned of the quality of life outside work. For example, Fredrick P. Keppel and R. L. Duffus, whose survey The Arts in American Life gives a comprehensive presentation of the position of arts in American society in the early 1930s, write that

> From a social point of view, as contrasted with art for art’s sake, the problem of art, like that of religion and recreation, turns today on its service to man in his inner adjustment to an environment which shifts and changes with unexampled rapidity. It appears to be one of the three great forces which stand between maladjusted man and his breakdown. Each serves in its own way to bring him comfort, serenity and joy. It is conceivable, but by no means proved, that the development of these forces in American life would reduce the terrible decimations made by mental disorders. (Keppel & Duffus, 1933, p. 207)

What is particularly interesting about this passage in terms of social reconstructionism and subjectification is that Keppel and Duffus see art as “one of the three great forces which stand between maladjusted man and his breakdown” in “an environment which shifts and changes with unexampled rapidity.” While, like Savage, setting aside “art for art’s sake,” the social function of art is, for Keppel and Duffus, similar that of religion and recreation: it provides an antidote to the complex mental landscape of the ever-shifting modern life. This is not merely a question of therapy: the fact that they couple art with
religion and recreation, two spheres of life that are traditionally outside of the realm of work, means that art is linked to a modality of (human) being that exceeds the frame of commodified social and material relations within modernity. In fact, they argue that “[a]rt is deeply rooted in human life; it is today as nearly always in the past a most important factor in human behavior.” (p. 208) The idea that art is inherently tied to human life and, subsequently, to culture means that social ills like “mental disorders” can be dealt with structurally through social policies that help individuals better their lives. This bettering has a distinct social purpose: it “reduce[s] the terrible decimations” that modern society may bring about, thus, in terms of Unesco’s passage in the previous chapter, supporting subjectification toward a fully developed individuality.

The Owatonna Art Education Project

One of the most informative examples of social reconstructionism in art education is the Owatonna Art Education project, which was a five year long educational experiment in Owatonna, Minnesota that started in 1933 and ended in 1938. Funded by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (the same foundation that had commissioned Savage’s report) and led by Melvin E. Haggerty from the College of Education at the University of Minnesota (who passed away before the project was completed), the Owatonna Art Education Project was an attempt to rethink the role of art education as part of comprehensive schooling system. Edwin Ziegfeld’s and Mary Elinore Smith’s (1944) book *Art for Daily Living – The Story of the Owatonna Art Education Project* gives a detailed account
of the project, covering its development from the initial idea by Haggerty to the analysis of its outcomes.

Specifically, Ziegfeld’s and Smith’s book helps to situate the former accounts by Savage and Keppel & Duffus in their socio-political context. The political and economic circumstances during the interwar time in the United States, that of, the stock market crash of 1929 and the Great Depression that followed it, meant not only growing societal unrest (particularly in relation to newly formed Soviet Union) but, most importantly, severe cuts in public funding for education. Since art programs were usually the first to be affected by these cuts, art educators had to come up with arguments for the inclusion of art in schools. The seeming severity of the situation is present in Ziegfeld’s and Smith’s book, where, when describing the effects of the economic depression in educational debates of that time, they note that it was necessary to rethink “[w]hat programs, what courses are *vital* for us, to our survival?” (p. 1, emphasis mine)

The language that Ziegfeld and Smith use here lays an important backdrop for their articulation on the importance of art education in the society. In order to be genuinely “vital” school subject, art education had to be reframed in terms of its goals and contents that come very close to Savage’s aims. This becomes clear in Ziegfeld’s and Smith’s own diagnosis of the situation: they do not find fault from the socio-economic situation that put art programs in jeopardy, but that it was art education itself that was to blame for such problematic state:
art had no real function either in school curriculum or in the lives of school children. It was still a kind of ladies’ seminary activity, typified by water-color paintings of fading flowers or those imaginary landscapes that had to be exactly two-thirds sky and one-third hills, grass, and trees. The aim was to teach children to reproduce objects as faithfully as possible, and the criterion of excellence was technical skill. What meaning could such skill have in the perplexed and struggling lives of the adults of these children were to become? (p. 1)

In other words, as a “pallid luxury-subject,” (p. 1) art education was estranged from the everyday life of students, just like Dewey had argued a few decades earlier and as Savage diagnosed to be the fundamental problem of modernist art. Interestingly, Ziegfeld and Smith note that at the same time when the appreciation of art was decreasing in the public schooling system, “[b]usinessmen and industrialists” were using the services of artists and designers to give “some added lure” to their products in the increasing competition for consumers (pp. 1–2). Thus, it was “in the marts of commerce, not in the public schools, [where] art [was] functioning in its oldest and most important role—as a practical solution to the problems of daily life.” (p. 2) Despite Dow’s earlier attempts to do away with the esotericism of artistic genius and monotonic repetition of industrial drawing by opening the space for artistic skills and appreciation for beauty, he had not succeeded in removing the historical weight that art making had as sort of a “ladies’ seminar activity.” Thus, along the same lines with Savage and Keppel & Duffus, the Owatonna Art Education Project can be seen as an attempt to bridge together art and daily life in order to secure art education’s position as a vital practice of subjectification (qua an informed participation in the society) for students. As Ziegfeld and Smith put it “the life of every person will be richer and more
satisfying if he can learn to make his environment as pleasing to the senses as nature originally made it for her children.” (p. 5) Similar views can be found from C. Valentine Kirby, State Director of Art for Pennsylvania, who stated in 1929 that “[a]rt education is no longer to be regarded as a special subject, a pigeonhole in the educational desk, a mere patch on the educational quilt, but rather well-thought-out design woven into the educational fabric, enriching every phase of the school, home and community life.” (Kirby, 1929, as cited in Keppel & Duffus, 1933, p. 51) Notably, the emphasis on beauty as a central category for subjectification follows similar traits as Bailey had argued a few decades earlier in the 1910s: aesthetic capabilities qua skills for and appreciation of the beautiful were important strategies for connecting human life to its surroundings.

Owatonna was selected as the site for the project since it was close to the idea of a “typical American community:” not too big, not too small, has local characteristics, no predominate social group, and fairly diverse economic structure (Ziegfeld & Smith, 1944, pp. 6–7). Also, it did not have an art program in the public schools, which made it possible to start the project from a scratch. As Haggerty put it jokingly, Owatonna was a community that was “undebauched by either learning or experience” (p. 10) As an example of this “undebauched” state, Ziegfeld and Smith write that

[m]en and women [in Owatonna] redecorated their homes bit by bit, bought new clothes as they needed them. Influences from far away—fads and fashions, gadgets, machine-made products—changed their lives and their surroundings from day to day. But were the changes always satisfying? Would they have been more satisfying if the people had known more about art? How much did they know about it that they could directly apply? Were they aware of the
beauty and the ugliness around them? Did they want to enhance the beauty, eliminate the ugliness? (p. 13)

In other words, the need for art in such an “undebauched” community was to make people aware of the aesthetic choices that they encounter on daily basis. Opposed to a more traditional esoteric understanding of artistic judgment, their understanding of taste qua awareness of the beauty and the ugliness was an essential part of the relationship between the individual and their surroundings and thus an important skill toward subjectification. By making Owatonna residents more aware of this relationship, art educators empowered their individual agency in the society. In this sense, the cultivation of taste was not only related to cultural capital, but to social capital as well. This idea is interestingly present in one of the reports that examined Owatonnians’ home décor:

The owner and his wife are interested in art, but they are hampered, like so many people, by the idea that a thing must be revered and preserved because it is old or because of certain sentimental associations it holds, rather than because of its quality. Perhaps this is why they have been unable to make changes and improvements except in a superficial manner. Their good ideas have been sacrificed because of an apparent inability to relinquish outmoded ones. (p. 17)

As it is visible in the two passages above, the life that occupied the central position in the project was approached through the material surroundings that framed people’s everyday life, that is, everything from streets and stores to workplaces, yards, and homes. As a preparatory procedure, the project coordinators gathered information from the Owatonnians by interviewing them about their views on art as well as observing their surroundings. The observations were written out in reports (such as the one cited above) and rated using a
rating scale. This information played an important role in designing the art programs in schools and in the evaluation of the outcomes of the project itself.

In terms of entwinement between art education and life, Ziegfeld’s and Smith’s summary of the initial findings of these reports provide a clear articulation of their views on the position of art in everyday life and the need for art education within the social landscape of Owatonna. Divided in three parts and supported with explanations, they list the main claims that laid the basis for the project:

*The Relation of Art to Life.* 1. All the people in Owatonna used art. […] 2. The art problems of the people of Owatonna occurred in all the many areas of living […] 3. Art problems arose in immediate, concrete situations. […] 4. No one person’s tastes in art were uniformly high or uniformly low; art tastes were, in fact, compartmentalized. […] 5. People were often unaware of the beauty of their surroundings. […] 6. Solving art problems successfully gave people a sense of satisfaction and well-being. […]

*Attitudes and Interests.* 1. The people in Owatonna were interested in art. […] 2. The art in which people were most interested was the art that was inherent in their surroundings and their daily lives. […] 3. The residents of Owatonna were interested in the relationship of the art in their own community to that of other American communities. […]

*Abilities and Knowledge.* 1. Most people in Owatonna did not have sufficient ability or knowledge to solve everyday art problems to their own satisfaction. […] 2. Most people did not have sufficient ability or knowledge to utilize materials that were near at hand. (pp. 48–59, original emphasis)

What is interesting about these accounts is that the everyday life of Owatonnians is full of “art problems” that a proper art education can help to solve. These problems were everything from selecting a tie to planting flowers. What made these problems as *problems* was Owatonnian’s seeming inability to solve them in an aesthetically pleasing manner; a
manner that was in line with the “impersonal” foundations of art that Savage had argued for.
Most importantly, these everyday life situations were strongly tied to a life that was
distinctively modern. Whereas in *The School and Society*, Dewey had pointed out that the
growing distance between one’s immediate surroundings and the production of its objects
(e.g. candles vs. electric light) affected the way that people took part in their communities as
*producers* of its (common) livelihood, in Owatonna Art Education Project, the focus is more
on *consumer’s* side: the everyday “art problems,” were they questions about industrial design,
landscaping, or domestic interiors, were problems that found their solution by bettering what
already exists. In other words, education was not only about the sustenance of life, but about
the quality of the objects and environments that support one’s life; a quality that was
accessible through *right* kind of aesthetic choices.

Indeed, as Kerry Freedman (1989) points out, it was industrial capitalism that
provided the fundamental framework for imagining good life in Owatonna. She writes,

> [t]he curriculum was to represent art as an aid to industrial development and
social and economic welfare. It was assumed that a better, more pleasing life
would result for individuals prepared to work at maximum levels in any
occupation. Disorder in the environment caused chaos and rebellion.
Improved work habits, public taste, and visual surroundings would upgrade
industrial competition, improve sale value, and stimulate the depressed
economy. (Freedman, 1989, p. 23)

Going back to Ziegfeld’s and Smith’s question “[w]hat programs, what courses are
vital for us, to our survival?” it is possible to say that the vitalness of art education was based
on enhancing the life within the existing order (liberal capitalist democracy), not changing it.
Indeed, Freedman argues that the emphasis that the Owatonna Art Education Project laid on
“consumer education” (p. 21) was deeply tied to Carnegie Corporation’s and especially its founder Andrew Carnegie’s interests in securing the existing economic order by “only supporting those who helped themselves.” (p. 18) which, of course, requires that the activity of those who are being helped is productive. This might explain the deep suspiciousness toward art that did not seem to have a clear societal purpose, since when one's activity was directed toward something that was akin to “ladies’ seminar activity,” its productive potential was lost, or at least, very difficult to tie to the reproduction of the economic frame in which this activity took place.

From this perspective, the individual and social empowerment that derived from solving everyday “art problems” had a reconstructive function: it sustained the belief in capitalism’s ability to solve its own problems. Moreover, it also created a direct relationship between one’s life and the existing order: just like Dewey had described the individual life within pre-industrial communities, all human activity was tied to the maintenance of the society. Thus, the art that was an integral part of human life for reconstructionist was art that did not try to exceed its own conditions of existence but, on the contrary, worked firmly within them. To put it shortly, art was to better societal conditions without actually changing them. In terms of the passage from potentiality to actuality, this means that art was allowed to actualize only its socially productive potential; in fact, it had to actualize this potential in order to be granted a presence in the society.

In this respect, the “culture” that Efland identified as the central purpose for art education since the post World War I era was, for reconstructionist, first and foremost
culture that was inseparable from its economic basis. Although to understand art as an integral part of one’s daily activities can be considered as a form of democratization of art and a way to treat students as active participants in art curriculum, these participatory dimensions of reconstructionist art education were always already concomitant with the existing order. Active participation in the society was still measured in terms of productivity: whereas during industrial drawing education in the late 1800s, productivity was measured in technical skills, it was now tied to the quality of one’s life. Subjectification that art education ought to provide to students was, then, a constitution of agency of a productive citizen of a capitalist liberal democracy. In other words, despite the explicit emphasis on aesthetic skills, the fundamental aim of reconstructionist art education was to support the management of one's life within the existing (capitalist) order. Thus, the demands of the industry were still at place; it was just that accumulation of capital was becoming increasingly integrated with the social.

**Expressionism: Fully Developed Life**

In Nicholas’, Mawhood’s and Trilling’s *Art Activities in the Modern School* book from 1937, the authors start the book by listing five general objectives of art education. What is specifically interesting about these objectives is that the first one is “creative self-expression,” which is positioned before “personal enrichment” (the second objective), “social worth” (the third objective), “a recreational resource” (the fourth objective) and “vocational training” (the fifth objective) (Nicholas, Mawhood & Trilling, pp. 4–19). According to them,
Creative self-expression through art means that the child has an opportunity to satisfy his needs, to follow his natural interests, and to make use of his innate capacity for creating with art media. Through his efforts at creating his own pictures, sand-table scenes, book-covers, clay tiles, and similar articles, he will experience what may be termed the creative act. This type of experience will help him to develop naturally, to assimilate the facts of his environment most readily, and to develop his individuality most completely. (Nicholas, Mawhood & Trilling, 1939, p. 7, emphasis mine)

This passage, notably written at the same time when the Owatonna Project was up and running, bears striking similarities with the passage from Unesco's report discussed in the previous chapter: it envisions a complete individuality that art, through its distinctive qualities, can unfold. Despite the fact that the reconstructionist educators had somewhat similar goals, what differentiates this particular passage from, for example Savage's text, is the notion of “creative act,” that is, seeing artistic practice as an act of creating something, not merely as an act of problem solving. In terms of the entwinement of education and life, this distinction is central when trying to understand the position of life within processes of subjectification in the expressionist stream of progressive art education.

Like reconstructionists, educators who argued for creative self-expression were critical toward standardized schooling system that separated education from everyday life. However, while projects such as Owatonna stressed the importance of social participation and considered the everyday life of modernity as a pedagogical starting point for its curriculum, expressionists were more suspicious toward the social frame in which such life-management took place. In this respect, it is possible to say that the expressionist stream of art education tried to offer a take-off from the economic demands of the society that guided
reconstructionist educators. This does not mean, however, that the idea of creative self-expression was completely incomparable with those demands: it can be seen as a necessary precondition for the total integration of life in education; a life that also includes economic productivity.

**Rugg's and Shumaker's *The Child-Centered School***

It would be problematic to talk about creative self-expression in art education without mentioning the work of Viktor Lowenfeld, whose *Creative and Mental Growth* (originally published in 1947) is perhaps one of the most influential textbooks for art educators in the United States. Lowenfeld, who had emigrated to the United States from Austria just before World War II, drew heavily from the Germanic tradition of education, child art movement, and psychoanalytic formulations of human expression (Efland, 1990; Smith, 1996). In the introduction of *Creative and Mental Growth*, Lowenfeld (1968) offers clear and succinct articulations of the importance of (artistic) creativity for the development of the individual and the society. For example, “*the opportunity for the child to create constantly with his present knowledge is the best preparation for future creative action;*” (p. 4, original emphasis) “*to teach toward creativity is to teach toward the future of the society;*” (p. 7, original emphasis) “*at all levels of creative performance children need to have the encouragement to progress beyond their present capacities and to come closer to a genuinely creative spirit.*” (p. 7, original emphasis) Indeed, these originally italicized, guiding statements bring forward a conceptualization of creativity that situates art education firmly between human potentiality
(“a creative spirit”) and its actualization in “creative action;” a position that, like Unesco’s statement in the previous chapter, makes art education a central element for a truly human development.

Despite Lowenfeld’s historical importance, I see that Harold Rugg’s and Ann Shumaker’s book *The Child-Centered School* (1928) offers a particularly interesting historical parallel for reconstructionist stream of progressive art education, especially since they take a rather different approach to art and education within modernity than one finds from reconstructionists. Interestingly, one finds quite similar characterizations of creativity from Rugg and Shumaker than from Lowenfeld’s passages above, but while Lowenfeld drew from the European tradition (especially from Franz Čižek), Rugg and Shumaker situate their work deeply in the American educational thought, especially in Dewey (after all, it was Dewey who had envisioned a school where the child is the sun around which everything revolves). This means that *The Child-Centered School* provides an interesting example of further developments of Deweyan thought that I discussed earlier in this chapter. Notably, whereas in Owatonna, the Deweyan legacy appears in more or less applied form (in fact, Ziegfeld and Smith do not make any direct references to Dewey), Rugg and Shumaker locate their work “under the revolutionary leadership of John Dewey” (Rugg & Shumaker, 1928, p. 35) and dedicate the majority of the chapter on historical overview of progressivism in the United States to his work.

Like Dewey, Rugg and Shumaker see that industrialization and its by-products (urbanization, mechanical labor, etc.) made the relationship between people and their
environment so complex that in order to keep individual agency truly individual (and not, for example, solely tied to alienated labor in factories), the schooling system had to be structured in a way that it left space for this individuality to develop. As they argue, “[t]here is no more spectacular human migration in the world’s history than that bound up in our great westward movement, and there is no more tragic atrophy of national creative capacity than that which paralleled the erection of our great industrial civilization.” (p. 14)

It is notable that here, Rugg and Shumaker distinguish “creative capacity” from the mechanisms of production that led to the “erection of our great industrial civilization.” This means that Rugg’s and Shumaker’s understanding of human agency is not as directly tied to societal usefulness as one finds from reconstructionists. For Rugg and Shumaker, creativity is not about problem-solving but about one’s capacity to act in their fullest potential. This becomes particularly clear when they question the “lifeliness” of education and the “real-life situations” that child-centered education should embrace (p. 105). For them, “realness … is measured by the child’s interest in the activity rather than the extent to which it reproduces the physical or even the intellectual and emotional situations of life outside the school.” (p. 106) By positioning “maximum growth of the learner” against “maximum lifeliness for the learner,” (p. 105) Rugg’s and Shumaker’s response to the spatial and temporal distance that standardized education had introduced to learning environments is far from demands for productive adaptation to the society; on the contrary, it is the school system that should adapt to the “innate needs” of students.
Notably, Rugg and Shumaker acknowledge the possible problems that a rigid understanding of such innate activity might generate. They strongly reject the idea the replacement of the “old régime” of “knowledge for knowledge’s sake” with a new school that is merely based on “activity for activity’s sake” (p. 125). They see that

[t]here is a imperative need, therefore, that the school in planning its curriculum have before it adequate lists of the fundamental meanings, concepts, generalizations, and problems of contemporary society, and the controlling themes and movements which modern civilizations are rapidly evolving. The curriculum cannot be planned for effective growth unless the relative importance of these in human living is determined. (pp. 126–127)

In this respect, although Rugg and Shumaker see that schools should be structured based on the needs of the students, the growth of students does not take place in a social vacuum. So, despite the fact that Rugg and Shumaker reject the primacy of adaptation in education, they still see that the role of school is to prepare children for life within the modern society. In terms of human potentiality and its actualization(s), this means that the passage from potentiality to actuality still has a central function in the educational thought: by securing the full actualization of human potential(s), education partakes in the construction of a properly “human living.” Going back to Dewey's statement “[i]t is radical conditions which have changed, and only an equally radical change in education suffices,” (Dewey, 1990, p. 12) such “maximum growth” of students is, then, a strategy of subjectification that helps students to tackle the problems that the rapidly industrialized society had already caused or was constantly causing to its descendants.
In Owatonna, such concerns were understood through the idea of “art problems” that were always already applicable to students’ everyday life and, most importantly, bettered the quality of the everyday. In the child-centered school, however, students’ social activity is secured by “selective discrimination” (Rugg & Shumaker, 1928, p. 110) of issues that teach students “the development and retention of essential forms of vocabulary, the universally useful concepts, meanings, generalizations, and a few constantly used techniques – those of reckoning, writing, talking, spelling, the facts of map location, etc.” (p. 132) It is worth noting that contrary to the traditional forms of education where such skills are taught by using tests and drills, child-centered school “shall contrive to bring the need for skill to the attention of the child in such a dynamic way as to arouse a desire for it.” (p. 138) This means that instead of requiring students to learn knowledge and skills that makes them useful to the society (for example, by contributing the aesthetic harmony of the urban environment), the child-centered approach sees that the need for such knowledge and skills should stem from the students themselves, thus making student agency dependent on students’ (assumably) innate desire to learn.

In terms of entwinement between life and education as the *modus operandi* of subjectification, this innate desire to learn brings up interesting problematics. If school was to perform its duty as “the only social institution [that is] even partially equipped to prepare a generation of informed, thinking youth,” (p. 131) it had to construct its curriculum not only by responding to the needs of the society, but in a way that it engenders the innate needs to learn in students themselves. Here, the boundary between external imposition (societal
requirements) and internal motivation (human agency), one of the guiding distinctions that Dewey makes between the old and “New” education, becomes blurred. The child-centered learning sustains a preparative function (like the old education), but this preparation is considered to stem from students themselves, as part of the “maximum growth” of the individual. (the New education). Like in the pre-industrial communities that Dewey discusses, education is to become inseparable from one’s being and agency in the society. In social level, the Deweyan democratic ideal, that “[d]emocracy prevails as there are more, and more varied, points of shared common interests among the multifarious groups that go to make up society, and as there is ever freer interaction and mutual adjustment among these groups,” (Cremin, 1964, p. 121) Rugg and Shumaker tie the true agency of human life to such societal arrangement and, most importantly, that humans innately desire it. In short, humans desire their own subjectification; subjectification that is inseparably an act of participation in the democratic society.

What makes The Child-Centered School important for art educators is that Rugg and Shumaker stress the importance of art in releasing the creative capacities of students. In a chapter called “The Creative Artist Enters the Classroom,” they introduce concepts such as “artist-teacher” and “creative artist” who turn their backs upon art as information, art as abstract principles, as technique to be acquired, as drill in design, [and] as respect for the classics” and work from “the impelling desire to translate an experience, fleeting inner image, into outward form; to convey a feeling or refine a meaning that has lived before only in imagination. (Rugg & Shumaker, 1928, p. 227)
Here, the reversal of the traditional understanding learning (the flow of knowledge from outside in) toward the innate desire to learn (inside out) becomes fully manifested. For Rugg and Shumaker, artistic self-expression makes possible the translation of one’s personal experiences and imagination into something that becomes information that, then, is shared with others. Contra “abstract principles,” (like Dow’s elements and principles that Rugg and Shumaker criticize harshly) such knowledge is first and foremost deeply tied to one’s life, to its most intimate and personal manifestations. From this perspective, art is not merely a glue that merges life and education together (like in Owatonna): it is the ultimate manifestation of a singular life within the educational institution that prepares such singularity for democratic belonging to the society (belonging qua subjectification). Thus, it is artistic activity that unfolds the real life of students within school, not merely the inclusion of their everyday experiences and surroundings in school curricula.

What is interesting about Rugg’s and Shumaker’s views on artistic self-expression is that despite their aversion toward “abstract principles,” they see that creative expression is grounded in specific types of activity. For them “[t]he very essence of the creative act … is original portrayal and completeness,” (p. 145) which means that

[t]he essentials of the creative process are invention and complete integration. … First, invention, uniqueness, the making of something new; second, completeness of integration – the weaving into intimate relationship of interdependent elements, each contributing its necessary component – a unique meaning or feeling, a new generalization, attitude. The product becomes truly creative art only with the presence in right relationships of the various interdependent elements. (p. 145)

Furthermore, a creative act
must be original to the individual making it. It does not matter if the same act has been performed millions of times by other people, but if it is new to that individual and if it is complete in the sense of being an integration of interdependent elements, it is creative. Furthermore, the creative process is not restricted to so-called artistic media for its successful development. It is carried on alike with light and color, with physical gesture, with oral and written speech, with tone, with the crass materials of the modern world – wood, stone, iron, leather. (p. 145)

In other words, creative expression *qua* manifestation of one’s individuality constitutes a fundamentally singular relation to the world (“It does not matter if the same act has been performed millions of times by other people”) that, nevertheless, follows principles that make its outcomes meaningful to others (“the weaving into intimate relationship of interdependent elements, each contributing its necessary component”). This meaningfulness connects creative self-expression to Deweyan democratic ideal: rather than encouraging esotericism or naval gazing (two stereotypical characteristics of creative self-expression), Rugg’s and Shumaker’s views on the creative act unfold the deeply social nature of individual agency that it is simultaneously personal and clearly communicable. Most importantly, such creative act is a form of communication that is fundamentally non-mediated and opens individual expression to its own voice. As Rugg and Shumaker put it, “creative artist [breaks] through the thick crust of imitation, superficiality, and commercialism which bound the arts almost throughout the first three centuries of industrialism.” (p. v)

Here, the relationship between human life, subjectification, and belonging can be finally articulated in terms of creative self-expression. The human community in which creative acts are recognized is a community of individuals that is held together by their very
individuality. As facilitators of individual creativity, art educators are able to “break through the thick crust” of everything that does not seem to stem from the students themselves (i.e. everything that can be labelled as “practical solution to the problems of daily life,” as Ziegfeld and Smith put it) thus demanding a truly individual form of belonging to the modern society; belonging that is not only about one’s passive presence but actively engages one’s life in the (Deweyan) democratic ideal. In this respect, the root of individuality is found in subjectification qua a recognition of the humanness of human life, which, subsequently, means that a truly human life is always already an act of participation in the human community. Thus, subjectification through self-expressive art education is understood as an actualization of one’s potentiality for truly individual (human) participation in the society; participation that stems from the students’ innate desire to participate.

Hence, in order to step out from the pressures of social and economic efficiency that one finds from both social efficiency and reconstructionist progressivism, expressionist stream of progressive art education had to constitute an alternative universal frame of belonging, a truly individual life, that is simultaneously specific to all individuals and an inherent quality in everyone. This individual life is the modus operandi of democratic society: it constitutes the pluralism that Dewey’s democratic ideal requires. Here, student’s life as the most private and individual part of their humaneness becomes the constitutive terrain for art education, which means that art education could break the barriers between art, education, and human life without, however, putting its own position as a passageway to subjectification in question. Indeed, like in Unesco’s passage in the previous chapter, one cannot become a fully
developed human individual without art, which means that artists and art educators hold the key to the terrain of truly human activities that separate them from both animals and machines.

**Progressive Education in the Light of Rancière and Agamben**

How, then, does my analysis of the two streams of progressive education help to further elaborate my guiding question, *what does it mean to act politically*, or step toward the three main goals of this study, that of, political existence for art education that does not presuppose predetermined needs or categories, but, on the contrary, challenges them; shift in focus of political theorization in art education from the construction of political categories to the corrosion of the existing ones, and troubling the narrative of progression in both education and politics, thus reframing political theorization in terms of the present?

As I have shown, reconstructionism and expressionism open up rather different perspectives on subjectification *qua* the entwinement of life and education; a modality of subjectification that Unesco’s call for art education as a universal human right is based on. In terms of the actualized human agency that such subjectification grants to students, reconstructionist stream emphasized the use of human potential for the construction of common good, which, as discussed above, was firmly tied to the sustainment of liberal capitalist democracy, while the expressionist stream argued for a completed human individuality that enables *truly* democratic agency; an agency that is a product of an innate desire for subjectification. In this respect, the difference between these two streams seems to
be, at first, constituted on the basis of adaptation: reconstructionism stressed the importance of adapting human potential to the productive mechanism of the society and expressionism put more emphasis on the need for the educational institutions to adapt to the natural growth of the individual. Despite this difference, however, they both share a common denominator that brings their strategies of politicization much closer to each other than they first seem to appear. This denominator is their mutual attempt to constitute a subject whose humanness becomes manifested through an active participation in the society; participation that is something else than mere alienated labor (e.g. technical drawing) or passive spectatorship (e.g. unquestioned appreciation for art or a complete unawareness of it).

Indeed, throughout this chapter, I have argued that the individual life that has made its entry to the realm of art education in various forms (Dow’s art appreciation, Ziegfeld’s and Smith’s everyday life, and Rugg’s and Shumaker’s completed life) has always been tied to such idea of participation. It is this fully actualized human life that initially guarantees one’s full presence in the society, which, then, means that the telos of politics that is based on the actualization of human potential is tied to a constitution of public realm where each individual can actualize their potential for a completed belonging to the human community (just like Dewey imagined the life in pre-industrial communities). In terms of the entwinement of life and education, this conflates human life, education, and subjectification into a fully educational and, indeed political, life, which turns a singular human existence into a pedagogical project that is targeted toward individual and social completion.
In the previous chapter, I explained how Rancière and Agamben trouble the demand for a recognized participation in political theory through their concepts *disidentification* (Rancière) and *whatever singularity* (Agamben). From the perspective of a radical politics of actualization and a radical politics of potentiality, the relationship between individual life and the form that it takes in its social context (i.e. the subject of subjectification) is put in question. Neither Rancière nor Agamben see that mere participation or adaptation are sufficient strategies to constitute politics; on the contrary, if politics *qua* participation in the society always already fits within a social frame where individual life becomes recognized as individual (a part of the whole, as Rancière would say), politics does not challenge its own constitution. For political theorization, especially when trying to understand *what does it mean to act politically*, such distribution of roles means the tension between what has been, what is, and what could be is discarded in the name of coherent temporal structure for political action. In terms of actualization and potentiality, this temporal structure prefers predetermined actualizations over radical ones and disregards forms of action that do not base their force on actualization of human potential only in terms of participation in the social.

From a Rancièrean standpoint, to see art education as a necessary passage from the potentialities of human life to their actualization in a functional (reconstructionism) or individual (expressionism) subjectivity means that the appearance of a political subject within the distribution of the sensible is already an appearance of a part that has a part in the totality of the social. In other words, if subjectification (being informed, being active, being present)
leads simply to a better version of the current society, then the political function of art education is not to disrupt the existing order but, like in Owatonna, make it seem more inclusive and more democratic, thus seemingly less alienating than the industrial demands in the late 1800s.

Here, Rancière’s reversal of the traditional understanding between inequality and equality (that is, from the idea that social order secures equality to seeing equality as a precondition for politics as such) helps to unfold this problem. When subjectification through art education is seen as the guarantor of truly equal societal participation, the political agency that this equality grants is dependent on the existence of an order where societal inequality is the presupposition; an understanding that inevitably constitutes a distribution of political agency and positions art education at the center of this distribution.

From this perspective, the telos of Deweyan democratic participation, a goal found both in the Owatonna Project and in Rugg’s and Shumaker’s writings, becomes troubled. The pedagogical emphasis on students’ ability to partake in the school and the society as informed and self-aware individuals is based on an understanding of politics as a fundamentally transparent sphere of interpersonal communication where, following Cremin’s (1964) conceptualization of Dewey’s democratic ideal, “[d]emocracy prevails as there are more, and more varied, points of shared common interests among the multifarious groups that go to make up society, and as there is ever freer interaction and mutual adjustment among these groups.” (Cremin, 1964, p. 121) In other words, participation qua free interaction and mutual adjustment between groups and individuals requires a
constitution of realm of communication that, as such, is seemingly neutral. Subsequently, political problems become merely problems of communication, never about politics as such. Moreover, when human agency is actualized only within such seemingly neutral realm of communication, politics becomes inherently relational: it requires a constitution of subject positions (partitions of the social) that are always in relation each other through free interaction that secures their participation in the democratic society.

In Owatonna, this idea of neutral realm of communication and participation is embedded, for example, in the reports that evaluated home décor: the assumably non-subjective aesthetics offered a meeting point for individuals to establish a meaningful relation to their surroundings and evaluate its quality. An aesthetically trained eye was, then, a participatory eye: it was an important prerequisite for social action that bettered the quality of communal life by securing the social usefulness of the passage from one’s potential to actuality. In Rugg and Shumaker, the idea that self-expression secures the full growth of an individual meant that art education offers a way to convert the purely subjective in a communicable form; a form that secured the free interaction between individuals. Just like for reconstructionists, art performs a function of communication, but while they were more interested in the appreciation of art (the aesthetic eye), the expressionists put the focus on artistic production. Thus, an expressive gesture was a participatory gesture: it secured the existence of individuals in a society of individuals.

