High and Low: The Race for an Extension of Sensations*

I. The Separation of Cultural Spheres

Can the terms aesthetics and aesthetic experience be meaningfully applied to popular culture at all? Almost all of the terms that have traditionally been used to describe popular culture imply severe aesthetic shortcomings. Characterizations like kitsch, sentimentality, sensationalist or trashy literature (for which the equally disparaging term *Kolportageliteratur* has often been used in German-speaking countries), or the term *Trivialliteratur,* which dominated discussions of popular culture in German-speaking countries for decades, all have their common denominator in the assumption that, whatever their merits and cultural significance may be, popular cultural texts are marked (and marred) by fundamental aesthetic flaws. This also applies to two of the most frequently used characterizations which have long been a staple of cultural criticism, those of mass culture and the culture industry. In emphasizing standardized mass production as the defining characteristic of popular culture, these terms postulate not only a deplorable lack of artistic originality and creativity but assert their impossibility. No matter where the emphasis lies: all of these characterizations emphasize a loss of control over the creative process, and thereby a watering down or corruption of aesthetic standards – either because of ineptitude or, worse, for commercial reasons. This apparent lack of a notable aesthetic dimension provided the conceptual separation of cultural spheres into highbrow and lowbrow with a seemingly self-evident plausibility and thus contributed its own share to the justification of an unquestioned cultural hierarchy.

However, in his influential study *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America,* Lawrence Levine has presented rich evidence in support of the claim that this separation between *high* and *low* by no means reflects generally accepted ideas about what constitutes aesthetic

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value. The division was not established because people finally realized that popular culture possessed no aesthetic merits but because such a claim became useful. As Levine argues, the separation of cultural spheres into highbrow and lowbrow is the result of a particular historical situation and reflects social developments that unfolded in the second half of the 19th century. A pivotal moment are the so-called *Astor Place Riots* in 1850, which were among the most violent clashes in the era before the Civil War and led to the death of altogether twenty-two persons. In what amounted to a form of vicarious class war, supporters of the popular American actor Edwin Forrest tried to prevent the famous British actor W. C. Macready from appearing in a performance of *Macbeth* because Macready had become a symbol of fashionable society. The event is significant because it highlights an increasing social differentiation of the theater audience and, along with it, the disintegration of a common public sphere in which different classes had been taking part in the same public events. At the same time, the *Astor Place Riots* draw attention to a growing hostility between the proponents of high culture and the "common people" that began to grow stronger in the *Gilded Age*.

In this 19th century culture war, Shakespeare provided a crucial point of reference. Levine has described the process of a gradual sacralization of Shakespeare after the Civil War. The story he presents illustrates the growing importance of the idea of art in the *Gilded Age*. In American cultural history, this is a moment in which culture is redefined as the sphere of high art, so that a society like the American one can have culture or not yet, can be "cultured" or still "uncultured." Inevitably, this reconceptualization of culture had institutional consequences. Once art is considered an almost sacred object, performers and audiences have to change their attitudes towards the aesthetic object in order to have a rewarding aesthetic experience. Actors, stage directors and musicians have to be faithful to the text or score and respect its artistic integrity, just as audiences have to fully concentrate on the theatrical or musical performance and observe complete silence. On the other side, the sacralization of art must also have consequences for those literary texts, theatrical and musical performances, as well as objects of visual culture, that do not meet dominant aesthetic expectations: at worst, they are seen as failures, at best as "mere entertainment." The latter term has become our favorite term for describing a text, performance or object that seems to be without any aesthetic ambitions and can therefore be excused for its aesthetic shortcomings because from time to time we need some kind of distraction or temporary relief from the hardships of everyday life. In such moments, the depth of aesthetically valuable art can be temporarily sacrificed for the shiny sensations of popular culture.

In the antebellum period, different classes and social groups still formed one common audience for stage plays or musical performances. Fashionable society, respectable middle-class citizens and lower classes all had their

designated spaces in the theater and responded actively to what they saw on stage (or outside of it). The degree of lively audience participation can hardly be imagined today. Approval and disapproval were expressed in no uncertain terms and in unashamedly noisy forms. Favorite passages were spoken aloud along with the actors, bad actors were driven from stage by throwing whatever was at hand, and in the case of especially good performances, audiences would ask actors to repeat the scene, so that, for example, the stirring monologue of a dying man might have to be repeated several times and an actor might have to die repeatedly to satisfy the audience. In the following description, Robert Toll provides a graphic summary of the lively anarchy that still prevailed at this time in an institution that would later become a solemn temple of bourgeois respectability:

> Audiences buzzed with activity, even during the show. In the boxes, the upper crust gossiped and flirted. In the gallery and pit, people stamped their feet in time with the music, sang along with familiar tunes, recited famous speeches along with the actors, and hollered out punch lines to old jokes. … Whenever those audiences liked a speech, song, or piece of acting, they cheered wildly and demanded encores, regardless of the nature of the performance or the script. This practice included interrupting *Hamlet* to have a speech repeated as often as demanding encores at variety shows. When displeased, audiences hissed, shouted insults, and threw things at the performers (Toll 6).[1]

In view of the happy anarchy described by Toll, in which the disciplinary forces of modern society are still successfully defeated, the question must arise, however, why this wonderfully carnivalesque condition was ever given up. Levine's claim is that this was not done voluntarily but that the process was set in motion by upper-class members in search of social capital who created the distinction between high and low as a means of social distinction. By institutionalizing a separation of cultural spheres (the *Gilded Age* was the period in which many major high culture institutions were established in the U.S.), they enforced a division between highbrow culture and lowbrow onto others. In the antebellum period, Shakespeare had been the most popular playwright on all levels of society. Now he became the figurehead of "high art" who could no longer be presented in an openly entertaining fashion and

