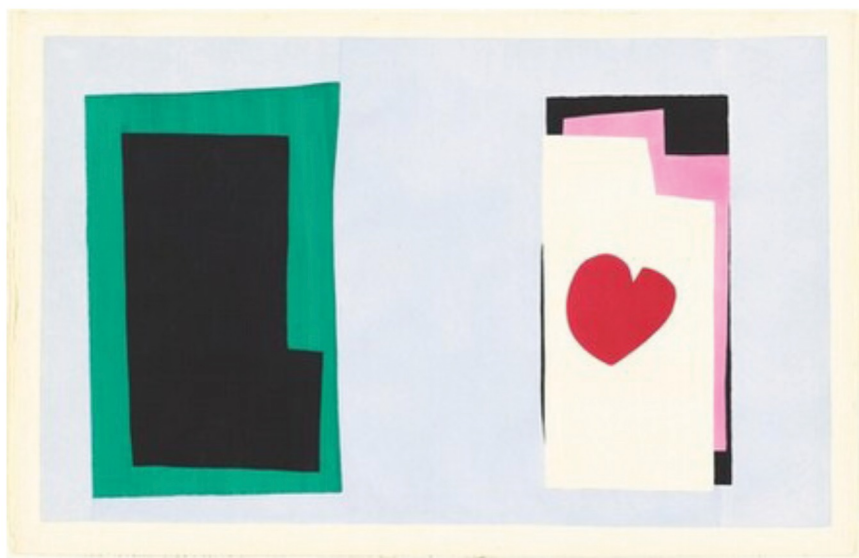


RITA FELSKI

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Preface

“What’s the hook?” The question calls up a certain picture: a big-shot producer, perhaps, leaning back in his chair and quizzing a hapless scriptwriter who is hawking her wares around Hollywood. Hooks are associated with blockbusters and bestsellers: cliffhangers, charismatic characters, what Alfred Hitchcock called MacGuffins. The audience is reeled in, played for all its worth, left flapping and gasping on the line. “Hooked” does not jump to mind as an adjective of choice for admirers of Marcel Proust or Marcel Duchamp—where the preferred language is that of aesthetic distance or critical resistance. Scholars often pride themselves on being indifferent or impervious to hooks: ignoring the bait, with a disdainful flick of their tails they swim away.

Yet all of us are hooked, even if our lures are fashioned from dif-

fering stuff. To a certain kind of reader, the pull of *Ulysses* is stronger than that of *Game of Thrones*; devotees of Joseph Conrad or J. M. Coetzee are no less fervent than fans of Tom Cruise. Wrestling the language of hooks away from charges of sticky sentiment and manipulative marketing, I clarify its broader relevance for aesthetic experience. Perhaps we find ourselves not just captured but *captivated*: that is to say, we come to value the experience of being bound, in ways that cut aslant the modern prizing of unrestricted agency and freedom. The following pages build an aesthetic that is premised on relation rather than separation, on attachment rather than autonomy. What do works of art do? What do they set in motion? And to what are they linked or tied?

A groundswell of voices in the humanities is calling for a course correction—an overhaul of the aims and methods of humanistic study. In contrast to the culture wars of previous decades, this reassessment is spearheaded by critics—feminist and queer scholars feature prominently—with zero nostalgia for the past but hopes for a less cynical and disenchanting future. An assortment of catchphrases echoes through these debates: surface reading, new formalisms, the affective turn, the return to beauty. What *Hooked* adds to this conversation—and what distinguishes it—is its stress on attachment: how people connect to art and how art connects them to other things.

Literary studies, for example, zigzags between historicism and formalism (the stocks of formalism are currently on the rise), but neither approach can shed much light on some fundamental questions. Why do people seek out works of art? What are their differing motives, interests, concerns? What are these encounters with artworks *like*? And how are they sustained, suppressed, or reconfigured in the spaces of the library or the classroom? (What is the relationship, in other words, between the arts and the humanities?) And here there is a rift between the general capacity for aesthetic response—most people can point to a movie or a novel or a piece of music that affects them strongly—and the very partial accounts of the aesthetic in academic writing, where it is equated with either Kantian disinterestedness or edgy transgression. Without denying differences between ordinary and academic interpretation (see especially chapter 4), I draw out similarities that are often over-

looked. Meanwhile, as Bruno Latour points out, whether attachments are felt to be irrational or well founded depends entirely on their distance from one's own tastes and preferences. My high estimation of Bartók or Badiou is so patently justified as to need no explanation; meanwhile, your love of Taylor Swift or—god forbid—Habermas can only be the result of manipulation by outside forces.

The language of attachment may make some readers nervous—fearing that what follows is a brief for mawkish outbursts and self-indulgent meanderings. Yet attachments involve thought as well as feeling, values and judgments as well as gut response. And they are, of course, often ambivalent, fraught, or vexed. I avoid overpsychologizing or oversociologizing the word by forcing it into the exclusive ambit of particular disciplines. As it is used in this book, “attachment” can include, but by no means requires, warm and fuzzy feelings (irony, as we’ll see, can be a powerful tie); it allows for, but does not stipulate, relations to a social group or collective (one can feel as closely connected to a film, a painting, or a song as to another person). Moreover, attachments should not be confused with roots; they are made and unmade over time, intensify or fade away, are oriented to the future as well as the past, can assume new forms and point in surprising directions. Dissenting from the view that bonds are nothing more than restraints, I strive to clarify what they create and make possible. Such a line of argument slices across boundaries between reason and feeling, self and other, text and context. An emphasis on tie-making rather than tie-breaking can inspire ways of thinking about art and criticism that are not tripped up by their own contradictions.

In an influential tradition of modern criticism, for example, poems and paintings are prized for being sovereign, self-contained, and severed from their surroundings. The task of the critic is to honor this autonomy by zeroing in on the specifics of form and medium: an arresting visual composition or a striking juxtaposition of words. The uniqueness of a work will come into view only if all distractions and external details are pushed aside; its separateness and singularity must be fully honored. An alternative approach that has been dominant in recent decades sees the language of politics as the only permissible way of accounting for these same works. Rather than being gloriously self-sufficient, they are now charged

with sustaining inequality or opposing it—the scholar’s task being to sort them into categories of the complicit or the resistant. While these two approaches might seem to be worlds apart, they are often combined in one of the most beguiling of modern mythologies. That art often retains a certain distance from everyday language and thought is imbued with an amplitude of political meaning; this separation is hailed as an act of refusal and thus of critical dissent. The very functionlessness of art, to channel Adorno, serves a critical function: in saying no to the world, it embodies a fragile moment of freedom from the tyranny of instrumental reason and the slick seductions of the marketplace.

This mythology—like many mythologies—is not so much false as it is partial. It crystallizes a stirring and influential ideal: an ethos of critical aloofness that has indisputably molded the self-image of modern artists and intellectuals. And yet their own fierce attachment to this vision undercuts the claim that art is solely a matter of distancing and estranging. That artists assail convention, excoriate the public, or inveigh against oppressive norms does not mean they are untied. Attachments vary in form, scale, intensity, and object; they can be forged to a handful of fellow malcontents rather than to a mass public; to artistic forms rather than to marketplace values; to patterns of words rather than to persons; to what is ideal rather than to what is real. In the very same breath that they insist artworks resist any form of appropriation, meanwhile, scholars deploy these same works to deliver a talk, score points against academic rivals, or build a tenure file. (Attachment is a matter not just of feeling, as we’ll see, but of intellectual, ethical, or institutional ties.) In short, we need better ways of thinking about relations: as not just encroaching but enabling, as sustaining both aesthetic experiences and the work of criticism. The question of what attachment *means* needs to be rethought from the ground up.

I’ve long been drawn to cultural studies, feminism, and pragmatism—approaches that are attuned, in their differing ways, to relational styles of thinking. Most recently, actor-network theory has allowed me to appreciate more fully that ties do not destroy the distinctiveness of art but make it possible. ANT, as it is often called, allows us to circumvent a series of surprisingly stubborn dichotomies: art versus society, text versus context, sophisticated

versus naive response. (The word “circumvent” is intentionally chosen; the point is not to interrogate or deconstruct such oppositions but to walk around them in order to arrive somewhere else.) And above all, the scission of the subjective versus the objective: I versus they. Any case for art cannot brush aside the salience of first-person response; it is via such response that artworks come to matter, to make claims upon us. (This is one reason I prefer to speak of attachment rather than mediation or translation.) And yet, the personal does not exclude the transpersonal; nor is the experiential at war with the argumentative or the analytical. (Attachment, as we’ll see, is about much more than “love.”)

What I take from ANT is a certain way of going about things rather than a theory or a self-contained system of ideas. *Hooked* makes no attempt to survey the history or premises of actor-network theory or to summarize the prodigious number of books and essays authored by its most influential thinker, Bruno Latour. Nor is it an attempt to create a “Latourian criticism”—whatever that might mean. Rather, it looks closely at how people connect to novels and paintings and films and music. ANT came on the scene several decades ago as a way of crafting more accurate descriptions of how science *works*. Rather than endorsing soul-stirring stories of heroic discovery or debunking science as nothing more than a smoke-screen for capitalist interests, its practitioners followed scientists around in their laboratories and documented the precise details of what they did and said.

By analogy, then, an ANT perspective does not endorse a view of aesthetic experience as transcendent and timeless; but neither does it seek to demystify it by translating it into the categories of another domain—economics, politics, psychoanalysis—that is held to be more fundamental or more real. Instead, it slows down judgment in order to describe more carefully what aesthetic experiences are like and how they are made. Rather than seeking distance from such experiences, it strives to edge closer. Antoine Hennion has done groundbreaking work along these lines, transposing ANT into the fields of art, music, and practices of taste; his influence can be seen everywhere in the following pages. Hennion, however, holds the job description of sociologist; my own emphases, in speaking from and to the humanities, cannot help but fall differently. New

questions come to the fore: how attachment relates to traditional accounts of aesthetic experience; to theories of interpretation; to the status of exemplary works in the humanities; to divisions between expert commentary and the responses of lay audiences. If ANT is to be carried over into the humanities, it will be altered, revised, reoriented, betrayed. What follows is, perhaps, less ANT than ANT-ish.

Attachment is often treated as something to be interrogated, while its antithesis gets off scot-free. *Hooked* begins (chapter 1) by flipping things around: looking quizzically at the deference to detachment as the quintessential philosophical ideal and definitive diagnosis of late modernity. Turning to Yasmina Reza's play "*Art*," I note the existence of status distinctions that would interest Pierre Bourdieu while pointing out that aesthetic relations involve more than power relations. The attachment theory of psychologists John Bowlby and Donald Winnicott might offer a more positive resource, yet here again the specter of reductionism threatens: we cannot do justice to aesthetic attachments as long as we explain them in terms of something else. Art hooks up to many other things; but it is not based on them or encased by them. Meanwhile, caring for art involves more than pleasure or feeling; it also brings into play second-order assessments of why art matters.

The first "attachment device" I consider is *attunement*—those affinities, inclinations, stirrings that often fall below the threshold of consciousness (chapter 2). Why, for example, are we drawn to a painting or piece of music in ways we struggle to explain while being left cold by others whose merits we duly acknowledge? In recent decades, talk of the ineffable has often been taboo—seen as evidence of Romanticism, elitism, mysticism, or other thought crimes. Yet most people can point to novels or movies or music—whether Mozart or Mötley Crüe—that affect them strongly in ways they find hard to articulate. Doing justice to such experiences will mean moving beyond standard forms of phenomenological or sociological explanation and attending to the surprising as well as the scripted, the sensuous as well as the sense-full, yet without pitching aesthetic experience outside the social world. Ranging across diverse examples of attunement, with a focus on Zadie Smith's

conversion to the music of Joni Mitchell, I reflect on the agency of artworks, the duration and rhythms of becoming attuned, and the question of art's presence.

The following chapter turns to *identification*—a widespread response to fiction that is often invoked by critics but rarely fully seen. And here arguments are commonly derailed by treating identification as synonymous with empathy, on the one hand, and with identity, on the other. Yet identifying has no neat fit with identity categories; meanwhile, it can trigger ethical, political, or intellectual affinities that have little to do with co-feeling. Here I disentangle several strands of identification: alignment, allegiance, recognition, and empathy. What people most commonly identify with are characters—who are alluring, arresting, alive, not in spite of their aesthetic qualities but because of them. Yet fictional and real persons also overlap: the confusion of character and author in certain genres of fiction; the merging of character and star when watching a film. Characters are hybrids patched together out of fiction and life. Reflecting on the allure of Camus's antihero Meursault, I coin the idea of ironic identification: a style of attachment-via-shared-disassociation that also permeates the contemporary humanities. Rather than being limited to naive readers or over-invested viewers, identifying turns out to be a defining aspect of what scholars do.

The fourth chapter considers academic *interpretation* as another circuit of connection: critics forge ties to the works they explicate, the methods they use, and the disciplinary identities they inhabit. Yet an explicit concern with attachment can also alter *how* we interpret. And here I consider the salience of scale and stance. I elaborate on how an ANT-ish approach is compatible with differences in scale—tracing works within networks as well as networks within works—while justifying my own focus on midlevel ties between works and audiences as fundamental to clarifying what art does and why it matters. Drawing on the recent work of David Scott and Toril Moi, I ask what exactly it might mean to be receptive or generous and how knowledge is related to acknowledgment. How, finally, might such questions be relevant to the classroom? Being exposed to unfamiliar works or being exposed differently to

familiar ones, learning new techniques of analysis and habits of attention—such practices of analytical engagement can alter the vector of our attachments.