Thus, both streams of progressive art education can be seen as attempts to actualize a human potential for democratic life where subjectification (governed by art education)
secures the actualization of an individual who actively partakes in the community. From a Rancièrean standpoint, this means that equality and political subjectivity are always dependent on a system that distributes them. As partitioned, fully developed individuals, these democratic subjects have a specific purpose in the society: to keep the system of distribution in place. The passage from potentiality to actuality is, then, highly predetermined: it follows a lineage from essentialist preconceptions of human life to their totalizing completion.

From Agambenian perspective, the entwinement of life and education that progressive educators called for means that there is no room for political existence that is present but does not participate, that is, human existence that is connected to its own impotentiality. Within such thought, the possibility that art education could be “ineffectual, leaving our world as ugly as before” (Savage, 1929, p. 6, emphasis mine) and thus removed from the real life of an “average person” and “most people” (Savage’s words) is simply unacceptable: art, education, and, indeed, life itself, ought to be gestures of participation in the governance of their own existence, not simply “ladies’ seminar activities” that seem to create a world of their own, a world that leaves “our world as ugly as before.” This damnation to remoteness unfolds the deeply contractual nature of such thought. The mere existence of art and art education within the social realm already makes them responsible of actualizing human potential for societal presence that completes the social contract that governs the existence of political subjects. In short, since truly human life is always indebted to the
sovereign power that grants it its political subjectivity, art education is responsible for securing the proper function of this contract.

From this perspective, the integration of life to education is not merely an act of making school more relevant to students or make students more active participants in educational institutions, but a process of securing societal function of school as a realm of subjectification; a subjectification that limits the passageway from potentiality to actuality to the completion of the social contract that grants the political agency for art education and its subjects. Thus, the beautiful life of reconstructionism and the naturally grown life of expressionism are both forms of completed life; completed in the sense that their potentialities are made isomorphic with the realm of liberal (capitalist) democracy. The humanness of this realm is, subsequently, secured by either aesthetics (Owatonna) or “creative acts” (child-centered school); both of which, as I have shown, offer a universal frame for belonging (the non-subjective aesthetics; the universal individual) that connect individual agency to the sustainment of the realm itself. In other words, when objects of everyday life occupied the central material for art education in Owatonna or the child-centered school was to break “through the thick crust of imitation, superficiality, and commercialism” (Rugg & Shumaker, 1928, p. v) in order for it to reach the true creative capacity of students, it was the integration of students’ lives to the school that to sustained school’s position as “the only social institution [that is] even partially equipped to prepare a generation of informed, thinking youth.” (p. 131)
Going back to Dewey's attempt to reduce abstraction in schooling by integrating students' lives in schooling, an attempt that was to actualize educational system's potential for proper socio-political subjectification, it is possible to say that although it allowed educators to imagine their profession in terms of culture and not merely commerce (following Efland’s remark), progressive educators were not able to put schooling itself in question. Education was still seen as a preparation for the future actualization of one's potentialities; an actualization that made students useful for the society. Whereas in the last decades of the 1800s this usefulness was mainly tied to one's labor power, the progressive turn in education meant that it was people's entire life that was to become an act of participation in the productive mechanisms of the society. Moreover, this new kind of participation was based on free and conscious subjectivity whose freedom was solely dependent on its individuality that, initially, was governed by the social within which this individuality appeared. Thus, despite the factory-like, efficiency-driven education of the late 1800s seemed treat students as impersonal “units” (as Dewey called it), it was precisely the life that made its entry to the realm of art education during the progressive era that made it possible to categorize people into truly separate units that, nevertheless, were connected to one common goal: the sustainment of the social realm in which they had to appear in order to be truly individual. In short, although the content of art education qua subjectification changed, the ontological basis for its politics was left unexplored.

In the next chapter, I discuss how the increasing particularization of these individualities has affected the way that the entwinement of life and education qua
subjectification is understood in contemporary art education literature. After all, although concepts such as fully developed individuality (discussed in the previous chapter) preserve a similar universality that one finds from the subjects of progressive education, the heightened role of identities and identity construction in educational discourses means that the relationship between the particular and the universal in processes of subjectification needs to be examined further.
Chapter 3: Subjectification and Belonging in Visual Culture Art Education

When it comes to the question **what does it mean to act politically**, the two previous chapters have unfolded some of the intricacies of politics of art education that is based on the notion of subjectification *qua* the *full* actualization of human potential. My discussion on progressive education brought up an important characteristics of this passageway from potentiality to actuality: the change that art education brings to the society, that is, its political impact, seems to always be an act of belonging and participation. In other words, a sociopolitically relevant art education denotes an activity that produces subjects who have the ability to fully participate in the society, not only through their labor (i.e. responding to the demands of the industry) but by incorporating their entire lives as human individuals to its productive processes.

What still remains unexplored is what does subjectification *qua* the entwinement of “real” life and education means within the contemporary sociopolitical landscape where individuality is understood in a rather different way than during the progressive era. Indeed, while progressive educators were interested in building up individual agency, they never discussed it in terms of *identity* or other concept that would challenge the universality of terms like a *student* or a *human*. In other words, the individuality that reconstructionist and expressionist streams of art education constituted subjectification on was individuality that
remained in a very general level. The particularity of every individual was preconceived, which means that there was no need to examine what constitutes this particularity and the differences between them. Today, such preconceived notions are challenged by social, political, and cultural critiques (e.g. feminist studies, post-colonial studies, queer studies, and disability studies, to name a few) that point to the partiality of such universalist conceptualizations of subjectivity. Since these critiques have affected art education theorization, it is important to examine how does such particularization of subjectivities and processes of subjectification mean for political imagination of art education.

In this respect, the goal of this chapter is to map the terrain in which political subjectification takes place within contemporary art education theory and examine these strategies in relation to a radical politics of actualization and a radical politics of potentiality. Due to the increasing emphasis on particularized subject positions in contemporary social theory, I will focus this inquiry on the complicated relationship between the particular and the universal.

The central argument of this chapter is two-folded. Firstly, the incorporation of the real life of students in art curricula works as a strategy of underlining the particularity of all subject positions, which opens the politics of art education to its multiplicity. Students are not understood anymore through a universal subject position of the student who, once acquiring a seemingly universal set of knowledge and skills to navigate in the world (like the “impersonal” aesthetics of Owatonna) can strive for inherently non-subjective excellence: something that anyone can acquire with just the right kind of effort or practices (like the
creative act in Rugg and Shumaker). Rather, students are now seen as culturally and socially situated, which allows art educators to talk about the social not only as a site of multiple identities and subject positions, but also point to power-relations between them. Secondly, despite the multiplication of political subject positions within art education, such political thought is unable to put the telos of participation in question due to its dependency on predetermined relationship between the particular and the universal. In other words, when the ideal of (Deweyan) democratic and active life sets the ground for processes of subjectification and thus makes participation in the human community the ultimate precondition for truly individual human life, the political agency of the particular is always constituted in a universal frame that governs its existence. This means that a political particularity becomes a compromised particularity: a singular being whose difference to other singularities is governed by a universal frame of recognition. As discussed in the first chapter, both Rancière and Agamben, in their own ways, find such predetermined constitution of subjectivity problematic: whereas Rancière argues for a radical subjectification qua disidentification that disrupts its space of appearance (the distribution of the sensible), Agamben is interested in “politics of being as such,” (Mills, 2008, p. 130) that is, politics of whatever that troubles the sovereign power that governs the political constitution of identities and subject positions.

I start this chapter by laying out the historical context of Visual Culture Art Education and what kind of political break it can be seen to have constituted in art education. Then, I identify four strategies of subjectification in art education literature that
take the notion of real life of students as the source of student agency. Finally, I examine these strategies in relation to a radical politics of actualization and a radical politics of potentiality in order to further elaborate my critique of subjectification in political theorization in art education.

**Visual Culture Art Education as a Historical Context**

In order to approach the question of political subjectification in contemporary art education theory, I examine how art educators, in the past fifteen years, have approached political subjectivity in terms of actualization of the particularity of students' lives. I am particularly interested in examining how real life is used as a political concept when theorizing the societal function of art education and discussing the paradigmatic shift from Discipline-Based Art Education (DBAE) to Visual Culture Art Education (VCAE).

As my research material, I use two professional journals, *Studies in Art Education* and *Visual Arts Research*, from 1998 to present. In the United States, 1998 can be seen as a symbolic watershed between DBAE and VCAE, two paradigms that are easily positioned ideologically against each other. That year, J. Paul Getty Trust decided to discontinue the funding of the Getty Education Institute for the Arts, which was the central source of financial and scholarly support of DBAE; a decision that led to the termination of the program a year later.

In terms of the question what does it mean to act politically, this shift offers an intriguing point of reference when trying to grasp the difference that a political act
constitutes in the existing order. Indeed, by labeling VCAE as a paradigm shift already entails that the (political) imagination of art educators changed from one perception of reality to another. However, as I showed in the previous chapter, although progressivism changed the terms of subjectification in art education, the ontological basis for its politics remained unquestioned, which meant that the political function of education stayed the same. Thus, it is important to map similar limitations of the change that VCAE has introduced in the (political) theorization of art education in order to unfold more nuanced reading of subjectification as a strategy of politicization.

The Getty Foundation offers a contested figure that helps to enter the discourse of change from DBAE to VCAE in the turn of the millennium. In 1998, upon the resignation of Leilani Lattin Duke who served as the director of the Getty Institute, Elliot Eisner wrote a guest editorial in *Studies in Art Education*, where he discussed the legacy of Getty's support for art education. Eisner saw that “[t]here has never been in this country an organization whose philanthropy has been so constant and so intelligent when it comes to arts education. Federal support, like the winds, come and go. Politics and priorities change. The Getty Center for Education in the Arts has been there consistently.” (Eisner, 1998, pp. 6–7) Seven years later, Kevin Tavin (2005), when discussing the historical developments of VCAE, gave a very different characterization of Getty's legacy:

As the Getty's grip of art education started to slip in the late 1990s, DBAE became less prominent and a growing number of art educators called for a paradigm shift toward visual culture, that challenged canonicity, advocated for the study of an expansive range of objects and images including popular
culture, and raised issues about visuality and everyday life. (Tavin, 2005, p. 111)

The difference that Tavin’s passage constitutes between DBAE and VCAE becomes interestingly close to the critique that progressive educators targeted against schooling system that was separated from students’ life. His metaphor of a “grip [that] started to slip” lays out the political promise of VCAE: like progressive education many decades earlier, it VCAE freed art education by opening it to something else than the seemingly restricted focus on fine art that DBAE had championed. As visible, for Tavin, this something else is connected to the everyday life of students, which not only echoes Deweyan critique of schooling a hundred years earlier, but also underlines the importance of students’ life in the shift in art educators’ political imagination.

Notably, it would be problematic to make a simple analogy between VCAE and progressive education, especially if the motivation behind such analogy is to state that the latter is simply a return to the past. Indeed, they are both responses to very different historical, political, and social landscapes, which means that their critique has a different purpose and motivation. However, I see that their relationship can be understood as an intensification of similar political strategy: a strategy of subjectification that is based on the increasing entwinement between life, education, and society. To see VCAE as an intensification rather than as a return to the past helps to approach the two-folded argument that I introduced in the beginning of this chapter: that, on the one hand, the slipping grip of DBAE made it possible to talk about particular lives within art education and on the other
hand, these particularities become political only in relation to a specific understanding of political subjectivity.

In this respect, the everyday itself is approached in a different way than it was discussed during the progressive era. As intensified in VCAE, the entwinement between everyday life and education takes more complicated forms as it did earlier. For example, whereas in Owatonna, the “art problems” that people dealt with in their everyday life were limited to poorly decorated homes, flower benches, and right kind of ties, contemporary “art problems” are much more complex and thus require even more support and control from art educators: the youth simply cannot handle everyday issues by themselves. This means that the immediacy of the everyday is not only a source of educational relevancy, but a challenge for art educators.

This is well demonstrated in Paul Duncum’s article “A Case for an Art Education of Everyday Aesthetic Experiences,” published in Studies in Art Education in 1999, where his central claim is that the “ordinary, everyday aesthetic experiences” are “more significant than experiences of high art in forming and informing one’s identity and view of the world beyond personal experience.” (Duncum, 1999, p. 296) Since these “ordinary” experiences are “significant” for students’ identity formation, art educators should teach students to deal with these experiences, their very ordinariness. Thus, Duncum not only demands similar immediacy of curricular content that one finds from Dewey and other progressivists, but makes clear that students today cannot escape popular culture that offers its own life lessons and role models that, like symbolic knowledge for Dewey, is based on imposition rather than
active and critical engagement. In other words, when Dewey and his followers were worried that a schooling system that distances itself from students' lives hinders children's individual development toward active agency, Duncum sees that the immediacy of visual culture is not only something that helps art curricula become more relevant to students, but that this immediacy has to be approached with a critical eye. Thus, the everyday life within postmodernity is portrayed as something like a dystopic version of Deweyan pre-industrial communities: one's everyday actions and experiences have a pedagogical potential, but they are always already immersed in the commodified culture of modern day capitalism. In terms of intensification, this means that while the social problems that art education should tackle seem to have become more severe and inseparable not only from political subjectivity but also from students' physical and mental health, art education has to tighten its grip of the precarious life within late modernity in order to sustain its societal usefulness.

Like with all paradigmatic changes, it would be problematic to assume that the change from DBAE to VCAE took place overnight, or better, over the course of 1998. Moreover, neither of the paradigms should be understood as be total historical condition that did not leave room for alternatives. For example, social theory oriented art education and multicultural art education provided prominent position of critiques almost from the initial introduction of the Getty-led DBAE to the field in the early 1980s. After 1998, the critique toward VCAE was still prevalent in both publications and the legacy of DBAE is well visible in the material that art teachers can order for their classrooms. Despite the fluidity of this

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5 For example, The Caucus of Social Theory in Art Education of National Art Education Association had been established already in 1980.
change, both publications, especially *Studies in Art Education*, showed a tremendous increase in writing not only on popular culture but also about socially engaged art and education in the turn of the millennium, especially during first few years of 2000s.

In this respect, I see that the *post-Getty* art education offers an interesting historical frame to examine subjectification *qua* the entwinement of life and education. To paraphrase Tavin’s passage above, how one is to understand the *freedom* that the slipping grip of DBAE provided for art educators and, most importantly, what are the limits of subjectification that this new, expanded and thus more inclusive field generated?

**Four Strategies of Subjectification**

Since there seems to be *something* about *real life* that helps to unfold more meaningful art education, it is this *something* that needs to be opened up to its different modalities. If, indeed, the entwinement between life and education has intensified together with the developments of modernity, how has this intensification manifested itself in art education literature? It is important to note that despite the reputation that VCAE has as a critical study of everyday life via popular culture (especially during its early years), popular culture constitutes only one of the realms in which students' lives become politicized in the post-DBAE landscape. The trope of “real life” can be found not only from the content of art education curricula, but also from its methodologies, practices, as well as from the ways that art education is theorized as a social and psychological activity. Consider, for example, the following four passages:
A healthy, vital, and sustainable democracy requires a citizenry educated around cultural issues of individual and collective concern as well as having the capability to consider such issues from a critical perspective. Art educators can uniquely contribute to this preparation of citizens by promoting the investigation and appreciation of the broadest possible range of objects, artifacts, spaces, expressions, and experiences.” (Bolin & Blandy, 2003, p. 246)

A/r/tography is a living practice; a life writing, life creating experience into the personal, political, and professional aspects of one’s life. Through attention to memory, identity, autobiography, reflection, meditation, story telling, interpretation, and/or representation, artists/researchers/teachers expose their living practices in evocative ways. (Springgay, Irwin & Kind, 2005, p. 903)

As teachers, we are not only teaching, we are modeling a way of living. One person can make a difference. Groups of people can do even more. Sharing and learning about the power of art through meaningful art education service experiences is and can be possible through the integration of service-learning into university art education programs. And through this creative process, the students and the community work together to bring about understanding, tolerance, and committed involvement in the world around them through an impressive and meaningful postmodern work of art. (Taylor, 2002, p. 139)

More than an isolated activity, problem-based learning [PBL] is both a curricular organizer and an instructional method that develops students’ higher order thinking skills as they investigate ill-defined problems drawn from real-life situations. In the most successful applications of PBL, students are challenged to think deeply about complex situations. (Costantino, 2002, p. 219)

The common denominator for all of the passages above is that they all envision life as an entryway to a more nuanced understanding of art education as a situational and subjective, that is, particularized practice. Like in Dewey, this particularity is inherently productive: it enables democratic, affective, community-based, and cognitive processes that, subsequently, unfold an active life that is aware not only its subjective actions, but also its
social surroundings. In other words, the immediacy of life unfolds a particularity of the politicized subjectivity: one’s actions are situated in a specific social and material context that informs art education.

Following the lead from the passages above, I approach the question of political subjectification, life, and the tension between the particular and the universal through four vignettes that bring forward different strategies for actualizing the potentialities of human life through art education:

**Content**: What makes art education relevant to students’ everyday life and what does it mean in terms of subjectification?

**Methodology**: What makes art education research more connected to the lives that it examines and what does it mean in terms of subjectification?

**Social Perspectives**: What makes art education relevant to the lives in various communities and what does it mean in terms of subjectification?

**Cognitive Capacities**: What makes art education useful for students’ life in term of cognitive capacities and what does it mean in terms of subjectification?

While these vignettes should be understood as speculative rather than descriptive, I see that they help to understand various ways that art education has become increasingly **vital for society**. They all constitute a critique of the existing conditions of schooling and/or educational research by arguing for more particularized processes of learning and knowledge production by entwining life with education.

Next, I discuss each strategy separately by drawing examples from *Studies in Art Education* and *Visual Arts Research*. It is important to underline that all of these perspectives
are inherently overlapping; for example, including popular culture in art curriculum connects to socially more inclusive understanding of art education. However, I see that discussing each of these perspectives separately will help to unfold a more multifaceted understanding of the entwinement of art education and life and its connection to political subjectification.

Strategy 1: Content

We should acknowledge that most of us are willing, even eager, participants in everyday aesthetic sites. Art educators may find some sites unrewarding or even lamentable, but almost everyone frequently accesses them. Moreover, most of us seem to both revel in their pleasures and use them as resources for the construction of our own identities. As art educators, we are, after all, members of the class of cultural intermediaries. While typically we teach in and through the fine arts, in our own time we also typically indulge in the calculated hedonism of everyday aesthetics. We have tended to keep our professional lives and personal lives separate, teaching the fine arts but in our own time accessing everyday aesthetic sites. (Duncum, 1999, p. 307)

It is fair to say that in the United States, VCAE has been predominantly understood as shift in curricular emphasis from the fine arts to various forms of popular culture. As Duncum’s passage above demonstrates, the inclusion of (popular) visual culture in art education curricula is understood in very similar terms as Dewey noted about schools a hundred years earlier: there is a disconnection between what teachers and students experience and discuss in school and what they do outside of it. To talk about various “sites” of visual culture that “almost everyone frequently accesses” in their daily lives, sites that offer both “pleasures” and “resources for the construction of our own identities,” means that art education should be societally active not only within the confines of art classroom, but open up to contents that breaks the modernist tension between art and life.
Interestingly, the relation between art and life, an old dichotomy for art educators that William G. Whitford had already tackled in *An Introduction to Art Education* from 1929 by arguing for a “happy medium” between “fine arts” and “industrial arts,” a medium that offered art “of equal value for all students” (Whitford, 1929, p. 13) interestingly raised its head in the turn of the millennium. As Tom Anderson and Melody Milbrandt (1998) argued in *Visual Arts Research*, “teaching art for life’s sake may position art at school as necessary, not just nice. This demands that we understand some of the foundational roles of art in society.” (Anderson & Milbrandt, 1998, p. 15) By drawing from Arthur Efland’s conceptualization of the school art style in the mid 1970s, they claim that the functions of school art were very much the same as those in the artworld: that is school art was very much like modern art itself in being *disconnected from all of art’s traditional functions in life* except the (pleasure or relief of) the aesthetic response. Rather than being different than mathematics or science in serving the larger society, *art has indeed served the same peripheral function in school as modern art has in society*: aesthetic response as a sense of release and relief from more important things in life. (Anderson & Milbrandt, 1998, p. 14, emphasis mine)

Just like Ziegfeld and Smith (1944) argued for the return to art’s “oldest and most important role—as a practical solution to the problems of daily life,” (p. 2) Anderson’s and Milbrandt’s passage suggests that the modernist tendency of self-critique and self-examination to the point where this *self* becomes understood as a completely autonomous sphere of knowledge and activity had *separated art from life*; that the issues that art educators were dealing with in their classroom in daily basis were, deliberately or not, chosen on the
basis of their inherent distance from everything that could be labelled as non-art (after all, it was art that art educators were supposedly teaching).

It is notable that this observation did not emerge out of nothingness. In a special issue of *Visual Arts Research* on DBAE, published a year before Anderson’s and Milbrandt’s article, Gilbert Clark (1997) responded to the critics of DBAE by arguing that effective art teaching is limited to realistic and attainable goals. Expecting art teachers to set redefinition of American society as their primary goal simply is unrealistic … [T]eachers cannot abandon students or their educational needs because of social conditions in the American society. Effective education is still the most powerful antidote to social inequalities based on gender, race, ethnic origin, linguistic background, or other conditions. DBAE contributes to greater self-esteem and self-fulfilment [sic] for all students through effective education and the promotion of students' awareness of their growth, rather than lowering standards or misdirecting attention to conditions far beyond a teacher's control. (p. 14, original emphasis)

What differentiates Clark from writers like Anderson, Milbrandt, and Duncum is that while he is undeniably interested in working against “social inequalities,” the content qua “standards” of art education should not be drawn from the “social conditions” of these inequalities. One could say that for Clark, it is the very disconnectedness of art from the immediate surroundings of students that makes it socially “effective education:” it offers cultural capital that students can use when striving for success in life. Here, identity formation remains secondary: students' “self-fulfillment” is dependent on the quality of art curriculum, which, no matter what their “condition” (gender, race, ethnic origin, linguistic background) is, betters their lives in and outside the school. In terms of the relationship between subjectification and students' lives, this means that curriculum design is to be
understood as pedagogical work that gives students the best possible knowledge; knowledge that is not simply about the everyday, but something that helps to go beyond its (sometimes problematic) immediacy, thus allowing genuine agency to unfold. In short, school distributes knowledge to the everyday life, not simply draws from it.

So, what made art educators reverse such understanding of the direction of knowledge distribution (school → everyday life) and emphasize contents that informs the curriculum about “real life” issues (everyday life → school)? Let us look at some examples from Studies in Art Education and Visual Arts Research from the first half of the 2000s:

Because there is a disjunction between visual experience in contemporary, everyday life and the ability to grasp it in terms of one’s best interests, there is both an opportunity and a need for studying everyday visual experiences. Recognition that something must be done can be seen in the growth. (Duncum, 2002, p. 1)

I believe social interests and the specific situation in which curriculum is developed and practiced are important factors in examining educational computing. With this in mind, I will argue that all lived experiences are encountered, internalized, or mediated through a conscious and unconscious physical and temporal space—the human body—and geographic place in the world. Virtual and real-life experiences are human processes that have the potential to influence significantly the formation of self and social identity. Equally, they influence social relations, and the reproduction, generation, and negotiation of knowledge. (Krug, 2002, p. 28)

Advertisements play a significant role in the symbolic and material milieu of every day life. Advertisements, as part of the larger visual culture, can help people make sense of themselves and the world around them. They can provide representations and resources that help forge our identities, including notions of ethnicity, race, nationality, sexuality, and citizenship. In this sense, advertisements do more than sell products and represent the world; they can help shape, and often limit, perceptions of reality. … Accordingly, contemporary life in our (visual) culture can be better understood by critically investigating advertisements as part of a larger social construction of
the visual experience. In other words, by studying advertisements we may be able to reveal how these particular forms of visual culture help to socially and culturally. (Tavin, 2002, p. 38)

Although visual images emerged in the last century as one of the most pervasive forms of communication, their enormous social, historical, and cultural power as cultural texts is largely ignored in schools. Yet, visual images, and the experiences associated with seeing or being seen, saturate public and private spaces and influence how children, adolescents, and teachers learn, perform, or transform their identities, values, and behaviors. Further, images as visual culture, participate within networks of culturally mediated processes and power relations while they appear as common sense … or "the way it is." Art teachers and students need to examine these encounters with images and how meaning is negotiated by viewers through these culturally learned lenses, sociocultural contexts, and embodied experiences. (Pauly, 2003, p. 264)

It is clear that we need to rethink the content and pedagogy of art education, but at the same time we also need to think about the forms of assessment that will facilitate these changes. We need to engage students in the sustained pursuit of ideas that are relevant to their lives and to their culture. We need to teach them to be critical participants in democratic life. To do this we need them to understand the seductive power of the visual to engage and persuade them as they participate in the world of ideas. This raises very complex assessment problems that cannot be addressed in the simplistic ways our politicians and educational administrators seem to think are appropriate. (Boughton, 2004, p. 268)

The dominant approach to art education excludes a wide range of visual and related phenomena that play an important role in the everyday life of contemporary students. As a result, students in schools and in universities lose the opportunity to study these cultural phenomena with a critical and engaged eye. These students are not encouraged to analyze the material culture of mass consumption or mass entertainment, the iconography of contemporary politics, or the form and meaning of objects outside their immediate reach. As a result, they are encouraged to believe that these forms or cultural production are beyond their proper competence to study, analyze, and interpret. (Hicks, 2004, p. 286)
As visible, while Clark warned art educators about “lowering standards” in curriculum design, the new millennium witnessed a profound reevaluation of the very idea of “effective education.” Here, it is the immediacy of everyday life visual culture that sets the standards for meaningful and socially effective art education. Instead of “misdirecting attention to conditions far beyond a teacher’s control,” the “wide range of visual and related phenomena that play an important role in the everyday life of contemporary students” (Clark’s words) helps to access these conditions and, indeed, make them part of teacher’s pedagogical control over subjectification qua “formation of self and social identity.” In this respect, the idea of expanding the curriculum to include contents from students’ everyday life is an integral part of attempts to re-imagine the function of school within contemporary society.

The importance of identity construction over the enhancement of individual capabilities reflects a change in the way that subjectification is understood in art education. Rather than seeing aesthetic skills and/or creativity as skill sets that actualize a general human potential for democratic life within the social, the construction of identities particularizes this passage from potential to actuality: it is individual life, not merely human life, that education helps to complete.

In VCAE, the direct relation between everyday aesthetic experiences, student’s sense of self, and subjectification through art education is manifested in a “critical and engaged eye,” (Hicks, 2004, p. 286) which makes it simultaneously possible to engage oneself with the immediacy of (popular) visual culture and take a critical distance to it. This creates an
interesting tension between the particularity of aesthetic engagement and the universal analytic frame in which this engagement ought to actualize as an engaging, life-like curriculum. Moreover, this tension brings up two perspectives on the particularization of subjectification: firstly, the repeating claims about the importance of identity formation though popular culture place the perceiving subject into a sphere of visual production where the particularity of the student is acknowledged, but this sphere is seen as insufficient source of identity construction as such. Due to the “seductive power of the visual” (Boughton, 2004, p. 268) the knowledge of the self becomes something like Dewey's understanding of symbolic knowledge: it is always already produced somewhere else, which means that the student can either absorb it (the least desirable option) or negotiate with it (more desirable option). Secondly, since popular culture seems to offer students an image of individuality that is not a sufficient basis for them to become “critical participants in democratic life,” (Boughton, 2004, p. 268) there needs to be a reflective surface where the active negotiation between the student and popular culture may occur.

Here, it is the notion of a “critical eye” that establishes a disinterested subjectivity between two forms of particularity: the particularity of one’s everyday life and the particularity of one’s roles as a participant in democratic society. Despite the particular characteristic of individual identity, this logic still requires a universal point of reference to work properly: a figure of a “critical participant” whose individuality is simultaneously a declaration of its belonging to a shared realm of visual culture (i.e. being influenced by its social, political, and aesthetic surroundings) and its independence within this realm (i.e.
capability to approach these influences with a disinterested critical eye). This is initially what I mean by a compromised particularity: it is a political strategy that makes it possible to examine critically one’s social and political surroundings without putting one’s belonging and participation in it in question. From this perspective, although the inclusion of popular culture in art curricula can be seen to function as a structural critique of the pedagogical mastery that is based solely on knowledge distribution (like Clark’s cure for social inequalities), this critique can be seen to establish another kind of distribution power that sustains the same idea of public realm that one finds from Clark; that once students acquire a specific set of knowledge and skills ("effective education" for Clark, "critical eye" in VCAE) their participation in the society as individuals with societal agency is secured.

In this respect, the expansion of the curricular content of art education toward students’ immediate everyday life is closely tied to the double movement that constitutes a liberal democratic subject discussed earlier: a critical participant and observer of the social and political landscape in which everyday aesthetics and students’ identities and subject positions unfold. Such mode of critical and democratic participation is strongly present in the notion of “critical eye;” it is an analytical apparatus that serves as a manifestation of human agency within its social, political, and cultural context. Art curriculum is, then, seen as a milieu in which one’s active participation becomes concrete: rather than examining a range of artifacts that fit under the umbrella of fine art (which is, of course, a highly elusive term in itself), the expansion of the content of art education to concern “a wide range of visual and related phenomena” (Hicks, 2004, p. 286) connects students’ educational agency
to their socio-political one. In terms of the entwinement of life and education, this means that the boundary between school and life outside of it becomes increasingly blurred, thus reconstituting the idea that formal education is, indeed, a key for a genuine subjectification, to a proper social and individual agency.

The emphasis on popular culture is, then, simultaneously an acknowledgement of the primacy of students’ identity formation outside of school and a call for stronger pedagogical involvement within these processes of identification. Unlike in Owatonna, where the everyday was to be organized based on seemingly universal aesthetic qualities, the participation (qua critical eye) of contemporary art education is much more particularized, that is, socially and culturally specific. However, it is this very specificity that enables a constitution of an ever-inclusive universality that governs the existence of political subjectivity and secures the position of art education as the passageway to the actualization of such subjectivity.

**Strategy 2: Methodology**

If the expanding curricular content and the notion of “critical eye” helps to unfold active human agency in terms of students' experience and participation, it is important to examine what does such active agency mean for art education research; that is, how does it change the relationship between the researcher and her/his research. Perhaps one of the most pertinent phenomena within the field of art education that helps to tackle this question is the heightened interest toward ethnographic, autoethnographic, collaborative, narrative, and
artistic research methodologies since the turn of the millennium. Although these methodologies differ from each other and should not be understood as monolithic practices in themselves, they share a similar interest toward particularities over generalizations and universalistic representations. As Desai (2002, Studies) notes, the interest toward ethnographic practices in contemporary art as well as multicultural art education have, from the 1980s onward, provided an important basis for reflective and critical inquiries on the part of art educators on the ethical and political responsibilities of doing ethnography, the issues of power involved in the written representation of culture, collaboration, the complex relationship between insider and outsider, the researcher’s social and theoretical position, and the style of writing the ethnographic document such as voice, choice of metaphors, organization of the text, personal expression. (Desai, 2002, p. 307)

Here, subjectification becomes understood from the perspective of representation, that is, the production of knowledge about our social and material surroundings. While the question of the “expanding” content of art curricula in VCAE unfolds an art education that is close to the “real life” of students and helps them with the construction of their particular identities, the primary focus here is how art educators can talk and write about these particularities without forcing them into a strict universalist frame. The “real life” that such particularized representation unfolds is similar to the “real life” that one finds from education that is based on a close proximity to students’ everyday experiences: its meaningfulness lies in the assumption that universal subject positions are always insufficient strategies to talk about particular lives. This is why by rooting the act of representation in real life encounters, affects, and events, the power that Desai talks about becomes more tangible and, eventually, exposed
to a similar *critical eye* that one ought use in one’s everyday life experiences. In short, “real life” offers a necessary point of reflection for processes of representation and knowledge production. As Tom Anderson (2000) puts it while writing about the intersection between art criticism and ethnographic research in art education: “the ultimate test of an ethnographic interpretation is its real life coherence and potential utility …. Ethnographic critics ultimately want to know the meaning and value of that which is observed in relation to real experience.”(Anderson, 2000, p. 86)

The ethnographical research that Anderson refers to is rooted in the changes in the field of anthropology toward more particular, local, and individual interpretation of culture; a development that has been called “postpositivist” or “critical ethnography” where anthropologist “look first at specific, singular phenomena for meaning, only then (if at all) attempting to generate theory about art or life in general.” (p. 80) Despite the fact that such “critical ethnography is rooted in the particular,” Anderson claims that it can contribute to the general theory by offering potentially “richer, deeper, and more meaningful experience in teaching and learning in art.” (p. 86) Interestingly, this comes close to the idea of the critical eye discussed above: when an analytical apparatus that has usually been reserved to the study of art is expanded to the realm of particular identities and subject positions, it becomes more “meaningful” and evocative, that is, something different than a search for “scientific truths” that are “found through scientific means within the scientific system of belief.” (p. 81)

In terms of representation, this means that just like Dewey’s critique of *symbolic* schooling system unfolded a form of education that brought the knowledge of schools closer
to students’ immediate life, the “ethnographic move,” as Desai (2002) calls it, meant that both teacher and student subjectivities had to be understood in the least symbolic way: as particularities who are never as total as the very concept “student” or “teacher” might suggest. Again, the life that inhabits such research is similar life that one finds from the critical eye: it simultaneously a step toward more immediate relationship to one's social and material surrounding and a constitution of an analytic distance that makes possible an active and meaningful participation in the social.