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1 See also the following description provided in Toll's book *On With the Show. The First Century of Show Business in America*: "Rowdies picked fights; mothers nursed babies; drunks staggered; immigrants partied; men spit tobacco juice; sailors leered; lovers held hands; old men took naps; blacks picnicked; prostitutes strutted; and socialites paraded their latest hair styles, fashions, and lovers. The odors of onions, cigar smoke, and whiskey and the sounds of masses of chattering, laughing people filled the air. It was a cross-section of America out to have a good time. Such outings took place almost every night in almost every nineteenth-century American city – but not in parks, as we might now expect. There were virtually no parks. All this activity and much, much more took place in theaters, which served as social clubs, picnic grounds, watering holes, and meeting places, as well as entertainment centers" (3).

was thereby taken away from the common people. For Levine, the actual aesthetic experience of antebellum theatrical performances, still aimed at both high and low taste levels, was provided by the communality of a public event in which all members of society still participated. This democratic public sphere could confirm a sense of equality and function as a source of empowerment for audience members. But it was precisely this democratic dimension which provoked members of the upper classes to replace cultural democracy by cultural hierarchy because they felt threatened in their claims for social superiority. Instead of affirming an idea of equality, the aesthetic sphere could now function as an instrument of social distinction. By elevating Shakespeare's popular dramas to the level of high art and using them for a redefinition of what constituted aesthetic experience, the popular cultural object was deprived of an aesthetic dimension of its own. Levine's version of the willful creation of a separation between "high" and "low" culture as result of a search for social capital – and thus for social (self)authorization – is by now a familiar one and has become an authoritative, widely accepted narrative about the emergence of a cultural hierarchy in the 19th century that robbed the people of their common culture and turned the search for aesthetic experience into an elitist pursuit.

In the following essay, I want to offer an alternative version about the beginning of the separation between highbrow and lowbrow in American culture. This story also begins in the antebellum period. But contrary to the assumption of a broadly defined common culture until mid-century, on which Levine's argument rests, the introduction of new printing presses around 1830 can already be seen as playing a crucial role in the emergence of different taste cultures and aesthetic projects – not only in response to a growing class differentiation and the ensuing search of upper classes for social capital, but as the result of competing projects to liberate and strengthen the aesthetic dimension itself. For this story, the arrival of the so-called *Penny Press* and, linked with it, of a popular culture of sensationalism, is of supreme importance, but, at the same time, we also encounter first manifestations of a modern(ist) view of the aesthetic as an autonomous sphere. At first sight, these two developments seem to take part at opposite ends of the cultural spectrum and appear to go into entirely different directions: one introducing the cheap thrills of modern mass culture, and the other paving the way for a modernist aesthetic of high art. However, in an important contribution to our understanding of American cultural history, David Reynolds has shown that these apparently opposite cultural spheres were connected by common themes and by related formal strategies much more closely than formerly realized.[2]

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2 Cf. David Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance. The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville.* In several contributions, Hermann Schnackertz has drawn attention to the "disreputable" links of Poe's aesthetic to such pseudo-sciences

Critics have argued convincingly that an author like Poe did not hesitate to use sensationalist material in his stories – and thus did not strictly observe a purist highbrow insistence that the autonomous work of art was not to be contaminated and corrupted by cheap thrills and other sensationalist matter. But although this is an important point to make, I want to go beyond it: I want to claim that, in the final analysis, the journalistic and literary sensationalism of the period and the programmatic aestheticism of a writer like Poe pursued a similar project, namely the question of how aesthetic experience could be optimized as an end in itself. In pursuit of this project, highbrow and lowbrow culture took different routes, but found surprisingly similar solutions. Seen from contemporary developments towards an aesthetics of corporeal experience or an aesthetic of immersion, this unexpected affinity between two cultural spheres that long appeared as diametrically opposed to each other might even add a chapter to contemporary definitions of aesthetic experience.

II. The Culture of Sensationalism

In the U.S., forms of journalistic and literary sensationalism developed in connection with the emergence of a new type of mass-circulated newspaper. This *Penny Press* responded to new urban realities that had created a newspaper readership with entirely new interests and new appetites. Newspapers in the colonial period and the Early Republic had focused almost exclusively on local politics and on trading news. Now, newspapers began to include such aspects of urban life as crime, political corruption, sports, and society news.[3] One of the events nourishing this new orientation was the violent

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of the time like phrenology and mesmerism. The plausible explanation Schnackertz provides for the fact that these connections have long been ignored is that highbrow critics were embarrassed to admit the connection: "Indeed, at first sight the assumption of a connection between phrenology and Poe's aesthetic must appear absurd. The claim that an aesthetic theory considered by common consent to argue for the autonomy of the aesthetic may be inspired in part by phrenological theories, seems to defy plausibility" (*Poe und die Wissenschaften* 16, my translation). See also Schnackertz, "Mesmerizing the Reader."