In *The Limits of Critique*, I raised the question of what kinds of responses art elicits: what perceptual changes it triggers, what affective bonds it calls into being. What would it mean, I wondered, to do justice to these responses rather than treating them as naive, rudimentary, or defective? To be less shamefaced about being shaken or stirred, absorbed or enchanted? To forge a language of attachment as intellectually robust and refined as our rhetoric of detachment?¹ The hill on which I'm prepared to die is my conviction that the social meanings of artworks are not encrypted in their depths—perceptible only to those trained in professional techniques of interpretation. Rather—or so *Hooked* contends—any such meanings can be activated or actualized only by their differing audiences: calling for a rethinking of the fundamentals of aesthetic experience.

On Being Attached

How does a novel entice or enlist us; how does a song surprise or seduce us? Why do we bridle when a friend belittles a book we love or fall into a funk when a favored TV show comes to an end? Attachment, I've suggested, has more than one meaning: to be attached is to be affected or moved and also to be linked or tied. It denotes passion and compassion—but also an array of ethical, political, intellectual, or other bonds. *Hooked* makes a case for “attachment” as a vital keyword for the humanities. Why do works of art matter? Because they create, or cocreate, enduring ties.

To focus on attachment is to trace out relations without presuming foundations. To look closely at acts of connecting as well as what one is connected to; the transpersonal as well as the personal; things in the world as well as things in works of art. It is

less a topic or a theme than a style of thinking, a way of becoming sensitized to issues that are often sidelined in scholarship. My argument edges forward crabwise by attending to examples: Zadie Smith's conversion to Joni Mitchell; Patricia Hampl being hammered by a Matisse; Mohsin Hamid's invitation to empathy in *Exit West*; feminist allegiances with *Thelma and Louise*; ironic identification with Camus's *The Stranger*; ties between paintings and friends in Yasmina Reza's "Art"; Geoff Dyer being turned off and then turned on by Tarkovsky's *Stalker*; Wayne Koestenbaum's affinity with a stentorian phrase from Brahms; the geography of emotion in Eva Hoffman's *Lost in Translation*; my twinge of recognition on reading Thomas Bernhard; David Scott's generosity toward Stuart Hall.

Why go about things this way? The goal, in Annemarie Mol's words, is "not to fight until a single pattern holds, but to add on ever more layers and enrich the repertoire."¹ Stabs at analysis are needed to clarify our attunement to a certain song and not another, or why "empathy" may feel like the wrong word for a felt affinity with a fictional character. And yet the piling up of examples can mess up tidy schemas: causing generalizations to crumble, thwarting our best efforts to pin down and pigeonhole. Aesthetic theories often rein in this unruliness by staking their claims on a selective vision, writing as if aesthetic experience were always disinterested or rapturous or ethically consequential or politically motivated. In doing so, they overlook important differences in how people respond to works of art.

Attachment doesn't get much respect in academia. It is often outsourced to others—naïve readers, gullible consumers, small-town patriots, too-needy lovers—and treated as a cause for concern, a regrettable, if common, human software malfunction. The history of critique, remark Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, pits detachment against attachment, mobility against stability. In contrast to the bourgeoisie glued to their possessions—or women bound to their families and children—modern artists and intellectuals strive to slip free of ties, taking their cues from the figure of the Baudelairean dandy.² The critical frameworks of the last half century largely echo and endorse this modernist vision; any specialness accruing to art lies in its power to desist or resist, to break

bonds rather than make bonds. The language du jour is one of dislocating, disorienting, demystifying. But perhaps the true naïfs are those critics who imagine themselves free of attachments.

The fear of stickiness is the fear of being stuck in place, of having one's freedom constrained and one's mobility impeded. And yet things move, and we move with them; we travel, and our attachments come along for the ride. We are talking about Velcro rather than superglue: connecting parts that move against each other, that can often be unhooked and rehooked. Stickiness is not something to be regretted or repudiated, as the condition of those unable to slide through the world with sufficient dexterity and ease. It is, rather, a nonnegotiable aspect of being in the world. Our critical languages extol the merits of unbinding and unraveling, and yet our critical practices tell a different story.

Attachments, of course, are not always positive. We can be drawn to things that hurt or humiliate, that feed our narcissism or pander to our delusions, that shore up half-baked ideas or wrongheaded beliefs. The playing field, moreover, is conspicuously uneven. Female readers have—of sheer necessity—glommed on to male writers more than the other way around, while most of the world's cultures bear the imprint of a Western canon of art and beauty. Is there not a risk, then, of idealizing or romanticizing attachment? All attachment is optimistic, writes Lauren Berlant, and yet such optimism becomes cruel when we are drawn to things that diminish or damage us. And Sara Ahmed reflects on how stickiness can get us stuck; binding can become a form of blocking; people can become deeply attached, for example, to schemas of racist thought.³

Yet, as Ahmed goes on to say, there is a tendency among critics to treat ties *only* this way: as if the condition of being-attached were an inherent weakness or defect, as if ties served only as restraints and limits. The upshot is a one-sidedness that not only simplifies the attachments of others but leaves us floundering to account for our own. It is not a matter of idealizing ties but of facing up to the ubiquity and inescapability of ties. Even the most searing or skeptical of judgments depends on a prior, if unacknowledged, commitment. Scholars are adept at theorizing, historicizing, and politicizing the investments of others—while often remaining coy or evasive about their own. What do we feel obligated to? What keeps us up at

night? Taking attachment seriously—which does not mean denying ambivalence, friction, or discomfort—means grappling with the issue of what carries weight. It has both affective and ethical force.

We might begin by noting that aesthetic experiences are actively sought out. People break open a novel or watch a movie or stop to look at a painting in the hope of gaining something: solace or self-understanding, a frisson of pleasure or an insight into the world or the self. (Without discounting such motives as impressing one's friends or gaining cultural capital, I propose that such explanations take us only so far.) Yet these expectations are often overridden and overwritten by the metalanguages of criticism. Joli Jensen puts it well: "to reduce what other people do to dysfunction or class position or psychic needs or socioeconomic status is to reduce others to uninteresting pawns in a game of outside sources and to glorify ourselves as somehow off the playing field, observing and describing what is really going on."⁴ Whether their approach is critical or affirmative, critics feel obliged to read novels, films, and paintings closely, with due attention to detail—yet lay responses to such texts are often held at arm's length, explained away before being fully seen. Not only are such responses more multifaceted than critics acknowledge, but they are also less remote from their own practices than they might think. (That identification and attunement are not listed as course learning goals or pondered in the pages of *PMLA* does not mean they do not affect academic life.)

It is not that research on lay audiences is lacking—many such accounts have piled up over the years—and yet they've made barely a dent in prevailing views about what it means to be a sophisticated reader or discerning appreciator of art. Again and again—in the aside of an essay, the sotto voce remark at a lecture—assumptions are aired about the inevitable gulf between scholarly and lay response. One reason for the nonimpact of audience studies on the mainstream of the humanities surely lies in its splicing of these audiences into very specific demographics: studies of Harlequin romance readers or of Bruce Springsteen fans. The very framing of such responses as "other"—as the property of a group that is not one's own—lets critics off the hook. It allows them to keep such responses at arm's length; to dismiss them as being of merely sociological interest; to evade, in short, their normative implica-

tions for, and provocation to, a certain academic self-image. What Deidre Lynch writes of the study of English holds true for the humanities generally: oppositions between a specialized guild of interpreters concerned with knowledge and meaning and a broader public driven only by feeling and pleasure create a distorted picture of both.⁵

How to tackle this dichotomy of the clueless versus the critical, those who are stuck to their love objects versus those who have prided themselves free? Over the last few decades, cultural studies has assailed this opposition on behalf of popular audiences, rebutting portrayals of such audiences as passive, overly emotional, and entirely uncritical. But less has been written about the *other* side of the divide: how responses of more educated readers or viewers—including academics—are shaped by investments, how they are entangled and affectively thick. Feminist and queer scholars have done most work along these lines, yet their ideas are too rarely taken up in other fields. In his book on musical taste, Carl Wilson urges critics to cling less tightly to their defensive postures of detachment and coolness and to own up to their enjoyment, “with all its messiness and private soul tremors.”⁶ As his phrasing suggests, interests are not absent, even if they are unaccounted for. The most jaded of critics are invested, if only in their own upmanship—and often in a great deal more. We are always *oriented* in some way: turned toward or against certain possibilities of feeling, thought, and action.

Attachment, meanwhile, is not just a matter of emotion. The point is not to shunt from the objective to the subjective but from a language of bifurcation (art versus society, text versus context) to one of relation. Attachments are not only psychological but involve many forms of joining, connecting, meeting. This means zeroing in on differing kinds of ties. People can become attached in a quite literal sense: the dog-eared paperback that rides around town in a jacket pocket; the lyrics streaming through the headphones that are glued to a student’s ears; the Matisse postcard that is propped up on a desk and carried from one sublet to the next. Attachments can be institutional (the novel that crops up every year on my syllabus), cognitive (the essay that gave me a new intellectual vocabulary), ethical or political (the core beliefs and commitments

that shape how I react to a controversial film). These connections sustain not only experiences of art but perceptions of its value. To the Shakespeare scholar, there is a world of difference between *Henry IV Part 1* and *Part 2*; the Stephen King fan will be highly indignant if you confuse *Cujo* and *Christine*. It is via the forging of ties—the acquisition of know-how, the honing of attention, exposure to examples, input from friends or teachers or reviewers—that novels or pictures or films come to matter: that they become more present, more vivid, more real.

That attachments are *made* in this way is often acknowledged, but only in order to score a point. Over the last few decades, the rhetoric of “social construction” has been weaponized to weaken the status of artworks, to downgrade them to a shadow of their former selves. Actor-network theory’s style of thinking, however, is additive, not subtractive. That various factors are involved—that our attachments are shaped by the world into which we are thrown—does not lessen the import of these attachments or their objects. The fabrication of things does not have to be played out *against* them—to diminish or undercut them—but can also be played out *with* them, remarks Antoine Hennion.⁷ That ties to artworks must be made does not weaken their value; that we help create the work does not mean it cannot surprise us. How to account for the complexity of this co-making?

We need to do justice to what the artwork does. The poem intervenes; the painting arrests a nonchalant viewer; the movie makes something happen. Someone is drawn to a haunting refrain, a quirky narrator, a burst of pigment: features that beg to be described, detailed, captured. For the fan, the enthusiast, the aficionado, such qualities matter. This mattering is built into the meaning of attachment: that we are drawn to one thing and emphatically not to another; that its specialness is nonnegotiable; that we are riled when we see it being treated as a stand-in for something else. “A work of art *engages* us,” writes Latour, “and if it is quite true that it has to be interpreted, at no point do we have the feeling that we are free to do ‘whatever we want’ with it. . . . Someone who says ‘I love Bach’ . . . receives from Bach, we might almost say ‘downloads’ from Bach, the wherewithal to appreciate him.”⁸ Works of art invite and enlist us; they draw us down certain perceptual or

interpretive paths. They have their own distinctiveness and dignity, can affect us in ways we did not imagine or anticipate, are not just pawns in a game of social distinction or blank screens onto which we project our *idées fixes*.

And yet these works of art also need our devotion. Their existence depends on being taken up by readers or viewers or listeners, as figures through whom they must pass. Without these intermediaries, they are destined to fade away into nothingness, are reduced, in Latour's evocative words, to "failure, loss, or oblivion: abandoned stage sets, rolled up canvases, now useless accessories, incrustated palettes, moth-eaten tutus."⁹ What an artwork affords is exceptionally hard to disentangle from our response; its qualities disclose themselves only as we attend to them. We make the artwork even as it makes us. Rebecca Solnit writes: "the object we call a book is not the real book, but its potential, like a musical score or seed. It exists fully only in the act of being read; and its . . . home is inside the head of the reader, where the symphony resounds, the seed germinates."¹⁰ Artworks must be *activated* to exist.

Meanwhile, these works arrive at our doorstep already wreathed in interventions and appropriations of many kinds, thanks to the diligence of publishers, agents, teachers, friends, curators, reviewers, and, in some cases, long histories of commentary. These mediations are not extraneous to a work, to be yanked off like pesky vines encroaching on a pristine house wall. They form an essential part of it, shaping what we perceive and why it comes to matter in the first place. (Because this book was on the syllabus, I grew to love it; because I heard that song on the radio one rainy Tuesday, it became the anthem of my early twenties.) As Hennion puts it, there is never a naked face-to-face of subject and object; even if we brood over a page of prose in monastic solitude, the air is thick with the ghosts of the many coactors who made the encounter possible.¹¹ Attachments are a matter not only of individual receptiveness but also of catalysts, sparks, triggers—all those influences that steer us toward an affinity for certain works, in predictable but also in surprising ways.

An essay by Wayne Koestenbaum captures beautifully what is at stake: the triangulation among a work, its recipient, and a penumbra of influences. Koestenbaum reflects on being drawn, as a

teenager, to the opening movement of a Brahms piano concerto. Puzzling over the sources of this enigmatic affinity, he is drawn into a labyrinthian line of questioning that testifies to the impossibility of nailing down a single or simple causal explanation:

Was Brahms the object? Was it the particular interval (minor seventh? ninth?) that the opening phrase traversed? . . . Was my object the piano's affinity with the orchestra, an ensemble chained to the dominating, hubristic piano? Did I feel affinity with finger-wizard Rudolf Serkin, with maestro George Szell, or their imagined affinity? Was my object—affinity's bull's-eye—my piano teacher, a diminutive young woman who'd played that daunting concerto earlier, as a soloist with a college orchestra? Did I feel an affinity with this teacher, whose narcissism, and whose audacious virtuosity, I imagined as a nougat I wanted to eat? Did I feel an affinity with D minor itself, the signature of woe and of containment within that comforting category, woe? . . . Was I mesmerized by Brahms's affinity with Beethoven, or Brahms's ties to Schumann? . . . Did I feel an affinity with modernity or with tonality's rupture, even if tonality was not yet being destroyed, even if I'd be a fool to say that this opening phrase predicted Schoenberg?¹²

In this passage—which winds on for many more sentences—Koestenbaum spins out a tangled web of associations. He felt compelled by the stentorian ugliness of Brahms's theme: its avoidance of happiness and its testy rejection of optimism and productivity resonated with his own feelings of malaise. The music felt masculine, even paternal (a difficult father?); it seemed aggressive, ambitious, Promethean; it conveyed a refusal to cooperate, a desire to throttle the environment; its surliness spoke to his own youthful sentiments. He felt called by the music, summoned into an excited blur of fear, love, and disgust, drawn to an aura of dominant magnetism. It was an affinity, he observes, that his younger self might have described as satanic, anarchic, family destroying but that brought no intellectual program or coherent ideology in its wake.