How does such subjective qua life-likeness of representation manifest itself in art education research the era of VCAE? If, as Anderson suggests above, a more meaningful representation derives from research practices that stem from the particular rather than from a universal system of beliefs, it is important to examine in what ways have art educators constituted such particularities in their writing. Indeed, this is fundamentally a question of writing as representation: what kind of strategies of writing can disrupt the universal frame of representation and open up art education research to its particularities?

Notably, most articles published in Studies in Art Education and Visual Arts Research follow conventional writing strategies that one finds in humanities: linear structure, continuous narrative, non-subjective voice (when a subjective I or we is used, it is more of a stylistic issue and not part of the methodology itself), and emphasis on text rather than images (if images and graphs are used, they demonstrate something in the text rather than have a function of their own). Probably due to the interest toward (auto)ethnography described above, one of the most common way to step out from such norms is to construct a
strong, often personal, narrative that is used either alongside with more formal academic expression or traverses the entire text (e.g. Bey 2011; Brown, 2008; Church, 2010; Erler, 2013; Evans, 2011; Ewald, 2007; Freyermuth, 2006; Garoian, 2010, 2012, 2013; Gradle 2004; Grauer, 2006; Grube, 2004; Irwin, 2006; James, 2004; Kellman, 2004; McClure Vollrath, 2007; Patterson, 2006; Pente 2010; Richmond, 2004; Sanders, 2007; Schulte 2011; Slattery, 2006; Smith-Shank & Keifer-Boyd, 2009; Springgay 2007; Tarr, 2004; Thompson, 2009; Wilson, 2005). Other strategies include conversations, dialogues, and multiple narratives (e.g. Barrett et al., 2009; Buffington & Lai, 2011; Carpenter, Sullivan & Zimmerman, 2009; Congdon et al. 2008; Gill & Freedman, 2009; Kan, Bresler & Thompson, 2009; Kantawala et al., 2009; McLure & Thompson, 2009; Sinner & Owen, 2011; Stokrocki, 2009; Suominen Guyas & Keys, 2009; Zimmerman & Eldridge, 2009), graphic novels (e.g. Carpenter & Tavin, 2010; Duffy, 2009; Visual Arts Research, Vol. 38, Issue 1, 2012) and arts-based research (e.g. Staikidis, 2011; Visual Arts Research, Vol. 38, Issue 2, 2012).

In terms of entwinement of life and education, the personal narrative qua autoethnography and a/r/tographic research offer the most productive examples for this inquiry: whereas personal narrative helps to constitute a particularized position from where the world is experienced, a/r/tographic inquiry can be seen as a way to rethink the subject position of speech and open it up to multiple identities beyond disciplinary boundaries. As noted above, personal narrative is the most common way for art educators to deviate from academic norms, while a/r/tography can be considered as the most prevalent example of
recent arts-based research in art education. Moreover, the strong emphasis on subjectivity that one finds from both of these strategies goes hand in hand with the particularization of subjectification that the “ethnographic turn” has introduced to art education research. This means both of these strategies have to be read not only through their difference to dominant forms of academic knowledge, but also from the standpoint of subjectification: they constitute a particular life whose potentialities are actualized in an individual identity and subject position.

From these two concepts, personal narrative should be understood as an umbrella term for various specific methodologies including autoethnography and narrative inquiry, whereas a/r/tography stands for a more specific methodological approach. In this respect, it should be noted that my interest is less in conducting a comparative analysis of these different research methodologies and more in a philosophical inquiry on the position of particular life within these two practices of knowledge production.

So, what do I mean with the term personal narrative? Vicky Grube’s (2004) article “Gulliver’s Travels” in *Visual Arts Research* offers an interesting point of departure:

As the art teacher, I wear a large red apron smeared with paint with "Bennett Tool and Die" silkscreened on the front. I quickly move from child to child, asking questions and suggesting solutions. Most of my involvement with the children is physical snapping, tying, twisting, crawling, bending, lifting, patting, and wiping. When I am not acting like a teacher, my face is blank. I drink lukewarm coffee from a mug and imagine myself eating pie and reading the newspaper someplace quiet. (Grube, 2004, p. 99)

Here, Grube conflates descriptive and contemplative as well as private and public in her writing. Her two identities (“as the art teacher” and “when I am not acting like a
teacher”) split the narrative in two, thus unfolding two rather different (but relatable) representations of classroom reality. As an art teacher, her actions are always targeted toward students, while stepping out from that role means a solitary intimacy where her own experiences occupy the central role in her description of her relation to the world.

To talk about art education through a collection of private and shared moments, encounters, affective responses, and materials the writer certainly unfolds a different kind of art education that one encounters in texts that leave such life-likeness out from their research. Indeed, according to Bridwell-Bowles (1992), these kind of deeply personal narratives and strategies of inquiry open another kind of relation to the field of knowledge that students and teachers are working with. For Candace Stout (2007), such self-reflective practices are not representations of the research experience, but ways of presenting anew the researcher’s understandings. These re-presentations—words that participate and evoke—are interrogations, confrontations of conditions as perceived. When the scholarship, artistry, and reflexivity of the experimental writer are adept and in tune, their texts, in their work through mind and body, create verisimilitude to life; this verisimilitude intertwines with life, re-inscribing, opening possibilities for change. (Stout, 2007, p. 133)

In this respect, the fact that such narratives do not follow the dominant model of expression means that besides their content, the writing itself creates a particularity that steps away from the assumed universality of representation. In Grube’s passage above, the personal and affective content of her narrative, a perspective that may not be visible in the “scientific” methodologies that Anderson (2000) refers to, merges with the very act of writing as an intervention in the field of knowledge, thus opening another kind of “verisimilitude” that a universal general theory cannot offer. In this respect, the personal becomes, indeed, political:
the singular life that a personal narrative brings forward are, like in Grube’s narrative, situational and changing. Here, the connection to a tradition of critical and experimental ethnography is strong: such writing puts forward the question of political and cultural representation by asking “not only about who should represent whom but what should be the forms of representation in relationship to hegemonic practices of governmentality, including the practices of social science.” (Clough, 2000, p. 283) As a strategy of subjectification, personal narratives can be seen to bring the immediacy of life to art education, not only in terms of content, but as a way to give a more detailed description of the very agency that takes part in the production of knowledge and representations of one’s social and material surroundings.

In art education, another way to question the “hegemonic practices” that Clough (2000) refers to is to conflate artistic production, research, and education. Arts Based Research (ABR) and Arts Based Educational Research (ABER) have served as umbrella terms for various methodological approaches that art educators have used to broaden the frame of academic writing and open it up for practices that allow various forms of (self)expression and (self)reflection beyond overdetermined relations between disciplines and subject positions. In *Studies in Art Education* and *Visual Arts Research*, one of the most common strategy of art-based practices is a/r/tography, which has received growing attention among art educators since the mid 2000s. As the term a/r/tography suggests, this approach is situated between

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6 For example, in *Studies in Art Education* Vol. 48, Issue 1, 2006, an issue focused on Arts Based Educational Research, two articles out of eleven discuss specifically a/r/tography, while in 2012, *Visual Arts Research* Vol. 38, Issue 2 was dedicated solely to a/r/tography.
art, research, and teaching (a/r/t). Here, it is worth quoting again the same passage that appeared in the beginning of this chapter:

A/r/tography is a living practice; a life writing, life creating experience into the personal, political, and professional aspects of one’s life. Through attention to memory, identity, autobiography, reflection, meditation, storytelling, interpretation, and/or representation, artists/researchers/teachers expose their living practices in evocative ways. (Springgay, Irwin & Kind, 2005, p. 903)

In terms of representation, Patricia Leavy (2012) claims that

A/r/tography merges images and text, without privileging either, in order to open up and create new meanings and imaginings. Through metaphor, juxtaposition, presence and absence, reverberations and excess, the marriage of “texts” in different mediums and the fusing of different ways of knowing, multiple meanings are created, reflected, and refracted back. There is also a strong social justice current running through a/r/tographical works as a/r/tographers and readers are invited to co-create, to imagine what is possible, and to carve out new spaces for connection—spaces in between spaces. For those forced to the peripheries of their disciplines or societies, here they walk with others. Through this special collection the a/r/tographers welcome you into this community. (Leavy, 2012, p. 7)

The idea of “living practice” or “living inquiry” that a/r/tographic research puts its emphasis on is an attempt to fully embrace the situatedness and partiality of all subject positions and practices that inform one’s relationship with the world. In short, it is the very particularity of life that becomes a central category for a meaningful knowledge. As “living,” writing takes up an “evocative” character that brings forward the subject that speaks; a subject that is not total nor whole, but works “in-between” discursively imposed boundaries (Leavy, 2012). This means that a/r/tography is “relational,” since as a process, it is “an act of invention rather than interpretation where concepts emerge from social engagements and
encounters.” (Irwin et al, 2006, p. 72) As Leavy notes, this relational and dialogic character is an example of a “strong social justice current” that a/r/tographic practices embody. Here, it is possible to see that, again, it is the entwinement of life and its educational setting that not only brings about more multifaceted representation of particular subject positions and social contexts, but it also politicizes the particular in relation to the universal.

To go back the milieu of political subjectification that personal narratives and a/r/tography engender, both of these strategies take, in slightly different ways, particularity of life as the focal point of their methodology. As discussed above, it is this particularity that brings out the political agency of the subject that is either being represented or the one who represents. The “evocative” knowledge that unfolds from these practices constitutes a difference within the dominant mode of academic inquiry by blending the boundaries between private and public, that is, creating a “living practice” that exposes the singular subject within the shared realm of academic inquiry. This subject has feelings, memories, and past experiences, which is, then, put against the lack of such affective, life-like representations in assumably neutral academic writing.

Whereas the strategy of subjectification through curricular contents can be seen to carry similar (but in no means identical) discursive elements that the Owatonna Art Education Project, the methodological approach to subjectification qua representation as a particularized, “living practice” can be seen to echo similar claims for truly individual expression that one finds from Rugg and Shumaker. Again, this should not be understood as a simple return to the past or as a linear historical development, but as an intensification of
the problematics that are in play within art education literature. As I showed in the previous chapter, the individual expression that Rugg and Shumaker argued for is, despite its individual manifestations, based on a universalist understanding of the potentialities of human life. In the era of VCAE, the subject is clearly much more particularized and multifaceted that what one finds from Rugg and Shumaker. However, the idea that the shared realm of signification should be inclusive of all these various particularities remains as the organizing center of these strategies. In other words, the subjectification that derives from the constitution of a life-like, subjective narrative or inquiry is a request to be acknowledged as a particularity, which, then, means that its presence is rooted in a difference that it brings to the realm of communication. In short, despite the attempts to reject universals, these particularities still need a universal frame in which their difference can be constituted.

Consider, for example, the following passage by Charles Garoian:

I was there to tell you, I am there and, in the... blink of an eye, the blinds are drawn... the gaps of memory opened, exposing an outlook, drawing my attention outward, through the window of the back of our house, a sightline aimed due cast along the 36th parallel, down hallway, out of the window of the back door (Garoian, 2010, p. 177, original formatting, Studies)

In Garoian’s article, which is partially an autobiographical narrative that focuses on one of his childhood memories, the language that amalgamates the personal and the shared system of signification is not only fragmented, but struck through. It is partly private; a full access to its space of signification is denied. His narrative does not rest on communication, but on the impossibility of fully communicating subjective thoughts and memories through language. From this perspective, his strategy of constituting a difference qua particularity
rests on the division between singular experience and its transformation into language as a universal realm of signification. Here, art, art education, or any other signifier acquires a personal significance that, nevertheless, can never be fully shared. If one is to agree with Stout (2007) that integrating such subjective “verisimilitudes” into the body of literature on art education opens “possibilities for change,” then the ultimate political goal of such particularities seems to be, paradoxically, the inclusion of the personal into the shared system of meaning-making. After all, the personal that is political has to be acknowledged as personal in order to become political. While the language that governs subject’s speech may be challenged, the demand to participate in the shared realm of communication remains undisputed.

In this respect, a/r/tographic research seems to challenge the notion of a specific subject position from where one speaks and experiences the world. To speak simultaneously from the position of an artists, a researcher, and an educator seems to multiply the particularities that unfold through representation:

The polarization of my artist-researcher-teacher identities never worked for me; I could not carve out parts of myself and place them into different boxes. Like many educators I have always felt that we teach who we are. In these respects and others, I could not separate my “work” from my “life.” How thrilled I was to learn that I did not need to—that I could be in community with those creating work that is fulfilling, meaningful, ethical, and resonant—work at the intersections of “art” and “research.” A/r/tography invites and celebrates interconnectivity. (Leavy, 2012, p. 6)

Instead of merely adding up subject positions, art educators Springgay, Irwin, and Kind (2005) remind in Qualitative Inquiry that “loss, shift, and rupture” are “foundational
concepts or metonyms for a/r/tography” since “[t]hey create openings, they displace meaning, and they allow for slippages. Loss, shift, and rupture create presence through absence, they become tactile, felt, and seen.” (p. 898) In this respect, Leavy’s difficulty of “carving out parts” of herself is an acknowledgment of two kinds of losses: on the one hand, the need for experimental inquiry qua a/r/tography stems from limitative categories that differentiate artists, researchers, and teachers from each other, which means that by having to choose only one of them leads to a loss of the other two. On the other hand, the blending the boundaries of these categories open a space of representation where rigid practices of expression are lost in favor of the a/r/tographic in-between.

However, despite this nuanced reading of subjectivity, the personal still remains as the central category of life-like representation. In fact, the centrality of the politicized subject of participation is secured by acknowledging differences within it. These blending boundaries between a/r/t identities brings out the question about the initial function of differences for a/r/tographers themselves. As a call for “interconnectivity,” a/r/tography follows a similar logic of inclusion than one finds from personalized “verisimilitudes.” the differences that constitute a/r/t identities become productive through an a/r/tographic subjectivity, which serves as a constitutive realm where these differences can be acknowledged. If a/r/tographic representation is “a process of double imaging that includes the creation of art and words that are not separate or illustrative of each other but instead, are interconnected and woven through each other to create additional meanings” (Springgay, Irwin & Kind, 2005, p. 899), the normative logic of non-subjective representation (mode of representation that, negatively,
gives a/r/tography its specificity) gets replaced by strategy that needs differences in order to function and produce “additional meanings.” This makes a/r/tographic practices “constitutive rather than descriptive,” (p. 899) which, despite the rejection of descriptive processes of naming, underlines its dependency on endless production differences that sustains its ability to produce knowledge; knowledge that becomes the kernel of its actions understood as “living practice.”

In this respect, it is possible to state that the processes of subjectification that I have described above, that of, ones that can be found from personal narratives and a/r/tography, see singular life as an important basis for practices that question the seemingly universal realm of academic meaning-making. Whereas the expanding content of VCAE helps art educators to approach singular life from its visual, social, and political context (subjectification in relation to one’s experience of the world), these aforementioned processes of meaning-making help to point to the multifaceted nature of the subjective expression that is necessarily at play when the criticality of the critical eye is communicated to others. However, to bring forward the particular lives qua narratives and representations within art education seems to always constitute a demand to be acknowledged as a subject that participates in a shared realm of shared meaning-making. Eventually, all differences between particularities crumble down and form a plane of pure transparency and inclusivity and where personal memories, identities, autobiographies, and reflections are seen as self-evident material for constituting differences within such realm. In Leavy’s words, these differences can eventually “walk with others” which means that their presence, visibility, and tactility is
not only secured, but also imposed on them by the very realm where they are recognized as individuals. Thus, one can say that such practices make the process of subjectification more nuanced than one find from progressive education, but this complexity does not fundamentally challenge the closed relation between the particular and the universal.

**Strategy 3: Socio-Cultural Perspectives**

The two previous strategies of subjectification revolve around the subjective experience that, then, becomes transformed into various acts of critical participation in the society. Although the social has provided a conceptual background for both of these strategies, the question what such critical participation actually does to it is a question that is yet to be explored.

If one is to agree with Efland that the progressive era was a turn to “culture,” VCAE can be seen as a manifestation of the turn to the *social*; a *turn* that finds its parallels from the rise of participatory and socially engaged practices in contemporary art, from the growing importance of identity politics in the political landscape and, indeed, from the so-called *visual turn* that marks the ever-pervasive importance of visuality in people's (everyday) life in (post)modernity. Indeed, Theresa Marché (2000) pointed to the growing importance of social issues in the field of art education in the turn of the millennium and argued that “community” is becoming a central “organizing concept” for contemporary art education

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In fact, the very term “social turn” has been used in art history and aesthetic theory to describe the growing interest toward participatory artistic practices in contemporary art. (e.g. Bishop, 2012)
after the emphasis on “creativity” in the first part of the 20th century and “aesthetics” in the latter (Marché, 2000, p. 51).

It is notable that although terms such as “community,” “culture,” and “the social” each constitute a different characterization of the realm in which one participates in as a politicized subject, they all entail an idea of a milieu that governs individual identities and subject positions. In this respect, multicultural, community-based, and social perspectives in art education can be seen as different responses to the same question: what is the relationship between subjectification and its sociopolitical context? As Kerry Freedman (2000) sums up the various social perspectives that had emerged in the field of art education by the turn of the millennium,

[i]t is difficult to describe these [social perspectives in art education] because there are so many of them. They include, but are not limited to, a concern with issues and interactions of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, special ability, and other body identities and cultures; socioeconomics, political conditions, communities, and natural and humanly-made environments, including virtual environments. Their common ground is based on the conviction that the visual arts are vital to all societies and that representations of art in education should seek to reveal its complexity, diversity, and integral cultural location. These perspectives represent the lived meanings of art and arts communities through, for example, change in curriculum, collaborative instructional methods, and community action. Social reconstructionist versions of these perspectives are founded on the belief that art education can make a difference in student understanding of and action in the world and that, that difference can enrich and improve social life. (Freedman, 2000, p. 314, Studies, emphasis mine)

Freedman’s claim that art is “vital to all societies” and that it should be taught by addressing their “complexity, diversity, and integral cultural location” brings up two important points when trying to understand the entwinement of life and education from the
perspective of the social: firstly, it makes art a fundamentally human construction that, just like language for Aristotle, constitutes the humanness of human societies. Secondly, it can be used to unfold particularities within these societies, that is, the singular parts that establish the “social life.” In short, art simultaneously constitutes a shared frame of cultural belonging and partitions this frame in smaller units that, initially, emerge as subjects that always already belong to a shared realm of culture.

Going back to the issues discussed in the first chapter, positioning art as an integral part of human life means that not only is a singular life deprived of art less human, but also that societies without art do no function as they should. At the center of this logic, one finds naturalization of art: just like democracy for Dewey, it is described to be something that human individuals and societies need in order actualize their full human potential. As Julia Kellman (2004), who, drawing from theorists such as Clifford Geertz and Ellen Dissanayake, argues for an anthropological and socio-biological definition of art by stating that “art elaborates our social and individual lives by marking the significant, describing the intimate and individual, and enriching and relating the many stories of being in the world.” (Kellman, 2004, p. 10) When discussing “art’s for life’s sake,” Anderson and Milbrandt (1998) note that “[a]rtworks represent both our individual and our cultural identities. Artistic expression is both unique to each artist and a reflection of the culture and visual language of the artist’s place and times.” (Anderson & Milbrandt, 1998, p. 15)

It is possible to notice that such understanding of the relationship between art, human life, and human communities unfold a dialectics between the particular and the
universal. What this means is that these two realms cannot truly exist without each other: individual artistic work is possible only in a social context and this social context is held together by the artistic work of individuals, thus constituting a sharp dichotomy between art for art’s sake and art for life’s sake. Like progressive educators pointed out already in the beginning of the 20th century, if the emphasis is on the individual, it is easy to slip to esotericism or social vacuum; if it is on the social, the question of societal effectiveness surpasses subjective processes. Although socially-oriented discourses within VCAE have added more complexity to this age-old tension in art education, such dialectic itself still constitutes the organizing center of the political theorization in art education, especially in terms of theorization that places the so-called social and communal issues in the focal point of political action.

The idea that art education can contribute to the construction of a more democratic society is a recurring theme in art education journals. For example:

Art education, like all subjects, should be connected intimately to students’ lives; therefore, curriculum, because of this connection to student life and their worlds, should be thought of as an ongoing process and not a product. I consider art education to be a caring, social space where critical investigation of and through relevant cultural production can be facilitated by teachers to help students to inquire into the complexities and possibilities for understanding and expressing life and death in new ways. I want an art education that helps students actively participate in a world that has reverence for life and values social justice. … If art education curriculum, like life, were thought of in this way, then an important component of it would have to deal with the investigation of social and cultural issues from multiple personal, local, national, and global perspectives. (Stuhr, 2003, p. 303)
The pursuit of democracy and civil society requires a life-long commitment learned and exercised within multiple and diverse venues. Education settings should have as a part of their mission preparing children, youth, and adults to sustain and encourage civic engagement. Educators and their students working within community arts centers, museums, and schools, among other settings, should be involved in the creation, appreciation, and understanding of objects and images that are a part of, or grow out of, this participation. (Blandy, 2004, p. 7)

Social justice education can also be thought of as guiding students to know themselves and their worlds, and to live and act as part of community and society as critical citizens. (Garber, 2004, p. 6)

Art education can play a vital role in the development of communal identity, compassion toward others, and civic engagement. The arts allow young people to formulate and convey personal meanings and values about life ... and to bond with one another within their own school and community settings. The study of varied art forms of diverse peoples provides a means by which meaningful connections between individuals with differing cultural experiences, values, and interests may be developed. (Delacruz, 2005, p. 6)

Appropriately infusing art education curricula with goals and objectives for preparing students for political participation should also be primary. Such goals and objectives will not focus on encouraging students toward a particular point of view, but will inform students about arts and cultural policy and the means through which policy can be conceptualized, implemented, critiqued, and modified. Encouraging students to take their citizenship seriously by participating in the political process will be equally important. I can imagine no more important work than inspiring and facilitating civic engagement among future leaders with the capacity to advance the arts and culture within democratic societies. (Blandy, 2008, p. 276)

As visible, the aforementioned dialectics between subject’s individual identification and the acknowledgement of the multiplicity of the social realm (a realm that, first and foremost, is a sphere of engagement and participation), offers an organizing discursive frame for social theory in art education. The intimacy of “relevant cultural production” that has its
“personal, local, national, and global” dimensions offers an important entryway to this dialectics. Like Dewey’s curricular structure that unfolds the abstract macro-level through the immediate microlevel of student’s everyday life, such socially engaged art education requires a recognition of the social within the personal and vice versa. This means that the closer art education comes to students’ lives, the better it can open the complexity of the social in which the students belong, as well as see a similar complexity in other cultures as well.

Here, it is important to examine what does complexity, diversity, and multiplicity mean, especially in terms of the relationship between politics and the social. After all, they all seem to echo Dewey’s call for democracy that “prevails as there are more, and more varied, points of shared common interests among the multifarious groups that go to make up society, and as there is ever freer interaction and mutual adjustment among these groups.” (Cremin, 1964, p. 121) Going back to the notion of subjective representation discussed earlier, the political function of life-like narratives is to acknowledge the diversity of subject positions in the processes of meaning-making, which, then, secures the ideal of the community of diversified logos. When it comes to the acknowledgement of the cultural and social complexity of the world in which students live in, the political function of such diversity can be understood in a very similar way: talking about complexity is a reinstatement of the idea of the society as an inherently empty site of inscription that is shaped by individual acts and, reciprocally, also governs the political existence of these acts. This tension between individual acts and their existence-as-individual is sutured together by “participation,” that is, an activity that is simultaneously an affirmation of the particular (the
citizen, the subject, the community-member) and the shared realm that one participates in (the society, the social, the community). Most importantly, the finer the differences between particularities get, the more intensified is the demand of participation. So, when Freedman (2000) positions “issues and interactions of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, special ability, and other body identities and cultures; socioeconomics, political conditions, communities, and natural and humanly-made environments, including virtual environments” (p. 314) as examples of strategies that can bring out the complexity of one's social, political, and material environment, it is not only that this complexity becomes named through these specific perspectives, but that this process of naming always already requires an ever-inclusive universal frame in which these particularities may appear as differences that constitute the ideal of complexity.

So, the inherent problem with the call for social and societal complexity is that it becomes easily tamed the moment that this complexity is given a discursive form. What this means is that the telos of such politics is never about particularities as such, but like the “critical eye,” it is constituted on the idea of exposing the dialectics between the particular and the universal; dialectics that, nevertheless, becomes stabilized through the notion of participation. Thus, subjectification is not tied only to the existence of subjective differences, but it also asserts that these differences will never threaten the function of the social, vice versa. As Tracey Bowen (1999) writes in her article on graffiti artists and their relation to art education and their community,
As a society we must make room for young people within the community, even as we recognize that they may not hold the same definition of community as we do. We must examine our assumptions about acceptable versus undesirable public acts, and look at the vast grey area between. We must look to developing the strengths and interests of all young people instead of finding band-aid solutions to problems created by activities we disagree with. Above all, we must accept individuals, especially our young people, for who they are instead of constantly comparing them to our version of the status quo. We have to accept that we might not like their style or their aesthetics, but then again, they may not like ours. (Bowen, 1999, p. 37)

In Rancièrean terms, such ever-inclusive view on the social is inherently consensus-driven: although there might be disagreement in “style” or “aesthetics,” this disagreement has an ameliorating function. It strengthens the predetermined function of the liberal democratic realm where different perspectives can co-exist. When this function is left undisputed, participation within this realm becomes an ultimate pre-requirement for subjectification, which, then, leads to the problems discussed in the first chapter: the citizen of civic engagement like the human of human rights is already constituted before the engagement or inscription of rights takes place. Thus, Bowen’s insistence on the particular character of different definitions of “community” (or art, for that matter), a particularity that offers a basis for subjectification and political agency, yet again unfolds the limits of complexity that the writers above are calling for. If “[w]e have to accept that we might not like their style or their aesthetics, but then again, they may not like ours,” it is necessary to ask what is the mediating act between these two sides of “us” and “them” that makes an acceptance possible and, crucially, makes it a viable political strategy?
Here, my intention is certainly not to argue that all forms of dialogue are futile and merely a form of societal reproduction; rather, the point that I want to make is that a political imagination that is based on an idea that all subjective and cultural differences (that is, particularities) can be truly politicized only by participation, presence, and visibility within a shared realm of politics does not offer any other way to understand political action than as an increasing intensification and refinement of the dialectics between the particular and the universal. At the end, what “we” are left with as acceptance; an acceptance of the complexity that, as discussed above, loses its complex character the moment “we” accept it. Such acceptance stabilizes all differences by constituting a frame for knowledge that governs the plurality of subject positions.

So, to answer the question I posed in the beginning of this section, that of, what does a critical participation (qua critical eye and subjective representation) actually do to the social, it can be argued that it seemingly brings out the complexity and diversity of human societies, which, then, is seen as a necessary requirement for working liberal democracy. Most importantly, such complexity is rooted in the idea that particular identities and subject positions already exist in societies and that the political goal of a socially engaged art education is to make these particularities appear within the social life; an activity that brings out the (naturalized) humanness of the social. Whereas the expanding content of art curriculum brings out the multiplicity of visual sites that students encounter in their life (both in and outside institutional settings) and the subject-centered forms of representation point to the diversity of particular appearances within the shared realm of communication,
this strategy of subjectification through social engagement strengthens the tie between a singular life and a social life by refining the difference between them to the point where all singular forms of life are always already named and recognized within the social sphere, thus making their existence an act of participation. In terms of the entwinement of life and education, this means that by recognizing the diversity of singular forms of life, socially engaged art education makes it possible to treat all particularities as material for social reconstructionism that harnesses singular lives to the reproductive mechanisms of liberal democratic frame. In short, the particular existence appears as a compromise between the subjective and the social; a compromise that reconstitutes the realm of politics.

**Strategy 4: Cognitive Capacities**

It is notable that in *Studies in Art Education* and *Visual Arts Research*, the entwinement of life and education *qua* an active subjectivity of participation is not only described in terms of social reconstructionism (as the three previous strategies can be understood), but also through psychological and cognitive perspective; a perspective that, nevertheless, retains a similar call for the necessity of art education as a part of public schooling system. This approach positions cognition, not identity construction, at the core of its educational goals, which means that subjectification becomes a question of developing one’s cognitive capacities. Anna M. Kindler (2003) writes,

> The vision of visual education that I am excited about is certainly inclusive of a broad spectrum of visual culture that has been at the center of attention of colleagues who have argued its importance based on social relevance or cultural arguments. However, I think that we should also be concerned with a
broadly defined visual culture because it is constructed with and embodies a wide range of pictorial repertoires within which human growth can be achieved and presents an array of choices of areas where visual imagery does matter. Immersion in visual culture offers an exciting opportunity to the visual brain to engage in cognitive activity at every step of this experience—not only through the invitation of socio-cultural interpretations that these encounters afford but also through the very processes of image construction that are intrinsic to them. Experiencing and creating visual imagery of different kinds can have significant cognitive benefits in making a more complete use of different parts of the visual brain and allowing for development of diverse strengths in creating and relating to the visual world. (Kindler, 2003, pp. 293–294, Studies)

As it is visible, the “socio-cultural interpretations” that the expanding curriculum allows are just one possible way to understand the benefits of “inclusive” art education. Kindler’s emphasis on the “visual brain” and its development through “a wide range of pictorial repertoires” unfolds another kind of critical eye; an eye that is directly related to one’s brain as the central educational category when “creating and relating to the visual world.” In other words, the expansion of art curriculum to concern images of popular media opens the possibility to enhance one’s analytic thinking, which, then, helps to navigate within the “immersion of visual culture.” Thus, the productive proximity between education and life becomes measured through the “cognitive benefits” that a diverse art curriculum provides to the students. In terms of subjectification, this means that “human growth” that art education offers is first and foremost a question of “cognitive activity” of the “visual brain.”
Interestingly, when it comes to the question of everyday life and cognitive capacities, it is possible to discern Dewey's influence here as well. Drawing from Maxine Green, who draws from Dewey, Judith M. Burton (2000) notes that

young people are too often bored in schools because we do not offer them meaningful challenges, we do not invite them to bring their own experiences into the arena of learning, we do not ask of them the kind of reflection and exploration of possibilities that engages their thinking, and we do not offer them insights and skills in those non-verbal languages of the arts where imagination can open up new corners of reality. In short, we do not help them construct a continuity between their own creative efforts and the culture in which they live in a way that accords distinction and respect to each. (Burton, 2000, p. 330)

Indeed, Dewey's critique of “artificially” separated school subjects and purely symbolic knowledge was revisited by art educators such as Michael J. Parsons (1998) and Don H. Krug and Nurit Cohen-Evron (2000) who write about “integrated curriculum” (Parsons) and “curriculum integration” (Krug & Cohen-Evron) as effective strategies for building a curriculum that takes account on the different ways that students approach and acquire “knowledge and issues that affect their everyday lives.” (Krug & Cohen-Evron, 2000, p. 258) Similarly to Kindler, the importance of cultural perspectives is acknowledged by Parsons, who argues that “students' interests, abilities, and cultural backgrounds are as important to curriculum planners as are the structures of knowledge. For the integration of knowledge, when it occurs, lies only proximately in the curriculum plans of teachers and ultimately in the understandings of students.” (Parsons, 1998, p. 104) In other words, the knowledge and capacities that school rehearses does not merely revolve around the skills that one needs to perform well as a student, but they should prepare student to their life outside
the school system; just as Dewey had argued a hundred years earlier. Whereas the previous
strategy of subjectification points to the complexity of human societies and the need to
unfold the diversity of subject positions, one encounters here a similar complexity in relation
to cognitive processes. As Krug and Cohen-Evron (2000) put is,

[w]e believe the arts should play a significant role for teaching toward
understanding about life-centered ideas and issues. Integrated curricular
practices can encourage students to learn a broad variety of means for
generating, constructing, and reconstructing knowledge. The arts can be a
means for students to learn more about community conditions and concerns.
(Krug & Cohen-Evron, 2000, p. 269)

However, Efland (2000) notes that in cognitive processes, complexity has its limits as
an educational goal. By using city-planning and lattice as metaphorical tools that unfold the
desired outcomes of integrated curriculum, he argues that

there are certain problems posed by the lattice metaphor. One is the
assumption that complexity is always better than simplicity because it affords
more possibilities for explorations of interconnections among knowledge
domains. This is true, but learners do not pursue complexity merely for the sake of complexity! Rather, increased complexity must serve some higher
intellectual purpose such as setting the stage for higher order thinking, or
enabling one to achieve more powerful insights and understandings. It is also
likely that too much complexity in the learning situation might lead to
bewilderment as opposed to enlightenment. (Efland, 2000, p. 289, original
emphasis)

Efland’s point demonstrates the crucial difference between cognitive and cultural
perceptions of complexity as a way to bring education and life closer to each other. While the
complexity that the three previous strategies of subjectification are based on put their
emphasis on the singular within the universal frame of participation and appearance, the
cognitive approach seems to measure particularity through the capacity of thinking that leads
to individual “enlightenment” rather than “bewilderment” of cultural and/or social
differences. In this respect, it is not necessary to dwell relationship between the particular and
the universal, since despite the acknowledgement that “students’ interests, abilities, and
cultural backgrounds” play an important part in one’s learning, the knowledge that is
produced through such education is, to go back to Gilbert Clark’s statement in the
beginning of this chapter, “the most powerful antidote to social inequalities based on gender,
race, ethnic origin, linguistic background, or other conditions.” (Clark, 1997, p. 14) This
means that cognitive capacities themselves offer a universal and more or less impersonal
domain of political subjectification. This view is intriguingly championed by Richard
Siegesmund (1998) who, when arguing for a strong “epistemological rationale” for art
education, writes that

c]epistemology is important because educators should be fully aware of how they are teaching students to think. Educators should be able to recognize the values regarding knowledge that are embedded in curricula. They should also reflect on their own values regarding knowledge and consider whether their own values match the curriculum. Out of their analysis of curriculum and personal values, educators need to articulate what is worth knowing through the study of art. I would suggest that unless art education is perceived as providing a body of knowledge worth knowing, it will remain marginalized. The issue then is not how art can be used, but what it is that we learn from art. From the work of the scientific rationalists, I would argue that the major contribution art education can make is helping students to learn to reason through perception. (Siegesmund, 1998, p. 209, original emphasis)

Here, despite that art educators should “reflect on their own values” that influence their teaching, these personal values are always subject to “reason” that helps to “articulate what is worth knowing.” In other words, to “learn to reason through perception” connects
one’s singular life to non-subjective cognitive capacities that, like the critical eye, makes this life appear as truly singular and, most importantly, contributes to the general “epistemological rationale” that guides the “body of knowledge” that prevents art education from being “marginalized.” Although Siegesmund’s emphasis is on art teachers rather than in students, the idea that art plays an important part in the entwined growth of both individual and social life connects his thought to the questions discussed above, that of, subjectification that takes place through the development of the “visual brain” that Kindler talks about.