3 For a characterization of the American newspaper before 1830, see Michael Schudson: "The commercial press and the party press had several important features in common. First, they were expensive. A paper ordinarily cost the reader six cents an issue at a time when the average daily wage for nonfarm labor was less than eighty-five cents. But a person could not buy one issue at a time except at the printer's office. Newspapers were generally sold only by subscription, and annual subscriptions ranged from eight to ten dollars. Not surprisingly, circulation of newspapers was low, usually just one to two thousand for even the most prominent metropolitan papers. Newspaper readership was confined to mercantile and political elites; it is no wonder, then, that newspaper content was limited to commerce and politics" (15). In contrast

death of the beautiful New York prostitute Helen Jewett, who had been slain with an axe by one of her lovers in 1835.[4] In its sensational aspects, Jewett's case brought together two key ingredients of the *Penny Press*: a new, exciting topic – crime – and a new genre of newspaper reporting, the *human interest story*. Both can be understood as responses to an urban existence in which life gained a dimension of unpredictability and can no longer be as readily controlled as in the country-side. On the one hand, the frequency of encounters with others increases dramatically; on the other hand, most of these people remain strangers and hence "mysteries" (certainly the key word of all crime stories). This paradoxical situation must stimulate our curiosity; we want to know more and substantiate our speculations and suspicions in order to gain a certain sense of security. Disclosures and a rhetoric of revelation became a staple of the *Penny Press* because they could provide an illusion of knowledge. The *human interest story* is ideally suited to satisfy this hunger for disclosure: in using fictionalized modes of representation, it provides news that do not belong to the category of important political or practical know–ledge but which enact a symbolic drama to which the reader can relate in one way or another. The informational value of *human interest stories* remains negligible, while, at the same time, their expressive and dramatic value is skillfully enhanced, often by lively dramatization and strong emotional appeals.[5]

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to newspapers before 1830, the *Penny Press* was sold without subscription and thus could not count on a guaranteed readership. The U.S. were ahead in this development; the practice arrived in Europe only about 30 years later. On journalistic sensationalism see also Crouthamel, *Bennett's New York 'Herald' and the Rise of the Popular Press* and Stevens, *Sensationalism in the New York Press*.

4 Reports about the murder in the *New York Herald* raised its circulation from 5000 to 15000. Patricia Cline Cohen and David Anthony have described the great cultural significance of the Jewett murder case which Anthony calls "one of the most publicized in history" (489). Poe later tried to capitalize on a similarly spectacular murder case, that of the "beautiful cigar girl" Mary Rogers in 1841, which also provided ideal material for the sensationalist *Penny Press*. "The Mystery of Marie Roget" was his second detective story after "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" and again featured Auguste Dupin as the detective who solves a seemingly unsolvable case by the sheer power of his analytical mind. However, in "The Mystery of Marie Roget," Poe attempted to go beyond "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" in which the murder case solved by Dupin is still a fictive one, whereas "Marie Roget" has the ambition to solve an actual murder case that had remained a mystery to the police. Undoubtedly, one of Poe's motives was to profit from the great publicity the case had received. In his study *The Beautiful Cigar Girl. Mary Rogers, Edgar Allan Poe and the Invention of Murder,* Daniel Stashower has traced the turbulent circumstances under which the story was written (among them a confession shortly before the publication of the story which contradicted Poe's solution). See also Srebnik, *The Mysterious Death of Mary Rogers: Sex and Culture in Nineteenth-Century America.* Other bestseller authors of the time like Ned Buntline, Joseph Holt Ingraham, and E.E. Barclay also used the case to profit from its sensationalist appeal (cf. Halttunen 112).

5 The *Penny Press* had three major topics: crime, sports, and society news with reports

Both are indispensable. As is the case in fictional texts, the people who stand at the center of the *human interest story* are most likely unknown to us. Thus, forms of reporting have to be found that make it possible to empathize with them. It is not exaggerated to say that the crime report and the *human interest story* were instrumental for developing a new form of popular culture.

The *Penny Press* introduced new themes and extended the reading public. Literature could profit from this development. A new type of novel emerged, the serial or pamphlet novel with sensationalist subject matter that was published first in newspapers in serialized form. In the U.S., these novels were often inspired by evangelical reform movements, such as the temperance movement, which were glad to take advantage of the sensationalist motif catalogue in order to dramatize the fatal consequences of a lack of moral self-discipline.[6] (Even Walt Whitman tried his hand at this new type of evangelical reform novel![7]) However, serialization as a form of publication also

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on the social life of the upper crust. None of this had played any significant role in newspapers before. Aiming specifically at lower class readers who had been ignored by traditional papers, the *Penny Press* was an immediate success and led to a virtual explosion of newspapers in the U.S., from ca. 1200 newspapers in 1833 to roughly 3000 in 1860. One reason for the success of the new type of newspaper lies in an increasing narrativization that opened up new possibilities of imaginary and emotional transfers on the side of the reader. The editor of the *New York Herald* highlights this aspect in the following excerpt from one of his editorials: "If a Shakespeare could have taken a stroll in the morning or afternoon through the Police, does any one imagine he could not have picked up half a dozen dramas and some original character? The bee extracts from the lowliest flower – so shall we in the Police Office" (quoted in Lehuu 50).

6 Cf. Karen Halttunen on the origins of the term sensationalism. She also provides a helpful definition: "Gothic fiction exemplified a broader literary trend in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century that was captured in the neologism 'sensationalism.' According to the *Oxford English Dictionary,* the earliest usage of the term 'sensation,' meaning 'an excited or violent feeling' or 'the production of violent emotion as an aim in works of literature or art,' was in 1779. Over time, the term increasingly lent itself to what was perceived to be a degraded commercial tendency to pander to public excitement in the face of particularly terrible or shocking events, to what William Wordsworth in 1801 characterized as a 'craving for extraordinary incident' and 'degrading outrageous stimulation'" (67).