How to account for this attachment? The essay's trail leads to the pianist, the conductor, Koestenbaum's piano teacher, Brahms's rivalry with Schumann, the history and tonality of modern music—but also, in another passage, back to the affective turbulence of a

queer youth, with its “childhood bedroom, its carpet, its curtain-filtered sunshine, its pessimism, its cramps, its *Mod Squad*, its dead flies.”¹³ Koestenbaum’s essay alerts us to what actor-network theory calls “distributed agency”—that attachments to artworks are the result not of a single all-powerful cause steering things behind the scenes but of different things coming together in ways that are often hard to pin down. Ties that are parceled out for analysis among differing disciplines—musicology, psychology, cultural sociology—turn out to be hopelessly entangled. The starting point of Koestenbaum’s inquiry is his fascination with a specific musical theme, yet this affinity opens out on to an entire world.

Semidetached

Why has the idea of detachment commanded such unconditional loyalty and staunch support? The driving goal of modern thought, it often seems, is to wrest oneself free from a primordial immersion in the given. Whether one turns to Hegel or Foucault, it is only by distancing oneself from what exists that one can gain any kind of critical purchase on it. Alienation is, in this sense, an indispensable element of philosophy and politics; even when viewed in a negative light, it is taken to be irrevocable, a fundament of our historical condition. What defines modernity is a sundering of persons from any form of taken-for-granted community or unity. To be modern is to be ripped free of the bonds of tradition and superstition, to be borne along by shock waves of social upheaval and secular disenchantment. The only alternatives are the false consolations of naivete or nostalgia.

Yet this view of modernity as a drama of scission and separation, unbinding and loosening—what Charles Taylor calls the subtraction story—is in need of reappraisal. While some ties are broken, new ones are forged. Romantic love, for example, has assumed a previously inconceivable importance over the last two centuries, even while being thickly leavened with irony and ambivalence. As Eva Illouz has shown, it embodies a distinctively modern bond between persons that is implicated in struggles for social recognition.¹⁴ To be sure, accelerating waves of mobility across countries and continents have led to a crumbling of communities based around village

or tribe. And yet, as old groupings have disappeared, new ones have proliferated in urban and now virtual spaces: sexual minorities and political pressure groups; Star Wars fans and Wagner aficionados. We are not less connected but differently connected; contemporary tribes have their own totems, rituals, and professions of faith. Hiro Saito points out that cosmopolitanism is less a matter of transcending attachments—a condition of lonely exile—than of multiplying attachments to nonlocal and nonnational others.¹⁵ And once we factor in the vast spectrum of nonhuman actors in late modernity—the smartphones, shower gels, serotonin inhibitors, and shoes that populate countless lives—we might well conclude that our condition is one of ever-greater entanglement, of proliferating ties and multiplying dependencies.

At a philosophical level, meanwhile, detachment has been hailed as a precondition for any form of knowledge. This preference makes a certain intuitive sense: by standing back from phenomena, we strive to achieve greater insight. Thinking presumes a degree of distancing: the ability to discriminate between stronger and weaker claims, to sort and sift among modes of reasoning. We scrutinize our own biases, strive to correct our blind spots. And yet a complete impartiality is neither possible nor desirable. Perhaps the best we can strive for—and here I'm pulled back to the landscape of my British childhood, those sedate pairs of houses, cozily coupled and snuggled together, so redolent of lower-middle-class respectability!—is to be *semidetached*. The semidetached house is a residential unit that is linked to its neighbor; sharing a structural wall, it cannot stand alone. By analogy, we can distance ourselves from a few things at a time but never from everything at once.¹⁶ As certain questions move into the forefront of consciousness, others fade into the background. Moments of insight can emerge only against a horizon of unchallenged—indeed, unnoticed—assumptions. For one strand of modern thought (relevant figures would include Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Polanyi, Taylor) such embedding is not a closing off of possibility but the precondition of any form of meaningful engagement.

A striving for unbridled lucidity, writes Polanyi, can wreak havoc on understandings of complex phenomena, which invite us to “dwell in” things rather than to scrutinize them from afar.¹⁷ Dis-

tance is not always better than closeness: the bird's-eye view will miss crucial details and telling anomalies; it may result in knowing less rather than more. The coherence of critical theories is their forte but also their frailty; while intellectually appealing and morally compelling, they can be a poor fit for the messiness of reality—or of art. Meanwhile, it is not a matter of discarding thought in order to embrace a rapturous state of vibrating, throbbing, and wordless gaping. To query the *doxa* of detachment is not to elevate feeling over thought but to reflect on their intertwining. As Hans-Georg Gadamer reminds us, prejudices—that is to say, prejudgments—are not obstacles to thought but the precondition for any kind of thought; as Donna Haraway points out, it is only from a situated perspective that any kind of objectivity can be achieved. Even the most abstract and high-flown speculation, even the most iconoclastic or ironic of postures, pivots on a connection to *something*.

How does aesthetic experience relate to such questions? In its narrow sense, the phrase has come to denote a pleasure in beauty for its own sake rather than for any moral, practical, or other entailments it might bring. In the *Third Critique*, Kant gives an account of such pleasure as it relates to judgments of taste: it is subjective, since it cannot be justified by appealing to concepts; and yet it is also normative, since we cannot help wanting others to share our judgment. Aesthetic pleasure differs from finding something agreeable, moreover, in involving a stance of disinterest. Formalist critics seized on this account to construct a full-blown theory of art. What defines an artwork, they argue, are its qualities of significant form; these qualities demand a specific kind of response, in which everyday concerns and commitments are suspended. According to Clive Bell, “to appreciate a work of art we need bring with us nothing from life, no knowledge of its ideas or affairs, no familiarity with its emotions, . . . nothing but a sense of form and colour and a knowledge of three-dimensional space.”¹⁸ Aesthetic experience comes to serve as an exemplary—perhaps *the* exemplary—form of detached experience, and what defines art is its potential to offer such an experience.

This line of thought has been assailed from all sides over the last half century. Politically minded critics disputed the view that art could be cut off from its contexts, citing countless examples of

aesthetic judgments steered—sometimes in the most transparent fashion—by ideological interests. Philosophers of art in the analytical tradition were no less damning: not only was the idea of “aesthetic experience” hopelessly impressionistic, but it could not deliver any kind of tenable distinction between art and non-art. The significance of *Brillo Boxes*, Arthur Danto pointed out, had nothing to do with its discernible aesthetic properties calling forth a subjective response. It was a matter, rather, of grasping Warhol’s work as a conceptual provocation to the prior history and understanding of art. In the case against aesthetics—widely charged with being romantic, reactionary, apolitical, or incoherent—the idea of “aesthetic experience” served as Exhibit A.¹⁹

Yet these polemics have gradually subsided, alongside a growing recognition that aesthetics encompasses far more than Kant, Bell, or Greenberg. And while its associations with racial and gender inequalities are now amply documented, critics have testified to the vital role of aesthetic expression as a source of solace for the disenfranchised. Such expression serves as a stylized barrier, Paul C. Taylor writes, that can be held up against the incursions of a hostile world. His study of black aesthetics, conceived as an assembly of diverse forms and practices, elaborates on how beauty, structure, and meaning have been embraced as a form of consolation as well as an act of defiance in the face of oppression.²⁰

Meanwhile, Susan Sontag’s sally against interpretation half a century ago is getting a newly attentive hearing, alongside her rallying call for an erotics of art. There is a sharpening sense of the limits of decoding and deciphering, a feeling that hermeneutics can turn into hermeneutering, as Richard Shusterman puts it: a scholarly suffocating of art’s incandescent energies. Might the language of aesthetic experience be worth rescuing? It conveys, after all, a widespread intuition that encounters with art can be valuable, absorbing, meaningful, and distinctive—even if artworks are not the only source of aesthetic experience and not all artworks deliver such experience.²¹ Can we do justice to this intuition without falling back into a view of art and aesthetics as cut off from the rest of life?

Noel Carroll offers one solution: aesthetic experience in its narrow sense exists, he proposes, but as one response among others,

with no superior or honorific status. (He calls this solution a “deflationary” account.) We can, after all, pay attention to the design of a painting or a sculpture, weighing up whether or not it hangs together, responding to its formal, sensuous, or expressive qualities. But we also have moral, intellectual, or political responses to artworks that are no less valid and that may be actively solicited by the works in question. Derek Attridge writes from within a different tradition, yet his position has certain parallels to Carroll’s in acknowledging literary and nonliterary response, while also separating them from each other. “Though works of literature,” he observes, “may offer lessons on living, and this may be an important aspect of their social value, it is not *as literature that they do so.*” Elsewhere, Attridge differentiates between the literariness of a text and other qualities it may possess, such as rhetorical effectiveness, emotive appeal, or an imaginative modeling of utopian projects.²²

This might look like a promising line of thought—one that strives to be pluralist and ecumenical. Yet is it really feasible to distinguish so assuredly between aesthetic and other forms of response? Between the literariness of a work and the jostling crowd of influences pressing in from all sides? My crush on Kazuo Ishiguro’s *The Unconsoled* (see chapter 2) is partly prompted by the inspired pairing of its matter-of-fact language with a weirdly off-kilter fictional world. But—pace Koestenbaum—can I definitively disentangle this affinity from the shadow of Kafka that falls over Ishiguro’s writing and my reading; from a personal history that inclines me toward Central European themes and sensibilities; from an ingrained preference—inflected by personality and temperament—for writing that is subdued rather than showy (Kafka rather than Joyce; Coetzee rather than Rushdie)? Severed from everything that makes me who I am, could I have any kind of aesthetic response at all?

It is not just that I cannot unstick myself from my own attributes while having an aesthetic response. It is also that the “separate but equal” position conceives of reactions to artworks—like the fridge-freezer combos available for purchase at Lowe’s and Best Buy—as existing *side by side*: I have an aesthetic *or* a moral-political response *or* an emotional response. And yet these are often blended in ways that make it impossible to pry them apart. It is not just that

political or affective response is mediated by aesthetic properties, but that aesthetic properties can augment or intensify the force of such response. (As we'll see in the next chapter, it was *Thelma and Louise's* refashioning of genre conventions and sublime visuals that rendered it a powerful source of feminist identification.) Works of art have the potential to stir up ethical and political emotions—empathy, anger, outrage, solidarity—*by dint of their aesthetic qualities*.

As Winfried Fluck remarks, “taking an aesthetic attitude toward an object does not mean, or at least does not necessarily mean, that we disengage the object or ourselves from reality. . . . [T]he aesthetic function may become dominant, but it does not become exclusive.”²³ Aesthetic responses are often mixed: it is not a matter of either/or but both/and. In attending to the formal or aesthetic qualities of a work, we may briefly bracket practical urgencies, but this does not mean that all reference to reality is lost. Art's promise of insight or pleasure exists in relation to a larger world and often feeds back into that same world. Everyday reality is not eclipsed by art; it is *reconfigured* by it.

That aesthetic experiences are mixed, admittedly, does not mean that they are always mixed in exactly the same proportions. There may be times when worldly concerns seem to fade entirely away; there is a sense of being arrested by the sheer thereness, or presence, of an artwork (the timbre of Joni Mitchell's voice; the delicately etched ruffs of a Vermeer). A grain of truth adheres to the Kantian idea that aesthetic perception can distance us from real-world concerns—but there's no reason why this distancing should serve as the ideal or prototype against which all engagements with artworks are measured. Meanwhile, “disinterestedness” does not quite capture the quality of this attention, which possesses its own force and intensity. As Jean-Marie Schaeffer remarks, “the aesthete seeking a sublime painting is no less interested than a fetishist seeking a foot—or a shoe—that suits him.”²⁴ Attending to the formal elements of art may bring into play varying affects or dispositions, from the reflective to the rapturous, from the ecstatic to the ironic. But there is no single aesthetic attitude, no defining mode of pure or disengaged contemplation, that unites them.

The phrase “aesthetic experience” comes, meanwhile, with a

great deal of baggage; it often conjures up a drama that is being played out in the shuttered cells of individual minds. Kant, admittedly, reckons with the intersubjective aspects of such experience (we want our judgments to be shared by others), while Dewey spins the idea of experience to stress its communal and democratic qualities. But the default scenario, in most accounts of what it means to have an aesthetic experience, is a dyadic encounter on an empty stage: a solitary self faces a self-contained work. And yet, as we've already seen, a host of other players are involved. Our feelings about a novel or film are colored by multiple factors: a trenchant or effusive review, its presence on a college syllabus, scraps of random knowledge about an author or director. "Literary evaluation," remarks James Wood, cannot be separated from "the general messiness of being alive. . . . Your love of Chekhov might be influenced by the knowledge that he named one of his dachshunds Quinine."²⁵ Differing things come together; the singular qualities of Chekhov's writings, to be sure, but also, perhaps, a battered biography unearthed in a secondhand bookstore, a course on Russian literature taken in college, a friend's account of an off-Broadway performance of *Uncle Vanya*.