It is notable that the amount of writing around the cognitive approach to subjectification in Studies in Art Education and Visual Arts Research has steadily lessened throughout the timespan that I am focusing on in this research. During the past decade the focus on cognitive capacities is most present in articles that deal with curriculum integration. For example, Julia Marshall (2005) argues for curriculum integration by stating that,

> [c]onnecting art to other areas of inquiry in a substantive, integrative way not only reveals the foundations of each discipline, but also makes for sound pedagogy because it: (a) is congruent with the way the mind works—how we think and learn; (b) highlights and promotes learning, especially learning for understanding and transfer; and (c) catalyzes creativity. (Marshall, 2005, p. 229)

drawing from care theory, thus arguing for a multifaceted understanding of learning in art classes. Lastly, Rollinda Thomas' and Alice Arnold’s (2011) study shows that the strong integration of arts in school curricula. They argue that

[i]t is quite possible that integrating the arts with the curriculum may yield improved academic or affective results through greater emphasis on studio arts, contemporary arts, or design elements. The study of contemporary arts, for instance, could provide opportunities to apply critical thinking to current events of social, historical, or political importance. In addition, the emphasis on studio arts may yield benefits in the affective domain, impacting student attendance, self-esteem, and self-expression. (Thomas & Arnold, 2011, p. 102)

To sum up, the cognitive approach to subjectification is not overtly concerned with the political tension between the particular and the universal; in fact, it constitutes a skill-based understanding of human agency, which is, in many ways, *impersonal* despite the emphasis on integrating students’ everyday experiences in art curricula. Since the emphasis is on cognitive skills and reasoning, singular lives are seen as frames for human activity, or better, as a necessary precondition for learning to take place; a precondition that remains undisussed as such.

**VCAE in the Light of Radical Actualization and Potentiality**

It is possible to say that like in the progressive era, the life that unfolds in the contemporary politics of art education is an active life that receives its active character from the whole that it belongs to. The tension between the particular and the universal traverses all of these approaches to subjectification; a tension that, eventually, becomes compromised by the participatory logic of either everyday aesthetics, subjective expression, social engagement,
or cognitive capacities. The politicized subject that unfolds from such strategies becomes a vanishing presupposition in the face of the logic it sustains, that of, the ideal of universal frame of dialogue that functions well as long as subjects actively partake in it. As discussed in the first chapter, this constitutes a fundamental political problem for both Rancière and Agamben, since it requires that in order to act politically, one has to occupy a predetermined position in relation to the social. From this perspective, once the particular actualizes as a politicized subject (e.g. as a “fully developed individual”), its singularity is caught up in the distribution of the sensible and the Law that governs its belonging to the political community of speaking beings. This does not mean that it would be impossible to act politically: rather, Rancière and Agamben simply challenge political theorists to pay attention to the conditions of possibility that bring about politics and think about ways to trouble such preconditions.

As I have shown, the various ways that singular life becomes entwined with art education constitutes the basis for strategies of subjectification in VCAE. To critique this entwinement by completely rejecting it would not only be a mere reversal of the same logic, but it would also require that one splits life into separate realms that always have a certain societal function or meaning (e.g. *oikos* and *polis* in the Greek Antiquity). As it should be clear from the first chapter, Rancière and Agamben do not take their theorization to such direction, since both of them are interested in the limits of a taxonomical thought. For Rancière, a life that distorts such predetermined qualities and rejects to be understood merely through the closed relationship between the particular and the universal is manifested in
disidentification. It is life that has no other qualities except the fundamental equality with other speaking beings. For Agamben, such life means whatever singularities that retain their potential not to be actualized as predetermined concepts, thus vanishing from the sovereign power that governs their existence as recognized subjects and identities. Life, then, is not merely integrated as something that is close to students (like Dewey’s call for immediacy that gets repeated, in multiple ways, within VCAE discourses), but as a plane of actualizing non-identity (Rancière) and impotential whatever (Agamben), that is, as a radical politics of actualization (Rancière) and a radical politics of potentiality (Agamben).

Next, I recapitulate my critique of the strategies of subjectification by putting it in terms of a radical politics of actualization and a radical politics of potentiality.

**Content Reframed**

As discussed above, the expanding content of art curricula in VCAE has unfolded the multitude of sites where students are engaged with visual practices, thus reframing the agency of singularities within the educational realm. When the content derives also from students, the predetermined hierarchies of knowledge are put to test.

Through Rancière, it is necessary to ask when does such expansion put the educational frame truly in question and when does it merely reconstitute its validity as a realm that governs the circulation of pedagogical knowledge. Thus, in terms of the expanding content and radical actualization, it is not art education that expands its curriculum but the content itself disrupts the function of art education. Up to some extent, popular culture
within VCAE can be seen to have done this, but the problem I identified above is that the individual life that real life content ought to bring about within the art curriculum stabilizes its political character by making it a question of identity construction, not disidentification. In other words, the expanding content of art education curriculum conserves the predetermined function of art education as a necessary passageway from human potentialities to their actualization in partitioned identities and subject positions.

Through the lens of Agamben’s political theorization, the subjectivity that unfolds from a strong curricular connection to students’ everyday lives is an example of political strategy that requires an ever-intensifying relation between an inclusive social realm and the sovereign power that governs such process of inclusion. This means that the political impetus of particularities within the universal frame becomes eventually exhausted by its reliance on the endless production of differences that, nevertheless, are fundamentally compatible within each other. When the various sites of visual production, consumption, and enjoyment become part of the reproductive mechanisms of pedagogical control over students’ lives, the singular agency that assumably evolves from this act of inclusion is always dependent on an endless self-actualization, which makes participation, visibility, and recognition fundamental concepts of political theorization.

Here, my critique does not mean that students’ (everyday) lives and these various sites of visual culture should be left out from art curricula: rather, the problem is that their inclusion (at least as it is commonly understood in Studies in Art Education and Visual Arts Research) has been used as a strategy of securing the position of pedagogical mastery. To put
it rather crudely, if we do not discuss popular culture, we abandon our students to it. Radical politics of actualization troubles this schema by calling for a conceptualization of life within the pedagogical space of art education that appears disruptively, not as a strategy of (re)construction of the social whole. Radical politics of potentiality, on the other hand, allows to reject of this polarized schema by *profaning* the demand to participate. Here, it is worth going back to Kishik’s (2012) passage that I quoted in the first chapter since it sums up well the goals of these radical politics: “Since no identity is sacred, the ethical task is actually to profane it, use it, play with it, examine it, struggle for and against it, or even render it completely inoperative within our life, but without trying to resolve the matter once and for all.” (Kishik, 2012, p. 83) For art education, this means that the expanding content of art curricula could be decoupled from processes that tie its political impetus solely to identity construction and move toward politics that troubles the passageway to actualized identities.

**Methodology Reframed**

When it comes to subjective expression, the subject that unfolds from personal narratives, situated ethnographies, or *a/r/t*ographic “living inquiry” has the potential to disrupt practices of representation that render all singular differences into relationship between universal concepts.

From Rancièrean perspective, what remains problematic is the very emergence of the differences that ought to act disruptively. If it is the *personal* that becomes *political* (the
blurring boundary between the private and the public), this personal should be, through Rancière, understood as an act of disidentification, that is, as a collapse of qualities that constitute a smooth distribution of identities. Notably, it is possible to see similar melancholic tendencies in a/r/tography as one finds from Rancière; after all, “loss, shift, and rupture” are “foundational concepts or metonyms for a/r/tography” (Springgay, Irwin & Kind, 2005, p. 898). However, as I discussed above, a simple production of differences does not, as such, question the relationship between the particular and the universal, but, on the contrary, reproduces the idea that all differences can, at the end, “walk with others.” (Leavy, 2012, p. 7) In other words, the singularity qua difference that a/r/tographic inquiry constitutes is rooted in consensual politics; politics that sustains the function of the realm in which this inquiry takes place by bringing differences together, not intensifying the constitutive dissensus between them. Paradoxically, then, such politics strengthens identities by pluralizing them. Aesthetically, this means that while the subjective or “living” inquiry can put the conventional forms of forms of academic writing in question, but it seems that it cannot do the same thing to itself: rather, it strengthens its identity as different form of inquiry, which, eventually, carves out a neat place for its own experimentation.

Agamben’s critique of political subjectivities helps to approach this problematic by drawing one's attention to the potential of silencing the language that one speaks. This means that while personal narratives and a/r/tography need speech and representation in order to constitute their political strategy (that is, their difference from the norm), a radical politics of potentiality does not actualize a voice that, then, should be acknowledged as a
different or even better form of representation, but withholds its presence from the demand to participate in the community of logos. From Agambenian perspective, the fact that it is subjective life that carves out a position of critique and subjectification means that the relation between the particular (the speaking being) and the universal (language) is constantly affirmed: the materiality of language becomes obstructed by its communicative function, which limits the critique to the realm of representation, thus also turning singular life into a question of representation and concept. Again, the notion of profanation that I discussed above offers an interesting point of reflection. If a radical politics of potentiality postpones the actualization of singular life as a representation, it can offer tools to profane the direct relationship between the speaking being and language.

Socio-Cultural Perspectives Reframed

The social perspectives to subjectification in art education have brought up a number of subject positions and identities that challenge the universalist conceptualizations of students and teachers. By drawing one’s attention not only to identity construction, but also to the multiple communities where this construction takes place means that situational character of student subjectivities is much more nuanced than one finds from early progressivists.

When reading this strategy against Rancièr’s radical actualization, it is possible to say that the complexity, diversity, and multiplicity that these strategies emphasize do not, at the end, pose a threat to the idea of politics per se; rather, the ideal of liberal democracy is
merely refined to concern more identities and subject positions and acknowledge the fluidity between them. Rancière’s call for *dissensual* politics means that politics is not an inclusive act, but an activity that questions the very premises for inclusion. A radical actualization of subjectivity is, then, akin to the public action of the undocumented workers: rather than wanting to become citizens, they demand the same rights that citizens have, which, subsequently, questions the very legitimacy of the existing distribution of civil rights. These political acts are not rooted in the idea of belonging, but in a recognition that the seemingly universal civil rights are deeply dependent on the exclusion of the part that has not part: the Others, who, due to their geopolitical origin, are not considered as eligible for these rights. In this respect, if one is to radicalize such socially engaged art education in Rancièrean fashion, the notions of belonging and inclusion have to be reframed so that the singularities that appear within art education could put the existing distribution of educational and social roles in question. In other words, neither appearing as socially, culturally, politically, sexually, etc. *neutral* students nor as always already recognized identities, subject positions, or social groups, the lives that emerge within the realm of art education would question this seemingly polarized framework in which art education becomes understood as political (or apolitical), that is, culturally and sociopolitically relevant or irrelevant.

**From the standpoint of a radical politics of potentiality, the equation between singular existence and (liberal) democratic participation leaves no room for imagining politics in any other mean than through always already actualized subject positions and identities. Like as I discussed above in terms of silence, such political imagination cannot**
function without differences that are rooted in representation. Indeed, Agamben’s ontological critique of Western political philosophy that unfolds its inherent dependency of sovereign power forces to think how to understand belonging without pre-constituted representational differences. This is why he considers language (not culture, identities, etc.) as the elementary human community, not as a transparent realm of communication. This is what initially allows the profanation discussed above: by not trying to suture the fundamental split between particular and the universal through accurate representation or feeling of belonging, Agamben argues for communities of whatever singularities where a constitutive disrespect toward attempts to couple life and Law allows political action that does not exhaust itself in actualized subjects of belonging.

**Cognitive Capacities Reframed**

Since the cognitive approach is the least involved with the tension between the particular and the universal due to its emphasis on cognition that, despite its social situatedness, is inherently rooted in non-subjective skills, the process of subjectification that it delineates does not offer tools to tackle the question of singular lives that are positioned within the educational frame of art education. However, it is notable that this approach unfolds the problems that derive from putting the emphasis on the universal; a strategy that Rancière and Agamben find equally problematic as politics that is dependent on always already recognized subjects. In this respect, it is important to see how a radical politics of
actualization and potentiality as strategies of non-identification could be read against the universality of cognition.

From Rancière’s perspective, the impersonal understanding of subjectification is radicalized by putting the pedagogical emphasis on unlearning rather than learning. Here, unlearning is not simply a process of replacing one assumption with another, but activity that challenges the “epistemological rationale” (as Siegesmund puts it) that governs the seeming neutrality of knowledge and reason. Moreover, if students are seen as subjects that acquire a fully developed individuality through cognitive development, they are already positioned on a scale that makes them targets of pedagogical interventions; interventions that are needed because students lack characteristics that make them equal to other speaking beings (adults, the teacher).

For Agamben, the idea that the impersonal reason and knowledge actualize as activities that support the existing dynamics of pedagogical power does not leave room to think learning beyond social reproduction. Since the impersonality of Agambenian whatever singularities is not an affirmation of an universal frame of reference but a strategy of becoming imperceptible to all efforts to stabilize the relationship between being and a concept, learning has to be thought apart from subjectification that transforms life into a set of problem-solving skills. This makes it possible to reject the overdetermined passage from human (cognitive) potentialities to actualized knowledge and open learning to its impotential dimensions. I will discuss this question more in-depth in chapter 5.
Conclusion

To conclude, the interest toward particularized, real lives within VCAE has helped art educators to theorize the processes of subjectification in more detailed fashion than before. However, this increasing particularization of various subject positions and identities has not allowed an ontological critique of politics of art education to emerge. On the contrary, since the ever-inclusive logic that fuels such thought eventually diminishes all differences by its demand to participate, politics becomes fundamentally consensual: it is dialogue that fosters agreement and mutual recognition. Moreover, such demand to participate has made art education increasingly essential part of the humanness of human life, thus entwining subjectification deeply with the institutional frame in which art education so often takes place. This means that a particular life can become political only within a universal frame that governs its political character.

Here, the thought that has governed the question what does it mean to act politically as a process of subjectification eventually exhausts itself. From the universalism of Unesco’s passage to the particular lives of students in the VCAE, politics of art education that is based on the actualization of predetermined potentialities of human life fundamentally compromises the change that it ought to bring in the existing order. The function of both education and politics is to offer a safe transition from the past to the future, which reduces the eventness of this change to a vanishing presupposition of what should come. Although processes such as identity construction might be understood as open-ended and continuous, the fact that it is construction that constitutes the organizing center of subjectification already secures the
position of art education as an “essential component of a comprehensive education” (as UNESCO's passage puts it) that brings about the completion students' political agency.

Thus, in order to further explore the ways to approach the question *what does it mean to act politically* in relation to the three main goals of this study, that of, imagining a political existence for art education that does not presuppose predetermined needs or categories, but, on the contrary, challenges them, shifting the focus in political theorization in art education from the construction of political categories to the corrosion of the existing ones, and troubling the narrative of progression in both education and politics, thus reframing political theorization in terms of the present, the relationship between art education, subjectification, and political agency needs to be reframed in a way that puts the ontological premises of politics in question, not only its social function. This is why in the next part of this study, I turn away from the existing political framework in art education toward possibilities to think politics of art education *differently.*
PART II

CORROSIVE RADICALIZATIONS: DISRUPTING THE ONTOLOGIES OF SUBJECTIFICATION IN ART EDUCATION

Writing comes up from under my skin. It creeps into my sleep, to tense my fingers; I am plunged into it, as a space of capturing a new voice, for figuring a new body: to take an empty page and to fill it, with the day to day. Memories. Imagination.

To locate another connection, unrecognizable at first.

_How might I undo my voice, its pattern and cadence; to strip it of its certainty, its vocabulary?_

Brandon LaBelle,
_Diary of an Imaginary Egyptian_
Chapter 4: The Precarious Life of an Obscure Subject:
Pilvi Takala’s “The Trainee”

The main goal of this chapter is to further theorize my conceptualization of a radical politics of actualization and potentiality by relocating the focus of attention from art education and its politics to the realm of contemporary art. As noted in the last chapter, the strategies of subjectification that position art education in a fixed passageway from human potentialities to their socially reconstructive actualization do answer the question *what does it mean to act politically*, but in a way that exhausts the radicalness of the question itself: art education’s political activity is confined in an imagination that conserves its predetermined societal function.

I have chosen to write about Pilvi Takala’s *The Trainee* (2008), an artwork that is based on a month-long intervention that Takala conducted in a multinational accounting company, Deloitte, in Helsinki, Finland. Before giving a detailed description of the work, it is worth explaining what makes *The Trainee* an interesting artwork in relation to a radical politics of actualization and a radical politics of potentiality. Firstly, the work holds an ambiguous position between contemporary art, political action, and corporate sponsorship, which has meant that it is appraised for being both as an example of anti-corporate politics (e.g. Mirzoeff, 2012) and a new and productive way to understand the cooperation between
artists and businesses (Koistinen, 2011; Bergman, 2012). Secondly, Takala’s intervention plays with the idea of activity, passivity, identification, and presence; all of which, as I have discussed in the first part of this study, are central to the question of subjectification. Thirdly, I concur with Siegelbaum (2013) that *The Trainee* is an example of an artwork that is located in the changing landscape of labor in neoliberal capitalism where capital accumulation is understood not only in terms of an increasing production of goods, but through services, interpersonal relations, and immaterial labor. This development, sometimes discussed as *post-Fordism*, (e.g. Aranda, Wood, & Vidokle 2011) expands the (re)production of capital from workplaces to everyday life, which means that the division between work and one’s life outside of it has become increasingly difficult to discern. In this respect, *The Trainee* can help to revise the relationship between the two forms of participation in liberal capitalist democracies, social and economic, that offered the Owatonna Art Education Project its societal relevancy.

My choice to write about *The Trainee* does not mean that I find contemporary art more radical than practices and discourses that I have described in the previous chapters. Rather, by shifting the terms of the argument, I hope to give a more nuanced reading of Rancièrean and Agambenian politics in relation to art and education. It is also important to underline that my intention is not to use *The Trainee* as an example of Rancièrean or Agambenian politics. Rather, I wish to situate their theorization in the context of artistic practice and see what kind of political theorization might unfold from this connection.
I start this chapter by discussing *The Trainee* and situating it in the ambiguous ground that I briefly glossed above. Then, I conduct two close readings of the work in terms of a radical politics of actualization and a radical politics of potentiality. Unlike previous chapters, I will not read these two forms of political theorization against each other, but construct two separate analyses that, despite their overlapping themes, unfold two different kinds of politics. The reason for doing this is purely strategical. As I stated in the introduction, my goal is not to form a coherent Rancièrean-Agambenian theorization that would offer a general political theory for art educators. Since the three previous chapters are based in a more comparative approach between these theoretical perspectives, I contend that it is important to develop them separately as well.

**Pilvi Takala: The Trainee (2008)**

Pilvi Takala (b. 1981, Helsinki, Finland) is a Finnish artist who works mainly with video, intervention, installation, and social practices, addressing issues of social control and norms, belonging, identification, and labor. In her intervention pieces, Takala positions herself at the center of the complexities that her often unconventional presence evokes in social situation. The interventions are documented with (often hidden) cameras and microphones and presented as video projections and/or installations. For example, in *Event on Garnethill* (2004) she wore a school uniform of a private catholic school in Glasgow and spent time on the street near the school. When she was mistaken as a student, she

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8 Takala prefers to use the term “intervention” rather than “performance,” since her works are often not performed to an audience but take place in social situations where her presence works both with and against implicit social norms. (Vainio, 2014)
acknowledged that she did not have any formal affiliation with the institution. This ersatz identity caused distress among the school officials and community members. In *Bag Lady* (2006-2008) Takala went to a shopping mall in Berlin and carried a transparent plastic bag full of money, leading the security officials to ask her to leave since she was seen as a security threat to the mall. In *Real Snow White* (2009) she tried to visit Disneyland Paris wearing a Snow White costume, but her entrance was denied by the park officials since she was not hired to perform there. Although none of these activities were illegal, they still ran against the normative social conventions that build a cohesive relationship between appearance, identification, and (political) activity.

In certain respects, *The Trainee* shares many characteristics with the three aforementioned works. It is based on a month-long period in which Takala worked as a trainee in the Helsinki branch of Deloitte’s marketing department; a company that is one of the biggest accounting and consultation companies in the world. To her colleagues at the office, she was introduced as Johanna Takala, a university student who was currently working on her master’s thesis and gathering material for her study. Besides the manager of the department and few other people in the company, no one knew about her real identity or that she was doing an art project.

For the first two and a half weeks Takala performed normal duties that one would expect from a trainee; for example, making photocopies and working on her laptop. Then, she stopped all physical activities that would indicate that she was working. This meant that she spent her days in the office seemingly doing nothing: she sat silently at her desk and
when asked what she was doing, she would explain rather ambiguously that she was thinking and doing “brainwork.” Her other activities included spending an entire day in an elevator or at the Tax and Legal department, again seemingly doing nothing. Her activity, or better, inactivity, raised anxiety and amazement among her colleagues, who, according to the email exchanges that Takala included in the documentation of the work, questioned her sanity and demanded the manager to get rid of her.

I was able to see The Trainee in the New Museum in New York City as part of The Ungovernables exhibition in the spring 2012. The work itself consists of an installation that includes video projections of the material she secretly filmed during the intervention, documents from Deloitte, email exchanges and voicemails about her, and office furniture. While the installation of the work is extremely important when discussing The Trainee, I focus on the intervention itself as it is presented through the documentation that is available at Takala’s webpage. This means that my analysis is more speculative than descriptive; I am interested in the fundamentally inaccessible (or better, accessible only through her documentation) event that her intervention unfolded in the working community.

The reason why I find The Trainee more suitable for my theorization than the three other pieces I mentioned above is that it operates in an ambiguous ground between politics, economics, and art. The Trainee was commissioned by the Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma9 in Helsinki, Finland and funded by Deloitte; two institutions that represent, on the one hand, cultural and governmental power, and on the other, economic power. However, I

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9 Kiasma is one of the three art museums that comprise the Finnish National Gallery, which is a public foundation funded mainly by the State.
see that it would be problematic to simply state that *The Trainee* completely complies to the institutional parameters that Takala is working in, because that would dismiss the ambiguousness that she embodied as Johanna Takala. Just like Takala’s presence at the office, *The Trainee* simultaneously inhabits multiple readings that, most importantly, do not construct a coherent subject position. As one of the emails that Takala included in the documentation puts it, “[p]eople at the Tax not only thought this is weird and funny, but also scary to some extent. What on earth is this and why has nobody missed the trainee all day?” (Takala, 2008c)

*The Trainee* can be seen as a contemporary variation of Herman Melville’s short story “Bartleby,” a story of a Wall Street scrivener who gradually stopped complying with his employer’s requests by merely saying “I prefer not to,” eventually extending this ambiguous refusal beyond work tasks to his entire life. Melville’s narrative is a first-person account by Bartleby’s unnamed employer, who finds himself in a state of complete stupefaction before Bartleby’s absolute refusal. The narrator tries fervently to understand Bartleby’s actions, leading him to go through a wide scale of emotions, ranging from pity to anger, from fear to companion. Since he simply does not know what to do with Bartleby, who eventually refuses to leave the office, the employer moves the office to another location, thus making Bartleby someone else’s problem. Yet, Bartleby still haunts his mind, and when Bartleby ends up in

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10 The statement “I prefer not to” is one of the only things that the reader actually learns about Bartleby. At first, he is highly effective worker, who says something only when he is being spoken to. In addition to minor details about his work history, nothing is revealed about him. Here, it is important to note that “I prefer not to” is not the same thing as saying “no,” since it leaves space for both doing and not doing. Moreover, Bartleby does not give any explanations to his actions.
prison, the employer visits him and is the person who eventually finds him dead of his own refusal.

Writes like art critic James Westcott (2012) and visual culture theorist Nicholas Mirzoeff (2012) have explicitly discussed the connection between* The Trainee* and Bartleby, assigning a radical political meaning to Takala’s (and Bartleby’s) refusal to work. Indeed, like Bartleby, Takala’s passivity arouses speculation and suspicion that does not get properly resolved in any intelligible way. Emails are exchanged, calls are made, but her inactive presence still haunts the work community. Although Takala claims that she was not fully aware of this connection before she did the piece (Westcott, 2012), her gesture can be seen as deeply Bartlebyan and bears close resemblance with Agamben’s reading of Bartleby (Agamben, 1999b), especially in terms of the double nature of potentiality that she argues for. In her artist statement, Takala writes:

> What provokes people in non-doing alongside strangeness is the element of resistance. The non-doing person isn’t committed to any activity, so they have the potential for anything. It is non-doing that lacks a place in the general order of things, and thus it is a threat to order. It is easy to root out any ongoing anti-order activity, but the potential for anything is a continual stimulus without a solution. (Takala, 2008a, paragraph 5)

Here, Takala herself situates* The Trainee* (partially, at least) to the realm of “resistance” as a “continual stimulus without a solution,” which politicizes Bartleby-like passivity by allowing a political agency to appear from “non-doing.” What makes this “non-doing” radical for Mirzoeff (2012), who reads* The Trainee* in the light of the Occupy Wall Street movement, is that
Takala occupied Deloitte at a time when their work undoubtedly involved processing the ruins of the financial disaster. Instead of carrying out this task, she asserted her claim to “prefer not to” and spends her time in thought. As a trainee, she was not supposed to think. She is not supposed to be out of place. (Mirzoeff, 2012, paragraph 14)

The idea that Takala’s intervention offers an example of non-traditional approach to political action (which, after all, can be seen to be one of the goals of the Occupy movement) is further corroborated by Sami Siegelbaum (2013) who points out that “Takala’s gradual yet idiosyncratic change in behavior at Deloitte does not fit into traditional patterns of worker resistance or refusal (e.g., strike, protest, absenteeism, unionization), which typically involve collective organization and clear messages.” (Siegelbaum, 2013, p. 55) After all, she is working, but her “brainwork,” which, ironically, can be seen to constitute the center of immaterial labor in contemporary capitalism, is difficult (or impossible) to measure in terms of the production of services that Deloitte offers.

Interestingly, the connection to Bartleby is found only in texts that read *The Trainee* in terms of radical politics; in fact, politics is completely absent in Deloitte’s description of the work. As stated in their press release, titled “An artist infiltrated a sponsoring company” (Deloitte, 2009, translation mine)11, *The Trainee* was a part of their strategy of sponsoring contemporary art. The CEO of Deloitte Finland Teppo Rantanen argues that “[w]e wanted to rise up to a new level in art sponsorship and to be involved receptively with a completely new way of making art.” (Deloitte, 2009, paragraph 9, translation mine)12 From this

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11 The original title in Finnish: “Taiteilija soluttautui sponsorointiyritykseen”
12 The original quote in Finnish: “Halusimme nousta taitteen sponsoroinnissa uudelle tasolle ja olla ennakkoluulottomasti mukana aivan uudessa tavassa tehdä taidetta”
perspective, Takala’s presence becomes understood as a useful addition to the creative processes that Deloitte is (or wants to be) involved with. The press release goes on,

[previously] we have financially supported Kiasma, taken our clients to see contemporary art and brought art to the everyday lives of our experts by organizing an art exhibition in our business premises. Now we have a unique opportunity to challenge ourselves and become part of an artwork.” Rantanen continues. “Our experts were positively surprised by the background of the work. This reflects our open-minded and innovative practices and our ability to throw ourselves into new situations. (paragraph 9, translation mine)\(^\text{13}\)

Indeed, according to Siegelbaum (2013), Deloitte has been active in trying to incorporate artistic thinking with consulting. For example, they organized a workshop program called “Art Think” in their New York branch, which “was presented as a model of ‘creative’ thinking; it directly equated contemporary art with financial consulting, thereby encouraging Deloitte staff members to approach their work for the firm as a form of creative activity similar to art.” (Siegelbaum, 2013, pp. 56-57) From this perspective, the fact that the employees at Deloitte were “positively surprised” after eventually learning that Takala’s presence was part of an artwork, the struggle that they had to go through when trying to figure out why did she act in the way she did, ended in a cathartic finale – a moment to when a candid camera is revealed to its perplexed subjects – that was intended to strengthen their abilities to “throw [themselves] into new situations.” New situations which will, eventually, increase the productivity of their labor.


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Similar views on *The Trainee* are found in two Finnish master’s theses that deal with the cooperation between artists and businesses. Koistinen (2011) mentions *The Trainee* as an example of an artwork that brings “interesting perspectives” [“mielenkiintoisia näkökulmia”] (p. 14, translation mine) to labor. Bergman (2012) uses *The Trainee* in her conceptualization of “Artist in-house” practices where an artist is hired into a workplace to create artworks, thus helping to construct a “more diverse work community” [“monimuotoisempi työyhteisö”] (p. 28, translation mine). In both of these theses, Takala’s intervention is described as something useful to the company, which follows the understanding of *The Trainee* that Deloitte upholds as the sponsoring institution, thus standing in sharp contrast to Mirzoeff’s reading which stresses the inoperative nature of Takala’s intervention.

In terms of a radical politics of actualization and a radical politics of potentiality, I see that both of these perspectives, that of the revolutionary and the reconstructive/reproductive, are important to keep in mind when locating Rancièrean *disidentification* and Agambenian *whatever* in my analysis of *The Trainee*. To dismiss their coexistence (which, to an extent, the aforementioned writers do) reduces Takala’s intervention into a predetermined activity that actualizes itself in specific social, political, and economical discourses. Theorizing this work through radical actualization and radical potentiality, I unfold the problematics that derive from such predetermined positions. My refusal to isolate either one of these readings will, then, hopefully lead not only to a more nuanced reading of the artwork, but also help to further theorize the intricacies of actualization and potentiality in my own theorization.
The Trainee and a Radical Politics of Actualization

Political appearance in the Ranciérien sense is about making a connection between having a part and having no part in the common, which means that the factual appearance of those who have no part does not lead to their integration into a democratic space of communication, but to a highlighting of the distribution of the sensible as a system of representation, that is, a normative system that assigns activities and possibilities, visibility and sayability, to specific roles and places. The forms of aesthetic realism thus have a political claim, insofar as they destabilize this normative system of representation and fracture the traditional scheme of expectations, hierarchies, and identifications. (Muhle, 2011, p. 120)

To talk about *The Trainee* in terms of a radical politics of actualization requires that Takala's ambiguous presence within the work community is examined as a possibility for a radicalization of the non-identifiable part that has no part. Conversely, to theorize politics of radical actualization through *The Trainee* means that the very question of actualization is given a more nuanced reading than I have yet conducted. In this respect, I locate the issues that I have discussed throughout this study, that of the entwinement of life education, the relationship between the particular and the universal, and political subjectification on a conceptual milieu that is encircled by radicalization of presence and actualization. This is necessary if one is to understand the Rancièrean “political appearance” that Muhle describes above and its connection to the question of disidentification.