7 See Walt Whitman, *Franklin Evans, or, the Inebriate* (1842). The editors of the essay collection *The Serpent in the Cup. Temperance in American Literature* point out that they have taken the title of their collection from Whitman's novel (Reynolds/Rosenthal 6). In his own contribution to the volume, "Black Cats and Delirium Tremens. Temperance and the American Renaissance," David Reynolds uses one of the most popular temperance novels of the period, T.S. Arthur's *Ten Nights in a Bar-room* (1854), to provide a list of recurring motifs in moral reform literature of the time: "Arthur utilized all the gimmicks of dark temperance to make his point: the novel contains three murders, an episode of delirium tremens, an eye-gouging, and a case of a wife's insanity – all resulting from alcohol consumption" (Reynolds 31). Moore adds in a different context: "Temperance stories, another genre that generally won clerical endorsement, were equally graphic. Timothy Shay Arthur's runaway best-seller

creates a need for ever new and ever more spectacular effects in order to keep up the reader's interest and to make him seek out the next installment.[8] In his study of literary sensationalism, David Reynolds has drawn attention to the far-reaching presence of sensationalist themes and topics even in the proto-modernist literature of the writers of the *American Renaissance*.[9] However, while sensationalist motifs are aesthetically transformed in the work of writers like Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, Edgar Allan Poe or Walt Whitman, Reynolds argues, popular bestseller authors like George Lippard, George Thompson, T. S. Arthur, or Ned Buntline tried to exploit them cynically in their search for strong effects, submitting aesthetic considerations completely to commercial goals.

Of all the sensationalist novels of the period, George Lippard's *The Quaker City; or, The Monks of Monk Hall: A Romance of Philadelphia Life, Mystery,*

Ten Nights in a Bar-room … was one among many such tales of domestic violence. Husbands beat their wives and were then killed by sons. Daughters generally died of remorse. Drink did terrible things to people which could be described because they were true" (29).

8 Alexis de Tocqueville had foreseen this tendency towards sensationalism as a logical consequence of democratic conditions: "By and large the literature of a democracy will never exhibit the order, regularity, skill, and art characteristic of aristocratic literature; formal qualities will be neglected or actually despised. The style will often be strange, incorrect, overburdened, and loose, and almost always strong and bold. Writers will be more anxious to work quickly than to perfect details. Short works will be commoner than long books, wit than erudition, imagination than depth. There will be a rude and untutored vigor of thought with great variety and singular fecundity. Authors will strive to astonish more than to please, and to stir passions rather than to charm taste" (474). "I have no fear that the poetry of democratic peoples will be found timid or that it will stick too close to the earth. I am much more afraid that it will spend its whole time getting lost in the clouds and may finish up by describing an entirely fictitious country. I am alarmed at the thought of too many immense, incoherent images, overdrawn descriptions, bizarre effects, and a whole fantastic breed of brainchildren who will make one long for the real world" (489).

9 This surprising observation provides the point of departure for Reynolds to focus on the literary sensationalism of the period which, up to this point, had been ignored in American literary history: "Poe's portraits of psychopathic murderers; Melville's studies of incest and deceit; Hawthorne's probings into the psyche of social outcasts; Whitman's frank expression of sexual passion – these and other daring aspects of the major texts were artistic renderings of irrational or erotic themes predominant in a large body of overlooked sensational writings of the day. … Poe famously borrowed crime stories from the penny press … Melville also kept a close eye on the sensational press, which often featured bizarre or freakish images (e.g. destructive white whales, convincing confidence men, ship disasters) that may have sparked his imagination … Melville readers should be aware that at this early stage the American public was obviously fascinated by mythic sea monsters …" (Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance* 169-173). On this topic, see also Shelley Streeby, *American Sensations, Class, Empire, and the Production of Popular Culture*, and Isabell Lehuu, *Carnival on the Page. Popular Print Media in Antebellum America.*

and Crime (1845) became the most successful.[10] Lippard's highly popular novel is "shameless" in its unrepentant sensationalist excesses. In its search for strong effects, it offers something like a compendium of almost all sensationalist themes, motifs and plot constellations that would dominate this type of popular culture into the next centuries.[11] The story is that of an urban underworld of hidden dungeons and treacherous trapdoors, false identities and ever new deceptions, cynical betrayals and heart-breaking breaches of promise.[12] In this moral underworld of the hypocritical Quaker-city Pennsylvania, crime prevails in all shapes and sizes, from violent murder to kidnapping, seduction, rape and torture, bodily mutilation, and including even necrophile and cannibalistic suggestions. In serial fashion, we are confronted with a seemingly never-ending sequence of climactic life-and-death situations that produce an emotional see-saw effect: incredible coincidences are responsible for the never-ending misfortunes of the pure and innocent but also for their unexpected rescue at the very last moment. Lippard's preferred generic choice is the melodrama with its constantly revived threats of victimization, and this provides one explanation for the enormous popularity of his novel. Along with *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, another gripping melodrama, Lippard's sensationalist novel was one of the most successful American novels of the 19th century.[13] Like many 19th century melodramas, the novel is organized around a moral dichotomy between a corrupt and decadent upper class and its innocent victims from the respectable middling classes. In view of their cruel fates at the hands of an irresponsible elite, the question must arise whether moral virtue will still be rewarded in this world or whether true justice can only be expected after death.[14] On the formal level, this scenario of victimization is intensified by an expressive externalization of inner conflicts, and a constant play on the reader's emotions. As readers we are constantly moving between pity for the innocent victim and anger about the

10 The following argument draws on a more detailed analysis of the novel in my study *Das kulturelle Imaginäre: Funktionsgeschichte des amerikanischen Romans* (131-46).

11 Lippard's novel also drew inspiration from a widely publicized murder case of the period: "… Lippard's novel was based in part on a famous court case of 1843 in which Singleton Mercer, a well-off Philadelphian, was acquitted after killing the alleged seducer of his sister" (Reynolds/Gladman, "Introduction x)

12 In his plots and motifs, Lippard followed the "mysteries of the city"-formula established by Eugène Sue's novel *Les Mystères des Paris* (1842-43) and G.W.M. Reynolds's *The Mysteries of London* (1845-48).