It is here that the language of "attachment" offers a crucial re-orientation: one that blends response with relations, the personal with the transpersonal. What phenomenology gets right is that aesthetic experience can happen only in the first person: no one can listen or read or look for you; no one else can have *your* response. To treat such experiences as symptoms of larger structures is to erase those very qualities that define them: their perceptual and sensual textures, their variability, the way they are experienced as "mine." And yet readers and viewers do not exist in a vacuum; many things must have happened before I can gawp in admiration at a Manet at the Met. Many of the questions raised by cultural sociologists are thus entirely a propos. *Aesthetic experience is mediated; aesthetic experience can feel intensely immediate.* Both propositions hold true, and neither negates or cancels out the other.²⁶

Yet they are often opposed or, at the very least, dispatched to different disciplines: as if talk of absorption or aesthetic pleasure cannot coexist with accounts of ties. There is no zero-sum game where the more "social" the artwork is, the less "aesthetic" it must

be! We acquire forms of know-how that help us to engage a text; yet this text also solicits us in certain ways. Meanwhile, perception is shaped by the input of others, such that the question of what comes from the artwork or from elsewhere is difficult to disentangle. You look at a painting, Latour remarks, and “a friend of yours points out a feature you had not noticed—you are thus *made to see* something. Who is seeing it? You of course. And yet wouldn’t you freely acknowledge that you would not have seen it *without* your friend? So who has seen the delicate feature? Is it you or your friend? The question is absurd.”²⁷ Our seeing often depends on the seeing of others.

Cue Yasmina Reza’s *Art*: a play about three middle-aged Parisian men whose friendship is cast out of joint by the purchase of a painting. Finding out that friends dislike an artwork you love can cast a pall over your relationship: how could they be so insensitive or obtuse? Conversely, our aesthetic responses are often colored by the reactions of others, not necessarily—or not only—because we are sycophants anxious to conform, but because their input helps us to see what we could not perceive by ourselves. Philosophies of art, remarks Noel Carroll, stress its impact on the individual or society as a whole. Yet art “is not just a personal affair, nor is it only a force in society writ large. It is also a medium through which we forge our small-scale, face-to-face, everyday relations with others.”²⁸ We often go to movies and concerts with friends, thrash out disagreements about a novel over a coffee or a beer; yet little has been written on the topic of art and friendship.

Art starts with Serge announcing that he has bought an expensive abstract painting by the artist Antrios: a large white canvas marked by almost invisible diagonal lines. His friend Marc is filled with a deep sense of unease; he laments Serge’s willingness to be ripped off, his loss of discernment. His oldest friend has become a snob and an aesthete: someone who talks about deconstruction and drops the phrase “incredibly modern” into his conversation. In short, Marc feels betrayed and abandoned; Serge has become a stranger, with pretentious and incomprehensible tastes. “I love Serge,” he mourns, “and I can’t love the Serge who is capable of buying that painting.” The acquisition of the Antrios frays the ties

of their friendship; the austere minimalism that enchants Serge feels like a personal affront to Marc.

Serge responds by going on the counterattack, accusing his friend of taking pride in being a philistine. He extols the beauty of the painting, enthusing over how its whiteness fades into a spectrum of very light grays. He has not simply acquired an Antrios, like some cynical speculator on the art market: he loves the Antrios! Yet Marc, bristling with resentment, cannot accept this love at face value but must cynically reduce it to venal motives. “You’ve denied,” Serge says bitterly, “that I could feel a genuine attachment to it.” Their needy and insecure friend, Yvan, attempts to placate both of them: agreeing with Marc that Serge has gone crazy; with Serge that Marc is being insufferable. We are invited to consider how attachments to friends and to artworks are intertwined.

From one perspective, Reza’s play speaks to Pierre Bourdieu’s arguments that taste is just a way of demarcating and sustaining cultural hierarchies. Not only does your background affect the kind of artworks you like (Bach rather than Barry Manilow, Rothko rather than Renoir), but you like them in different ways. To be highly educated is to be schooled in an “aesthetic disposition”—an appreciation of form in relation to the history of art—while those without such training fall back on commonsense criteria: moral or political subject matter, the realism of a painting or the hummability of a tune. From the latter perspective, modern art can only look like an elaborate con trick; for their part, meanwhile, those with advanced degrees can look down their noses at devotees of Thomas Kinkadee or Celine Dion. Serge’s attachment to his Antrios, in this light, signals not only his affluence but also his ease with a certain critical language. And here Marc is not wrong to perceive a dividing line: between those who “get” modern art and those who don’t. Not just a division but a status hierarchy, one that leaves Marc, the engineer with a technical education, stranded on the wrong side, tongue-tied, maladroit, and resentful. (In his own apartment hangs a pseudo-Flemish landscape looking out on to Carcassonne.)

And yet the Antrios is not *only* a means of shoring up distinctions. It does other things too, though they will elude the gaze of a Bourdieusian sociologist intent on seeing art as nothing more than

an exercise in symbolic domination. Like any work of art, it exists via its ties. Yet these ties involve far more than struggles over cultural capital: the four-part relation between the three friends and the painting is also an elaborate dance of intimacy and distance, fascination and frustration, self and other. Marc, Serge, and Yvan are forced to confront the question of who they are and how well they know, or don't know, each other. (An existential leitmotif of the play is posed by the offstage psychoanalyst Finkelzohn: are you what you think you are or what your friends think you are?) Encountering a new painting, viewers may intone critical pieties gleaned from the Sunday supplements to impress their friends, as Bourdieu might suggest. But they may also burst into tears for reasons they cannot explain (James Elkins on people crying in front of pictures), or set off on a yearlong pilgrimage to see other works by the same artist (Michael White's *Travels in Vermeer*), or slash a painting with a razor (Dario Gamboni on the history of artistic vandalism).²⁹

They may even—though very rarely!—draw another picture on top of the picture. In a gesture of contrition and self-sacrifice, Serge offers a felt-tip pen to his aggrieved friend. Grabbing hold of the pen and sketching a skier with a little woolly hat on the Antrios, Marc defaces it—or, seen from another angle, he makes the painting his own. Abstract art is transformed into a representational image; whiteness now signifies the blinding sheets of a snow blizzard. The ink is washable, it turns out, and the Antrios has been returned to a pristine state by the play's conclusion. But it is Marc who intones the play's closing lines and is given the last word on the painting: “A solitary man glides downhill on his skis. / The snow is falling. / It falls until the man disappears back into the landscape. / My friend Serge, who's one of my oldest friends, has bought a painting. / It's a canvas about five foot by four. / It represents a man who moves across a space and disappears.”³⁰

“*Art*” ends with Marc affirming a tie to the painting and reaffirming his tie to Serge. He now glimpses something in the Antrios he did not see before; in altering the painting, he has also been altered by it. The final sentence of the play—“a man who moves across a space and disappears”—acknowledges absence as well as presence, points to what is indiscernible as well as what is visible. The painting has acquired a new salience for Marc; it now bristles

with meanings that exceed the schemas of the sociologist's questionnaire. And yet this semantic richness has little to do with "autonomous art" as it is usually understood. Marc's original dislike of the Antrios is wrapped up with his feelings for Serge and his resentment at being replaced by a painting; his change of heart and altered perception are inseparable from his desire to salvage their friendship. Nicolas Bourriaud coined the phrase "relational aesthetics" to describe new styles of staging and performing art in the 1990s; yet Reza's play proposes that abstract painting is no less relational, no less connected, no less entangled than any other kind. In "Art" she traces out relays of attachments between artworks and persons that neither Kant nor Bourdieu can help us to decipher, that cannot be explained in terms of either aesthetic disinterest or metaphors of capital. "Friendship," Reza has remarked, "is at least as strong and as difficult as love."³¹

Attachment Devices

My line of argument should not be confused with "attachment theory": the school of psychology associated with John Bowlby and Donald Winnicott that identifies infant-parent bonds as the driving force of human development. Some critics have turned to child psychology to explain aesthetic response, treating artworks as transitional objects that, like the toddler's blanket, help us to negotiate the relationship between self and other. Yet novels and paintings are hardly the equivalent of blankets or stuffed animals; relations to artworks differ in kind from attachments to mothers and other caregivers. The writer Tim Parks, for example, asks some sharp questions about the puzzle of aesthetic affinities: why a certain novel will gel with a reader while another work makes no sense; how putting down a book in frustration can be likened to choosing not to pursue a friendship. Yet his answer—that it is all down to early family dynamics, as explicated by the Ugazio school of psychology—cannot help but disappoint.³²

In this way of thinking, aesthetic ties are translated into something else; in being explained, they are explained away. For Parks, this "something else" is family dynamics; for other critics, it may be repression and the unconscious or capitalism and the commodity

form or discourses and institutions. The critic nails down a final cause, of which relations to artworks are held to be effects. The issue of causality can be tackled with varying degrees of finesse: Marxist critics have pounced on this question with the passion of medieval scholars debating the finer points of theological doctrine, discriminating between models of mechanical, expressive, and structural causality. Meanwhile, the Frankfurt Four (Lukács, Adorno, Brecht, and Benjamin) have crafted some of the most dazzling modern commentaries on art. While Marxist criticism is often seen as reducing art to ideology, these critics take pains to underscore art's *difference* from ideology—its relative autonomy, its critique of capitalist structures. And yet, despite their philosophical subtlety and sensitivity to form, art is ultimately explained via a language that is derived from these same structures (as a commentary on alienated consciousness or as a protest against reification).

There is a real sense here in which art still gets the short straw; the center of gravity—what ultimately matters—lies elsewhere. Even as it resists an economic logic, it is explicated in terms of the logic that it resists. How can the aesthetic force of novels, films, or paintings be given its due if it is defined as subordinate to something else? Here we can look to Latour's discussion of modes of being; art possesses its own form of reality that is not derived from, or dependent on, a more fundamental level of existence. And yet a mode of being is not synonymous with a *domain* of being. A mode, in contrast to a domain, has no clear edges, borders, or walls; differing modes—aesthetic, religious, economic, legal, political—overlap and interact at numerous points.

To question single-order causalities, in other words, is not to deny connectedness. Certain ideas honed in psychology, for example, can be helpful in discriminating between modes of aesthetic response. Meanwhile, that the publishing industry has been afflicted by a chain of corporate takeovers and is now controlled by a handful of multinationals certainly affects what people are able to read, as well as what authors may feel obligated to write. But psychology alone cannot explain why we are drawn to certain works rather than others; nor does literature's status as a commodity single-handedly determine its many uses. Art hooks up to many other things, as we'll see. However, it is not *based* on them, nor is it

encased by them. While it is not separate, it is also not subordinate. It is here that common spatial metaphors lead us astray. Society, Latour remarks, does not have a top and a bottom (as if art were being held up by the pillars of a more fundamental reality). Nor does the macro contain the micro: a work of art encased within the larger box of culture, in turn enframed by the megacontainer of society or history, akin to a set of stacking Russian dolls.³³ The task is to account for distinctiveness without overlooking connectedness, to trace actual ties without presuming inevitable foundations.

Actor-network theory pivots on this very question. Born from the intellectual ferment of science and technology studies in the late 1970s, its influence has spread across many fields and disciplines, though its uptake in literary studies is only just beginning. This delayed reception is not surprising, given that its way of going about things is out of synch with how most critics are trained to think. ANT offers no obvious purchase on historical periods, national literatures, or political identities—the main categories around which the discipline is organized. It rejects the picture of a yawning gap between words and the world (the much-touted linguistic turn) and steers clear of concepts such as ideology, discourse, and representation. Meanwhile, Latour has been scathing about the institutionalization of practices of critique. “Entire Ph.D. programs are still running to make sure that good American kids are learning the hard way that facts are made up, that there is no such thing as natural, unmediated, unbiased access to truth, that we are always prisoners of language, that we always speak from a particular standpoint, and so on,” he remarks, “while dangerous extremists are using the very same argument of social construction to destroy hard-won evidence that could save our lives.”³⁴ At a time when climate change deniers are attacking the legitimacy of scientific knowledge and fake news has become a cliché, is a ratcheting up of skepticism really what we need?

While I’m more interested in doing ANT than explaining it, a brief gloss of the phrase is called for. “Actor” is used in a quite specific sense to denote the irreducible nature of phenomena; it refers to anything whose existence makes a difference. My coffee mug makes a difference in conveying a stimulant to my befogged brain; its handle makes a difference by inviting me to pick it up

in certain ways. A rock makes a difference by forcing water running downstream to flow around it rather than over it, while its overhanging side makes a difference in providing shelter for tiny water creatures. As such examples make clear, “actor” has nothing to do with consciousness, will, or intention, let alone with autonomy or independence. Rather, it points to the distinctiveness of phenomena as they interact in a mutually composed world. ANT is sometimes called a “flat ontology” because it suspends our usual sorting and ranking mechanisms—nature versus culture, persons versus things—to grant the nonhuman world equal footing, to acknowledge its vital role in human affairs as well as its vast existence beyond them. Such a suspension does not deny obvious differences between quarks and sharks but steers clear of dualistic schemas that prejudge these differences in damaging ways.