I start my inquiry with the following short exchange between Takala and her fellow employee:

*Employee* (to another employee or Takala, it is unclear which one she is talking to first): Well, ok. I just sent you that, I don’t know if you have the risk concepts. *(to Takala, laughing)* Oh, you don’t even have a computer! *Takala*: Oh hi! I’m just doing some thinking
Employee: Ok
Takala: Brain work
Employee: (laughing) Ok
(Takala, 2008b)\(^{14}\)

Notably, these kind of short exchanges constitute the fabric of everydayness in many workplaces. Such fifteen second dialogues happen frequently; there is nothing special about them as such. However, Takala’s presence in the office as Johanna Takala, a trainee that does not “even have a computer,” unfolds a strange awkwardness within that moment, leading to a situation where compassionate laughter seems to be the only way to deal with the fracture in the “normative system that assigns activities and possibilities, visibility and sayability, to specific roles and places.” (Muhle, 2011, p. 120) What is striking about this particular encounter is that the fracture does not derive from an appearance of an abnormal object of activity, but, on the contrary, from the lack of something normal; in this case, a computer. Takala’s nonchalant and vague responses serve as an infinite postponement of a closing statement that would soothe the crack in the signifying totality that the lack of a computer engenders. To talk about Takala’s labor as “brain work,” which, as mentioned earlier, is what labor revolving around issues like “risk concepts” initially is, does not seem to resonate very well with her colleague, who ends the discussion with an amused “ok.” This short “ok” reconstitutes the normality of their exchange and affirms that it is just one of the passing small talk situations that has mainly a social, not informative function at the workplace.

\(^{14}\) All quotes from *The Trainee* are based on the English subtitles that are included in the video excerpts on Takala’s website. The texts on parentheses are mine, indicating activity that is crucial for interpretation.
What is, then, the life of Johanna Takala that enters the everyday of the office? How can it be understood in terms of actualization or subjectification? Or through the relationship between the particular and the universal? Here, it is important to conceptualize Takala’s two-folded presence. On the hand hand, her (in)activity takes place in a shared space of work, which already gives her a specific kind of visibility that, nevertheless, has nothing special about it. In fact, her role as Johanna Takala qua the trainee supports a very normalizing reading and helps to make sense of her presence in this specific work environment. On the other hand, her (in)activity does not fully conform with the implicit norms of this environment, which generates fractures in her presence and its neatly signified mode of being.

Here, one encounters the distinction that Rancière makes between identification and subjectification. While the former is dependent on the existing categories that assign a proper place for subjects within the distribution of the sensible (i.e. Johanna Takala = a trainee) the latter is “a disidentification, removal from the naturalness of a place, the opening up of a subject space where anyone can be counted since it is the space where those of no account are counted, where a connection is made between having a part and having no part.” (Rancière, 1999, p. 36) In The Trainee, the Takala’s brainwork can be seen as a distortion in “the naturalness of a place” that Johanna Takala embodies as a trainee. Whether this is a true event of a Rancièrean subjectification or not is a matter of dispute, since, after all, the awkwardly amused “ok” that ends the conversation can be seen as what Rancière calls the police; a re-identification with the existing distribution of the sensible. Rather than trying to
argue for or against such question (a question that, notably, points to the limits of the
taxonomic tendencies in Rancière's theorization), I see that Rancière's understanding of
subjectification qua disidentification helps to theorize the intricacies of actualization in The
Trainee. After all,

[a] mode of subjectification does not create subjects ex nihilo; it creates them
by transforming identities defined in the natural order of the allocation of
functions and places into instances of experience of a dispute. "Workers" or
"women" are identities that apparently hold no mystery. Anyone can tell who
is meant. But political subjectification forces them out of such obviousness by
questioning the relationship between a who and a what in the apparent
redundancy of the positing of an existence. (Rancière, 1999, p. 36)

Here, the “mystery” that Johanna Takala holds can be put in terms of the relationship
between the particular and the universal; a relationship that, as shown in the previous
chapter, has not been given much attention in art education literature. In The Trainee, Takala
claims a particular subject position that, like Bartleby, is one of the many (like Bartleby is just
a scrivener, Johanna Takala is just a student, a trainee). However, this particularity is not fully
compromised: its presence is not entirely tied to the sustainment of the realm in which she
appears. Going back to the passage from one of the emails that Takala included in The
Trainee, that of, “[p]eople at the Tax not only thought this is weird and funny, but also scary
to some extent. What on earth is this and why has nobody missed the trainee all day?”
(Takala, 2008c) the weirdness, the funniness, and the scariness that her presence emanates
derives from the failure to meet the implicit standards that keep not only the work
community together, but they also signify her particularity through the negation of what the
community (implicitly) thinks is normal. Despite this fracture in such normality, her
belonging to the work community is never really questioned but merely seen as an issue of individual responsibility (“why has nobody missed the trainee all day?”). Thus, Takala sustains a non-productive presence that, like in Bartleby’s case, cannot be completely shut out from the office but neither can it be fully included in it.

In Rancièrean politics, such distortion of the conditions of communal belonging brings out the relationship between aesthetics, politics, and actualization. As Rancière argues, “the question of the relationship between aesthetics and politics [is to] be raised at … the level of the sensible delimitation of what is common to the community, the forms of its visibility and of its organization,” (Rancière, 2012, p. 18) which, for him, helps to overcome Walter Benjamin’s warnings concerning the aestheticization of politics that Benjamin discusses in relation to the Nazi spectacles in the Third Reich (Benjamin, 1968). Again, it is possible to see Rancière’s strong emphasis on the processes of letting go or becoming something else that his conceptualization of subjectification qua disidentification manifests. From this perspective, Takala’s bodily presence as a Rancièrean aesthetico-political actualization of the limits of “what is common to the community, the forms of its visibility and of its organization” opens up a possibility to examine what could a presence without participation mean in terms of a radical actualization of a particular life that balances between predetermined subject positions and an “ungovernable” being (as the New Museum’s exhibition characterized *The Trainee*). One could argue that Takala is not simply giving an aesthetic frame to a political action (that is, representing politics), but points to the aesthetic
(aisthēsis, that is, sensory) dimensions of the formation of a community where consensus and dissensus appear.

Since for Rancière, the disruption of the terms of belonging qua disidentification denotes a change in one’s relationship to the social and the aesthetic aspects of the world, the Rancièrean subjectification rethinks the function of a singular life within politics. Whereas in the previous chapter, the politicization of art education was understood through the blurring boundary between the subject, education, and the social in which the politicized subject (e.g. a “fully developed individual”) appears and affirms the function of an existing frame for politics, in The Trainee, it is Takala’s presence qua a disruptive intervention that becomes inseparable from politics; politics that ought to put its own limits in question.

Going back to the limits of Rancièrean politics that I discussed in the first chapter, it is possible to say that when Takala is assigned a disruptive function in the distribution of the sensible, she always already actualizes her political potential within this distribution. This means that Johanna Takala cannot escape politics in any other way than by complying her actualized presence with the (unwritten) rules of the workplace. Here, her radical ambiguity does not seem to hold. The play between identification and disidentification becomes a tension between two actualizations: the actualization of Takala’s belonging to the work community as Johanna Takala the trainee, and the actualization of the “mystery” that she carries, that of, her camouflaged non-belonging as the artist Pilvi Takala. As discussed above, the former one is immediately exhausted with a signified presence, while the latter resists an
actualization of a clear identity, but, most importantly, still actualizes a part that has no part within the work community.

Here, Rancièrean dialectics of actualization is fully at work: the dissensus that the unresolvable tension between fully visible Johanna Takala and disguised Pilvi Takala creates in the realm where all work needs to manifest itself in action is what, initially, brings about The Trainee’s politics, at least from Rancière’s stand. Such split presence is a political life, where the boundary between oikos and polis is similarly blurred as the boundary between work and life in a post-Fordist labor. The political question par excellence is, then, how to radicalize this blurring boundary so that it does not become merely a form of participation and belonging in a predetermined realm of being.

At this point, it is important to go back to Deloitte’s views on the project and see how the question of disidentification and a split presence becomes understood from their perspective. Indeed, as Deloitte’s press release shows, the ability to be “open-minded” and “throw [oneself] into new situations” is embraced by the company, which means that far from creating irreversible problems, Deloitte sees that Takala’s presence was, in fact, something that was beneficial for them. This reading is supported by Siegelbaum (2013) who writes that, “[Tuomo] Salmi’s [the head of integrated services and innovation for Deloitte Finland] characterization of The Trainee as a ‘game’ or ‘new situation’ for Deloitte’s employees suggests that the value of the engagement for the company was not exclusively directed toward external image manipulation (branding, PR, promotion, and marketing) but also internally, for its own staff.” (Siegelbaum, 2013, p. 56)
Here, Deloitte's ability to retrospectively turn Takala’s intervention into a disguised workshop for its employees shows how Takala's ambiguous identity can also work smoothly within such realm. After all, such identity can be seen as one of the key components in the contemporary post-Fordist labor that rests on flexibility, precariousness, and constant self-improvement. As curator and art theorist Marion von Osten (2011) puts it, post-Fordism is not a disciplinary regime that guides the subject's actions, but rather a set of governing practices that mobilize and encourage rather than “survey and punish.” The new subject of work should apparently be as contingent and flexible as the “markets.” A work subject who is able to find a productive relationship between work time and life time is “supported and challenged,” and within this relationship private activities are also geared toward economic use value. (von Osten, 2011, p. 55)

Going back to the awkward laughter that ends with an amused “ok,” it can be argued that its awkwardness is not merely an opening to something unexpected, but an act of dealing with challenges that workers have to be ready for in their precarious working conditions. In this respect, Takala’s mysterious presence was exactly what von Osten refers as *support and challenge*; that is, as something that increases one's readiness for flexibility not only in their individual work performances, but in all social interactions within the workplace. One’s presence becomes inseparable from the frame in which this presence appears; in this case, labor. If Takala cannot escape her own political presence, it is also impossible for her colleagues to escape such camouflaged workshop that permeates the workplace. Such workshop is not limited to any particular time or space: without a clear beginning nor an end, without a clearly defined site (e.g. a conference room), Takala’s presence *qua* workshop can take place anywhere and whenever. By standing in the elevator.
for a day, her presence *qua* support and challenge occupies the in-between spaces between formal sites of labor (different departments, offices, etc.), thus amalgamating all separate sites of work into an all-inclusive realm of productivity. Most importantly, these encounters take the form of everyday sociality that, besides the momentary feeling of weirdness, funniness, or scariness that Johanna Takala might embody, do not seem special in any way:

*Employee* (stepping into the elevator): You are always in the elevator
*Takala:* Yeah
*Employee:* You can’t get out of here?
*Takala:* I don’t want to get out. I’m having a very good thinking…
*Employee:* Yeah. Right. (laughs) So where are you from, you are Johanna. So you’ve just started to work with us.
*Takala:* Yeah, in the beginning of the month.
*Employee:* Where did you come from?
*Takala:* I’m a student, I’m like a trainee.
*Employee* (leaves the elevator): Ok. Welcome!
*Takala:* Thank you!
(Takala, 2008d)

Here, it is interesting to see how the ambiguousness of Takala’s non-identifiable actualization becomes dealt with: that is, how her awkward temporality and spatiality *qua* all-encompassing *challenge* and *support* is eventually assigned to its proper place. Takala’s unconventional presence in the elevator is immediately understood as an *inability* to get out, and when this is challenged by Takala herself, the amusement shifts to an attempt to understand her activity through identification (“So where are you from, you are Johanna. So you’ve just started to work with us”). Such identification works like what Rancière would call *policing*: identifying Takala's presence with a predetermined set of qualities that here, paradoxically, can be seen precisely as an example how “open-minded” and ready for
challenges” Deloitte’s employees really are. Like in the previous example, laughter provides a protective threshold between Takala’s “mystery” and the smooth function of everyday activities at the workplace: it secures the dynamics of power where the people who are being trained to face the precariousness of their labor (Deloitte’s employees) eventually always pass the test since the challenge that Takala’s presence evokes can be laughed off. Even retrospectively, laughter continues to soothe every possible tension that her awkward presence engenders in the spectator: according to Koistinen (2011), when The Trainee was presented at Deloitte’s spring event, the “reception was extremely cheerful” [“vastaanotto oli erittäin hilpeä”] (Koistinen, 2011, p. 14, translation mine). Thus, a laughter offers an effective counter-actualization qua identification that re-appropriates Takala’s dysfunctional behavior by assigning it a very specific function in the distribution of the social roles within the work community. After all, this short elevator discussion ends up with an affirmative “welcome” that, despite the perplexed opening line (“you are always in the elevator”), gives Takala a place in the community. This is interestingly reflected by Takala herself in Deloitte’s press release, where she states:

Everything that happened at Deloitte was strongly part of real life. I truly was Johanna Takala at the office. And I really was in the elevator for an entire day. A long-term intervention was tough to carry out, but correspondingly the reactions were stronger. People at Deloitte are strongly committed to the community and colleagues are taken care of in a wholly different way. (Takala as cited in Deloitte, 2009, paragraph 7, translation mine)


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As visible, Takala positions herself integrally part of the “real life” of Deloitte’s work community and, most importantly, describes the toughness of her work as a reciprocal experience that brings out the dedication within the community. Of course, one has to keep in mind that this statement appeared in Deloitte’s press release (a document that underlines Deloitte’s crucial role in The Trainee in the title “An artist infiltrated a sponsoring company”), which means Takala’s words have a strategic function in the cooperation between Takala and Deloitte. Nevertheless, this passage stands as an intriguing example of what I referred in the previous chapter as a compromised particularity: no matter what form does a particularity take, it eventually sustains the social frame in which it appears. From a Rancièrean perspective, the fundamental problem here is that one’s belonging to the community of work is not put in question but, on the contrary, the distribution of roles within that community is refined and adjusted to respond to the challenges that the community encounters. In other words, the stronger the reactions are, the deeper one’s the commitment to the community is, meaning that these reactions never really threaten the distribution of social relations within the community due to the inherently consensual function of toughness in Takala’s work.

Thus, the radicalness of Takala’s ambiguous presence can be seen to balance between two different openings that her presence evokes. On the hand hand, she installs a corrosive presence that, as such, disturbs the policed order of the workplace and on the other, she poses a productive challenge that serves as a camouflaged training for the post-Fordist workforce. Notably, both of these strategies rest on the process of actualization. While the former puts the naturalness of identification in question by actualizing something that is simultaneously
part and not part of the community, the latter actualizes a presence that challenges the implicit norms of the office by keeping the community on its toes (a fairly familiar strategy in today’s workplaces). Either way, Takala’s presence takes up a character that is akin to a slippery piece of soap; even if one has a hold on her identity, there is no genuine feeling of control. Artist and art theorists Hito Steyerl (2011) points to the inherent similarity between these two perspectives when she writes,

[w]hy and for whom is contemporary art so attractive? One guess: the production of art presents a mirror image of postdemocratic forms of hypercapitalism that look set to become the dominant political post-Cold War paradigm. It seems unpredictable, unaccountable, brilliant, mercurial, moody, guided by inspiration and genius. Just as any oligarch aspiring to dictatorship might want to see himself. (Steyerl, 2011, p. 32)

Steyerl’s strong words point not only to the difficult position that *The Trainee* occupies in terms of actualization and presence, but they can help to flesh out the intricacies of a radical actualization in relation to control. Here, it does not seem to suffice to radicalize actualization merely by residing to strategies that increase unpredictability and unclarity (*contra* rigid identities, subject positions, and taxonomies) for the simple reason that companies such as Deloitte base their whole business on *trying* to predict and analyze the capriciousness of global markets up to the point where, as von Osten’s passage above suggests, their work itself becomes “as contingent and flexible as the ‘markets.’” (von Osten, 2011, p. 55) The change that von Osten, drawing from Foucault, identifies as a shift in social control from the disciplinary to subjective practices means that flexibility disperses control into seemingly endless ways to occupy different identities and subject positions that exceed
the traditional divisions between the employer and the employees, or, as in the case of *The Trainee*, the artists and the material that she is working with (one good example of these new fluid identifications is the fact that Deloitte’s press release does not talk about *employees* or *workers*, but “experts” [asiantuntijat] when referring to the people who work there). In terms of control, if a radical actualization is to be understood through the Rancièrean subjectification *qua* disidentification, a “removal from the naturalness of a place,” (Rancière, 1999, p. 36) the control that one ought to disrupt has to be undermined not only by removing the demand for rigid identification, but the demand to participate in such processes. Here, it is important to underline that Rancière does not aim at fluidity, but, as Maria Muhle (2011) argues, he is interested in an “aesthetic realism” that is to be understood as “a negation or suspension of the classical hierarchies of representation,” (p. 114) meaning that structures of power are not simply replaced with non-structures (what Steyerl calls “unpredictable, unaccountable, brilliant, mercurial, moody, guided by inspiration and genius”) but they are rendered inoperative (at least momentarily) by a presence that has the potential to put participation in question.

To conclude, *The Trainee* offers an interesting milieu to theorize the relationship between a radical actualization and subjectification. It points to the precarious place between intelligibility and unintelligibility that a radical politics occupies when trying to unfold a *different* sociopolitical imagination than one finds from the first part of this study. Takala’s presence within the office seems to fall in both of these categories. She takes up a radical political presence that actualizes a non-identity *within* her predetermined identity (following
Rancière’s idea of dissensus as an event of actualization of two worlds in one). She also reinforces the existing ideological frame by embodying an uncertainty that traverses the contemporary labor and its dependence on a fluid participation. The liberating laughter that her colleagues and the company engaged in underlines the momentary nature of a radical presence that her inactivity makes possible.

From Rancière, one does not really find ways to sustain the political event that unfolds from a radical appearance of the part that has no part. After all, Rancière’s theorization is focused more on the very event of politics. By rejecting the existing categories of knowledge, his theory does not leave much room to conceptualize what takes place after the redistribution of the sensible. In this respect, the challenge that *The Trainee* poses to the theorization of a radical actualization is a temporal one: how to further elaborate the duration of political activity as a continuous corrosion of the existing order?

**The Trainee and a Radical Politics of Potentiality**

The logical starting point for the examination of *The Trainee* from the perspective of a radical politics of potentiality is Takala’s passage that I quoted earlier in this chapter, that of,

> [w]hat provokes people in non-doing alongside strangeness is the element of resistance. The non-doing person isn’t committed to any activity, so they have the potential for anything. It is non-doing that lacks a place in the general order of things, and thus it is a threat to order. It is easy to root out any on-going anti-order activity, but the potential for anything is a continual stimulus without a solution. (Takala, 2008a, paragraph 5)

As I pointed out shortly earlier, to see “non-doing” as a “potential for anything” bears striking similarities with Agamben’s Aristotelean understanding of potentiality as a state of
being that is fundamentally connected to impotentiality, that is, the ability to not pass into an actuality. Moreover, Takala’s claim that “it is easy to root out any on-going anti-order activity” can be seen as a nod to Agamben’s critique of always already actualized understanding of being that, going back to a passage I quoted in the first chapter, allows only a formation of identities and communities whose presence is exhausted by their actuality:

among beings who would always already be enacted, who would always already be this or that thing, this or that identity, and who would have entirely exhausted their power in these things and identities—among such beings there could not be any community but only coincidences and factual partitions. (Agamben, 2000, p. 10)

From this perspective, in order to examine how the entwinement of life and education, the relationship between the particular and the universal, and subjectification could be understood through the interplay between a radical politics of potentiality and *The Trainee*, these questions have to be located in the Agambenian problematics of potentiality and the challenge that it poses to presence, recognition, and participation. Conversely, I hope to shed light to some of the intricacies of Agambenian politics, whose radicalness should not be taken for granted. As Mills (2008) writes about the possible shortcomings of Agamben’s theorization, “rather than contributing to genuinely radical political theory, [Agamben’s] apparent radicalism passes into a kind of anti-political quietism.” (Mills, 2008, p. 137) This makes *The Trainee* an interesting point of reflection, since, as I have shown, it also occupies an unclear position between radicalness and social reproduction. If Agambenian politics of potentiality and *whatever* means that one infinitely postpones an exhausting actualization of
a recognized presence, what can the figure of Johanna Takala bring into this discussion with her ambivalent inactivity?

To be able to answer this question, it is useful to approach Takala’s inactivity indirectly, that is, by examining the activity that her presence engendered in the work community. Here, I would argue that the most striking resemblance between Melville’s Bartleby and *The Trainee* is found from these reactions rather than from similarities between Bartleby and Johanna Takala; after all, Melville’s short story is an exhaustive description of the frustration that Bartleby’s presence brings out in the narrator. One of the emails that Takala included in the documentation of her intervention gives a good idea of the frustration that she engendered:

Hi

Now the trainee has placed herself in the elevator closest to the cantine. She’s standing in the back corner drifting from floor to floor with the other users. People have spent a sensless amount of time speculating on this issue. Couldn’t we now get her out of here? Obviously she has some kind of mental problem.

I also informed Y about this.
(Takala, 2008d)

Here, Takala is described as someone who is “standing in the back corner” of the elevator, “drifting from floor to floor” as if she was unable to stop this activity, thus leading to accusations of “obvious” mental problems. Like in Bartleby, her coworkers have spent “sensless [sic.] amount of time” on trying to understand the reason for her inactivity; a reason that is never fully affirmed by Takala herself (strikingly, *thinking* does not seem to be a
sufficient reason for her actions). What I find interesting in this email is the image that it paints of Takala as a person who, in her passivity, is simply “drifting” and, because of that, someone who “we” can get rid of. Since she does not seem to be in control of herself, she is automatically subjected to two forms of power: the power of naming (activity that takes a “sensless [sic.] amount of time”) and the power of expulsion (activity that seems to resolve this problem by naming her as an outsider). Not only does this logic reinforce an understanding that a “mental problem” is like a demon that possesses one’s mind by taking the control of one’s agency, it also asserts that the lack of a clearly defined (actualized) presence within the community is a good reason to renounce the right to belong in it.

So, how would a radical politics of potentiality help to understand and trouble this kind of control, recognition, and governance that Takala’s presence evokes in the work community? Here, it is important to underline that the key to the Agambenian understanding of potentiality and his conceptualization of whatever is the ability to not do or be, which should be differentiated from the inability to do or be. Johanna Takala certainly was capable of work that she was expected to perform in the office; after all, she spent the first two and a half weeks acting according these expectations. This activity-centered time is what constitutes her initial recognition as a trainee and her initiation to the workplace. The crucial shift in her labor from office work to “brainwork” can be seen as an act of reclaiming the impotential side of her potentiality to be a trainee and act like one. Interestingly, this seems to intensify her presence: not only is she a trainee (one of the many), she is also a problem that should be solved. However, despite this shift, she remains as a trainee, a body whose
presence is marked by predetermined qualities that ought to actualize in specific ways, thus unfolding an uncanny middle ground between the two sides of potentiality. The bewilderment of her colleagues shows how quickly Takala’s impotentiality is re-signified as a failure and/or a sign of her mental state, but the acknowledgment that, regardless of its obviousness, this re-signification demands a “sensless [sic.] amount of time” shows how her presence retains an unnerving quality that does not lend itself to be fully exhausted by these accusations. Thus, by maintaining the potential to not do, Takala unfolds a deeply ingrained demand to do the opposite, that is, to always actualize one’s presence as someone who is clearly recognized and thereby a controlled part of the community; a cog in the machine. Her ambiguity gives rise to attempts to install a signifying closure by imposing a more accurate meaning on her that would both explain her acts as a failed trainee and give a solid reason to kick her out; a closure that Takala would not provide until the screening of the work to Deloitte’s employees (who, as mentioned above, were able to soothe their minds with cathartic laughter). In this respect, The Trainee succeeds in showing the amount of self-control, self-recognition, and self-governance that a minor disruption in the everyday work environment causes in the work community; a community where, in Takala’s words, “[p]eople … are strongly committed … and colleagues are taken care of in a wholly different way.” (Takala as cited in Deloitte, 2009, paragraph 7, translation mine)

It is important to note that the self-control, self-recognition, and self-governance do not emerge ex nihilo but are inseparable part of one’s identification with the work community; a notion that Agamben puts forward in his theorization of a sovereign power
and the State. Through their very presence, the workers are indebted to the company that
governs their belonging; they are responsible of doing their part for the great cause that keeps
them all together: in this case, productive labor. Takala’s explicit impotentiality makes it
seem that control, recognition, and governance, the essential components of the community,
do not have a totalizing power over her, thus turning her inactivity into an obscene gesture
that breaks the contract of belonging. From the perspective of a radical politics of
potentiality, the challenge that Takala’s inactivity poses to such demand to be recognized and
participate as a fully identified subject is that her non-doing has the capability to turn the
power of subjection against the subjecting power itself: the “sensless [sic.] amount of time”
that self-control, self-recognition, and self-governance took from her colleagues can be seen
merely as an intensification of the subtle forms of control, recognition, and governance that
are inseparable part of the sense of belonging to the office.

The question of recognition qua naming brings attention to the relationship between
Agamben’s political theory and his theory of language. In terms of the particular and the
universal, it is possible to notice that in order to function neatly, the acts of signification that
make singular beings appear in language (Johanna Takala = a trainee, Johanna Takala = a
crazy person) are dependent on the actualization of characteristics and skills that confirm
being’s belonging to a specific linguistic category that confirms its existence as something (i.e.
Takala is not only named as a trainee, but she herself performs tasks that one would expect
from one). However, as Agamben’s theory of potentiality asserts, one does not merely stop
being something (a trainee, in this case) the moment when they do not actualize their
potential to be acknowledged as this specific entity. For example, a musician remains as a musician even when s/he does not play; however, in order to be a musician and to be acknowledged as such, *one has to have the potential to play*. The moment when musician’s skills are actualized (in a concert, for example), a specific existence of this singular being becomes affirmed: s/he truly *is* a musician. Agamben’s turns this linguistic question into a political one by elaborating on the act of affirmation and its connection to subjectification. If a singular being (particular) and a concept that describes it (universal) become inseparable, and, notably, the act of signification is always dependent on an actualization of a specific set of qualities, a singular being becomes political only by meeting these predetermined categories that it is forced to actualize. In the case of *The Trainee*, subjectification should be understood as a full initiation to the work community, that is, a smooth conflation between presence and participation. Since Takala’s inactivity postpones such affirmation by being a trainee without acting out her potential to be recognized as such (like a musician who does not play), the power of signification over being is distracted and rejected.

For Agamben, at the center of both of the aforementioned figures (Johanna Takala as a trainee who does not seem to work and the musician who does not play) lies not a true essence to be found (a subject), but what he calls as a “linguistic being” or “being-called” that means

a class that both belongs and does not belong to itself …. Linguistic being (being-called) is a set (the tree) that is at the same time a singularity (*the* tree, *a* tree, *this* tree); and the mediation of meaning … cannot in any way fill the gap in which only the article succeeds in moving about freely. (Agamben, 1993, p. 9, original emphasis)
When putting this rather abstract thought in more concrete terms, it is worth pointing out that, according to Mills (2008), Agamben’s political thought is rooted in the idea of completion of humanity as being-in-language where language as such, not a specific concept (e.g. American, citizen, activist…), constitutes the human community. This means that rather than trying to suture the gap between a material essence and a linguistic existence by giving an increasingly detailed and/or complex definition for one’s belonging in a specific group, Agamben’s understanding of a linguistic being denotes a being whose linguistic existence is grasped as such. In The Trainee, the aporia of Johanna Takala is that her presence (being) is inseparable from her identity (concept), that is, her singular existence is conflated with her belonging to a specific linguistic group (the trainee), thus stabilizing her position as a particular within a universal frame. This, then, makes her appearance fundamentally compromised: she always already belongs to a signifying group that allows her colleagues to experience her presence as a presence of a concept (the trainee, the mad) without leaving room to question the signifying power of this concept as such.

In order to understand what a linguistic being means, Agamben sees that an example provides a manifestation of being that is “[n]either particular nor universal” since “the example is a singular object that presents itself as such, that shows its singularity.” (Agamben, 19993, p. 10, original emphasis). This is why

![Example](image-url)

[exemplary being is purely linguistic being. Exemplary is what is not defined by any property, except being-called. Not being-red, but being-called-red; not being-Jacob, but being-called-Jacob defines the example. Hence its ambiguity, just when one has decided to take it really seriously. Being-called—the property that establishes all possible belongings (being-called-Italian, -dog,
-Communist)–is also what can bring them all back radically in question. It is the Most Common that cuts off any real community. Hence the impotent omnivalence of whatever being. (p. 10, original emphasis)

Here, the whateverness of “being-called” uncouples being from a concept that signifies it, which situates being as such on ambiguous grounds. When such being is stripped of its exemplary status, it becomes merely a particular within a universal frame, leading to a governance of one’s identity. If one is to approach Johanna Takala as a whatever linguistic being, she would be understood as a being-called-trainee, a being-called-crazy which, notably, allows the impotential part of her being to unfold. After all, being-called is not the same thing as being something, where a life and the concept that signifies it are seen as isomorphic. Going back to Takala’s claim that “[t]he non-doing person isn’t committed to any activity, so they have the potential for anything,” the ambiguity of being-called has to be read precisely as a “potential for anything,” since, as Wall (1999) notes, “[w]hatever being is not a je ne sais quoi, an obscure quality no one can put their finger on. It is the thing with all its predicates that undefine and delimit it.” (Wall, 1999, p. 126, original emphasis) This brings forward a strategic connection between ambiguity and inactivity qua impotentiality: ambiguity and impotentiality are not simply goals that would resolve the problems that a demand of actualization engenders, but offer tools to postpone and play with “the thing with all its predicates,” that is, all potentialities (which are always also impotentialities) of life. Agamben makes clear that this does not mean that “anyone can do or be anything” which, for him, “is nothing but the reflection of the awareness that everyone is simply bending him- or herself according to this flexibility that is today the primary quality that the market
demands from each person.” (Agamben, 2010, pp. 44-45) Here, it is precisely the impotential side of potentiality that disrupts the neoliberal agenda that creates “the definitive confusion in our time between jobs and vocations, professional identities and social roles, each of which is impersonated by a walk-on actor whose arrogance is in inverse proportion to the instability and uncertainty of his or her performance.” (p. 44)

When further elaborating Takala’s ambiguous presence in terms of Agamben’s whatever being, it is possible to notice that like Johanna Takala, the whateverness in Agamben’s theorization is not a complete abstraction of one's identity into a completely undefinable entity (after all, Johanna Takala is a trainee), but an attempt to approach politics and subjectification between the particular and the universal and distract the dialectics between them. As Agamben writes, “[w]hateverness is the thing with all its properties, none of which, however, constitute difference,” (Agamben, 1993, p. 19, original emphasis) which means that the whatever denotes neither a universal sameness nor a particular existence that is constituted in difference, but a life that, like Takala’s presence, has the potential for both sameness and difference simultaneously (here, it is worth remembering Agamben’s example of the tree above). Her passage from a trainee to the trainee is not merely an actualization of specific qualities and activities (although these qualities are important), but a cumulation of attributes that initially postpone the stabilizing affirmation of her particularity as a trainee.

Here, Agambenian politicization of life stands in a diametrical opposition to a political subjectification that constitutes a subject position that allows participation in the community through an affiliation with a universal concept (citizen, human, etc.); a strategy
that inevitably constitutes limits for belonging and, subsequently, produces limit concepts like *homo sacer*. When a political subjectification becomes an act of *postponement* of exhaustive actualization in a radical politics of potentiality, political action is connected to its impotential side, thus losing its dependency on actualized qualities that mark the passage from mere existence to a political life.

This notion of postponement offers not only an interesting political strategy, but also an important perspective when examining the possible shortcomings of Agamben’s politics that, as Mills’ (2008) passage above suggest, can be also understood as “anti-political quietism.” After all, a postponement of any form of counter-actualization can be seen as a silent approval of the status quo. In *The Trainee*, Johanna Takala postpones her identification to the point where she acquires a new one, which, from the standpoint of a politics of radical potentiality, can be considered as an end of her political presence. This newly imposed identity (Takala = a crazy person) does not challenge the existing dynamics, but, on the contrary, reinforces the terms of belonging in the community. In short, her ambiguous presence between the particular and the universal is so precarious that it becomes immediately subjected to recognition, thus emptying it from its political force.