13 See Reynolds/Gladman: "After six months, the first two-thirds of the novel were published in one volume, which sold 48 000 copies; in May 1845, Lippard published a greatly expanded version of the completed novel, which sold 60 000 copies in its first year and 10 000 copies annually during the next decade, making it the most popular work of fiction in the United States before *Uncle Tom's Cabin*" ("Introduction" xi).

14 Lippard saw himself as a socialist and founded one of the first socialist organisations in the U.S., called *The Brotherhood of Union*, later renamed *The Brotherhood of America*.

inexplicable injustices of the world, between anxiety about the unprotected and strong feelings of revenge, between sensations of threat and sensations of release.

At first sight, Lippard's literary sensationalism may appear crude in its starkly melodramatic effects. In effect, one may consider his writing a regression to earlier, still nascent novelistic forms that were already obsolete in the age of the *American Renaissance*. Such a negative verdict may seem particularly applicable to Lippard's representation of the interiority of his wooden characters, which fails to ever transcend trite formulaic dimensions. However, one may also reverse the argument and claim that Lippard's focus on extreme sensationalist effects allows him to penetrate to another dimension of interiority that goes beyond the still strictly controlled interiority of the sentimental novel. Descriptions of the inner life of characters of sentimental novels in the Richardsonian mode or of the *novel of manners* of the Jane Austen-type may provide differentiated psychological portraits, but their portrayals remain limited to what is considered sayable within a discourse of virtue. We get the illusion of an access to the inner world of a character, but this inner world is only a cultural construct of interiority within a particular discourse. After all, the novel works hard to gain recognition for its heroine. To be worthy of such recognition, the characters have to demonstrate that they have learned to submit their desires, fantasies, and emotions to a strict regime of self-control.[15]

In contrast, all barriers break down in the sensationalist novel and a new form of interiority is revealed – aggression, lust, greed, cravings for omnipotence, narcissist self-empowerment (= the "master of the universe"-fantasy), incestuous wishes, rage, sadism and masochism, and, not to forget, pornographic fantasies. What emerges in this way is an uncontrolled and uncensored imaginary that had still been suppressed in the public sphere of Victorianism. Or, to put it differently: the central project that links sentimental novels, domestic novels, the novel of manners and the realistic stories of self-development, namely the internalization of cultural norms of self-regulation, is radically undermined by the culture of sensationalism.[16] In its articulation of hitherto repressed emotions and fantasies, the sensationalist novel is already moving toward a body-centered, corporeal form of aesthetic experience, to a direct, seemingly unmediated experience of bodily "sensations."

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15 For a description of the contrast between sentimentalism and sensationalism, see also the chapter "Poe, Sensationalism, and the Sentimental Tradition" in Jonathan Elmer's *Reading at the Social Limit* (93-125).

16 In his seminal study *BRAVO Amerika,* Kaspar Maase has described a similar phenomenon in popular music: "The 'Americanization' of Western Europe profited greatly from the attractiveness of the seemingly 'vulgar.' Stylistically, forms of expression gained dominance that were provocatively sensuous, dazzling, direct and overpowering; socially their source were the taste and cultural attitudes of the lower classes and marginalized cultures" (28).

Karen Halttunen can therefore define sensationalism as a form of "popular literature which stimulates emotional excitement as a pleasurable end in itself" (30). For the radical reformer Lippard, this effect is still politically and morally motivated, because he wanted to use his novel to stimulate rage about the hypocrisy of the so-called respectable society. But soon such legitimation is no longer needed. Once the search for the strongest effect is severed from its moral or political legitimation, however, a race for the strongest sensationalist effect must set in, which is a race not unknown to Poe and his interest in the sensations that are produced at the moment of greatest terror. Poe's parody of contemporary literary sensationalism in his tale "How to Write a Blackwood Article" can therefore also be read as containing a good dose of self-irony: "Sensations are the great thing after all. Should you ever be drowned or hung, be sure and make a note of your sensations – they will be worth to you ten guineas a sheet" (281).[17]

III. Poe and Aesthetic Distance

As David Reynolds has shown in *Beneath the American Renaissance,* Poe was especially close to the culture of sensationalism. Reynolds even suggests that his work has to be seen in the context of the antebellum culture of sensationalism because it developed in response to it: "Intimately aware of every type of popular sensational literature, Poe repeatedly commented on such literature in his criticism and borrowed from it liberally in his tales and poems. – To some degree, Poe was clearly trying to tap the new market for sensational literature" (226). There do indeed exist some remarkable affinities between sensationalism and Poe's work. Poe often takes his point of departure from sensationalist material and uses themes and motifs from journalistic and literary sensationalism.[18] Both, the sensationalist writers as

17 In his own tale, the editor of a literary journal specializing in sensationalist effect advises "Psyche Zenobia" in a way that evokes Poe's own stories: "It may appear invidious in me, Miss Psyche Zenobia, in the way of Model or study; yet perhaps I may as well call your attention to a few cases. Let me see. There was '*The Dead Alive*,' a capital thing! – the record of a gentleman's sensations, when entombed before the breath was out of his body – full of taste, terror, sentiment, metaphysics, and erudition. You would have sworn that the writer had been born and brought up in a coffin. … Then there was '*The Involuntary Experimentalist*,' all about a gentleman who got baked in an oven, and came out alive and well, although certainly done to a turn" (280-81). From this point of view, the recipe for a successful Blackwood story "of the sensations stamp" is simple: "The first thing requisite is to get yourself into such a scrape as no one ever got into before. The oven, for instance, – that was a good hit. But if you have no oven, or big bell, at hand, and if you cannot conveniently tumble out of a balloon, or be swallowed up in an earthquake, or get stuck fast in a chimney, you will have to be contented with simply imagining some similar misadventure" (281-2).