“Network” is another potential source of confusion. As used in ANT, it does not imply a network-y shape of crisscrossing lines or have anything to do with computer and media technologies (paens to a “network society”). Rather, it conveys an insight that is applicable to any historical milieu: things exist only via relations, but these relations can take on radically variant forms. Networks are groups of actors working together—whether persons, things, plants, animals, machines, texts, or competences—and have no necessary size, shape, or scale. A network can be made up of twenty-two soccer players, a ball, a stretch of flat ground, a referee, the rules of the game, and cheering spectators. Networks, however, can also play havoc with geographical measures of distance and proximity: I can be a few feet from someone in the next phone booth, remarks Latour, and yet be much more closely connected to my mother, who is located six thousand miles away. Some networks, of course, are longer, sturdier, and more powerful than others; that actors are treated symmetrically by ANT does not mean their effects are held to be equal. The task, rather, is to account for what is often taken for granted: how certain networks are able to gain support, enroll allies, and extend their influence. And here, of course, researchers are also implicated in the processes they are tracing; networks are not just things we find but things we make.³⁵

“Theory,” finally, is also something of a misnomer. In the dialogue at the heart of *Reassembling the Social*, a student drops in

on a Latour avatar during office hours, seeking advice about how to apply ANT in a dissertation—only to meet with objections at every turn. Actor-network theory, it turns out, is less a theory of how to study things than of “how *not* to study them—or rather, how to let the actors have some room to express themselves.”³⁶ It is not a matter of feeding a topic—whether paintings or presidential assassinations—into a whirring machinery of concepts or theories in order to spit out the desired result. We need to follow the actors, scrape our knees on the rough rocks of reality, expect to be disconcerted or perplexed. (ANT does not flinch at the word “reality”—yes, we see the world from a certain standpoint rather than a God’s-eye view, but we can also make inquiries, correct our assumptions, create better descriptions.) This orientation might be called pragmatic; ANT is something that is performed—a way of proceeding and paying attention—rather than a series of propositions or a self-contained body of ideas.

ANT, then, is a confusing if not downright misleading name. (At one point, Latour declares his readiness to ditch all the problematic aspects of the term: “that is, actor, network, theory, without forgetting the hyphen!”)³⁷ As a style of thinking, however, it coaxes us away from entrenched spatial models: base versus superstructure, macro versus micro—and, ultimately, Art versus Society. Humanists, for example, are very fond of pitting the singularity of the artwork against the overbearing sameness of social forces. As Caroline Levine remarks, they are highly sensitive to aesthetic form while being much less attuned to the “many different and often disconnected arrangements that govern social experience.”³⁸ The invocation of society as if it were a self-evident reality begs the fundamental question: *which* associations—which specific formations or groupings of actors—are we talking about? And here a panoramic view misses a great deal of what is happening on the ground, the specific connections and conflicts between differing networks. “Minor forms can sometimes work against major ones,” Levine remarks. “A woman poet can retreat to the boundaries of her bedroom to block the encroachment of some very tiresome networks in favor of a richer, more expansive world.”³⁹

To do actor-network theory, then, is to tackle the fundamental question of how actors—whether scallops or subway trains,

springboks or box springs—exist via their relations. And yet, as this phrasing suggests, it soon runs into potential objections. Reflecting on the influence of ANT, Latour ruefully notes that freedom of movement has been gained via a loss of specificity. As the scholar of networks “studies segments from Law, Science, The Economy or Religion, she begins to feel that she is saying almost *the same thing* about all of them: namely that they are ‘composed in heterogeneous fashion of unexpected elements revealed by the investigation.’”⁴⁰ The very portability of ANT can be a weakness as well as a strength; if everything can be described as a network of diverse actors, then everything begins to sound more or less the same. How can such an approach help us to capture the force of Derek Walcott’s poetry or the extraordinary appeal of *Game of Thrones*? We might well concede that literary works connect up to many other things, while also insisting that they involve distinctive ways of writing, reading, experiencing, and evaluating. (That my edition of *The Turn of the Screw* was made out of paper from an Ohio factory forms part of its networked existence but is less relevant to my Tuesday seminar than James’s words or the editorial commentary that encircles them.)

To speak well to the concerns of humanists, ANT needs to hook up to the concerns of aesthetics since the eighteenth century: *features* of the work and *experiences* of the work. This linking is an act of translating that leaves neither party unchanged: to translate, after all, is to transform, distort, betray. And we can return to the question of attachment, now placed in a fresh light. *Hooked* centers on attachments to artworks: considered for their own sake rather than as effects of a more fundamental reality. How are we hooked, enticed, reeled in? What affective, ethical, political, or temporal aspects come into play? And what kind of attachment devices are we talking about? In daily life, we regularly rely on hinges, clamps, buttons, zippers, Velcro, laces, knots, stitches, tape, stickers, and glue. What are their aesthetic equivalents?

The following chapters zero in on three forms of attachment: attunement, identification, and interpretation, as differing ways of paying attention, with varying entailments. Interpretation is often separated from—and opposed to—the two other forms of engagement, yet there is common ground as well as salient differences.

I inquire how the affordances of artworks hook up to affective dispositions, patterns of perception, ethical or political commitments, repertoires of response—such that our attention is distributed in certain ways and we become sensitized to certain qualities rather than to others. While drawing mainly on essays, memoirs, and works of fiction that capture the phenomenological thickness of aesthetic response, I also cite relevant examples of ethnographic research. As Kim Chabot Davis shows in a sequence of fine-grained studies, there can be dramatic variations in affective response and in ethical or political judgments even within very specific interpretive communities: academic feminist responses to *The Piano*; gay men who love *Kiss of the Spider Woman*; fans of the TV show *Northern Exposure*.⁴¹ It is not a matter of tongues slotting smoothly into grooves over and over again. Responses cannot be corralled into tidy boxes; actors do not always hook up in expected ways; anomalies, surprises, exceptions are not uncommon.

One reason critics are sometimes leery of social explanations, after all, is that aesthetic experience can feel like a turn away from the social. There may be a purposeful act of refusal or renunciation, a spurning of communal bonds; an overwhelming sense of absorption where the rest of the world briefly fades into nothingness. Such perceptions need to be honored rather than brushed aside. That books could distance readers from their milieu was already a familiar theme in the eighteenth century; critics complained that novels weakened social ties by creating a sense of distaste for what was nearest. Reading can cast the world in a radically different light, inspire us to turn away from what we thought we cared about. Books unite, Leah Price remarks, but they also divide; people can hide behind books, burrow into books, defend themselves with books (a handy repellent for women eating alone in public!), and use them to escape dull spouses, demanding children, and the trials of daily life.⁴² They promote acts of division as well as association.

Orhan Pamuk's *The New Life* opens with a dramatic account of being yanked out of everyday life. "I read a book one day and my whole life was changed. Even on the first page, I was so affected by the book's intensity I felt my body sever itself and pull away from the chair. . . . What if I raised my eyes from the book and looked around at my room, my wardrobe, my bed, or glanced out of the

window, but did not find the world as I knew it?”⁴³ The protagonist feels compelled, impelled, propelled by the words he is reading; the shift in his sense of being is irrevocable; he cannot help feeling—though he realizes the absurdity of this view—as if the book were written only for him. A gulf yawns between his new and his former life; things that had once mattered now seem utterly without consequence. Looking at his mother, a mother whom he dearly loves, he is overcome with guilt at the gulf between them. “I was well aware,” he remarks, “that my room was no longer the same old room, nor the streets the same streets, my friends the same friends, my mother the same mother.”⁴⁴ Sitting down at the table, before a stew of meat and potatoes, braised leeks, a salad, he strives to engage in conversation, to help his mother clear away the dishes, to act as if his life has not been turned upside down. A fundamental scission has taken place—one that will propel Pamuk’s protagonist on a long and arduous journey.

It is not uncommon, when reading, to have a sense of breaking away from one’s everyday life and entering a different kind of reality. And yet, although being caught up in a book may cut readers off from their immediate milieu, it forges other kinds of ties: for example, to real or to imagined persons. Perhaps there is a sensed affinity with other readers of the same book; one feels oneself to be part of a virtual community of kindred spirits. Or readers may develop an obsession with certain authors, hunting down everything they have written, poring over the details of their biographies, having ongoing conversations with them in their heads. Or certain characters may elbow their way into readers’ lives, becoming almost as real as those around them: avatars, allies, or love objects. Fictional figures, as we’ll see in chapter 3, can become an integral part of an *Umwelt*—the world as it is lived from a first-person perspective.

Alternatively, a reader may be seduced by a style or by the intricate architecture of a fictional world or by the vividness of a descriptive technique. Susan Fraiman, for example, reflects on her enjoyment of literary descriptions of homemaking. Pushing back against a feminist equation of the domestic with entrapment, she traces out a counterhistory of what she calls shelter writing: looking, for example, to key passages of Lesley Feinberg’s *Stone Butch Blues*,

with their itemizing of domestic objects—rugs, dishes, curtains, couch—and careful accounts of sanding floors, unrolling rugs, and placing furniture.⁴⁵ Or—to toggle between media—perhaps someone who is rushing through an art galley on her way to lunch is caught up short by a Matisse, without quite knowing why (see chapter 2), or a museum visitor is entranced by the hazy penumbras of Turner’s paintings, with their maelstroms of agitated water and blazes of light. “Emerging from Turner’s heliocentric cathedral, I felt I had cataracts: it takes time to re-acustom your dazzled eyes to the wan, monochrome mock-up we call reality.”⁴⁶ There are countless ways in which artworks can compel our attention or solicit our devotion.

It is here that ANT’s flat ontology is exceptionally clarifying. In steering clear of the usual presorting mechanisms, it allows us to appreciate the many ways we can become attached. It is no longer a matter of equating ties with something called “society” while treating art as a tie-free zone. Aesthetic experiences not only break bonds but also make bonds; they separate us from some things but connect us to many others. Like the phone line linking Latour to his mother thousands of miles away, they cut across swathes of space as well as time; audiences can become hooked to texts, characters, scenarios, and ideas that originate in very different worlds; that these ties are not tangible does not mean that they are not enduring, sustaining, and important. Actors that seem far distant from each other come into intimate contact; “space and time have no absolute jurisdiction,” Wai Chee Dimock remarks, “when it comes to the bond between texts and readers.”⁴⁷

It is possible, in short, to be as tightly bound to a seventeenth-century painting as to a friend seen every day, as intensely invested in *Big Little Lies* as the dramas of one’s neighborhood community. The former bonds have their own solidity, salience, and force—they are not just displacements of the latter, to be waved away as escapist or apolitical. And those who are not at home in the world—who find themselves out of sync with the social or sexual norms of their milieu—may be especially reliant on such aesthetic bonds. An expression of yearning, a snarl of anguish, a shimmer of beauty can offer itself as a partial recompense or reparation. I disagree with

Ross Posnock's remark that an ANT-ish stress on relations cannot account for the "vertiginous challenge of the aesthetic." As I hope to show, especially in chapter 2, it speaks to this very question.⁴⁸

Affect, Love, Value

To say we are attached to works of art is to say that we have feelings for them. It is also to say that they matter, that they carry weight. How are these aspects related? Lawrence Grossberg introduces the idea of "mattering maps" as a way of thinking about how affect connects to value. His concern is with the sensibility of the fan—how feeling, identifying with, and caring about take on a certain shape and coherence. For Grossberg this question pertains solely to popular culture; it makes little sense, he declares, to see someone as a fan of art.⁴⁹ And yet, that devotees of Liszt or aficionados of Proust are not usually described via the language of fandom does not mean they are not caught up in similar investments or passions.

In its most obvious sense, attachment denotes an emotional tie: whether passions and obsessions or low-key moods and lukewarm likes. Such ties are ubiquitous in academic life: critical devotion to James Joyce or Toni Morrison; a flicker of anticipation at lecturing on *Stella Dallas* or *The Maltese Falcon*; tamped-down annoyance when a favorite Maria Callas recording is met with blank faces in the classroom. Against the usual portrayal of academia as an affect-free zone, I would venture that affective ties are often *stronger* in academia than elsewhere, because more is at stake; the ties are thicker and woven out of more diverse strands. The scholar who's written several monographs on Virginia Woolf is bound to her work not just because of a longstanding love of *Mrs. Dalloway*. Literary modernism has become a defining part of a scholarly identity and professional persona, a cornerstone of a chosen life path, with its rites of initiation and its yearly rituals, its complicated blend of rewards and regrets. Affective labor, as Deidre Lynch points out, is a defining aspect of literary studies; and yet, while often on display in the classroom, it is rarely acknowledged in critical writing.

I approach the "affective turn" in an oblique rather than direct fashion. I do not elevate feeling over thought (though one or other may dominate in a specific response), nor do I attempt to offer

any kind of taxonomy of affect, feeling, mood, and emotion. My starting point, rather, is curiosity about how we become attached to works of art—as calling into play an often volatile blend of sensation and reflection. And here there are several possible lines of inquiry. We can consider *representations* of affect: how a novel or a film depicts the emotional states of its characters; how song lyrics convey a mood of melancholy or a sense of yearning; how a painting—by Mary Cassatt, for example—captures the intimacy between a mother and her child. Alternatively, we may be more interested in *solicitations* of affect: looking at how an artwork encourages certain kinds of emotional response. As Carl Plantinga writes, movie audiences are “often thrilled, excited, or exhilarated; moved to tears, laughter, scorn, or disgust; made fearful, expectant, curious, or suspenseful; outraged, angered, placated, or satisfied.”⁵⁰ Such affective states, he remarks, are not incidental but fundamental to meaning—emotions can be crucial, for example, to making sense of a film’s narrative.

Feminist critics have often argued that affect cannot be separated from politics—while also acknowledging that they rarely line up in perfect harmony or synchrony. Analyzing her own experience of watching *Pretty Woman*, Robyn Warhol notes an accelerated pulse of excitement, alternating with a sense of mild nausea and shame at her involvement with a narrative she finds politically questionable. Tackling the tension between critical reading and what she calls implicated reading, Lynne Pearce also explores how academic commentary may be undercut by more unruly or unseemly attachments. Feminist critics, she observes, may experience a sense of anxiety or guilt about surrendering to a text, as if abandoning their intellectual and political commitments. And yet, while the text may be blamed for its seductions, Pearce remarks, the “reader is certainly more active in creating, sustaining, and negotiating her *ravissement* than it at first appears.”⁵¹

And then there is a third question: not how art represents feeling nor how it elicits feeling, but *how we feel toward works of art*—specifically those we care for, as distinct from those that irritate us, bore us, or leave us cold. These questions are not unrelated; art is often lauded for its potential to offer nuanced or evocative portrayals of emotional states. And yet it is not uncommon to have

strong feelings about works that do not involve emotion in any obvious sense. Someone can be drawn to a novel by its provocative ideas; to a painting by its austere minimalism; to a film by its tone of disenchanting irony. Conversely, it is possible to have an overpowering emotional reaction—to be scared out of one's wits by a B-grade horror movie—without feeling a strong tie to its source. The emotional content of artworks does not correspond in any straightforward way to the kinds of emotions we have about them.