In order to complicate this problematic side of postponement via a radical politics of potentiality, I see that the question of Takala’s ambiguous whateverness should be opened to its spatial and temporal dimensions since it is not merely her ambiguous identity that creates a problem in the community, but her very physical *presence* that, most importantly, has a *duration* and a *context*. In spatial terms, Takala’s presence can be seen to change the affect of
space where she appears (the office, Tax and Legal, the elevator), and the time that she spends in these spaces is a crucial component of her intervention (e.g. a full day in the elevator, or at the Tax and Legal). As one of the voicemails that Takala included in The Trainee explains:

…I just wanted to say that your trainee has found a new place. So now she’s lodging in the elevator and… she’s standing in the elevator and… rides back and forth with people. I mean she doesn’t press the button herself, but just stands there in the corner. There’s such problems involved in here that I don’t want to go into the same elevator with her. So, she’s riding with the elevator back and forth. So try to get her out. Ok, Bye!
(Takala, 2008d)

Here, Takala’s intervention disrupts not only her own spatial and temporal order as a trainee (i.e. she should be working somewhere else), but confuses the milieu of the office and its temporal structure. It seems that this relatively minor harm in her colleague’s workday (having to see the same person in the elevator over and over again) becomes unbearable due to its spatial and temporal endurance: these repetitive encounters with her ambiguity intensify the frustration that she engenders to the point where the space itself becomes marked by this seemingly never-ending presence. The request to “try to get her out” (here, Takala’s translation does not grasp the tone of the Finnish phrase “koittakaas hoitaa se pois,” which more of a demand to get rid of her than a request to get her out) may seem absurd considering the fact that she does not do anything, but it is precisely the enduring non-doing that occupies space and time of doing that makes her presence something that should be avoided.

Notably, it was Takala’s role as an ersatz trainee and the benevolent governance of Deloitte that sustained her awkward presence, which means that the time and the space that her intervention occupied was institutionally secured. Moreover, this institutional
benevolence made it possible to turn her presence into an event that trained her colleagues to be more flexible and “open-minded” post-Fordist workers. However, it would be problematic to reduce her presence into an empty site of inscription, since her inactivity obviously corrupted the assumably shared space and time of the work community, leading to a forceful imposition of new meanings on her; meanings that she preferred not (to use Bartleby’s motto) to affirm.

It is worth concluding this inquiry on *The Trainee* with a few words on Agamben’s aesthetics and its relationship to a radical politics of potentiality. In *The Man Without Content* (1999a), Agamben draws reader’s attention to the nineteenth century French poet Lautréamont’s statement “les jugements sur la poésie ont plus de valeur que la poésie” that is, “judgments on poetry are worth more than poetry” (Agamben, 1999a, p. 38) when discussing the relationship between an artwork and aesthetic judgement. His claim is that for the “modern man,” the work of art is nothing but “a privileged occasion to exercise his critical taste;” (p. 41) a taste that is fundamentally grounded in negativity, that is, in the distinction between art and non-art. This is why

> [w]henever the critic encounters art, he brings it back to its opposite, dissolving it in non-art; whenever he exercises his reflection, he brings with him nonbeing and shadow, as though he had no other means to worship art than the celebration of a kind of black mass in honor of the *deus inversus*, the inverted god, of non-art. (p. 46)

The reason for this short excursus on Agamben’s aesthetics is that his critique of the inherent negativity of an aesthetic judgement offers an interesting point of reflection on Takala’s identification process and the politics of her inactivity. After all, in *The Trainee*, the
attempts to identify her as a trainee or as someone who has mental issues eventually exhaust themselves in their own negativity: by coming up with more identities, more diagnoses, and more judgements on Takala’s presence, she paradoxically becomes merely more opaque. This opaqueness is, then, intensified through her (institutionally governed) endurance that postpones the ultimate act of negation, that is, the seamless conflation of a singular life and a concept that both refers to it and does away with it. Thus, Johanna Takala is presented as a painful reminder of the “black mass” that grounds the closed relationship between recognition and presence: she is the “shadow” that makes identities appear as identities. As a trainee, Takala is present but does not fully participate in the taxonomic order that keeps the community together; the inactivity that she is preoccupied with is neither fully exhausted by meaning nor a totally empty gesture. In terms of linguistic being qua whatever, such postponement of a totalizing union between a singular life and a signifying concept may open up a possibility to imagine being and language beyond the dialectics between the particular and the universal. However, this also turns her singular existence precarious in the face of the power of signification. By doing nothing, Takala embodies the seeming non-eventfulness that governs the everyday work milieu, which is, nevertheless, full of practices that govern one’s belonging and recognition. As it is visible from the documentation that Takala included in *The Trainee*, these practices of governance are at least as enduring as her precarious presence. This can be seen as the ultimate challenge for a radical politics of potentiality: if for actualized subject positions, endurance derives from the signifying act that
sutures the gap between a singular being and a universal concept, what constitutes endurance of whateverness for a politics of potentiality?

**Conclusion**

When situating these two readings of Pilvi Takala’s *The Trainee* in the general context of this research, one notices that the temporal aspect of the question *what does it mean to act politically* becomes increasingly important and one of the central challenges for a radical politics that abandons preconceived notions of subjectification. In terms of a radical politics of actualization, the question of temporality unfolds the question of the *eventness* of actualization: how could a radical presence be understood as an event where actualization has a duration beyond mere an ephemeral appearance? When it comes to a radical politics of potentiality, the question of temporality helps to elaborate potentiality from the standpoint of the endurance of a whatever presence: what does it mean to think politics as a postponement of actualization of a being-as-concept that, inevitably, would mean an indeterminate endurance of whateverness?

In *The Trainee*, the ambiguousness of Takala’s minor interventions, were they conceptualized from the standpoint of a radical actualization or potentiality, brings about events that have multiple overlapping temporalities. Firstly, the moments when Johanna Takala appears (and simultaneously disappears) as a trainee cause ephemeral ruptures in the everyday life of the office; ruptures that, as visible from the examples, are often laughed off. These moments do not have a continuation nor a future *per se*; they simply exist as peculiar
encounters within the social fabric of the office. Secondly, the repetitive nature of these minor events constitute an unnerving causality and a fear of future encounters with her. This repetitiveness marks particular spaces with her inactive temporality (the elevator, Tax and Legal), thus also interfering with the spatial order of the workplace. When her colleague refers to the intervention in the elevator by stating that “your trainee has found a new place,” the newness of this place requires that her previous actions serve as disquieting reminders that what has happened before may happen again if she is continues to be present in the office. Here, the futurity of her presence is so unbearable that its discontinuation is made someone else's problem (“So try to get her out.”). Thirdly, Deloitte’s willingness to partake in Takala’s project and their praising words about the work connect the moments of confusion that Johanna Takala’s presence evoked to the temporality of a post-Fordist labor where the fast-paced decision making means “open-minded and innovative practices and … ability to throw [oneself] into new situations.” (Deloitte, 2009, paragraph 9, translation mine). Here, the diabolic futurity that makes encounters with her unbearable turns into a thrilling game: her presence is still a problem, but the act of solving this problem is welcomed with an excitement that stems from Takala’s uncertainty and unpredictability (“throwing oneself into new situations”). Thus, the momentary disruptions that Takala engenders become tied to the precarious temporality of “innovative practices” that, on the one hand, are dependent on continuous flow of challenges and, on the other hand, treat these challenges in the same way as Agamben sees the work of an art critic: as “a privileged occasion to exercise his critical taste” (Agamben, 1999a, p. 41) that eventually does away with the challenge itself.
All of these three (highly interconnected) conceptualizations of time in *The Trainee*, that of, the event, causality, and a precarious time, point to the intricacies of duration and endurance in a radical politics of actualization and potentiality. Going back to the two questions I posed above, how could a radical presence be understood as an event where actualization has a duration beyond mere appearance and what does it mean to think politics as a postponement of actualization *qua* an indeterminate endurance of whateverness, it is not possible to give a conclusive argument for or against the continuation of a radical appearance (in Rancièrean sense) or disappearance (in Agambenian sense) in *The Trainee*. After all, both Takala’s ephemerality and permanence created disruptive milieus, but also allowed totalizing closures to appear, were they in the form of cathartic laughter, imposition of a new identity, or requests to physically remove her from sight.

Here, it is worth reminding about the obvious fact: *The Trainee* is, indeed, an artwork and thus should be approached as such. As I stated in the beginning of this chapter, my intention is not to assign *The Trainee* an exemplary status of either a radical politics of actualization or potentiality, but, rather, read my political theorization against Takala’s inactivity and the activity that it evoked. This is why I am fundamentally hesitant to give either revolutionary or reactionary significance to *The Trainee*. This does not mean, however, that Takala’s intervention would have no impact or significance whatsoever. I see that her acts help to unfold an inherently precarious existence that a rejection of universalist conceptualizations of political subjectification brings about for the very reason that *it is art*. After all, the three temporalities above are institutionally governed and secured not only by
Takala’s status as an artist, but Deloitte’s and Kiasma’s contribution to the project as providers of her duration and endurance. It is this governed frame where I see that the art of The Trainee is located. Since art is the spectral remainder of these scenes, that is, the impetus and the outcome of Takala’s intervention, it both allows her ambiguous presence to unfold (art as a strategy of a disruptive camouflage) and, retrospectively, fixes the meaning of the experience of ambiguousness as art (Johanna Takala was just an artwork, an actor in a candid camera).16

From an analytical perspective, The Trainee as an artwork helps to unfold aesthetics questions that relate to a radical politics of actualization and potentiality by drawing one’s attention to Takala’s bodily presence within a time and space that is governed by a distribution of names, locations, temporalities, and movements. From Rancière’s perspective, her actualization as a non-identity within a predetermined identity allows an emergence of a nonrelation between her presence and subject position, thus “putting two worlds in one and the same world,” (Rancière, 2004, p. 304) and opening dissensus to its aesthetic dimensions. As Rancière argues, “[p]olitics and art, like forms of knowledge, construct ‘fictions’, that is to say material rearrangements of signs and images, relationships between what is seen and what is said, between what is done and what can be done,” (Rancière, 2012, p. 39, original emphasis) which in Takala’s case is manifested in the tension between her presence and participation in the work community. In Agambenian terms, by dwelling on her

16 Of course, it is worth keeping in mind that contemporary art has a reputation of being ambiguous. In 2008, the year that The Trainee was produced, Kiasma celebrated its ten year anniversary with the slogan “I don’t quite get it” (“En ihan ymmärrä”), which can be read as an affirmation of the old joke if I don’t get it, it’s art; a joke that strips the moment of not-knowing from all of its unnerving characteristics.
impotentiality, Takala uncouples her appearance from her being, thus troubling the negative grounds of signification that constitute her belonging in the office. For Agamben, it is not what her ambivalence represents or does not represent; rather, it is the possibility to grasp the limits of representation within language itself (thus not outside of it). While writing about the difference between Derrida’s deconstructive approach and Agamben, Mills (2008) points out that “Derrida misdiagnoses the problem of metaphysics, in Agamben’s view, since its origins lie not merely in the division of presence/absence, sensible/intelligible, or signifier/signified. Instead, the key moment is the point of articulation and division itself.” (Mills, 2008, p. 45) In The Trainee, I see that Johanna Takala helps to approach the political implications of this middle ground where both language and being are at stake as such.

From the standpoint of art and aesthetics, the aporia of temporality that I noted above takes us back to the question of appearance and presence: the appearance and presence of a singular life; the appearance and presence of life in politics; the appearance and presence of political acts. Notably, Takala’s intervention qua art limits the discussion of temporality in moments of art’s making and viewing. For art education, this is not sufficient perspective, since education can be seen to have quite different temporality than artistic practices. This is not to say that there would be a clear division between artistic and educational acts: on the contrary, since art education can be seen to function in-between art and education, it is important to theorize its politics within the space that limits both of them.

In the next chapter, I further elaborate the temporal dimensions of the question what does it mean to act politically and the examine the possible radical temporalities of a radical
politics of actualization and potentiality from the perspective of learning. I am interested in seeing how could Rancièrean and Agambenian perspectives trouble the linear narrative of education (where the past denotes non-knowledge and the future denotes knowledge) and help focus the attention to the very event of education *qua* subjectification. After all, if one is to abandon politics of art education that is based on the actualization of subject positions like a “fully developed individual” or a “critical participant,” the focus of political theorization shifts from future objectives to the intricacies of the present (just like Takala’s presence). This does not mean a total denial of the future, but a *different* relation to it.
Chapter 5: Taking Place of Learning: Toward a Radical Politicization of Art Education

The original task of a genuine revolution … is never merely to 'change the world', but also – and above all – to 'change time'. (Agamben, 2007, p. 99)

We do not want new works of art or thought; we don’t want another epoch of culture and society: what we want is to save the epoch and society from their wandering tradition, to grasp the good—undefferable and non-epochal—which was contained in them. The undertaking of this task would be the only ethics, the only politics which measures up to the moment. (Agamben, 1995, p. 88)

Since The Trainee left us with the question of time and duration, the task of this penultimate chapter is to articulate the underlying critical edge of my theorization, that of, the critique of subjectification *qua* a predetermined passage from potentiality to actuality, in *temporal* terms; a perspective that, as discussed in the introduction, is already present in my guiding question *what does it mean to act politically?* Indeed, the whole problematic that I have articulated in Part I (chapters 1, 2, and 3), that of, the desire to establish fixed points of completion that guide the narrative of politics (e.g. a fully developed individual, a critical eye) is dependent on a temporal structure that brings about *a* past, *a* present, and *a* future; all of which are understood to be in a causal relationship with each other. A call for a full actualization of a human potential is grounded not only in what it requires to become a fully developed individual, but also in an idea that *such actualization will take place*.
Throughout Part I, I discussed what such logic of subjectification means in terms of political theorization in art education: by securing the fundamental right for the actualization of one’s potential (chapter 1), defining human life in terms of it (chapter 2) and particularizing its universal telos (chapter 3), art educators connect the appearance (and disappearance) of a politicized subject to a linear narrative. In other words, the process of subjectification has a beginning and an end, the former denoting a state of not yet (not yet a fully developed individual, not yet affected by education) and the latter standing for a completed image of a learned subject. Here, art education controls the passageway between these two points, thus making itself responsible for the time spent on the transition from non-knowledge to knowledge, from a not-yet-subject to a fully developed one.

Notably, one does not really find any political theorization of time in art education literature. Identities are constructed, subjectivities problematized, and individualities developed, but these processes are often discussed only in terms of their desired or not-so-desired outcomes. This leads to a curious situation: art education erases its own duration through a temporal narrative that secures its societal function.

In order to abandon this self-annihilating logic of social relevancy, the question *what does it mean to act politically* has to be opened to its full temporal dimensions: what does it mean to imagine politics as an act during which thought takes up another (not new) form, another (not new) life? My discussion on *The Trainee* in the previous chapter already pointed

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to this direction: Johanna Takala’s ambiguous presence at the office was not merely an act of affirmation or negation, both of which denote a point of completion, but also a postponement and a corrosion of a completed image of her identity. In Takala’s case, it was the very duration of her ambiguity that made a difference in the work community, not a replacement of one truth with another. This, indeed, opens up another perspective on political action; a perspective that is not dependent on the logic of completion that turns the very event of politics only into a vanishing presupposition of the future, but opens politics to its very presence, to the temporalities of the change that it ought to bring.

If Takala’s intervention helps to unfold the question of temporality in the intersection of contemporary art and political action, how can one apply these observations to education? It is here where the somewhat overlapping relationship between subjectification and learning needs to be fully articulated; a relationship that the previous chapters have implicitly alluded to. Even though learning is easily situated within the temporal confines of formal education (one can think of everything from a single discussion to a class session, a course, a semester, an academic year, an entire degree…), it shares similar temporal intricacies with the more abstract idea of subjectification. In fact, the difference that learning brings to one’s life offers an interesting parallel to politics as an act during which the existing order changes to something else. If learning could be understood as an event of transformation that has a duration separate from a linear progression between a beginning and an end, the approach to education as a collection of learning objectives, efficient learning strategies, and predetermined begins to crumble.
Here, my intention is not to examine how long might subjectification take. Rather, I am interested in examining duration as such, that is, its interesting status as a necessary but neglected precondition for learning and subjectification. Since in Western cultures, it is quite common to understand time as a linear progression that is segmented into events that have a beginning and an end, to uncouple duration from these two points runs easily against a temporal logic that most people are accustomed to. Rather than trying to articulate a totally different conceptualization of time for art education and its politics, I am interested in seeing what does it mean for political theorization in art education to pay attention to time; to the durative event of politics and learning. Indeed, if corrosion, rather than construction, is seen as the *modus operandi* of a radical politics of actualization and potentiality, it is important to articulate how does a corrosive presence (such as Takala’s) affect both the narrative of politics and learning and the temporal organization of political and educational acts. In short, what would it mean to focus on the very *eventness* of politics and education?

Interestingly, both Rancière and Agamben have explicitly troubled the notion of a chronological and linear time in their political theorization. Such critique is present in Rancière’s conceptualization of *disidentification* and Agamben’s writings on *whatever singularities*: whereas the former creates a fracture in the repetitive inscription of the predetermined social identities and subject positions (*disidentification as discontinuation*), the latter troubles the progressive time of subjectification by uncoupling a political agency from actualization, thus disrupting the linearity between potentiality and actuality. In other words, both Rancière and Agamben imagine temporalities of politics without a totalizing closure,
without an end that would complete a telos. This does not affect only the way that the future is imagined: the past also becomes understood differently. By rejecting all pre-constituted images of political subjectivity, that is, images that offer simultaneously a starting point and a point of completion for political action, Rancière and Agamben point to the very event of politics, thus making the difference that politics constitutes fundamentally “non-epochal” (to use Agamben’s term from the epigraph), that is, it exceeds the dialectics between the past and the future. Notably, due to its non-epochal character, such radical politics does not offer anything new that would serve as a secured point of negation, but unfolds (in different ways depending whether one follows Rancière or Agamben) another kind of relationship to what already exists.

The first part of this chapter offers an attempt to constitute a theoretical shift from thinking politics of art education through an annihilating teleology to the immanence of its eventness. Since the previous chapter examined this topic in terms of contemporary art and politics, this chapter focuses specifically on education and learning. First, I take a closer look on how to approach learning through the notion of duration by theorizing learning’s taking place, the durative event of transformation from one thought to another. Then, in order to further elaborate the connection between learning and a radical politics of actualization and potentiality, I revisit The Trainee and discuss Johanna Takala’s presence at Deloitte in terms of education: what would it mean to situate Takala within the dynamics between students and the teacher? Finally, I offer a close reading of Rancière’s and Agamben’s
conceptualization of time, which constitutes the theoretical point of reflection for my suggestions for further political theorization in art education.

**Temporalities of *Taking Place***

Before starting my analysis on learning, it is worth making clear that due to the philosophical focus of this research, learning will not be discussed as a cognitive activity, but as an event that I call *taking place* of education, that is, the transformation of one thought to another. After all, whether education is understood as monologic, dialogic, constructivist, or positivist activity, it always brings out an event: *something ought to happen*; something that, in temporal terms, can seen to divide time between the past and the future. From this perspective, the *taking place* of learning operates on the threshold between what is and what could be; it can affirm what already exists and/or unfold something that does not exist yet. This *taking place* is, then, not only a liminal *space* between two existences, but the time that it takes to unfold this space; the time that it takes to *be* in-between.

As it can be deduced from my reading of *The Trainee* in the previous chapter, such liminal position between *what is* and *what does not exist yet* is deeply precarious and subjected to attempts to establish a fixed causal relation between these two temporal locations. Of course, the willingness to establish such relation is rooted in predictability: the transformation that learning brings up should be predictable. Such predicability constructs a spatio-temporal narrative of education as a progression from one phase/step/epoch to another, thus separating the past, the present, and the future into a set of clearly delineated
existences. If education does not divide time in this way, it is easy to claim that no learning took place: either the student remains the same (i.e. continues to live in the past, in the same developmental stage) or s/he does not change enough (i.e. s/he carries an awkward remnant of the past, did not fully learn the lesson, a C- student). In both cases, the taking place of learning is measured only in terms of its outcomes: the present actions make sense only when they are put to the test of a prefabricated future.

This is the underlying logic that constitutes the temporality of a linear progression that guides the strategies of subjectification that I discussed in the first part of this study. A predetermined future (e.g. learning objectives) require that the taking place of learning is preceded with a prototype that exists before the event of education and guides the very process of learning from the beginning to its end. As alluded in chapter 1, the notion of a “fully developed individual” can be considered as such prototype: it stands not only as the desired outcome of learning qua subjectification, but it also precedes the very event of subjectification by denoting the fundamental quality of human life that subjectification ought to actualize. Following this logic, education as a pedagogical taking place remains in the temporal zero point between what already is and what will be. It is reduced to an act of problem-solving that, initially, merely secures the continuation of what has already taken place. As a temporal zero point, education does not have a temporality of its own: it becomes spatialized and turned into a doorway through which one must enter in order to gain political subjectivity.
However, predetermination is not the only way to conceptualize the *taking place* of learning. Going back to the idea that learning can unfold something that does not yet exist, *taking place* also denotes activity where the outcome of learning, like Takala’s identification, remains *yet to come*. From this perspective, the event of learning and its *taking place* is opened to the temporal dimensions beyond linear continuity. Most importantly, this means that learning is understood as a process that has a duration: not merely denoting an empty threshold between what has been and what will be, it is an event *during which* knowledge is brought into existence. Learning becomes, then, indeterminable by taxonomic classification that is dependent on a dialectical relationship between the past and the future. In short, education *might do something*, or it *might to do something else*.

Here, it is worth noting that a *lifelong learning*, a fairly common trope in the contemporary educational parlance, can also be understood as a strategy that troubles the limited time and space that a formal education assigns to learning. However, I see that a lifelong learning has grave limitations when it comes to the critique of subjectification through education. To see education as a lifelong process simply inverts the logic of the temporal limitations without putting learning *as such* in question. In terms of potentiality and impotentiality, the lifelong duration of learning means that there is no room to exercise one’s potential to uncouple the social presence from the productive requirements of learning *qua* subjectification. As argued in chapter 3, when students’ lives are dependent on the knowledge and skills that (art) education offers them, the lack of (art) education becomes equated with the lack of a full subjectivity, thus transforming the ability not to be/do into
mere incapability. Then, life becomes a pedagogical project that is structured around the endless assertions of one's capability to learn, that is, the capability to pass through the series of doorways that divide the past from the present. By focusing on the durative *taking place* rather than on an endless confirmation of subjectivity through learning, I see that it is possible to uncouple *life* from *learning* and to imagine the relation between them in terms of corrosion rather than construction.

When trying to concretize the notion of a corrosive *taking place* of learning in art education, one possible starting point would be to think the art curriculum itself; that is, what would a corrosive curriculum look like. Despite that the content of art classes often occupies a central position in art education research, one of the by-products of the focus on temporality is that the content of art curricula becomes a secondary concern; a perspective that, at first, seems extremely problematic. For example, the tendency in the Western art history to focus on the dead White male artists has had its effects in ways that art is being understood in education; effects that have excluded artists and artistic practices from the hegemonic definitions of art.

Thus, it is important to make clear that uncoupling learning from a linear continuity does not mean that one should simply become ignorant of the outcomes of education. Rather, the aim is to constitute a different relationship to the narrative of learning itself. In terms of the example above, the initial problem is not only that a certain kind of understanding of art is preferred, but that learning about the *dead White men* is considered to be an inseparable part of learning about art, and, subsequently, subjectification through art.
However, drawing from chapter 3, the exact same thing can be said about an art history curriculum that does break away from this tradition in the name of more particularized processes of subjectification, since in both cases, the event of learning always remains in the shadows of the assumed outcomes of the curricular content. In short, if learning is always considered as a passageway from a potentiality to an actuality, criticizing education simply on the level of content does not trouble the ontologies of learning or its politics.

Thus, from the perspective of a corrosive taking place of learning, a decision between a conservative, a progressive, or any other kind of art history is based on a false dichotomy as long as it remains as a question that marks the preferred actualization of a full subjectivity through art education. By trying to articulate a different relation to learning through the focus on temporality, I wish to overcome the problems that I discussed in chapters 2 and 3, namely that bringing the content of art curriculum closer to students' lives has only refined students' dependency on the knowledge and skills that art education offers as prerequisites for subjectification. Most importantly, such dependency initially does away with the very event of education's taking place since the content that guards subjectification constitutes both a need and an outcome of learning, thus reducing it into an empty passageway between what already is and what will be.

Here, it is worth saying something about the current educational climate in the United States, since it provides an important backdrop against which my theorization should be read. One of the most pervasive examples of emptying out the event of learning is the ethos that considers standardized testing as the only objective measurement of what has taken...
place in the classrooms. In the face of the pressures to adapt one’s teaching to such standards, the call for a Bartlebyian gesture of preferring not to seems like (and most likely is) a professional suicide. After all, just like during the Great Depression discussed in chapter 2, the educational climate demands feasible reasons to support the art programs as part of the public schooling system.

For the inquiry of temporal dimensions of learning, standardized testing offers a point of reflection that unfolds the nihilistic features of a subjectification that is dependent on an actualized knowledge. After all, standardization requires that the inherently empty event of learning, that is, the threshold between knowledge and ignorance, is turned productive. The standard itself is this threshold: there is no duration between a right and a wrong answer, only a passageway that one either moves through or not. This is why not responding and leaving the answer indeterminate is also considered a wrong answer: only an actualization of the predetermined choice suffices to bring out the required closure that sustains not only the existence of the standard, but also the subject that it marks (both as a learned and a non-learned subject). Just like the image of a fully developed individual preexists the education that produces such individuals, the right answer exists before the student takes the test, actualizing its rightness only when learning is identical with the answer. What makes this logic nihilistic is that the threshold itself does not have any content but still manages to divide its subjects to students who meet the required standards and those who do not.
Thus, in terms of subjectification, it is possible to note that a standardized testing merely makes explicit the underlying logic of all education that rests on the production of educated subjects. This is why the critique of standardized testing from the perspective of future actualization of a human potential (i.e. to say that it cannot measure all aspects of human growth) is most likely to get stuck with the same logic it tries to negate. When subjectification becomes a question of an acquired knowledge that actualizes student’s potential for social agency, the very event of learning is diminished into a nothingness that nevertheless marks one’s passage from ignorance to knowledge. Within such pedagogical parameters, were they standardized or not, there is no room for a Bartlebyian inactivity, that is, to not actualize one’s learning: there is simply no time for that. If, however, time is being made, like in Johanna Takala’s case, the whole system of production is put in peril: the non-durative nothingness becomes durative, its potential to produce is uncoupled from the prototype, and its teleology is rendered inoperative.

To sum up thus far, a corrosive taking place of learning unfolds a durative time of transformation. Having neither a clear point of origin nor a fixed point of completion, a corrosive learning takes place within the durative present time, embracing all of its potentialities. This means that such learning corrodes the temporally annihilated point zero between a predetermined past and a future that secures the continuation of what already is. It troubles the prototypes of subjectification that simultaneously constitute the predetermined need for education and denote its outcomes by staying within the causality that ought to mark the passageway from the past to the future.
Notably, corroding the causal logic of a linear temporality does not mean that suddenly everything is possible; that educators and/or students could do anything they want since there are no future consequences to hold them back. Keeping in mind Agamben’s notion of impotentiality, the point is rather to uncouple the knowledge and skills acquired in learning from the predetermined actualizations, thus allowing the impotential side of potentiality to emerge. In Rancièrean terms, this means that learning is not seen as a process that helps the learner to adjust and adapt to the preexisting social categories and norms, but it becomes an event of disidentification from all forms of predetermination. For Agamben, the impotential modality of learning unfolds an education that is not targeted toward an actualization of knowledge and skills that tie students’ subjectification to a sovereign power.

Thus far, I have discussed education in general terms, which has left the dynamics between learning and teaching, and, subsequently, the student and the teacher unclear; dynamics that are quite central for the educational theory. In this respect, it is important to examine what does a corrosive *taking place* of learning mean for the pedagogical relationship between students and the teacher. In order to unpack this problematic, I return to *The Trainee* and conceptually relocate Takala’s intervention from contemporary art to the realm of education.

**Corrosive Education: Johanna Takala Revisited**

Indeed, what would it meant to situate Johanna Takala’s actions in an educational context? At Deloitte, was Takala a teacher or a student? There are two possible shortcomings
that one encounters when trying to identify her as a student or a teacher. Firstly, it would be counterproductive in terms of my theorization to assign Takala a stable identity of a teacher or a student, since both radical actualization and radical potentiality are strategies of resisting fixed identification. Secondly, learning and teaching are not solely tied to the predetermined subject positions and dynamics between such positions (i.e. a student learns and a teacher teaches), since teaching can also be seen to involve learning and vice versa. However, instead of trying to fit Takala or my theorization within such taxonomic confinements, I am interested in seeing how does a shift in focus from learning to teaching help to further elaborate my understanding of a radical politics of actualization and potentiality as pedagogical concepts. Whereas the previous chapter helped to point to the temporal dimension of a political act by unfolding the question what does it mean to imagine politics as an act during which a transformation takes place, the following discussion on the educational modalities of The Trainee hopefully expands on the temporal dimensions of learning and teaching as corrosive events of taking place.

Luckily, to see Johanna Takala as a student does not require much conceptual adaptation. After all, the title of the work, The Trainee, implies a pedagogical relation between her and the work community where she is positioned as the subject who ought to learn from the everyday activities of the office. In case of Johanna Takala, her identity as a trainee, that is, as someone who is being trained to become like one of Deloitte’s “experts” (as Deloitte’s press release refers to their employees) puts her in an educational position of not yet: she has a potential to become an expert, but this potential needs to be actualized through
learning within the work community. Notably, this position of *not yet* locates her behind the threshold that divides learning from non-learning. In order to pass through this threshold, she would have to meet the explicit and implicit norms of the work environment.

To see learning from the perspective of *not yet* makes it a process of adaptation: it is a process where the trainee adapts to the pace of the work community during the training period, thus becoming one of the many employees at the office. In terms of the particular and the universal, this means that the particular secures its belonging to the universal frame as a part of the whole. In short, subject’s particularity becomes governed by its belonging to the group.

However, after the first two and a half weeks when Takala halted her adaptation, she became particularized precisely because her learning was no longer congruent with the temporality of the office. In short, she was not like others *anymore*, neither was she like what she *used to be*. Instead of gaining a recognized presence within the work community through a successful learning *qua* adaptation, she became a *bad student* whose awkwardness was always her fault (e.g. mental issues, an inability to leave the elevator). Notably, this identification simply could not be about the training she received since the work community was already on the *right* side of the threshold that she had to pass in order to demonstrate her learning.

From the perspective a corrosive *taking place*, however, her identity as *not yet* becomes understood as *yet to come*: a seemingly small change that, nevertheless, disrupts the causal logic of learning as a passageway from the past potentialities to future actualizations. Her
presence as a durative taking place of learning is, then, a temporality of a student who never arrives to the other side of the threshold that marks one's subject position as a someone who has learned something; a student whose seeming ignorance puts her into a limbo where no progress seems to take place.

Here, it is not only an identification that Takala postpones, but a subjectification qua actualization of learning that adapts her presence to the work community and completes her seemingly lacking knowledge. As a corrosive learner, she embodies the durative taking place of learning, which makes her learning qua “brainwork” break the expected narrative of progression. The awkwardness that Takala’s presence engenders shows how a linear structure of learning simply cannot bear the duration of learning’s taking place. In linear confinements, learning has to stay as a non-durational threshold, since it is the only way to secure a direct causality of education; that teaching x will eventually lead to y. Since Takala’s (in)actions are devoid of any clear reason or directly actualized outcomes (e.g. her day at the elevator), she renders her own education inoperative while still retaining the potentiality to learn.

Thus, by halting the actualization of predetermined outcomes of learning, Johanna Takala’s presence opens up the durative taking place of her training. Despite that her refusal to meet the norms of the work community makes her a bad student (in fact, so bad that she is wanted out from the office qua classroom), her failure does not render her agency inoperative: just like Bartleby’s employer, the office seems toothless in the face of her.

In this respect, her learning can be considered corrosive: by not providing any actualized proof of learning, she halts the movement through the threshold that separates
knowledge from ignorance and skills from incompetence; an act that puts her linearity of subjectification *qua* learning in question. This allows learning to *take place* without simultaneously doing away with itself when reaching its goals (e.g. knowledge, skills, subjectification).

It is also possible to see Takala’s distracting presence as a pedagogical intervention: after all, as discussed in the previous chapter, her presence can be seen to offer a disguised workshop for a post-Fordist workforce; an understanding that is further corroborated by Deloitte's side of the story. So, if Takala’s learning can be understood as corrosive, what would this mean to her pedagogy? What kind of *training* does she give to the work community and how could it be understood as corrosive?

When discussing Takala’s (in)activity as a pedagogical intervention, it is worth rereading Deloitte’s press release, especially the passage where the CEO of Deloitte Finland, Teppo Rantanen, discusses *The Trainee*. To remind, for him the fact that Deloitte sponsored Takala’s work “reflects [Deloitte’s] open-minded and innovative practices and our ability to throw ourselves into new situations.” (Deloitte, 2009, paragraph 9) From this perspective, Takala’s awkward presence engendered a pedagogical space where the ability to *throw oneself into new situations* became tested: her colleagues *qua* students were presented with a challenge that they ought to solve. Interestingly, this leaves out Takala's side of the story, that of, the silent hostility that she was repetitively subjected to. In a pedagogical narrative where the event of learning is reduced to a non-durative threshold, the work of a teacher becomes understood in similar terms: as a teacher, Takala is merely an *input* to the work community,
which means that the outcomes of her presence weight more than her presence as such. The fact that Deloitte can count the hostility that emanates from the documentation of Takala's month at the office as “open-minded and innovative practices” that demonstrate Johanna Takala’s colleagues’ “ability to throw [themselves] into new situations” is an example of the deep cynicism that their idea of education is based on: the goals of a productive education are to be attained by whatever means necessary.