18 For example, in "The Mystery of Marie Roget" the murder is characterized in the

well as Poe, are occupied with the question of how to achieve strong aesthetic effects, and for both parties the experience of this effect seems to become a legitimate end in itself.[19] In both cases, the text therefore requires no other justification than that of creating a strong sensation and providing sensations "for their own sake."

In view of many similarities, the differences should not be forgotten, however. Poe was a severe critic of sensationalism in its "cheap" popular form.[20] For once, he was critical of its tendency to produce strong effects at any price, no matter whether they were tasteless or outright manipulative. As a rule, his own use of sensationalist themes draws its effects not from explicit descriptions but from skillful suggestions.[21] From the perspective of Poe's aesthetic

following way: "The atrocity of this murder …, the youth and beauty of the victim, and, above all her previous notoriety, conspired to produce intense excitement in the minds of the sensitive Parisians. I can call to mind no similar occurrence producing so general and so intense an effect" (Poe 398). With minimal camouflage, Poe had moved the much-discussed case of Mary Rogers, which dominated the *Penny Press* of the time, from New York to Paris. But except for the French names of characters, settings and newspapers, he followed the facts in the case, as they had been reported in the papers, in detail. Again and again, he stresses the brutality of the murder: "The medical testimony spoke confidently of the virtuous character of the deceased. She had been subjected, it said, to brutal violence" (401).

19 In journalistic sensationalism, strategies of aestheticization can be observed, too, as Anthony points out in the case of the *New York Herald*: "Representing the slain Jewett in Poe-esque fashion as a mix of deathly erotics and aesthetic beauty, Bennett offered her as a figure onto whom a variety of fantasies could be projected by the reading public. Describing her 'beautiful female corpse' as a 'passionless' object that 'surpassed the finest statue in antiquity,' Bennett seemed to be negotiating between illicit sexual desire and the forms of class and culture by which such desire might be mediated. This was a strategy he would use repeatedly in the days and weeks to follow. Again and again Bennett provided scenarios in which Jewett's 'beautiful' corpse was the central figure" (488).

20 In "The Mystery of Marie Roget," Poe sets his own story in contrast to the *Penny Press* from which he had drawn his material: "We should bear in mind that, in general, it is the object of our newspapers rather to create a sensation – to make a point – than to further the cause of truth" (407). For Poe's hostility towards literary sensationalism and the so-called *pamphlet novels,* see the chapter "Cheap Books and Expensive Magazines" in *Poe and the Printed Word* by Kevin J. Hayes (87-97). There is a thin dividing line, however, illustrated by the fact that some of Poe's stories were published in England "cheap editions," that is, "pamphlet novels." "The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym" was published under the title *Arthur Gordon Pym; Or, Shipwreck, Mutiny, and Famine;* "The Facts of M. Valdemar's Case" as "*Mesmerism 'in articulo mortis': An Astounding and Horrifying Narrative, Shewing the Extraordinary Power of Mesmerism in Arresting the Progress of Death.* "The Gold Bug" kept its title (Hayes 90-1).

21 In *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1844), Charles Dickens offers a biting satire of journalistic sensationalism when he describes the arrival in the New World as an encounter with the hyperbolic sales pitches of the newspaper boys and uses the occasion to offer a catalogue of sensationalist methods: "'Here's this morning's New York Sewer!' cried one.

organicism, the lack of form and structure in most sensationalist novels must have appeared as an unpardonable sin:

> His own insistence on artistic unity was related to his pained perception of the structurelessness of many popular texts. … Poe's famous definition of the plot as that from which nothing can be removed without detriment to the mass was, to a large degree, a direct reaction against the directionlessness of the popular irrational style (Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance* 228-30).

As Reynolds has shown, Poe's aesthetic treatment of sensationalist material manifested itself, above all, in two ways: in its transformation into an experience of the sublimity of terror and in Poe's "analytic method," which submits even the most horrifying events to cool observation and emotional distance. Instead of showing us the murder itself, Poe focuses on the rational deductions of his detective Auguste Dupin or on the skewed perceptions of the murder himself. In this way, Poe manages to establish distance in our experience of the crime in order to remove the reader from the temptation of identification. Reynolds has characterized Poe's method by reference to his famous short story "The Tell-Tale Heart:"

> Poe avoids the moral problems surrounding the criminal simply by making the criminal's crazed narration itself a main object of our attention … We are given no motive or justification for his crime, other than the obviously insane one of his obsession with the old man's eye (ibid. 233).

In Poe's use of sensationalist effects, the narrator is not a voice of authority from whom we expect information; instead, he becomes an object of attention and analysis himself, just as our encounters with the main characters move from identification to analysis. Poe's analytic method is thus a crucial source of aesthetic experience in his work: it allows us to get engaged with his characters (since the characters cannot know themselves), and yet also to distance ourselves at the same time.