How to describe this attachment, the sense of being powerfully drawn to a film or a painting: a feeling triggered by its qualities but not synonymous with them? Here theory and criticism have surprisingly little to offer, beyond an occasional reference to love. Alexander Nehamas, for example, makes love central to his account of aesthetic pleasure. Insisting that it is impossible to love someone or something without also finding them beautiful, he cites examples of paintings and novels as well as persons. "I can still remember falling in love with *In Search of Lost Time*," he remarks—as well as how wonderful it felt when he began to hate Hermann Hesse.⁵² Film criticism, meanwhile, has its own history of cinephilia, a history that is invoked by Susan Sontag in an elegiac lament. "The love that cinema inspired, however, was special. It was born of the conviction that cinema was an art unlike any other: quintessentially modern; distinctively accessible; poetic and mysterious and erotic and moral—all at the same time. Cinema had apostles. (It was like religion.) Cinema was a crusade. For cinephiles, the movies encapsulated everything."⁵³

Nowadays, the response to such fervent testimony is likely to be one of discomfort, if not outright embarrassment. Film scholars very rarely admit—at least in their writing—that their career path may have been motivated by a love of cinema. And any talk of loving literature seems jejune to most English professors, guaranteed to trigger a pained recoil or a moue of distaste. Such language brings academic discourse perilously close to adolescent infatuation or amateurish enthusiasm, to a treachery and treacherous cult of feeling. There is a rich history of philosophical reflection on love; and yet when the word is applied to art, it is often the case that anecdote overshadows—or even replaces—argument. Jerrold Levinson, for example, declares that it is possible to fall in love with *The Castle*

but not *The Trial*; with *David Copperfield* but not *Our Mutual Friend*; with Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* but not Houellebecq's *The Elementary Particles*. This is not because the latter are less worthy, he remarks, but because they are less lovable; they are admirable but not endearing. Here Levinson draws a distinction that greatly interests me: the difference between admiring a work of art and being affected by it. Yet individual preferences are presented without qualification or explanation as if they had the status of universal truths. (Would it really be as impossible to fall in love with *The Trial* or *Miss Lonelyhearts* as Levinson assumes?)⁵⁴

One difficulty is that the language of love can feel descriptively thin, conveying little of the spectrum of affective responses toward art: curiosity, excitement, rivalry, infatuation, jubilation, enthusiasm, anticipation, or consolation, to name but a few. It highlights the strength of an affect but nothing of its qualities, tone, or shading. I'm inclined to agree with Ronald de Sousa's view that love is not an emotion but a condition—or perhaps a syndrome, made up of intricate patterns of thoughts, behaviors, and feelings.⁵⁵ Love talk, moreover, often triggers an impulse to personify, to treat novels or paintings as if they were friends or lovers. Here again, ANT's flat ontology seems a propos. Relations to artworks are not imitations of relations to persons; to treat them as such is to diminish rather than honor them. Moreover, the language of love and especially of "falling in love" is weighted down by scripts of male pursuit and female submission that need to be reckoned with rather than ignored. Lynne Pearce offers one of the more illuminating accounts of the "reader as lover"; in dialogue with Roland Barthes, she details her own experience of reading as lurching from one affect to another: enchantment, devotion, anxiety, jealousy, frustration, disillusionment.⁵⁶

If talk of love can overpersonify, some recent theories of affect are eager to depersonify, rhapsodizing about flows and forces, intensities and sensations. Affect, in this line of thought, is to be sharply distinguished from emotion; it is seen as preconscious rather than conscious, linked to bodies rather than minds, depicted, in some cases, as an autonomous system that is independent of language or thought. Common reference points for such

accounts are Deleuze and Spinoza, as well as Silvan Tomkins. To my mind, the most insightful work along these lines comes from scholars such as Ben Anderson: even if affective ties have little to do with cognition or conscious belief, he argues, they are shaped, synchronized, articulated; they are patterns of relation rather than a “pure unmediated realm of affective richness.” Affect is never “affect as such,” he writes, but “always involved with the non-affective—that is to say, it is mediated.”⁵⁷

And here we need to account for the relative solidity of actors involved in aesthetic relations—whether a painting, a person, the routines of a graduate seminar, or a habituated pattern of response—as well as the ever-present possibility of surprise. In contrast to the language of flows and forces, a stress on attachment keeps these actors squarely in view. It reminds us that there are not only relations but also things that are being related: phenomena that are equipped with distinct features, shapes, contours—and sometimes hard edges. Friction and resistance are not uncommon; we can stub our toe on an obdurate or recalcitrant object. Connections, from an ANT-ish perspective, are less a matter of fluid intensities than of translation, hesitation, blockage: Why do I fail to “get” the TV show that all my friends adore? Why is this novel a bestseller, while a virtual twin vanishes from bookstores without a trace?

Attachment, meanwhile, is a question not just of feeling but also of valuing: something matters; it carries weight. Value talk has often been cast under a cloud in recent decades: castigated for being hierarchical, exclusionary, or authoritarian. And yet to rail against values is not to float free of the field of value. Accusations of bourgeois hypocrisy or endemic sexism carry their own normative force; value judgments are unavoidably in play, even if the basis for such judgments is not spelled out. It is impossible to get outside value frameworks; we cannot help orienting ourselves to what we take to be better rather than worse.

And here the language of attachment can sharpen our sense of the multimodal nature of value relations. Values, norms, and ideals are things that act upon us but also that we act upon. Their actions are not just coercive; they also energize, galvanize, give weight to our words. We are *animated* by values, ideals, principles—as touchstones for both art and life. Certain words—such as “justice” and

“freedom”—have inspired rumblings of discontent, utopian visions, manifestos, marches, sit-ins, protests large and small. These words function as actors, in ANT’s sense of the term; their presence—in a conversation, a blog post, an essay—makes a difference, pitching a sentence into a different register, conjuring up a sense of gravity or urgency, soliciting certain kinds of response. They are not just clichés to be abused by cynical speechwriters but objects of intense and enduring investments.

Of course, not all attachments are equal and not all values matter equally. Charles Taylor distinguishes between weak and strong forms of evaluation. In the former, the criterion for something being good is just that I desire it; weighing up the available options, I choose what I take to be preferable or more pleasing. Here there is infinite room for variation in my own desires as well as in those of others: my enthusiasm for Thai food is not threatened by your passion for French cuisine. That tastes differ is a truism; much of the time, nothing of consequence hangs on these differences. Strong values, by contrast, carry a normative force; they imply a contrast between higher and lower, better and worse. They involve not just desires but the *worth* of these desires. Here it is a question not just of difference but of disagreement and potential conflict. And we can, of course, direct such assessments at our own desires, as being in harmony—or not—with the kind of person we take ourselves to be.⁵⁸

Literature and art seem, at first glance, to have undergone a shift from strong to weak values. A democratizing of taste has taken place; whether one enjoys James Joyce or James Bond is nobody’s business but one’s own—no longer something to be adjudicated by bookish mandarins. Meanwhile, recent years have seen the rise of omnivore taste: an increased cultural eclecticism that takes the form of appreciating *Game of Thrones* as well as Jean-Luc Godard. (This shift in reception is also steered by changing forms of production; the rise of HBO, Netflix, Amazon Prime, and other forms of media streaming has blurred divisions between popular and “quality” television and between niche and mass audiences.)

Yet we should not conclude that strong values have vanished; rather, as Günter Lempoldt points out, weak and strong values coexist. On the one hand, the literary sphere often appears as a nonhi-

erarchical space of choices: a huge bookshop in which “capital-L Literature is merely one option among many, on a par with Mystery & Crime, Romance, Science Fiction & Fantasy, Thrillers, Westerns, and Self-Help.”⁵⁹ The purpose of such labels is simply to help consumers orient themselves and find what they are looking for. But, on the other hand, the literary world (and, even more, the art world) is also a sphere of strong or sacralized values. Here books are not just a matter of consumer preference but seen as having the potential to offer something higher—a “higher” that can be defined in many different ways. “The horizontal array of labeled aisles in your local bookshop then acquires a vertical tension,” notes Leypoldt; “some sections suddenly strike us as closer to the higher moral-political life of the culture than others.”⁶⁰ From the perspective of strong values, discriminations of worth are not incidental but fundamental.

This vertical tension does not appear out of nowhere, of course; it is tied to institutions and tastemakers: museums and galleries; art and literature departments; Nobel, Man Booker, and other prestigious prizes; the reviewing pages of the *New York Times*, the *London Review of Books*, and *Artforum*. Within these frameworks, individual works may lose or gain status, but shifts of fortune are mediated via a language of strong values. To make a case for adding an overlooked writer to a syllabus, for example, it is not enough to declare that her novels are a gripping read. Other kinds of arguments must be brought into play: testimonies to their aesthetic complexity, ethical ambiguity, or political urgency. In the realm of weak values, that a book fails to resonate testifies to the book’s inadequacy; in the realm of strong values, it says something about *my* inadequacy.

While institutions mediate strong values, they do not single-handedly impose them. We are talking about a force field that radiates outward to shape canons, fashions, college curricula, and museum displays. Yet audiences may pay little attention to such pressures; in the United States, for example, the authority of cultural experts is relatively weak, especially outside metropolitan centers. The art world, meanwhile, is far from being the only arbiter of strong values. bell hooks, for example, cites a long history of African American aesthetic expression that served as a source of spiritual meaning and communal ties. She invokes her grand-

mother, a quilt maker, who taught her about the aesthetics of daily life. Uplifting experiences of pleasure and beauty, she writes, have been essential for those living lives of material deprivation. The performance arts of dance, music, and theater, in particular, played a vital role in black culture long before aspects of such culture were taken up and sanctified in prestige-granting institutions (courses on rap music or the aesthetics of the quilt).⁶¹

Attachments are, by their very nature, selective: we cannot care for everything equally. And the criteria by which we evaluate vary. In English departments, for example, literary merit has often been equated with the glitter of the meticulously chiseled sentence. Closely tied to New Criticism and the heritage of modernism, such a template is a poor fit for assessing the merits of Balzac, let alone Stephen King. Here other criteria are called for: artfully orchestrated narratives, stylized yet vividly realized characters, spine-tingling thrills of excitement or suspense, the cathartic relief of narrative closure, evocative orchestrations of mood or renditions of milieu. “Aesthetics” is a noun conjured in the plural, not just a matter of irony or artfulness but of affective intensities, spectacular effects, moments of transport or enchantment, different registers of perception and feeling.⁶² These value frameworks bear the imprint of education, class, gender, race, and other variables, but there is common ground as well as unpredictable variation.

Hooked looks at examples of people getting stuck to novels and paintings and films and music in ways that matter to them. This mattering can be aesthetic, political, emotional, ethical, intellectual, or any combination of these. The issue is not just attachment, in other words, but of attachment to one’s attachment—or what we can call, after Taylor, second-order evaluations. Not just pleasure but one’s assessment of such pleasure: whether it is felt to be warranted, justified, worth reflecting on, deserving of being described and conveyed to others. In this sense, even the most nebulous or inarticulate reaction, in being singled out for attention, is drawn into the realm of interpretation and judgment.

This focus stems from my conviction that we need an ampler repertoire of justifications for literature and art. Instead of prescribing what kinds of responses people should have, we might start by getting a better handle on attachments they *do* have. How can

we think more capaciously about differing uses of novels and films and paintings and music? As Leypoldt remarks, people want all sorts of things from literature and, I'd add, from the arts generally: "pleasure, knowledge, wisdom, catharsis, moral growth, political vision."⁶³ Can we do better justice to this range of motives, opening up the question of art's relation to the world beyond the preferred academic options of interrogating a work's complicity or commending its canny acts of resistance (praising it, in short, for mirroring critics' own commitments, for being just like them)? Can we find ways of talking about the world-disclosing force of art that do not sideline its social shaping? And how might this expanded repertoire reveal commonalities as well as differences between academic and lay audiences?

Of course, it's far from being guaranteed that artworks will inspire epiphanies—or even lukewarm stirrings of interest. I take it as uncontroversial that we do not care very much for much of what we read, watch, or listen to: not even the swooniest of aesthetes is enraptured by everything. New technologies, moreover, can affect our ways of paying attention. Like Latour and Hennion, I am not persuaded by Benjamin's claim that the aura or presence of an artwork is destroyed by its technological mediation (I make the case that presence *requires* mediation in chapter 2). Yet the affordances of cell phones make it easier to engage with art in a casual or distracted manner. As Jeff Nealon points out, the experience of listening reverentially to an entire album—on the analogy of reading a book—is now much less common. Instead, individually curated music lists serve as mood enhancers to "create various 'scapes' in our individual and social lives—the sleep scape, the gym scape, the study scape, the commute scape, the romance scape, the political rally scape, the shopping scape."⁶⁴ Such ambient listening—engineered to harmonize with different tasks and spaces—is less likely to stir up an intense response.