In this respect, it is important to examine Takala’s role as a teacher not through the assumed outcomes of her pedagogy, but from the perspective of a taking place of education; that is, by taking account on the durative event where the lesson she gives is always forming. Indeed, her uncanny presence qua a postponement of a full identification can be considered as a lesson that is too long for her colleagues: she never really offers a pedagogical closure (i.e. valid reason for her actions) but, like Bartleby, merely postpones an affirmation of knowledge. This pedagogy of postponement brings about a temporality that creates anxiety among her colleagues qua students because, as one of the emails put it, “[p]eople have spent a sensless [sic] amount of time speculating on this issue.” In other words, Takala’s pedagogy forces to engage in learning that does not do away with itself after the lesson is over, which makes the lesson qua awkward presence seem endless (hence the request to remove her, to stop this endless presence). The elusive term “brainwork” that Takala uses to explain her (in)actions stands for a manifestation of such infinity: it never really actualizes as a completed thought that can be represented in PowerPoints or reports, thus not allowing a linear transference of knowledge to appear. Rather, her “brainwork” is a curricular component that
engages Takala’s students in the temporality of yet to come, which, as such, is “sensless” [sic] to them.

Eventually, the frustration that Johanna Takala’s colleagues encountered turned into a collectively produced knowledge: she was identified simply as mad, scary, or weird. These pieces of knowledge do away with the infinite lesson that Takala’s presence offers to Deloitte’s employees by connecting her presence to the linear and predicable temporality of the office. Here, Takala’s infinite and nondeterminate pedagogy was confronted with actions that offer immediate and determinate results: for example, Takala’s physical removal from the elevator. These counteractions departmentalized encounters with Takala by rationalizing her actions and, subsequently, dismantled her pedagogical power. Labeling her as mad was an act of such dismantlement par excellence: her madness means that she is not fully in control of herself, which reverses the dynamics between the learners and the teacher. In other words, her colleagues qua students took the charge of the pedagogical event and turned her lesson into a hindrance that can be dealt with since everybody except Johanna Takala herself knew what needed to be done.

How to put this agency that her colleagues qua students acquired, an agency that made them pick up the phone and do something about her disrupting presence, in terms of a corrosive taking place of learning? The actions against Takala’s presence not only secured the smooth function of the work community, but also point to the logic that ties learning to a set of predetermined actualizations. In Takala’s case, the postponement of an actualized knowledge meant that her durative lessons did not promise anything nor did they offer useful
knowledge that could be put in practice in the community. As discussed in chapters 2 and 3, the question of usefulness has close ties to the notion of a student agency: a knowledge that has nothing to do with students' lives is knowledge that, at worst, makes learning dependent on predetermined curricular contents and fixes its future with a specific actualization of knowledge (cf. Dewey in chapter 2). In this respect, the agency that was manifested in the counteractions against the indeterminacy and infinity of Takala's pedagogy was an agency that reinstalled a linear relation between the past and the future in terms of the usefulness of the lesson. According to this logic, the very event of education has to contain a promise of a future that helps to pass a right kind of threshold; a threshold that brings about a subjectification in terms of progression. If it does not, as in Takala's case, learning does not seem to take the student anywhere, which makes education not only seem useless, but also harmful to the community of learners.18

In this respect, Takala's position as a corrosive teacher is as precarious as her position as a corrosive learner. Her ambiguous presence qua an endless and indeterminate lesson allows, on the one hand, a different temporality of learning to occur (e.g. a learning that takes disruptively long time), but, on the other hand, immediately brings up counteractions that put an end to this painfully durative time. This means that a corrosive teaching is a pedagogy that balances between the non-affirmation (e.g. Takala in the elevator, her

18 Here, it is worth going back to Ziegfeld's and Smith's characterization of art education in the 1920s, since it talks about similar type of harmful uselessness that does not take students through any productive threshold whatsoever: "art had no real function either in school curriculum or in the lives of school children. It was still a kind of ladies' seminary activity, typified by water-color paintings of fading flowers or those imaginary landscapes that had to be exactly two-thirds sky and one-third hills, grass, and trees." (Ziegfeld & Smith, 1944, p. 1)
continuous non-affirmed presence *qua* an infinite lesson) and affirmation (the voicemail that demanded that has to be get rid of, an affirmation that puts an end to her ambiguity). In other words, while Takala herself renders the chronological temporality of education useless with her corrosive pedagogy, she herself is rendered useless by identifications that put an end to the durative event of *taking place* of her pedagogy. The dismantlement of Takala’s pedagogical position is not merely a question of knowledge *per se*, but an attempt to make sure that the lesson she gives has a future outcome that completes the need for the lesson in the first place. Such need for education is fundamentally based on negativity: the completion of a need that does away with the need itself. Since there is no determinate need for Takala’s presence *qua* pedagogy, it becomes disruptively corrosive. With no secure endpoint that could negate the event of learning, it opens up a limbo where both affirmation and negation of knowledge are postponed indeterminately. The request to get rid of Takala is a strategy of doing away with this indeterminacy and securing the linearity of education. Most importantly, such strategy gains its agency from an event of learning that has already passed; from a knowledge has already been completed.

To sum up, when reading the durative *taking place* of learning in terms of *The Trainee*, it is possible to note that the precariousness discussed in the previous chapter is still present. Although the postponement of both actualized outcomes of learning and actualized learning objectives allowed Takala to introduce a disruptive temporality to the office, this postponement was quickly turned against her. As a deviant, her belonging to the community of learning was denied, leading to a situation where the impotential side of her potentiality
was labeled as incapacity: she was a *bad student* and a *bad teacher*. By categorizing her as incapable, the durative event of her presence was flattened and she was situated to the *wrong* side of the threshold that would allow her to be recognized as a peer and/or as a pedagogical authority.

However, this precariousness of belonging is not simply a *bad* thing. Going back to Rancièrenian and Agambenian politics, recognized belonging is precisely what both writers identify as one of the central problems of Western political imagination. Their politics is not about finding a socially secured position of critique, but a disruption of the power that constitutes such positions. After all, both Rancièrenian equality and Agambenian whatever should not be understood as modalities of being that fit to the predetermined social positions, but as disruptive remainders of the distribution of the sensible and the function of the Law that partitions (as Rancière’s original French term *le partage du sensible* suggests) life into fixed subject positions, identities, and concepts.

It is also important to underline that both Rancière and Agamben reject a temporality of politics that creates a difference in the existing order by constituting a new order that denotes the future that ought to come. As noted earlier, rather than seeking for a progression, their writings are attempts to constitute a different relationship to what already exists. After all, for Rancière, equality is a *presupposition* for politics (i.e. not an outcome) and for Agamben, whatever singularity is a full embracement of the linguistic being that humans already occupy. In other words, the radical potentialities of their politics do not require a future actualization, but a new relation to the present.
From this perspective, the precariousness that the durative *taking place* unfolds in learning is not something that is only belongs to a corrosive learning and teaching, but it is always present in the shadows of a linear learning. The linear narrative of education is a way to control the indeterminacy that the *taking place* of learning embodies by constituting determinate confinements for it. In Takala's case, the disruptive ambiguity that her presence emanates is precisely the kind of shadow that linearity controls. By clearing out the duration of the event of learning, the predetermined position of learning between the past, the present, and the future is secured. This is why learning seems to be *nothing* without outcomes that are always already constituted before the event of learning, *takes place*.

As noted above, to point to the shadows of this logic, to the precariousness that its fundamental negativity controls, is to acknowledge that learning is not a one-way passage from potentiality to actuality, but an event that, in itself, dashes the learner into a process of change where one thought becomes another; a process that inevitably involves an ambiguous in-between where the potentiality to be and not to be is manifested. Just as Johanna Takala was able to both be and not to be a trainee, a corrosive learning and teaching work within the passageway from one modality of being to another; not in terms of problem-solving (i.e. how to reduce this threshold to its spatial and temporal minimum), but as an opportunity to open learning *as such* to all of its potentialities.

As it is visible from the responses to Takala’s intervention, working with all potentialities of learning also include hatred, fear, and resentment, which means that a corrosive learning and teaching should not be romanticized as utopian practices that bring
out the *good* in everyone. Moreover, it is important to acknowledge the danger of slipping into an empty pluralism where every outcome is welcomed with an equal excitement; a logic that assumes a universalistic sphere of recognition where these differences are acknowledged. Following Agamben, to talk about all potentialities always involves their impotential side, which means that thought should always be capable of its own silence. Pluralism does not leave room for silence, since it requires an endless actualization of identities and subject positions in order to fulfill its political function. Since a completed thought has already exhausted itself in meaning (e.g. Takala is *mad*), it cannot reside to silence without simultaneously doing away with itself. The challenge that the durative *taking place* of learning poses to pluralism is that by pointing to the contingency of the certainty that derives from putting an end to learning (i.e. a completed knowledge), a corrosive learning exposes the secureness of every thought to its own duration. From this perspective, the hatred, fear, resentment, or any other reaction that Takala was exposed to at Deloitte should be approached as forms of completed learning that has already brought the event of learning to a signifying closure. The pedagogical task of a radical politics of actualization and a radical politics of potentiality would be, then, to re-expose their duration, to reintroduce the uncertainty that such completed knowledge initially does away with.

What has yet remained unexplored are the explicit connections of my theorization of the *taking place* of learning to Rancière’s and Agamben’s political theories in the light of the question *what does it mean to act politically*. The strategic shift in political theorization from construction to corrosion, articulated above in terms of learning where the predetermined
outcomes are endlessly corroded, has to be, then, read alongside the temporalities of Rancière’s and Agamben’s theorization. Indeed, as mentioned above, their politics have direct impacts to their understanding of a radical time. Rancière argues for the *untimely* or *anachronistic* appearances while Agamben, drawing from Walter Benjamin and Pauline theology, writes about a *messianic time*; both of which unfold a temporality that troubles a linear and teleological conceptualization of time.

What follows is a discussion of both of these temporal categories in relation to the problematics that I have described above, namely the postponement of subjectification *qua* an exhaustive actualization of knowledge. I am specifically interested in examining how to understand the corrosive *taking place* of learning in relation to Rancière’s and Agamben’s conceptualization of time and how might this connection help to further elaborate a radical politics of actualization and a radical politics of potentiality.

**Rancière and the Anachronistic Event**

When talking about time in Rancière’s political theory, it is necessary to underline the importance that he puts in the “excess of words” or the “gap between words and things” (Rancière, 1994, p. 40), that is, the fundamental miscount that comprises the social. As Davide Panagia (2009) notes, Rancière's interest toward such miscount means that his theorization begins not from a disorganization that his theory organizes, but, on the contrary, from a “common measure” (p. 298) that he wants to disrupt. Notably, this “common measure” is also a temporal category: it points to the idea of an *epoch* and its totalizing
historical congruency that, like all social orders for Rancière, is fundamentally exclusionary. In this respect, an epoch is just another name for the distribution of the sensible; it helps to look at the distribution of the sensible as a historical condition.

In Rancière’s politics, the temporal dimension of the excess of words is articulated in his concept *untimeliness* or *anachronism*, which denotes a radical appearance of the non-epochal that is inherent in any epoch as the part that has no part. Since a redistribution of the sensible is not a constitution of a new order but a dissensual erosion of the present mastery, it does not offer an entryway to a new epoch; rather, it is an event that points to the contingency of the existing historical condition by opening up the in-totality of the present. In this respect, the anachronistic appearance of the part that has no part does not complete the social order by offering a future point of reference, a *telos*, but, on the contrary, breaks the idea of a chronological progression between historical conditions.

Here, it is important to distinguish two approaches to untimeliness that one can find from Rancière; approaches that I identify as *methodological* and *aesthetic*. While the former refers to the strategies of understanding events as historical, that is, as events that belong or do not belong to their *own* time, the latter points to the experience of one's epoch as coherent or incoherent. I see that both of these approaches can help to unfold the temporal modalities of a radical politics of actualization and, subsequently, offer a conceptualization of a *taking place* of learning from the Rancièrlean perspective.

The methodological approach to Rancière’s untimeliness is best articulated in his book *The Names of History* (1994), a book devoted to the “poetics of knowledge,” that
Rancière defines as “a study of the set of literary procedures by which a discourse escapes literature, gives itself the status of a science, and signifies this status.” (Rancière, 1994, p. 8) He discusses the poetics of knowledge in relation to history and historiography, especially in terms of a scientific construction of a historical knowledge. For him, the human and social sciences have, “for centuries, … tried with varying amounts of luck to win their place in the accord of true sciences, to remove the indeterminable suspicion that they still belong to the works of literature or politics, event to both at the same time.” (p. 8) Despite the fact that *The Names of History* mainly revolves around historiography and historical research, its connections to Rancière’s political theory and its temporal dimensions are strong: by offering a critique of a historical research that, in the name of historical coherency, forces events and subjects to conform with their assumably *true* historical condition, Rancière simultaneously points to the contingency of all epochs, were they past or present. Although a historical coherency provides a seemingly accurate and objective knowledge, such knowledge is never able to put itself in question: it constitutes a *common measure* that closes the “gap between words and things” by building up an *accurate* system of representation, which requires that that events and subjects are always in a *right* kind of relation to each other.

When situating these observations in relation to my earlier discussion on the durative *taking place* of learning, it is the timeliness of such event that attracts the critical attention. Indeed, what gives historical congruency to the event of learning? What makes it *properly* situated in-between the past and the future, which, initially, empties its duration? Here, it is worth going back to chapters 2 and 3 where the need for art education was articulated in
terms of the relevancy of education to students’ (everyday) life; that art education is properly responding to the demands of the present. For example, the call for the paradigmatic shift from DBAE to VCAE can be seen to be an attempt to constitute a timely art education that addresses the needs of students in our current socio-historical position; demands that find their historical counterparts in the progressive education almost a century earlier. While this might have offered art educators tools to better address the particularity of not only their students’ subject positions and identities but also their current sociopolitical realities, this timely character of education presumes a direct relation between an educational event and the totality of the epoch in which learning takes place.

Notably, this does not mean that the seeming anachronism of DBAE would have been a better option. Going back to Clark’s (1997) statement quoted in chapter 3, that of, “teachers cannot abandon students or their educational needs because of social conditions in the American society” (Clark, 1997, p. 14), a simple dismissal of “the social conditions” in the name of an ahistorical construction of “students and their educational needs” does not offer a viable critique of a timeliness qua an epochal subjectification: it simply locates the subjectification to a realm of transcendental truths that, as such, seem eternal. Rather than residing to such an ahistorical essentialism that presumes a universal plane of belonging (paraphrasing Clark, all students have basic educational needs that exceed particular socio-historical contexts), Rancière’s anachronism is a strategy of disrupting all forms of predetermination that assigns a specific set of needs to students; needs that reaffirm their
belonging to the assigned subject position as people who ought to pass the threshold that separates them from a completed knowledge.

Thus, although it would be tempting to draw the line between DBAE and VCAE in terms of a timely (VCAE) and untimely (DBAE) art education, a division that can be seen to be present especially in VCAE literature (as visible in chapter 3), neither of them disrupts the linear temporality of education that secures students' belonging to their proper place. As Kristin Ross (2009) notes when discussing Rancière's notion of untimeliness,

> [s]ocial science in general spends its time making the people who don't resemble their moment get back into their harness, making any aberrant speech fit the context—and in so doing affirming not only the noneventfulness, but the unknowingness, even the duped nature, of the objects of history as well—making them at one with the beliefs of their era. For the only way you can belong to your era is without knowing it—which is to say, through belief. The people are people who can't think otherwise. (Ross, 2009, p. 27)

From this perspective, the ideal of liberal democracy that functions as the *primus motor* of the political imagination of VCAE is a strategy of putting subjects in a *proper* relation to each other. As particularized identities, these subjects constitute a properly complex image of the society (cf. chapter 3) where everybody belongs to the same temporal plane of participation, that of, an epoch. Here, an epoch becomes a common measure of subjectification: it secures presence and belonging to the totality of the present and contains a promise of the future that reinstalls *progress* as the only viable narrative of education; progress that makes sure that the same distribution of social roles and places prevails (i.e. *students will stay as students*) from epoch to epoch, always in a slightly enhanced form. This is why
Johanna Takala seems out of such time of subjectification, since her (in)activity renders the shared temporality of progression inoperative by introducing another temporality that extends the time that participation takes; a temporality that can be considered as anachronistic since it breaks the coherency of the present time.

How, then, to approach the historicity of the taking place of learning differently? According to Whitener (2013), Rancière’s political theorization aims to imagine “a new poetic structure of knowledge” that would be based on “a nonrelation between words and things or an excess of meaning over meaning.” (Whitener, 2013, paragraph 5) In terms of the epochal belonging qua subjectification discussed above, this means that instead of trying to make students properly epochal subjects whose learning reflects the needs of our time, the temporal nonrelation that Rancièrean untimeliness suggests opens the present time to its “excess of meaning” that troubles the linearity embedded in learning qua a completion of knowledge. This means that the present time is not a plane of belonging, but denotes the time during which living and learning takes place.

Certainly, such duration is not devoid of a socio-historical context. Rather, one needs to keep in mind that such contextualization is always an act of doing away with the “nonrelation between words and things” that unfolds the inherent contingency of every social order. For Rancière, what is needed is a “method of equality” that must implement, at the same time, a principle of historicization, and a principle of untimeliness, a principle of contextualization and a principle of de-contextualization. You must make words resound in their concrete place and time of enunciation, instead of generalizations of historical discourse. But you must also draw the line of escape, the line of universalization on which
the poor romantic floor-layer meets the aristocratic philosopher of antiquity and verifies that they has something in common, that they speak about the same thing: the capacities or incapacities involved in the fact of having or not having time. (Rancière, 2009, p. 282, original emphasis)

In this respect, Rancière's call for a collision between historicization and untimeliness, as well as contextualization and de-contextualization, offers a method of scientific inquiry where the excess of meaning is made present in inquiry itself, thus restoring its belonging to “the works of literature or politics, event to both at the same time.” (Rancière, 1994, p. 8) This opens up the “line of escape, the line of universalization” that makes it possible to constitute a different relation to historical events; a relation that does not eradicate its object (the event) in epochal properness. In other words, to avoid the “disappearance of history in historiography” (Rancière, 1994, p. 41), a historical event should be approached as an event that always involves a nonrelation; an incoherency that exceeds the confines that a supposedly accurate system of representation constitutes by bridging the gap between words and things.

In terms of taking place of learning, this means that the educational theorization becomes uncoupled from its proper place in the society and also from a linear narrative of progression. Instead of situating learning to its present epoch, a thread of thought that unites progressive education and VCAE as critiques of a seemingly anachronistic schooling, it is opened to its untimely modalities; modalities that, in terms of a radical politics of actualization, allow learning to be understood differently and, as Takala’s case, also to take place differently. This has important implications for the educational theorization that tries to
tackle the entwinement of life and education; the central strategy for subjectification discussed in Part I. When a singular life is no longer introduced to realm of education as a properly situated epochal subject and/or identity that needs education to actualize and complete its subjectivity, subjectification can take up a duration that troubles the chronological narrative of education. This means that life is no longer an educational project that aims at a progression and amelioration of what already exists (i.e. reaffirming the relation between a word and a thing), but it is seen as an inherently nonrelational existence that always contains an excess of meaning that troubles subject’s belonging to the epochal totality of the distribution of the sensible.

The notion that Rancière’s own poetics of knowledge would restore the scientific inquiry to the realm of literature and politics offers an interesting transition to the other modality of untimeliness in his work, namely the aesthetic, which helps to unfold a temporal perspective on Rancière’s views on art and politics. Indeed, to imagine a “line of universalization on which the poor romantic floor-layer meets the aristocratic philosopher of antiquity” (Rancière, 2009, p. 282) requires that one declines a purely representational approach to knowledge production and reclaims its aesthetic aspects. Here, the untimeliness stands for an experience of the contingency of one’s own epoch qua the distribution of the sensible; experience that, for Rancière, art can engender. In *The Politics of Aesthetics* Rancière (2012) presents the idea of the three artistic regimes that offer an alternative way to historicize the social function of art: the ethical regime, the poetic/representative regime, and the aesthetic regime. For the purposes of my theorization, it is the aesthetic regime of art,
“the true name for what has been designated by the incoherent label 'modernity',” (Rancière, 2012, p. 24) that can be seen to be the most helpful, since it is “first of all a new regime for relating to the past.” (p. 25) What makes it specifically interesting in terms of a linear narrative of education is that, for Rancière, the “aesthetic regime of the arts does not contrast the old with the new. It contrasts, more profoundly, two regimes of historicity.” (p. 24) How could this help to understand the experience of untimeliness and its relation to the durative taking place of learning as an anachronistic activity? In order to answer this question, it is worth elaborating further what Rancière’s means with the idea of contrasting two regimes of historicity, since it opens up the Rancièrean aesthetics to its dissensual and temporal dimensions. Perhaps one of the most informative examples that Rancière gives about this idea is his discussion on the introduction of the “mechanical arts,” namely photography, into the artistic paradigm and its affects on the relationship between art and its subject matter (p. 31). Rancière is specifically interested in the fact that photography opened the art of portraiture to the masses; an art form that was traditionally reserved only for people who had the wealth and power to have portraits made of themselves. He writes, [i]n order for the mechanical arts to be able to confer visibility on the masses, or rather on anonymous individuals, they first need to be recognized as art. That is to say that they first need to be put in to practice and recognized as something other than techniques of reproduction and transmission. It is thus the same principle that confers visibility on absolutely anyone and allows for photography and film to become arts. We can even reverse the formula: it is because the anonymous became the subject matter of art that the act of recording such subject matter can be an art. (p. 32)
In terms of the “new regime for relating to the past,” the change in the relationship between the production of art and its subject matter re-stages the past by making something previously invisible visible. A new relation to the past means, then, that the anonymous masses did not simply appear *ex nihilo*; they were already present in the society but always excluded from the production (and viewing) of art. Their appearance in the realm of visibility that was traditionally reserved only for the noble bent the limits of what seemed possible or a natural form and content of artistic production. When the durative presence of the masses was collided with the durative presence of the noble, the aesthetically controlled, exclusionary coexistence of these two regimes was put in question. This meant that the present was revealed contingent on the specific strategies of exclusion that comprised the totality and the continuity of the epoch. The untimeliness of the anonymous masses can be found from the very in-totality and discontinuity that their appearance unfolded. In this respect, to be outside of time means to go against the grain of a chronology of a non-eventfulness that settles the present distribution of the sensible to its proper place. Again, this does not create anything new *per se*; what already exists is simply put in a new use and framed in a new way.

In his article “Aesthetic Separation, Aesthetic Community: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art” (2008) Rancière interestingly locates artistic practice between what has been and what will be, which allows art to be located in an inherently non-chronological temporality of the untimeliness. It is worth quoting him at length since this passage gives a helpful overview of the connection he makes between the untimeliness, politics, and aesthetics:
On the one hand, the ‘community of sense’ woven by artistic practice is, in the present, a new set of vibrations of the human community; on the other hand, it is a monument that stands as a mediation or a substitute for a people to come. The paradoxical relation between the ‘apart’ and the ‘together’ is also a paradoxical relation between the present and the future. The art work is the people to come and it is the monument of its expectation, the monument of its absence. The artistic ‘dissensual community’ has a double body: it is a combination of means for producing an effect out of itself: creating a new community between human beings, a new political people. And it is the anticipated reality of that people. The tension between ‘being apart’ and ‘being together’ is tied up with another tension between two statuses of artistic practice: as a means for producing an effect, and as the reality of that effect. To the extent that it is a dissensual community, an aesthetic community is a community structured by disconnection. (Rancière, 2008, p. 5)

By discussing the “aesthetic community” as a “community structured by disconnection,” Rancière assigns a similar nonrelationality to artistic practices than one can find from his take on history and historiography. Instead of imagining a linear thread of time that gives art its specific form and function, he sees that art, in the aesthetic regime, has the possibility to disconnect itself from the confines of its own epoch, not by creating “an artistic rupture” but by reinterpreting “what makes art or what art makes.” (Rancière, 2012, p. 25). Like in the case of anonymous masses who made an appearance to the realm of art, it is not an alternative future that art exposes, but rather the contingency of the present; its heteronomic rather than utopic character. An aesthetic approach to the untimeliness, then, points to the experience of such heteronomia as events of non-epochal appearances that do not fit to the confinements of the distribution of the sensible.

When this notion of an aesthetic untimeliness is read along with my theorization of the taking place of learning, it is possible to further develop the relationship between the
event of learning and the future that it may unfold. Notably, to reinterpret “what makes art or what art makes” does not entail a future point of completion that constitutes the telos of such inquiry, since, for Rancière, “[t]he channels of political subjectivization are not those of imaginary identifications but those of 'literary' disincorporation.” (p. 40) In terms of the durative event of learning’s taking place, this would mean that the futurity of learning is immanently present in the transformation of one thought to another as a “literary disincorporation” of the present. It is not that the future has already taken place as one finds in a cyclical conceptualization of time; rather, it is embedded in the experience of the present as “a monument that stands as a mediation or a substitute for a people to come.” (Rancière, 2008, p. 5) This “paradoxical relation between the present and the future” that unfolds “people to come” as the disidentified subjects of a radical actualization denotes a learning whose political character is precisely the experience of the contingency of one’s epoch; an untimely and durative event where the time is out of joint, thus disrupting the conditions of possibility of the present time by reconfiguring what has already taken place and what can take place. To experience the present time of learning and its taking place as contingent disrupts the causal logic that imagines the question what does it mean to act politically only in terms of a future completion.

Going back to the first part of this study, the constructive approach to subjectification cannot let go of this logic of completion, since learning qua subjectification is imagined through a linear progression of time where the presence is marked only by absence. If an artwork can be a monument of absence of “the people to come,” that is, simultaneously
present (the monument) and absent (the people to come), the taking place of learning could be imagined as a similar temporal in-between: as a time during which thought takes up another form, it already entails both presence and absence, completion and disincorporation, belonging and non-belonging; all of which, when collided, can unfold a radical actualization of an absence within the present.

In this respect, what the two modalities of untimeliness, the methodological and the aesthetic, have in common is that they both depict an event of an appearance that is fundamentally improper. This improper character derives from an untimely appearance of the remainder of the (mis)count that constitutes the totality of distribution of the social roles and positions. As a constitution of a nonrelation between words and things, an opening of the common measure to its inherent contingency, the untimely event of politics is not reducible entirely to its own epoch any more than to a recognizable new. As Kristin Ross (2009) puts it when summarizing Rancière's conceptualization of time, Rancière's [t]emporality of politics is not progressive, nor dialectical—a word [Rancière] uses only rarely—it is not continuous and it's not over. Politics is an event that cannot be predicted any more than its end can be apocalyptically announced. It is always circumstantial, local, and entirely contained with its singular manifestations. Unconcerned with duration or, for the most part, with measuring any social effects or usefulness of such events might have—and supremely unconcerned with institutions—Rancière's thought has produced disappointment in readers looking for a prescription or a program for action (Ross, 2009, p. 29)

How can such theorization of an untimely temporality help to further develop the durative taking place of learning, especially if, as Ross notes, Rancière is “unconcerned with duration”? As I have suggested throughout this part of the chapter, the improper modality of
the Rancièrean untimeliness denotes a radical actualization of the contingency of the *taking place* of learning. The appearance of the "people to come" as improperly anachronistic subjects is an appearance that does not find its place in a linear continuum between the past and the future, which means that it has the potential to seize the operation of a common measure that assigns social actors their *proper* socio-historical places and constitutes *proper* modes of socio-historical expression/experience. By interfering with the seeming totality of the epoch and its historical condition, the Rancièrean untimely politics works *within* the present by reconfiguring it instead of merely offering an alternative future.

Going back to beginning of this chapter, the corrosion of an exhaustive actualization of knowledge can be understood as this kind of a reconfiguration of the relationship between the past, the present, and the future. The improperness of Rancière's non-chronological subjectification opens the event of the *taking place* of learning to its corrosive qualities: it actualizes knowledge, skills, and ways of life that, through their presence, puts the existing order in peril. Interestingly, Ross (2009) makes similar observations when discussing the connection between Rancière's take on untimeliness, education, and equality:

> [s]hort-circuiting the temporality of pedagogy makes equality a point of departure, an axiom anterior to the constitution of a particular staging of politics and which makes such staging possible. Rather than being the criteria that determines how long it will take for the society as it is to become society as it might or should be, equality as an axiom enables thought, experiment, invention. (Ross, 2009, p. 26)

Despite the fact that it is difficult to find any explicit theorization of duration in Rancière, I would argue that a Rancièrean politics of radical actualization does, indeed, have
a duration: it is the duration of the *taking place*, articulated by Rancière as the *people to come*, that opens the present time to its contingency. Its duration derives from the dissensual relation between two regimes of historicity that cannot be put in a linear relationship to each other. Not a duration that has a specific beginning and an end, a Rancièrean duration denotes a time that, as such, “enables thought, experiment, invention” within the present, with *all* of its attributes. It is an untimely duration that reconfigures the very time that has passed and is being spent. Like Johanna Takala in the elevator, who turned the empty time that her colleagues used to move from one place to another to the primary event of thinking, the untimeliness of the durative *taking place* appears as a dysfunction in the *normal* order of things because it unfolds an action without a recognizable end or a predictable duration. There is nothing *proper* to such action; instead, it is improper insofar as it constitutes a nonrelation between what has been and what could take place.

Rancière himself puts this nonrelation in terms of “as if” that builds up “a new sensible world in the given one.” (Rancière, 2009, p. 280) This *as if* crystallizes the improperness that his notion of the untimeliness and nonrelation entail. In terms of *The Trainee*, Takala reclaims and re-appropriates the past *qua* her initial introduction and identification as a trainee, which, then, unfolds an anachronistic present-time of *as if*. Notably, this *as if* is not a request to be included in the distribution of the sensible, but, like Johanna Takala, corrodes the predetermined identifications and opens them to their contingency. Rancièrean *as if* offers an important point of reflection for Agamben’s temporality, since, following my distinction between a radical politics of actualization and a
radical politics of potentiality, it points to the inevitably actualizing remainder of the miscount that comprises all social orders and the excluded durative presence of the part that has no part.

As discussed in the first chapter, this actualizing character of the part that has no part creates some important limits for Rancière’s political theory. Since the appearance of **as if** is political as long as it retains its untimely and nonrelational character, the moment when it is recognized as a negation or an affirmation of the existing order (like Takala’s diagnosis as mad), its political existence ends. Following Ross’ description of Rancière’s politics as “always circumstantial, local, and entirely contained with its singular manifestations” (Ross, 2009, p. 29) the need for a continuous production of such “singular manifestations” shows how self-exhaustive the politics dependent on actualization can be; a reason why it easy to read Rancière’s politics as non-durative.

Next, in order to flesh out the possibilities to theorize the durative **taking place** of learning in relation to a radical politics of potentiality, I turn to Agamben’s conceptualization of time and its relation to his political theory.

**Agamben and the Messianic Time**

Whereas Rancière’s conceptualization of time helps to theorize the relation between the **taking place** of learning and the historical context in which learning and politics (radically) actualize, the centrality of (im)potentiality in Agambenian politics offers quite a different approach to temporality; one where the existing epoch and its linear historicism is
rendered inoperative by reclaiming one’s potential not to actualize, even if it was a question of an improper and untimely actualization, as one finds from Rancière. From Agamben’s perspective, despite a Rancièrean radical appearance unfolds events that break a linear relationship between the past, the present, and the future, the very eventness of such politics (and learning) presumes a conceptualization of time “as a quantified and infinite continuum of precise fleeting instants” (Agamben, 2007, p. 102) that turns the experience of history into an experience of such instants, not the experience of time as such. In other words, when the time itself becomes understood simply a container of separate points, the only way to grasp time is to quantify and organize it by turning it into segments, that, then, are either located on a linear axis (chronological time) or collided with each other to form dissensual relationships (Rancière).

For Agamben, however, “[a]ny attempt to conceive of time differently must inevitably come into conflict with [point as the concept of real time of experience], and a critique of the instant is the logical condition for a new experience.” (Agamben, 2007, p. 110) Here, it is crucial to underline the relationship that Agamben builds between the attempt to “conceive time differently” and a “condition for a new experience,” since it reveals the goals of Agamben’s theory of time and its connection to his politics; namely, as Mills (2008) puts it, his “vision of a ‘completed humanity’” of whatever singularities. (Mills, 2008, p. 129, emphasis mine) Indeed, Agamben’s “critique of the instant” finds its conceptual basis from the idea of a completion: what does it mean to complete the event of politics or the taking place of learning? The question of completion offers a critical point of diversion
between the Rancièrean and the Agambenian conceptualization of time and helps to understand the “new experience” that Agamben’s theory of time aims at.