Of all the writers of the period who, in the wider sense, belong to the *American Renaissance*, Poe pursued the project of liberating literature from moral and educational functions most radically and in the programmatically most consistent way. For Poe, literature is no longer supposed to stand in the service of moral values or social ideals but has its only purpose and justification in its potential as art. In his "grotesque" short stories, as well as in his essays "The Philosophy of Composition" (1846) and "The Poetic Principle"

'Here's this morning's New York Stabber! Here's the New York Family Spy! Here's the New York Private Listener! Here's the New York Peeper! Here's the New York Plunderer! Here's the New York Keyhole Reporter! Here's the New York Rowdy Journal! Here's all the New York papers! Here's full particulars of the patriotic loco-foco movement yesterday, in which the whigs were so chawed up; and the last Alabama gouging case; and the interesting Arkansas dooel with Bowie knives; and all the Political, Commercial and Fashionable News. Here they are! Here's the papers, here's the papers!'" (255).

(1848), the aesthetic effect of the literary text becomes an end in itself. Consequently, Poe sets out in his poems and in his tales to demonstrate that literature should be freed from the iron grasp of moral or didactic functions. Tales like "The Fall of the House of Usher," "The Tell-Tale Heart" or "The Black Cat" have no meaning in the sense of a morally or philosophically meaningful message.[22] They draw their artistic effects solely from the successful coordination of linguistic, phonetic and associative elements of the text to create a unity of effect. We are fascinated by them because they are highly suggestive and evoke sensuous experiences as well as moods which cannot be expressed otherwise and certainly not in a literal fashion.[23] Aestheticization thus means to focus on a dimension of suggestiveness that only art can articulate. Seen from this perspective, Poe was a pioneer in liberating the idea of art from other functions. Jürgen Peper captures the cultural and aesthetic significance of Poe's work when he says: "Poe's methodical *epoché* of replacing the conceptual and generalizing by connotation, by image and by sound, is a giant step in the liberation of the aesthetic which paved the way for symbolism and modernism" (73, my translation). Not accidentally, European avant-garde movements like the French Symbolists (and later the Surrealists) rediscovered Poe as precursor of their own search for an art that has finally liberated itself from all mimetic claims and social functions, while Americans in search of a realistic or democratic art remained disinterested for a long time.

IV. The Culture of Sensations: Jean-Luc Godard and the Beatles

In its focus on strong somatic experiences, the culture of sensationalism anticipated the shrill effects of modern mass culture, while Poe's idea of the

22 In view of the current revisionism in American literary criticism, it was to be expected that critics would try to provide a political subtext to the phenomenon. A helpful discussion and criticism of the new politicized approaches can be found in an essay by Paul Lewis with the title "A Wild and Homely Narrative: Resisting Argument in 'The Black Cat'." A classical critique of what was considered Poe's lack of substance is that of T. S. Eliot: "That Poe had a powerful intellect is undeniable: but it seems to me the intellect of a highly gifted young person before puberty. The forms which his lively curiosity takes are those in which a pre-adolescent mentality delights: wonders of nature and of mechanics and of the supernatural, cryptograms and ciphers, puzzles and labyrinths, mechanical chess-players and wild flights of speculation. … He appears to yield himself completely to the idea of the moment: the effect is, that all of his ideas seem to be *entertained* rather than believed" (9).

23 On this point, see Jürgen Peper: "Edgar Allan Poe … eliminates 'Intellect' and 'Conscience,' that is, logical and moral reason, as sources for the 'creation of beauty' by words. Poe's normative frame is the realm of the aesthetic ('beauty') and its manifestation is the autonomous poem. … For Poe, beauty finds expression in a particular melancholic mood, while the aesthetic autonomy of the poem is possible only because of literature's freedom from social functions" (71, my translation).

autonomy of the work of art paved the way for modernist avant-garde aesthetics. What separated the two approaches radically was Poe's reliance on aesthetic distance. For sensationalist novels, aesthetic distance was counterproductive because it weakened the extent of agitation produced by strong sensations. However, despite these major differences, sensationalism and Poe had one thing in common: They both tried to liberate and optimize aesthetic effects as ends in themselves.[24] In the final analysis, the separation of high and low emerged, not because a social group kidnapped the idea of art for the purpose of social distinction, but because competing strategies had been discovered and developed in pursuit of the question of how aesthetic experience could be made most effective.[25] For both writers, the most promising way to achieve this lay in a stimulation of the imaginary. Lippard's strategy consisted in a constant agitation of the imaginary and in a search for forms of representation through which this imaginary could be articulated in direct and undomesticated ways. For Poe, on the other hand, the imaginary provides access to sentiments and moods which cannot be grasped in any other way because they remain indeterminate in their object character. Precisely for that reason, however, they can capture the sensuous echo of an ideal that has become enigmatic and remote, from which we seem to be separated forever, and which can therefore be experienced only in vague moods or forms of melancholia, or the sublimity of the grotesque or the arabesque. (As is well known, music provided the highest form of aesthetic experience for Poe.[26])

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24 Lippard admired Poe. In the announcement of a public lecture by Poe, Lippard wrote: "As a contrast to the above lecture, it gives us pleasure to announce a 'Lecture on American Poetry,' by Edgar Allan Poe, Esq., on Tuesday next. Poe was a born poet, his mind is stamped with the impress of genius. Delighting in the wild and visionary, his mind penetrates the inmost recesses of the human soul, creating vast and magnificent dreams, eloquent fancies, and terrible mysteries. Again, he indulges in a felicitous vein of humor that copies no writer in the language, and yet strikes the reader with the genuine impression of refined wit; and yet again he constructs such works as 'Arthur Gordon Pym,' which discloses perceptive and descriptive powers that rival De Foe, combined with an analytical depth of reasoning in no manner inferior to Godwin or Brockden Brown" (quoted in Reynolds, *Prophet of Protest* 258-9). Poe, too, used the term genius in connection with Lippard, when he praised him for one of his manuscripts, but the use of the term appears much more formulaic: "You seem to have been in too desperate a hurry to give due attention to details; and thus your style, although generally nervous, is at times somewhat exuberant – but the work, as a whole, will be admitted, by all but your personal enemies, to be richly inventive and imaginative – indicative of *genius* in its author" (ibid. 261).