Meanwhile, teachers are well acquainted with expressions of indifference, apathy, or outright dislike. Reactions to literature in the classroom, for example, can be a matter of "hating characters, being bored, being made to feel stupid by a text, or feeling that a text is stupid."⁶⁵ Hopes that students will mirror our attachments—not just to specific works but to the painstaking deciphering of such

works—are often disappointed. But seasoned critics are no less likely to harbor feelings of antipathy, irritation, or boredom, even if they are rarely brave enough to own up to them. Reflecting on his experiences of walking around the Louvre, Amit Chaudhuri lists the things that set his teeth on edge: Titian and Rubens, varieties of Renaissance oil painting, the very texture of Greek and Renaissance sculpture. Try as hard as he might, meanwhile, “I couldn’t open up to a Rembrandt.”⁶⁶ This impatience, he remarks, is not a question of playing the postcolonial card; rather, its causes lie elsewhere, perhaps in the murkier realm of temperament or taste. Nowadays, it seems that any objection to a novel or a film must be dignified by being presented as a critique, as grounded in a substantive form of political or philosophical disagreement. How might criticism change if we could admit that sometimes our real topic is dislike!

That art collections can inhibit the appreciation they strive to foster, meanwhile, has long been recognized. Museums sap energy and deaden consciousness, remarks Deborah Root; the combination of sensory overload and mental exhaustion can impede our best efforts to engage with a painting. She continues: “I passed out in Saint Peter’s Basilica from all the bad taste, all the Berninis, the weirdness of the images, like the skeletal arm reaching out with an hourglass as a memento mori to passersby. I swooned under Saint Teresa and a woman from California whom I had never seen before had to revive me with grapes.”⁶⁷ Attachments, as we’ve seen, depend on various things coming together; given the many contingencies at play, it is hardly surprising that all too often things fail to connect or fall apart. Fascinating books are waiting to be written about the vast graveyard of aesthetic disappointments: the misfirings, glitches, malfunctions, breakdowns of various kinds that characterize experiences of reading novels, watching movies, or looking at pictures, underwritten by feelings of irritation, boredom, anxiety, peevishness, or shame.⁶⁸

In the following pages, I take up words that are often associated with popular art—“attachment,” “engagement,” “identification”—and apply them to a broader range of objects, from Joni Mitchell to Matisse, from Thomas Bernhard to Brahms, from *Thelma and Louise* to *Stalker*. Cultural studies has amply documented the pas-

sions of Star Trek and Madonna fans; but “higher” forms of art are not usually discussed in these terms—at least not by the academics who study them.⁶⁹ Meanwhile, the assumption one sometimes sees in cultural studies—that academics somehow do not count as “real” readers or viewers—seems highly questionable. They do not, of course, represent audiences as a whole, but it seems weirdly self-negating—and a potential act of bad faith—to deny the salience of one’s own investments.

Hooked was originally about attachments to literature; but as I stumbled across the many parallels to music, painting, and film, it soon became clear that a broader optic was needed. We now inhabit a multimedia environment where students come to Austen or Shakespeare via their film adaptations, where works of contemporary fiction often deal with paintings or performance, and where music is an inescapable backdrop and reference point in countless lives. Isolating literary from other forms of aesthetic response felt like a missed opportunity. Of course, media differ significantly in their affordances—yet a focus on attachment can also sharpen our appreciation of salient commonalities. Because the argument ranges widely in terms of media and also method (drawing not only on ANT but on cultural studies, sociology, the philosophy of art, and literary, art, music, and film criticism), I restrict its historical focus to the present. Much has been written, and remains to be written, about attachment in the past and attachment to the past, but they are not my concern here.

What counts as evidence of people’s reactions to movies or music or novels? That no source can be definitive or unimpeachable inclines me toward a variety of examples: memoirs, works of fiction, critical essays, reflections on my own attachments, audience ethnographies, and online reviews. Several decades ago, cultural studies made a pitch for ethnographies of audience response as a way of reining in wilder flights of academic fancy. As a result, it’s become harder for critics to deploy a casual or unthinking “we”—to assume that all readers or viewers or listeners react to the same works in the same way. Such empirical studies can be exceptionally useful in pushing back against entrenched academic assumptions. That film viewers identify unpredictably in terms of both difference and sameness (Stacey) challenges established axioms of film theory;

that many readers of literary fiction are interested in experiences rather than interpretations (Miall) contravenes certain premises of literary criticism; that music fans describe their attachments in the language of religion rather than politics (Cavicchi) speaks back to cultural critics who are eager to frame everything in terms of ideological complicity or resistance.⁷⁰

Yet there is also a sense in which these responses often do not go very deep—whether because of the large size of an audience sample; conversational norms that encourage a reliance on ready-to-hand phrases (one cannot press “pause” on an interview in order to search for exactly the right word); “hesitancies and inarticulacies” among fans who struggle to explain their own feelings; or a reluctance, perhaps, to reveal one’s innermost thoughts to a stranger. In implicit acknowledgment of this fact, direct quotations occupy a surprisingly modest space in most ethnographies—small islands in a sea of prose that surrounds, processes, analyzes, interprets, and extends them.⁷¹

It is here that memoirs, novels, and first-person essays have built-in advantages. Afforded ample time to reflect on the textures of their response, as well as a much broader repertoire of stylistic and expressive options, writers can convey far more vividly what it feels like to be lost in a book or brought up short by a painting. Such accounts are better able to capture the phenomenological “feel” of aesthetic response—those affective shimmerings or nascent stirrings of thought that are exceptionally hard to convey in words.⁷² To be sure, such descriptions are mediated in countless ways: shaped by the conventions of genre as well as the assumptions, tastes, and styles of thought of those who belong to the “writing class.” While conscious of these differences, I want, as noted earlier, to question the assumption that aesthetic experiences are incommensurable: that a “popular aesthetic” consists of a desire for entertainment and immediate satisfaction that has nothing in common with the “pure gaze” of educated audiences. Interweaving the musical conversation of Zadie Smith with the self-reportage of Brisbane club-goers, Amazon book reviews with examples of academic identification, I strive to honor connections as well as differences.

We often come to realize the strength of our attachments, Hen-nion remarks, only when they are tested or threatened in some way.

Several decades ago, Foucauldian critiques of the welfare state were all the rage; now that free dental care and unemployment benefits are being dismantled across much of the Western world, many of us look back on this same state and its benefits with nostalgia and gratitude. When I headed off to college in the 1970s, literature and art were still widely sacralized, at least in the undergraduate curriculum, and seen as beyond serious criticism. In such a context, it was imperative to drive home that aesthetic relations were also power relations; to reckon with the imprint of class, gender, racial, and sexual inequality; to read against the grain and between the lines.

We now find ourselves in a different moment. Departments of German and classics are threatened with closure; funding for the humanities and public arts is being slashed; far from being naive worshipers at the altar of Matisse or Mozart, many of our students have never heard of them. Meanwhile, scholars in the humanities are highly fluent in a rhetoric of skepticism but struggle to formulate frameworks of value beyond the usual homilies to critical thinking. The assumption that art's value lies in its power to negate—to interrogate ideology or subvert the status quo—is not false, but it offers a very partial account of what art can do. Such a line of argument, moreover, resonates only with the converted: those who are already on board with one's own political convictions. We need to step back and once again ask some fundamental questions. Why are music and literature and novels and paintings worth bothering with? Why should anyone *care*? The wager of *Hooked* is that something can be learned, as William James might have said, from attending to the varieties of aesthetic experience.

Notes

Preface

1. Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

Chapter 1

1. Annemarie Mol, "Actor-Network Theory: Sensitive Terms and Enduring Tensions," *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, Sonderheft, 50, no. 1 (2010): 261.
2. Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2005), 38.
3. Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011); Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (New York: Routledge, 2004).
4. Joli Jensen, "Fandom as Pathology: The Consequences of Characteriza-

- tion,” in *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*, ed. Lisa A. Lewis (London: Routledge, 1992), 26.
5. Deidre Lynch, *Loving Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).
 6. Carl Wilson, *Let’s Talk about Love: Why Other People Have Such Bad Taste* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007), 157.
 7. Antoine Hennion, “From ANT to Pragmatism: A Journey with Bruno Latour at the CSI,” *New Literary History* 47, nos. 2–3 (2016): 297.
 8. Bruno Latour, *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence: An Anthropology of the Moderns*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 241.
 9. Latour, *Inquiry*, 248.
 10. Rebecca Solnit, *The Faraway Nearby* (New York: Penguin, 2013), 63.
 11. Antoine Hennion, “Pragmatics of Taste,” in *The Blackwell Companion to the Sociology of Culture*, ed. Mark D. Jacobs and Nancy Weiss Hanrahan (Oxford: Blackwell’s, 2005), 137.
 12. Wayne Koestenbaum, “Affinity,” in *My 1980s and Other Essays* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013), 279.
 13. Koestenbaum, “Affinity,” 279.
 14. Eva Illouz, *Why Love Hurts: A Sociological Explanation* (Cambridge: Polity, 2012).
 15. Hiro Saito, “An Actor-Network-Theory of Cosmopolitanism,” *Sociological Theory* 29, no. 2 (2011): 124–49.
 16. I felt absurdly pleased at having coined (I thought) the idea of semidetachment, only to see it appear, six months later, in the title of John Plotz’s new book. Plotz deploys it to talk about aesthetic experience as a partial absorption in a fictional world. See his *Semi-detached: The Aesthetics of Virtual Experience since Dickens* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018).
 17. Michael Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 18.
 18. Clive Bell, “Art,” in *Aesthetics: Classic Readings from the Western Tradition*, ed. Dabney Townsend (Boston: Jones and Bartlett, 1996), 332–33.
 19. For a helpful overview of these debates, see Sam Rose, “The Fear of Aesthetics in Art and Literary Theory,” *New Literary History* 48, no. 2 (2017): 223–44.
 20. Paul C. Taylor, *Black Is Beautiful: A Philosophy of Black Aesthetics* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2016), 2.
 21. Richard Shusterman, “The End of Aesthetic Experience,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 55, no. 1 (1997): 30.
 22. Noel Carroll, “Four Concepts of Aesthetic Experience,” in *Beyond Aesthet-*

- ics: Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Derek Attridge, *The Work of Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 1; Derek Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature* (London: Routledge, 2004), 167.
23. Winfried Fluck, "Aesthetics and Cultural Studies," in *Aesthetics in a Multicultural Age*, ed. Emory Elliott, Louis Freitas Caton, and Jeffrey Rhyne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 87. See also Heinz Ickstadt, "Toward a Pluralist Aesthetic," 263–77, in the same volume; and, from a more analytical perspective, see Alan H. Goldman, "The Broad View of Aesthetic Experience," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 71, no. 4 (2013): 323–33.
 24. Jean-Marie Schaeffer, *Art of the Modern Age*, trans. Steven Rendall (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 301. See also Norman Kreitman, "The Varieties of Aesthetic Disinterestedness," *Contemporary Aesthetics* 4 (2006), <https://www.contempaesthetics.org/newvolume/pages/article.php?articleID=390>. Bence Nanay makes a case for replacing the idea of "disinterested attention" with "distributed attention"—yet aesthetic attention is surely often highly focused rather than evenly distributed. See his *Aesthetics as a Philosophy of Perception* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).
 25. James Wood, *The Nearest Thing to Life* (Boston: Brandeis University Press, 2015), 75.
 26. The point is not entirely new—Dewey spoke of "mediated immediacy"—but it has yet to be fully assimilated and taken on board.
 27. Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 237.
 28. Noel Carroll, "Friendship and Yasmina Reza's 'Art,'" *Philosophy and Literature* 26, no. 1 (2002): 202–3. There is a great deal of research on book clubs and on fans, but not much else. See, however, Alexander Nehamas, *On Friendship* (New York: Basic Books, 2016).
 29. James Elkins, *Pictures and Tears* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Michael White, *Travels in Vermeer: A Memoir* (New York: Persea, 2015); Dario Gamboni, *The Destruction of Art: Iconoclasm and Vandalism since the French Revolution* (London: Reaktion Books, 2007).
 30. Yasmina Reza, *"Art": A Play* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997), 63.
 31. Quoted in Amanda Gigeure, *The Plays of Yasmina Reza on the English and American Stage* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2010), 47. For a brief but insightful reading of the play, see the afterword to Hannah Freed-Thall, *Spoiled Distinctions: Aesthetics and the Ordinary in French Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 143–48.

32. Tim Parks, *The Novel: A Survival Skill* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).
33. Bruno Latour, "On Actor-Network Theory: A Few Clarifications," *Soziale Welt* 47, no. 4 (1996): 371.
34. Bruno Latour, "Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern," *Critical Inquiry* 30 (2004): 227.
35. For the phone booth example and other helpful clarifications, see Latour, "On Actor-Network Theory."
36. Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 142.
37. Bruno Latour, "On Recalling ANI," in *Actor Network Theory and After*, ed. John Law and John Hassard (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1999), 24.
38. Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 18.
39. Levine, *Forms*, 13.
40. Latour, *Inquiry*, 35.
41. Kimberly Chabot Davis, *Postmodern Texts and Emotional Audiences* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2007).
42. Leah Price, *How to Do Things with Books in Victorian Britain* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013).
43. Orhan Pamuk, *The New Life* (New York: Vintage, 1998), 3–4.
44. Pamuk, *New Life*, 7.
45. Susan Fraiman, *Extreme Domesticity: A View from the Margins* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017).
46. Peter Conrad, "Late Turner: Painting Set Free Review—Prepare to Be Dazzled," *Guardian*, September 13, 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2014/sep/14/late-turner-painting-set-free-tate-britain-review-prepare-to-be-dazzled>.
47. Wai Chee Dimock, "Literature for the Planet," *PMLA* 116, no. 1 (2001): 175.
48. Ross Posnock, review of *The Limits of Critique*, by Rita Felski, *American Literary History*, online review, series 6 (2016), <https://academic.oup.com/DocumentLibrary/ALH/Online%20Review%20Series%206/Ross%20Posnock%20Online%20Review%20VI.PDF>.
49. Lawrence Grossberg, "Is There a Fan in the House? The Affective Sensibility of Fandom," in Lewis, *Adoring Audience*, 50.
50. Carl Plantinga, *Moving Viewers: American Film and the Spectator Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 3.
51. Robyn Warhol, *Having a Good Cry: Effeminate Feelings and Pop-Culture Forms* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2003), 67; Lynne Pearce, *Feminism and the Politics of Reading* (London: Arnold, 1997), 106.
52. Alexander Nehamas, *Only a Promise of Happiness: The Place of Beauty in a World of Art* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 74.