For Rancière, a completion denotes the actualization of a political event as such. Despite Ross’ (2009) claim that Rancière’s politics creates an “event that cannot be predicted any more than its end can be apocalyptically announced,” (Ross, 2009, p. 29) it still presumes a (fleeting) completion of the tension that the fundamental miscount of every social order brings about; a completion that the radical appearance of a dissensual as if manifests. This is why his politics is dependent on singular manifestations of the part that has no part, which, as discussed above, gives Rancièrean political event a self-exhaustive character; it eventually negates both of the worlds that a dissensus brings together through a disidentification.

For Agamben, the idea of completion is tied to his interest toward the zones of indistinction (discussed in chapter 1), that is, his attempt to occupy (not negate) the threshold that separates worlds, epochs, and modalities of existence. When a completion is examined as a zone of indistinction, it becomes uncoupled from any self-exhaustive actualization that negates its existence. Not an end point or, indeed, a point at all, a completion denotes the time that it takes to complete something; the time that it takes to experience time as such. Thus, contra the Rancièrean heteronomia of the present as a dissensual collection of fleeting completions of the fundamental equality between speaking beings, Agamben’s theorization of time offers an understanding of the present as a durative zone of indistinction between the constitution and the fulfillment of humanity. Drawing
from the Pauline theology, Agamben offers a conceptualization of a messianic time, a time
that “radically removes man from the servitude to quantified time.” (Agamben, 2007, p. 111)

Before giving a more detailed description of Agamben’s messianic time, it is
important lay out its connections to my theorization of the taking place of learning, its
relation to a radical politics of potentiality, and the completion of learning as an actualized
knowledge. When discussing Takala’s pedagogy, I claimed that an indeterminate
postponement of the actualization of learning brings out a lesson that seems infinite, a lesson
during which something is learned but never fully confirmed. However, in order for such
lesson to seem (not be) infinite, one has to presume its completion, a state of being where the
activity of learning has ended and the potentiality to learn is passed into the actuality of
knowledge. After all, time has no function for an infinite existence since such existence, in its
infinity, simply is; it is devoid of both a beginning and an end (like the God in Christian
theology).

In terms of the taking place of learning, Agamben’s theorization of time raises the
question of how to understand the time (either as seemingly infinite as in Takala’s case or as
more predetermined) when learning has already taken place but has not yet actualized as
knowledge; when learning is still connected to its impotential side without being merely a
question of an incapability or a lack in the image of a fully developed subjectivity. The
significance of this question for political theorization in art education is that it forces to think
the very eventness of its political acts qua subjectification. Instead of establishing the need for
art education as the future completion of a pre-established subject position through learning,
it forces to take account of the very time during which such need is brought to its fulfillment, that is, to its end as a lesson that has been learned. In terms of the slogan “You Gotta Have Art” that I discussed in chapter 1, instead of constituting new societal needs and functions for art and art education that offer a better future qua a more complete completion of the humanity (e.g. Unesco’s claim that “[c]ulture and the arts are essential components of a comprehensive education leading to the full development of the individual.”), Agamben asks to pay attention to the self-annihilating logic of a future completion that reduces the events of learning’s taking place to fleeting chronological instants in order to constitute a “continuous, infinite progress” (Agamben, 2007, p. 106) that “separates us from ourselves and transforms us into impotent spectators of ourselves—spectators who look at the time that flies without any time left, continually missing themselves” (Agamben, 2005a, p. 68).

What is, then, Agamben’s understanding of the messianic time and how does it help to articulate the problems that the logic of a future completion brings to political theorization? One helpful summarization of what the Agambenian messianic time does not mean comes from Lewis (2010), who notes that “[s]he messianic is not simply waiting for a Messiah to come to save human history; [it] is beyond the discourse of deferral (perpetual waiting) or historical dialectic that posits the completion of humanity’s self-realization in a future temporality.” (Lewis, 2010 p. 239) By revealing “an immanence between this world and the future world” (p. 239) the messianic time points to a zone of indetermination between the existence and the “self-realization” of the humanity; a zone of indetermination that, for Agamben, is the present time, the now.
In his book *The Time That Remains* (2005a), Agamben elaborates his approach to a messianic time by doing a reading on the apostle Paul’s Letter to the Romans, paying a special attention to the term that Paul uses to describe his time: “*ho nyn kairos*, 'the time of the now.’” (Agamben, 2005a, p. 61) What makes Paul an important figure for Agamben’s theorization is that the “Pauline messianism … should be understood as concerning not the founding of a new religion, but the *abolition or fulfillment* of Jewish law;” (Mills, 2008, p. 116, emphasis mine) a notion that connects his theory of time to his interest in the concept of the ban and the Law in political theory. Notably, the “time of the now” during which Paul wrote his texts was a time when the Messiah had already arrived, which required a profound rethinking of the prophetic tradition of Judaism. After all, despite Jesus died and, according to the Christian tradition, continued his life in the Heaven, life on Earth still prevailed, introducing the people who had been waiting for the Messiah to a time where there was nothing else to wait for except the end of the world. This time is, following the title of Agamben’s book, “the time that remains,” a *remnant* of the Messianic event. Jenny Doussan (2013), while writing about this change in perspective in Paul’s theology, notes that “[u]nlike the prophets for whom the messianic event is projected in the future, Paul’s innovation, so to speak, following his self-understanding as writing *after* the messianic event, is in his conception of the remnant as a present and not future condition.” (Doussan, 2013, p. 155, original emphasis)

In this respect, the Pauline *ho nyn kairos* is not an empty passageway from one epoch to another (e.g. from Judaism to Christianity), a prophesy that constitutes a future-to-come,
but rather an announcement that the time of the now is time that “prepares this world for its end” (Lewis, 2010, p. 240); a time between “the messianic event and the eschaton,” that is, between the fulfillment/abolition of the law and the end of the world (Doussan, 2013, p. 155). Agamben makes clear that this preparation does not belong to an eschatological time that finds its fulfillment in the Apocalypse qua the end of time, since eschatology “sees the end fulfilled and describes what it sees,” (Agamben, 2005a, p. 62) which follows the logic of a prophesy, not messianism.

Read as “the time of the now,” the Pauline messianism offers Agamben a possibility to conceptualize the temporality that follows his political theorization of the means without end; an idea that in itself challenges a chronological narrative for politics and forces to rethink the relationship between a political event and its completion. He sees that the temporality of the Pauline messianism belongs to kairos, a Greek word for time (found in ho nyn kairos) that refers to an occasion or a moment. Kairos differs from chronos, another word for time that refers to a sequential time (chronology), in its emphasis on the moment as such rather than on event’s belonging to a linear continuum. In other words, kairos denotes “the abrupt and sudden conjunction where decision grasps opportunity and life is fulfilled in the moment,” (Agamben, 2007, p. 111) a moment that “that one must take hold of or forever let it pass.” (Mills, 2008, p. 118) It is not simply a blasé call for carpe diem, that is, an attempt to relocate the teleological promise from the future to the present time, but an interruption of punctual moments or instants that cannot be reconciled through a global process or teleology of destruction and resurrection. Cairotic time is the sudden appearance of a time that is now rather than later, a time
that is singular and thus cannot be redeemed through a dialectical synthesis. (Lewis, 2012, p. 359, emphasis mine)

Going back to Agamben’s claim that “the critique of the instant is the logical condition for a new experience,” (Agamben, 2007, p. 110) it is possible to notice that *kairos* offers him an opportunity to think the singularity of the event without encapsulating it in a chronological representation that, following his critique of negativity, annihilates the event itself. In fact, the question of representation is central for Agamben when he elaborates the difference between *chronos* and *kairos*. He refers to *chronos* as a representational time “in which we are,” a time that, as quoted earlier “separates us from ourselves and transforms us into impotent spectators of ourselves,” while *kairos* is “operational time in which we take hold of and achieve our representations of time, is the time that we ourselves are, and for this very reason, is the only real time, the only time we have.” (Agamben, 2005a, p. 68, original emphasis)

It is this kairotic moment where the *taking place* of learning should be situated when discussing its possible further elaborations through Agamben’s messianic time. As visible, Agamben grants agency to the operational time of *kairos* as a moment “which we take hold of” and thus grasp the present *as such*, which, in educational terms, means that it is a moment that does not merely pass before the learner who is inevitably caught in a linear progression toward an actualized knowledge and subjectification, but allows one to imagine the *taking place* of learning “now rather than later.” To reframe, learning becomes conceived not merely as an empty point in time that becomes actual only in its future completion as
knowledge, but as an event that disrupts both the continuation of the same (i.e. no transformation takes place) and a chronological progression (i.e. transformation is conceived only as a linear change) that forces learning into a sequential continuum in which the learner either fails to pass (sameness) or passes through (progression) the threshold that divides the knowledge from non-knowledge. Like with Johanna Takala, who never seems to arrive to the other side of the threshold that would actualize her education as a trainee, but, nevertheless, partially seizes the function of the office, learning becomes uncoupled from a linearity of education that turns students into “impotent spectators” of themselves in the face of the predetermined requirements. Indeed, Takala’s presence can be seen to open her education to its eventness, that is, to the durative taking place when learning follows “the time that we ourselves are” rather than “in which we are.” It is this eventness that points to the time during which learning has taken place but not completed in an actualized knowledge or subjectification.

This conceptualization of learning differs greatly from the prophetic language of art education that promises future actualizations of the fully developed individualities. Interestingly, the historic junction between DBAE and VCAE, discussed in chapter 3, offers a productive point of reference. Here, it is worth quoting Tavin’s (2005) passage of this paradigmatic shift again:

As the Getty’s grip of art education started to slip in the late 1990s, DBAE became less prominent and a growing number of art educators called for a paradigm shift toward visual culture, that challenged canonicity, advocated for the study of an expansive range of objects and images including popular
culture, and raised issues about visuality and everyday life. (Tavin, 2005, p. 111)

From the perspective of a chronological time, the *slipping grip* of the Getty in the late 1990s brought a historical break in art education; a break that constituted a new epoch of VCAE. Certainly, as discussed in chapter 3, the expanding “range of objects and images” changed the way that subjectification was understood among art educators: the particularization of identities and subject positions through the inclusion of everyday life in art curricula meant that a more refined set of potentialities of human life were becoming dependent on education as the only platform for actualization. However, despite that the epochal distinction between these two paradigms has helped art educators to reevaluate the individual and societal needs that their profession is based on, the chronological structure of these needs have stayed the same. In fact, by demanding more particularized and total inclusion of students’ lives in art curricula, VCAE has intensified the prophetic undercurrents of politics of art education as a completion of the true *telos* of subjectification that produces active participants within the realm of liberal democracy. Most importantly, the promise of subjectification *qua* a truly meaningful learning through an isomorphic relationship between life and education, seeded by people like Dewey over a hundred year ago, is reaffirmed in VCAE, thus presenting it as an era of emancipation and actualization of the political potential of art education; a time that “challenged canonicity” of DBAE that had prevented the fulfillment of this *true* (political) potential.
What makes this emancipatory discourse problematic is that it situates the *taking place* of learning within a time of progression whose linearity is infinite. As such, art educators and art education theorists are merely contained in this progression as the possible perpetuators or obstacles of a chronological development toward the *telos* of liberal democracy. The future subjectification that “the study of an expansive range of objects and images including popular culture” promises is a future where students’ potentiality to learn is liberated from the confinements that a seemingly narrow and restricted art curriculum sets them. It is the *completion of this potential* that *must take place* if art education is to be considered as a needed part of human life. From Agamben’s perspective, however, the life that unfolds from such completion is a *bare life*, since it conflates the promise of actualization of a political subjectivity with a human existence: education simply affirms one’s initial subjection to the sovereign power that grants humans their belonging to the sphere of politics in which a subjectivity actualizes. Thus, positioned between the subjection and its affirmation, the event of learning’s *taking place* is emptied of any real duration and tied to a prophetic logic of progression from constitution to completion.

Here, it might seem that *kairos* is directly opposite to *chronos*; that the problem I have identified above would be done away with by simply shifting the focus from chronological linearities to kairotic events. However, for Agamben, the messianic time is not opposite to a chronological time, but a time that is “comprised of two heterogenous times, one *kairos* and the other *chronos*, one an operational time and the other a represented time, which are coextensive but cannot be added together.” (Agamben, 2005a, p. 70) In order to understand
what this coextensive but incomparable relation means, it is worth going back to Rancière's
*as if* and its relation to the chronological time. Whereas Rancière's response to the totalizing
time of *chronos* is to disrupt the linear time with a radical appearance of *as if* that cuts
through predetermined identities and brings forward the initial miscount of every social
order, Agamben sees *kairos* as a “messianic cessation of happening”19 (Agamben, 2007, p. 112) that is rooted in the Pauline “as not” (“*hōs mé*” in Paul). As Lewis (2012) points out, this messianic event as *as not* “represents the now as not now, containing the past, present,
and future in a state of indistinction.” (Lewis, 2012, p. 360) It is this temporal state of
indistinction that marks the non-relational coexistence between *kairos* and *chronos* in the
messianic time and opens the completion to its durative modalities, that is, to the time that it
takes to complete something. *Kairos* does not add anything to the incomplete totality of
*chronos* through an ulterior *as if*, but rather *deactivates* its homogeneous and empty time by
holding it in suspension through *as not*. As Agamben puts it, a “[m]essianic presence lies
beside itself, since, without ever coinciding with a chronological instant, and without ever
adding itself onto it, it seizes hold of this instant and brings it forth to fulfillment.”
(Agamben, 2005a, pp. 70-71)

When discussing Paul’s passage that mentions the act of “weeping as not weeping,”

Agamben notes that

19 Notably, the term “ messianic cessation of happening” appears in Walter Benjamin’s “On the Concept of
History” (also referred as “Theses on the Philosophy of History”) which is highly influential text for
Agamben’s conceptualization of time. In order to keep my argumentation succinct, I purposefully left out
the discussion on Agamben’s reading of Benjamin’s text. However, it is important to note that in *The Time
That Remains* Agamben traces Benjamin’s thought to the Pauline messianism and argues that Benjamin’s
concept of *Jetztzeit*, the now-time, is deeply indebted to Paul’s *ho nyn kairos*. See Benjamin, 1968.
[t]he messianic tension … does not tend toward an elsewhere, nor does it exhaust itself in the indifference between one thing and its opposite. The apostle does not say “weeping as rejoicing” nor “weeping as [meaning =] not weeping,” but “weeping as not weeping.” … In pushing each thing toward itself through the as not, the messianic does not simply cancel out this figure, but makes it pass, it prepares its end. This is not another figure or another world: it is the passing of the figure of this world. (pp. 24-25, original emphasis)

Again, Agamben’s rejection of negativity as the primus motor of thought is evident: rather than coming up with a figure of the new that negates what already exists, that is, a dialectics that destructs only in order to resurrect, the Pauline as not implies that “there is no new end introduced by the negligence of the former end,” but, instead, “the end is … conserved in its fulfillment by deactivation.” (Doussan, 2013, p. 168) The idea that “the end is conserved in its fulfillment by deactivation” denotes the structure of the Pauline ho nyn kairos as “the time that remains:” after all, the coming of Messiah did not change the fact that the eschaton will come; rather, the Messiah confirmed and deactivated the Jewish law and established a time when the world is preparing to end.

When this logic of as not is applied in Johanna Takala’s presence at Deloitte, it is possible to note that the disruptiveness of (in)activity stems precisely from a deactivation that neither secures a chronological continuity of identification nor completely cancels out her identification as a trainee. In this respect, Takala’s intervention can be seen to constitute a messianic presence where “[t]he law is neither abolished nor is it left operative; it is instead held in suspension or deactivated.” (Lewis, 2010, p. 241) Such messianic cessation of happening that neither affirms nor confirms is the source of Takala’s impotentiality that
grants her teaching and learning a disruptive duration. Indeed, as Lewis (2012) argues, Agamben’s insistence on *as not* is deeply connected his views on the double nature of potentiality. He writes,

>[m]essianic time does not destroy or annihilate but, rather, deactivates and suspends efficiency, thus giving potentiality back to itself. Through this inoperative suspension of the law, nothing changes, and yet, everything changes all at once. This is the moment of radical transformation within the very immanence of the presence that characterizes the messianic “as not.” The “as not” overcomes the sovereign act of division—rendering the sovereign inoperative—precisely through the capacity to live in potential. (Lewis, 2012, p. 361)

From this perspective, it is possible to further elaborate the theoretical intersection

between the messianic time of *as not*, my theorization of the durative event of the *taking place* of learning and a radical politics of potentiality. Indeed, what would a *learning as not learning* mean in this context? In *The Trainee*, Takala’s *learning as not learning* can be understood through her “brainwork,” which is a form of working *as not* working. In her brainwork, the linear narrative of work and, most importantly, her education as a trainee, becomes *suspended*, not negated. The “inoperative suspension of the law [when] nothing changes, and yet, everything changes all at once” that Lewis talks about is crucial here: the change in Takala’s performance of work/learning does not offer anything new to the activities that one finds from the office (sitting quietly, taking the elevator, thinking), but a simple act of staying within the event of these activities (i.e. not letting them pass) has significant consequences in the office. Going back to the idea that *kairos* is an event “that one must take hold of or forever let it pass,” (Mills, 2008, p. 118) such a suspension *qua* seizing *chronos* is
precisely an act of taking hold of the event of learning and allowing its impotential modalities to unfold; modalities that corrode the linear narrative of education.

Drawing from my earlier claims about Takala’s learning and pedagogy as the durative postponements of actualized outcomes, Agamben’s notion of the messianic as not helps to refine and challenge the very notion of postponement: the messianic does not merely defer, but brings up a different relation to a completion; a relation that, in The Trainee, deactivates the chronological time that Takala, like all other workers and learners, ought to follow. Instead of offering alternative outcomes for learning through a disruptive as if (a strategy that can be found from the sans papiers discussed in chapter 1), learning as not learning pushes learning toward itself, thus exceeding the deadlock that forces the educational theory choose between learning (knowledge, subjectification) and not learning (ignorance, subjection), the former standing always as the image of completion that the latter haunts. In other words, learning as not learning positions learning in the zone of indistinction where the event of learning’s taking place has a duration of its own; a duration that prepares learning for its completion without exhausting it in an actualization of knowledge.

Before opening this chapter to its conclusion, it is worth pointing out some of the limitations that Agamben’s messianic time sets for political theorization in art education. While the problem with Rancière’s theorization is that he sees politics as a set of unpredictable and untimely actualizations of the part that has no part, an understanding that does not leave room for the impotential side of potentiality to unfold, Agamben’s call for a different relation to time through the deactivation of chronos remains highly abstract,
partially due to its strong emphasis on impotentiality. Although I see that *The Trainee* offers a helpful point of reflection when trying to make Agamben’s poetic expressions [like “the time that time takes to come to an end” (Agamben, 2005a, p. 67, original emphasis)] a bit more concrete, his deep suspiciousness toward any kind of actualized agency makes it hard to imagine what would a *different relation* to the time mean in terms of an educational and/or political action. In this respect, Agamben’s occasionally mystical approach that he asks his readers to engage themselves with prioritizes thought to the point where “the only God that can save us, for Agamben, can be interpellated solely by philosophy.” (Chiesa & Ruda, 2011, p. 168) Since art education works not only in the realm of thought, the challenge that one encounters when using Agamben is that the transformation of thought should also be articulated on the level of *aisthēsis*, that is, the sensuous. Thus, in terms of further theorization, I see that the aesthetic dimensions of the Agambenian thought need to be further elaborated alongside his radical politics.

**Conclusion**

In order to draw together the different traits of thought that I have articulated throughout this chapter, I go back to the three main goals of this study and see how my conceptualization of the *taking place* of learning as well as Rancière’s writings on the untimeliness and Agamben’s messianic time may help to address them:

- Imagining a political existence for art education that does not presuppose predetermined needs or categories, but, on the contrary, challenges them.
— Shifting the focus in political theorization in art education from the construction of political categories to the corrosion of the existing ones.

— Troubling the narrative of progression in both education and politics, thus reframing political theorization in terms of the present.

My two conceptualization of the taking place of learning, the one read from the perspective of a radical politics of actualization and the other as a radical politics of potentiality, unfold two points of departure from where a radical politics of art education can be articulated. Indeed, to challenge predetermined needs, to corrode existing categories, and to trouble progressive linearity requires, as Agamben notes in the epigraph of this chapter, a change in time; that is, a different relation to the very eventness of art education and its politics. In Rancière, one encounters disidentification qua an improper, non-chronological subjectification that opens linearity to a heteronomic as if: a rupture in the totality of the distribution of the sensible that forces to re-imagine what constitutes the properness of a political appearance. In Agamben, the messianic time allows to conceptualize political/educational action as an event that deactivates the linear passage from the constitution to the fulfillment of human subjectivity.

In both cases, the very event during which a politics of art education takes place is opened to its radical presence: neither being dependent on any predetermined qualities nor striving for their actualization, the taking place of learning radicalizes what has not yet actualized but has all the potential to do so. Seeing art education as a possibility for an appearance of the epochally improper (Rancière) or as a process of a cessation that renders a linear passage from human potentialities to their actualization inoperative (Agamben) means
that its presence within the existing order is decoupled from any indebtedness to its preservation. This means that a political imagination of art education *qua* subjectification is exposed to the radical dimension of the change that it ought to introduce to the existing order. Not an improvement or a negation of what already exists, this conceptualization of change forces to conduct an ontological critique of the presence of art education in the society.

From this perspective, read through the radical temporalities of Rancière and Agamben, the three aforementioned goals for this study strip off the certainty that a socially functional art education grants to itself. The precarious temporalities of a radical politics of actualization and a radical politics of potentiality, exemplified in Takala’s contested presence at Deloitte, do not offer any kind of tools to secure the presence of art education in the society or even secure the existence of the society itself, at least as these two are understood in the art education literature discussed in Part I. But, going back to my discussion on a radical politics in the introduction, the point of radicalization is precisely the attempt to question not only the relation between two preconceived entities, but to conduct a critique of their constitution as well. Thus, like the void that Blake describes in the epigraph that begins this study, the question *what does it mean to act politically* can be approached as a boundless immensity that, in its very boundlessness, opens a possibility for establishing a new relation to itself. For political theorization in art education, I see that encountering such void is necessary if one is to open the political character of art education to its various modalities.
Conclusions

Throughout this study, my attempt has been to argue a shift in the political theorization in art education from a construction and actualization of politicized subjectivities to a theory that allows an ontological critique of politics itself. In terms of my leading question *what does it mean to act politically*, rather than seeing art education as an activity that completes the *proper* function of the society, the political task *par excellence* is to trouble such function. My contribution to this task is articulated through the two concepts I have elaborated throughout the study, namely a radical politics of actualization and a radical politics of potentiality, which stand for openings for a *different* kind of political imagination than one finds in art education literature discussed in Part I.

In the first part of this study, comprised of chapters 1, 2, and 3, a radical politics of actualization and a radical politics of potentiality served as critical reflection points to the past and present discourses in North American art education research. In chapter 1, they helped me to problematize a political imagination that takes the constitution of political subjectivities for granted, was it question of human rights or fully developed individuals. In terms of a politics of art education, the passage from potentiality to actuality, a passage that both of these concepts aim at radicalizing, a radical politics of actualization and a radical politics of potentiality pointed to the intricacies of the relationship between subjectification
and the entwinement of life and art education. After all, as discussed in chapters 2 and 3, subjectification \textit{qua} the entwinement of life and education has served as one of the organizing center of educational critique both in the progressive era (chapter 2) and in the era of Visual Culture Art Education (chapter 3). Moreover, chapters 2 and 3 allowed me to further elaborate this relationship by showing how subjectification \textit{qua} the entwinement of life and education often assumes a human life that actualizes its full potential only through an active participation in a (liberal democratic) society; a participation that art education seems to offer necessary preconditions. Since both a radical politics of actualization and a radical politics of potentiality trouble the idea that a political participation always requires an initial recognition of predetermined identities and subject positions, it became possible to critically examine the strategies subjectification in art education that aim at constituting recognized and active participants in the society and to question the premises that the notion of participation entails, namely the constitution of a universal frame in which all particularities are recognized as political subjects.

The second part, chapters 4 and 5, constituted a critical examination and elaboration of a radical politics of actualization and a radical politics of potentiality as analytical concepts in political theorization. By reading them against Pilvi Takala’s \textit{The Trainee}, these two concepts were refined and exposed to their limitations, namely pointing to the precarious nature of a non-recognized existence. Based on the limitations articulated in chapter 4, chapter 5 opened a radical politics of actualization and a radical politics of potentiality to their temporal dimensions, to the very \textit{taking place} of learning \textit{qua} a political act, which
allowed me to discuss political subjectification as an event that has a precarious duration; a
duration that, once exposed, troubles the theorization of learning and politics that constructs
a linear narrative between the past and the future.

Going back to the two initial research questions of this research, that of, in what ways
can Jacques Rancière’s political philosophy, conceptualized in this study as a radical politics of
actualization, inform political theorization in art education research? and in what ways can
Giorgio Agamben’s political philosophy, conceptualized in this study as a radical politics of
potentiality, inform political theorization in art education research? it is important to evaluate
the possible value of my research to the art education research community. Despite that both
Rancière and Agamben are fundamentally reluctant to give any normative suggestions or
finished programs that would pass their thought from an abstraction to concreteness, I
acknowledge the political function of this document: it might, indeed, bring about a
transformation of thought that, hopefully, affects the way that politics is approached in art
education research. In this respect, I consider this dissertation as an opening for a larger
project that re-imagines the relationship between art education and political action, especially
in terms of the passageway from potentiality to actuality that the question what does it mean
to act politically entails. Indeed, if art education is seen as an activity that makes something
take place (something rather than nothing), it is this poietic act of bringing events into existence
that occupies the center of theoretical attention. Moreover, this denotes the shift from a
social theory to a political philosophy that I mentioned in the introduction: rather than
seeing politics as an activity between already constituted political categories, it is the political
activity itself that is exposed to an ontological critique. In this respect, the main contribution of this study should be understood in terms of this change in perspective. As mentioned in the very first paragraph of the study, it is an intervention to the conceptual space where a politics of art education can be theorized and, perhaps, radicalized.

When evaluating the possible impacts of my study to the field of art education research, it is important to discuss what kind of problematics do Rancièrean and Agambenian theorization introduce to the already existing discourse on the relationship between art education and (radical) politics. Here, I am specifically thinking art educators such as Jan Jagodzinski, Jason Wallin, and Charles Garoian, all of whom, as discussed in the introduction, have worked in the intersection of contemporary art, education, and Deleuzian and Deleuzo-Guattarian theory. Indeed, how do my findings differ from their projects?

Notably, the affective level of politics, present in Deleuzian and Deleuzo-Guattarian analyses, that has allowed a productive critique of political and educational theorization that is dependent merely on the plane of representation and cognition (e.g. Jagodzinski, 2010) is mainly absent in Rancière and Agamben. While I acknowledge the importance of affects in political theorization, I see that my discussion on a radical politics of actualization and a radical politics of potentiality help to tackle the question of representation in a different manner. While jagodzinski (2009) argues for a search for line of flights that help to escape the existing circulation of power, a strategy that requires a constitution of alternative economies of affect qua counter-actualizations of desire, my interests lie in the corrosion of the existing conditions of possibility for political action by occupying the passageway
between potentiality and actuality and cutting a fixed linearity between them. After all, Rancièrean disidentification and Agambenian whatever introduce a dysfunction in the distribution of the sensible (Rancière) and in the sovereign power (Agamben) not by stepping out from the circulation of power, but by making a radical dis/appearance within it, thus rendering this circulation inoperative. In terms of representation, this means that a radical politics of actualization and a radical politics of potentiality take a hold of representation while it is taking place and render it inoperative by either exposing its actualization to a radical contingency (Rancière) or to a whateverness that sustains the impotential side of potentiality for appearance (Agamben). For political theorization in art education, I see that this focus on potentiality and actualization allows a more nuanced reading of the radical poiesis of art education in relation to the circulation of power within which is appears.

Despite the fact that a radical politics of actualization and a radical politics of potentiality share some strategic similarities, they do not form a coherent milieu that would secure the existence of a properly radical politics of art education: after all, Rancière’s materialism and Agamben’s emphasis on thought are inherently inconsistent with each other. While Rancière helps to reframe the notion of a political appearance and Agamben allows to explore the political potential of disappearance and non-participation, the question what does it mean to act politically remains fundamentally in tension between these two thinkers. Here, my intention is not to offer two possible routes for radicalization that art educators have to choose from; on the contrary, following my understanding of radical politics, I hope to sustain the tension between these traits of thought. Rancière’s dependency on the production
of radical appearances and Agamben’s deep suspiciousness toward all forms of political subjectivities are certainly issues that need to be approached critically and I see that rather than condemning them separately, it is more productive to continue reading these strategies against each other.

Thus, I find both Rancière and Agamben useful for art education theory, but for different reasons. Rancière’s take on actualization supports a radicalization of political strategies that are rooted in the notion of appearance within the social, while Agamben helps to critically evaluate the ontological premises of the demand for actualized appearances. Despite that Agamben remains highly abstract and somewhat elusive theorist, I see that his writings offers more possibilities for further elaborations of a political theory in art education because his remarks on silence open up a dimension of politics that is yet to be explored, especially from the standpoint of art and education. I see that the seeming dead end that he leaves his readers in (the rejection of politicized subjectivities) could be tackled with a closer reading of what would whateverness mean for artistic and pedagogical practices.

Here, it is worth yet again to go back to the three main goals of this study and articulate what kind of challenges do they pose for future research:

– Imagining a political existence for art education that does not presuppose predetermined needs or categories, but, on the contrary, challenges them.

– Shifting the focus in political theorization in art education from the construction of political categories to the corrosion of the existing ones.

– Troubling the narrative of progression in both education and politics, thus reframing political theorization in terms of the present.
As I pointed out in the previous chapter, these goals unfold a terrain for a political theorization in art education that replaces certainty with precariousness: the corrosive *taking place* of learning is, indeed, a modality of education that pushes both teachers and students to a zone of indistinction between knowledge and non-knowledge. Further theorization is needed to elaborate the nuances between the precariousness that is present in the contemporary capitalism and the precariousness that emerges in radical politics. Certainly, my intention is not to romanticize uncertainty or unpredictability: the fact that many art educators already occupy a precarious position in schools due to the current ideological climate that sees more worth in other school subjects is a problem that should not be taken lightly.

By arguing for a shift in political imagination, my aim is to rethink the ways that such precariousness is tackled. As visible from chapters 2 and 3, the attempts to secure the epochal usefulness of art education has not led to a radical critique of learning *qua* subjectification or questioned the ontological premises of its politics. Like when Ziegfeld and Smith (1944) accused art education for being a “pallid luxury-subject,” that “had no real function either in school curriculum or in the lives of school children,” (p. 1) the blame is always on the content and/or practices of art education, not in the thought that constitutes its activity as politically and/or socially relevant. This leads to a similar logic that Deloitte used with Takala: by framing educational events in a way that they fit with the general narrative of progress, they can be reduced to what is already known. Like with Deloitte, such
ignorance is enmeshed in an inherently problematic pride: nothing can truly challenge the already existing premises of our work.

In this respect, the strategic function of a radical politics of actualization and a radical politics of potentiality is to intensify the already existing precariousness and take it to the point where it does no longer secure the existing order; where it does not fit with the existing frame of reference. If the belonging to the social whole and its educational apparatuses does not promise anything else than the continuation of its own existence, I see that it is worth questioning the reasons for sustaining such order. This is why a radical politics of art education does not promise anything to the social within which it appears: it is not indebted to this order in any way. It is a matter of future research to further elaborate the strategies of tackling the dynamics of power that engender such indebtedness.

By putting the continuation of the social in question, the subjectification that ought to unfold from the event of education becomes questioned as well. Rather than seeing subjectification as a constructive process, it turns corrosive and destructively folds back onto itself, thus disrupting the terms of belonging that grant a fixed political function to singular lives. One possible way to articulate the corrosiveness of such subjectification was discussed in chapter 5, where I argued for a theory of learning that does not presuppose a linear passage between the potentiality to learn and its actualization in a predetermined knowledge, but sees learning as an event of taking place that exposes subjectification to its duration; a duration that is not simply a linear passageway between two points in time, but a time during which potentialities are mobilized to the poietic force of learning. As discussed in
relation to Takala’s presence at Deloitte, the corrosiveness of the taking place derives from this
time that it opens: it thrusts a linear time out of joint and allows the eventness of the
transformation of thought to unfold.

In order to further elaborate what would a corrosive subjectification mean in terms of
art education, more theoretical work has to be done concerning the aesthetics of the attempts
to mobilize the eventness of taking place of learning. Indeed, what would it mean to think a
radical politics of actualization and a radical politics of potentiality as activities that not only
change the way that art education is understood as a political activity, but would also affect its
very making, its own coming-into-presence as a force within this world?
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