53. Susan Sontag, "The Decay of Cinema," *New York Times*, February 25, 1996. See also Christian Keathley, *Cinephilia and History, or The Wind in the Trees* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006).
54. Jerrold Levinson, "Falling in Love with a Book," in *Aesthetic Pursuits: Essays in Philosophy of Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 79. See, however, the interesting discussion by David Aldridge in "Education's Love Triangle," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 53, no. 3 (2019): 531–46.
55. Ronald de Sousa, *Love: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 3.
56. Pearce, *Feminism and the Politics of Reading*.
57. Ben Anderson, *Encountering Affect: Capacities, Apparatuses, Conditions* (London: Routledge, 2016), 19, 165. For another good account of affect as "heuristically *distinguished* but not sharply *separated* from emotion," see "Introduction: Affect in Relation," in *Affect in Relation—Families, Places, Technologies: Essays on Affectivity and Subject Formation in the 21st Century*, ed. B. Röttger-Rössler and J. Slaby (New York: Routledge, 2018), 1–28.
58. Charles Taylor, "What Is Human Agency?," in *Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).
59. Günter Leypoldt, "Social Dimensions of the Turn to Genre: Junot Díaz's *Oscar Wao* and Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Buried Giant*," *Post45*, March 31, 2018, <http://post45.research.yale.edu/2018/03/social-dimensions-of-the-turn-to-genre-junot-diazs-oscar-wao-and-kazuo-ishiguros-the-buried-giant/>. For more on the relevance of "strong values" to literary reception, see his "Degrees of Public Relevance: Walter Scott and Toni Morrison," *Modern Language Quarterly* 77, no. 3 (2016): 369–89.
60. Leypoldt, "Social Dimensions of the Turn to Genre."
61. bell hooks, *An Aesthetics of Blackness: Strange and Oppositional*, in *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (Boston: Southend Press, 1990).
62. See Rita Felski, "The Role of Aesthetics in Cultural Studies," in *Aesthetics and Cultural Studies*, ed. Michael Berubé (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004); Rita Felski, "Modernist Studies and Cultural Studies: Reflections on Method," *Modernism/Modernity* 10, no. 3 (2003): 501–17.
63. Günter Leypoldt, "Knausgaard in America: Literary Prestige and Charismatic Trust," *Critical Quarterly* 59, no. 3 (2017): 58.
64. Jeffrey T. Nealon, *I'm Not like Everyone Else: Biopolitics, Neoliberalism, and American Popular Music* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2018), 110.
65. Anna Poletti et al., "The Affects of Not Reading: Hating Characters, Being

- Bored, Feeling Stupid,” *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education* 15, no. 2 (2016): 10.
66. Amit Chaudhuri, *The Origins of Dislike* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 14–15.
 67. Deborah Root, *Cannibal Culture: Art, Appropriation, and the Commodification of Difference* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 136.
 68. There is already some writing along these general lines. See, e.g., Geoff Dyer, *Out of Sheer Rage: Wrestling with D. H. Lawrence* (London: Picador, 2009); or Jonathan Gray on anti-fans: “New Audiences, New Textualities: Anti-fans and Non-fans,” *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 6, no. 1 (2003): 64–81.
 69. Or more precisely, little *academic* attention has been paid to the personal reactions solicited by “high” art. A flood of books with titles like *My Life in Middlemarch* or *How Proust Changed My Life* or *My Life in Vermeer* points to a strong public interest in autobiographical accounts of attachments to artworks. That these books are rarely referenced in scholarly articles seems related to two factors: their encroachment onto academic terrain, combined with styles of thought that are often dismissed as middlebrow or belletristic.
 70. Jackie Stacey, *Stargazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* (London: Routledge, 1994); David S. Miall, *Literary Reading: Empirical and Theoretical Studies* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006); Daniel Cavicchi, *Tramps like Us: Music and Meaning among Springsteen Fans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).
 71. The phrase “hesitancies and inarticulacies” is drawn from Matt Hills’s impressively argued *Fan Cultures* (London: Routledge 2002), 7. Some ethnographers, such as Kimberly Chabot Davis, include much longer passages of audience commentary.
 72. This point is developed in more detail in Rita Felski, “Everyday Aesthetics,” *minnesota review* 71–72 (2009): 171–79.

Chapter 2

1. David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 440.
2. Erik Wallrup, *Being Musically Attuned: The Act of Listening to Music* (London: Ashgate, 2015), 6.
3. James English, “Prestige, Pleasure, and the Data of Cultural Preference: ‘Quality Signals’ in an Age of Superabundance,” *Western Humanities Review* 70, no. 3 (2016), <http://www.westernhumanitiesreview.com/fall-2016-70-3/prestige-pleasure-and-the-data-of-cultural-preference-quality-signals-in-the-age-of-superabundance/>.

4. Michael Gallope, *Deep Refrains: Music, Philosophy, and the Ineffable* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 16.
5. W. J. T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 8.
6. Nicholas Cooke, *Analysing Musical Multi-media* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).
7. See Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006); Steven Connor, "CP; or, A Few Don'ts by a Cultural Phenomenologist," *Parallax* 5, no. 2 (1999): 17–31; Don Ihde, *Postphenomenology and Technoscience* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009); and my references to neophenomenology in *Uses of Literature* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008). There is also Thomas Rickert, *Ambient Rhetoric: The Attunements of Rhetorical Being* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013); and Lisbeth Lipari, *Listening, Thinking, Being: Toward an Ethics of Attunement* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2014).
8. Michiko Kakutani, "From Kazuo Ishiguro, a New Annoying Hero," *New York Times*, October 17, 1995. For an overview of negative responses, some no longer available online, see Suzie Mackenzie, "Between Two Worlds," *Guardian*, March 25, 2000.
9. Connor, "CP," 26.
10. Antoine Hennion, "Pragmatics of Taste," in *The Blackwell Companion to the Sociology of Culture*, ed. Mark D. Jacobs and Nancy Weiss Hanrahan (Oxford: Blackwell's, 2005), 133.
11. Antoine Hennion and Line Grenier, "Sociology of Art: New Stakes in a Post-critical Time," in *The International Handbook of Sociology*, ed. Stella Quah and Arnaud Sales (London: Sage, 2000), 344.
12. Claudio E. Benzecry, *The Opera Fan: Ethnography of an Obsession* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); Tia DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Howard S. Becker, *Art Worlds*, rev. ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008); Maria Angelica Thumale Olave, "Reading Matters: Towards a Cultural Sociology of Reading," *American Journal of Cultural Sociology* 6, no. 3 (2018): 417–54. See also Rita Felski, "My Sociology Envy," *Theory, Culture, and Society*, July 25, 2019, <https://www.theoryculturesociety.org/rita-felski-my-sociology-envy/>.
13. Tony Bennett, "Habitus Clivé: Aesthetics and Politics in the Work of Pierre Bourdieu," *New Literary History* 38, no. 1 (2007): 206. Here Bennett is giving an overview of an argument by one of the most important critics of Bourdieu, Bernard Lahire, as articulated in Lahire's *La culture des individus: Dissonances culturelles et distinctions de soi* (Paris: Editions la

- Découverte, 2004). And see also Jeffrey C. Alexander, "The Reality of Reduction: The Failed Synthesis of Pierre Bourdieu," in *Fin-de-Siècle Social Theory: Relativism, Reduction, and the Problem of Reason* (London: Verso, 1995), 128–217.
14. Janice Radway, "What's the Matter with Reception Studies?," in *New Directions in American Reception Studies*, ed. Philip Goldstein and James L. Machor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 339.
 15. Zadie Smith, "Some Notes on Attunement," in *Feel Free* (New York: Penguin, 2018), 100. Further citations appear in parentheses in the text.
 16. Hennion, "Pragmatics of Taste," 136.
 17. Matthew Ratcliffe, "Heidegger's Attunement and the Neuropsychology of Emotion," *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 1 (2002): 289.
 18. Stanley Cavell, "Aesthetic Problems of Modern Philosophy," in *Must We Mean What We Say? A Book of Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 93.
 19. Robert Escarpit, *Sociology of Literature*, trans. Ernest Pick (London: Frank Cass, 1971), 87.
 20. Morris Beja, *Epiphany in the Modern Novel* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1971), 25.
 21. Ben Green, "Peak Music Experiences: A New Perspective on Popular Music, Identity, and Scenes" (PhD diss., Griffith University, 2017), 106. Similar descriptions of conversion to Springsteen can be found in Daniel Cavicchi, *Tramps like Us: Music and Meaning among Springsteen Fans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). For an earlier, and still important, critique of high versus popular culture oppositions, see Simon Frith, *Performing Rites: Evaluating Popular Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996). Frith writes: "I would argue, at least as a starting premise, that in responding to high and low art forms, in assessing them, finding them beautiful or moving or repulsive, people are employing the same evaluating principles. The differences lie in the objects at issue (what is culturally interesting to us is socially structured), in the discourses in which judgments are cast, and in the circumstances in which they are made" (19).
 22. Stanley Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?* (New York: Scribner, 1969), 52; Daniel N. Stern, *The Interpersonal World of the Infant* (New York: Basic Books, 1985).
 23. Zadie Smith, *NW* (London: Penguin, 2013), 36.
 24. Patrica Hampl, *Blue Arabesque: A Search for the Sublime* (New York: Mariner, 2007), 2–5.
 25. Peter de Bolla, *Art Matters* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 57.
 26. Geoff Dyer, *Zona: A Book about a Film about a Journey to a Room* (London:

- Vintage, 2012), 142–43. I am grateful to Namwali Serpell for bringing this book to my attention.
27. Dyer, *Zona*, 10.
 28. Virginia Woolf, “How Should One Read a Book?” in *The Second Common Reader* (London: Harvest, 2003), 266.
 29. Karl Heinz Bohrer, *Suddenness: On the Moment of Aesthetic Appearance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).
 30. Jean-François Lyotard, “The Sublime and the Avant-Garde,” in *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992).
 31. T. J. Clark, *The Sight of Death: An Experiment in Art Writing* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 5.
 32. Clark, *Sight of Death*, 12.
 33. Jean-Marie Schaeffer, *L'expérience esthétique* (Paris: Gallimard, 2015).
 34. Bence Nanay, *Aesthetics as Philosophy of Perception* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 16.
 35. Mark Doty, *Still Life with Oysters and Lemon: On Objects and Intimacy* (New York: Beacon, 2002), 4.
 36. Rebecca Mead, *My Life in Middlemarch* (New York: Broadway, 2015), 16.
 37. Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Music and the Ineffable*, trans. Carolyn Abbaté (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 102.
 38. Carolyn Abbaté, “Music—Drastic or Gnostic?” *Critical Inquiry* 30 (Spring 2004): 505–6.
 39. Freedberg, *Power of Images*, 1.
 40. Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 6.
 41. Caroline Van Eck, “Living Statues: Alfred Gell’s *Art and Agency*, Living Presence Response, and the Sublime,” *Art History* 33, no. 4 (2010): 646. On Gell’s confusion of the agency of art with poisoned arrows and land mines, see Richard Layton, “*Art and Agency*: A Reassessment,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 9, no. 3 (2003): 447–64.
 42. James Elkins, *Pictures and Tears: A History of People Who Have Cried in Front of Paintings* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 248.
 43. Antoine Hennion, “Objects, Belief, and the Sociologist: The Sociology of Art as a Work-to-Be-Done,” in *Roads to Music Sociology*, ed. Alfred Smudits (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2018), 50.
 44. Emilie Gomart and Antoine Hennion, “A Sociology of Attachment: Music Amateurs, Drug Users,” in *Actor Network Theory and After*, ed. John Law and John Hassard (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1999), 220–47.
 45. Hennion, “Pragmatics of Taste,” 135.
 46. George Steiner, *Real Presences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 183.

47. Steiner, *Real Presences*, 186.
48. Steiner, *Real Presences*, 183.
49. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *Production of Presence: What Meaning Cannot Convey* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 117.
50. Janet Wolff, "After Cultural Theory: The Power of Images, the Lure of Immediacy," *Journal of Visual Culture* 11, no. 1 (2012): 3–19. Where Wolff goes badly wrong is citing ANT as an example of an approach that ignores mediation. In reality, ANT is *premised* on mediation.
51. De Bolla, *Art Matters*, 3.
52. Annemarie Mol, "Actor-Network Theory: Sensitive Terms and Enduring Tensions," *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, Sonderheft, 50, no. 1 (2010): 3.
53. Alva Noë, *Varieties of Presence* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 115.
54. Nadine Hubbs, *Rednecks, Queers, and Country Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 97.
55. Toril Moi, *Revolution of the Ordinary: Literary Studies after Wittgenstein, Austin, and Cavell* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).
56. Clark, *Sight of Death*, 184.
57. Vivian Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 65.
58. Gilbert Ryle, "Knowing How and Knowing That," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 46 (1945–46): 1–16.
59. Elkins, *Pictures and Tears*, 87.
60. Elkins, *Pictures and Tears*, 88.
61. Hennion, "Pragmatics of Taste," 140.
62. See Isabelle Stengers, "Affinity," in *The Encyclopedia of the Enlightenment*, ed. Michel Delon (New York: Routledge, 2003); Nathalie Sarraute, *Tropisms*, trans. John Calder (New York: New Directions, 2015).
63. Gernot Böhme, "Atmosphere as the Fundamental Concept of a New Aesthetics," *Thesis Eleven* 36 (1993): 113–26; Dora Zhang, "Notes on Atmosphere," *Qui Parle* 27, no. 1 (2018): 122–23.
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Chapter 3

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