25 This is not to deny that political and social factors may have played an important role in the choices of aesthetic approaches and, above all, in their hierarchization, but, on the other hand, these social interests cannot sufficiently explain the aesthetic approaches themselves.

26 See Sheldon Liebman: "Poe emphasizes the abstractness and 'indefiniteness' of music; and when he speaks of Poetry (as opposed to 'poem') he similarly stresses its suggestiveness and nonreferential qualities – all of which implies that Poetry and music are

In sensationalism, the aim is to articulate that which has remained hidden or has been suppressed; Poe, on he other hand, uses the indeterminacy of the imaginary to articulate dimensions of our existence that move us closer to the experience of a lost transcendence.

With these two choices, two different chapters in the development of modern aesthetic experience were opened up that reach way into the 20th and 21st centuries: on the one hand, a modern popular culture that strives for ever more effective forms of somatic experience; on the other hand, a modernist avant-garde that attempts to undermine identification by means of defamiliarization and the creation of aesthetic distance. In one case, popular culture looks for unmediated and intense forms of sensations, in the other, the experience of sensations is defined as a state in which the recipient is liberated from direct emotional engagement, ultimately to gain a dimension of self-awareness. In both cases, the aesthetic dimension is intensified for its own sake, but for different purposes, highlighting the fact that the liberation of the aesthetic function can serve entirely different agendas.

For, ultimately, the liberation of the aesthetic dimension, as it was pursued by Lippard and Poe, still had a larger purpose. For Poe, art should be liberated from the burden of moral instruction, but only to fulfill other functions more successfully. Only through the indeterminacy of the aesthetic – this would become the guiding principle of high culture in the following hundred years or so – can we hope to capture otherwise unrepresentable dimensions of our existence, so that art might even take the place of religion or the metaphysical. Lippard, too, pursued his strategy of emotional agitation not merely as an end in itself. He used emotional agitation to become politically more effective and to remind society of the existence of a moral law that was in danger of being obscured.[27] But beneath the surface of Lippard's good intentions, we can already see how the strong emotions that he has stimulated for the purpose of political agitation take on a life their own. Several 20th-century critics, among them Leslie Fiedler, have therefore read Lippard as an avant-gardist *avant la lettre* who anticipated a counter-cultural literature of subversion.

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at once inspiration and yearning, but *not* the thing sought. In other words, they are not the achievement or concretization of supernatural beauty but the means of experiencing it" (590).

27 Cf. R. Laurence Moore: "Lippard was not a libertine seeking to subvert morality. He was, if anything, a muckraking Puritan seeking to expose evil in those who tried to use high social position as a sufficient proof of virtue" (28). Lippard himself had written in 1849: "Literature merely considered as an ART is a despicable thing. It is only, at least mainly, valuable as a MEANS. These people who talk about art, art, art in literature are terrible twaddlers. Grace of style, elegance of language are invaluable *aids* to literature, but they are not the ultimates of literature. The great object of literature is the social, mental and spiritual elevation of Man. When it works without a direct regard for these objects, it is either making ropes of sand or playing in a gunpowder magazine with a torch in its hand. It is silly or it is wicked. True literature is only the embodiment of a True Thought" (Reynolds, *Prophet of Protest* 279).

At this point, we are reminded again of the strong corporeal and immersive tendencies of aesthetic experience in today's culture. It can indeed be considered a supreme irony that the two diametrically opposed versions of aesthetic experience that began to go their own separate ways in the 1830s appear to be coming together again at the end of the 20th century. Yet, the renewed link between the two is not provided by an aesthetic of distance, but by the aesthetics of direct somatic experience which literary sensationalism pioneered. The origin of this development lies in the American counter-culture of the 1960s and its search for forms of aesthetic experience that could help to liberate the body and the psyche from the iron cage of instrumental rationality. Marshall McLuhan's reinterpretation of the mass media as forms of bodily extension or Susan Sontag's theory of a unitary sensibility were tailor-made for this purpose.[28] In this context, Sontag's essay "Notes on Camp" deserves special attention because it played an important part in reconceptualizing the relation between aesthetics and popular culture.

In her essay, Sontag draws on the concept of *camp* in order to argue for a fundamental change in our attitudes toward popular culture. Because popular culture had long been considered a culture with major aesthetic shortcomings, it had usually been discussed in terms of its social, political, or cultural functions. In contrast, the potential of popular culture to provide an aesthetic experience is now moved to the center stage by Sontag. Against common opinion and apparently against all good common sense, the very elements that were long cited as proof of an aesthetic inferiority of popular culture – its often unrepentant vulgarity, its many instances of bad taste, its representational and emotional excesses, its sometimes embarrassing artistic flaws – are redefined by Sontag as a potentially especially effective source of aesthetic experience. In a provocative reinterpretation of what most critics considered basic aesthetic weaknesses, the very elements that appeared to make a rewarding aesthetic experience impossible are now transformed into exactly the opposite, namely an enabling element.

The term *camp* describes a discrepancy between intention and effect that is produced by an unintended subversion of the text's realist claims (realistic in the sense of providing a convincing illusion of an event). Such subversive effects can result, for example, from dramatic exaggerations or performative excess ("too much" is a standard attribute of the *camp*-perspective). Kitsch

28 Already in *Culture & Society 1780-1950*, Raymond Williams tried to re-authorize aesthetic experience by defining it as merely another form of everyday experience. With his *Art as Experience,* John Dewey had paved the way for such an argument, but for Dewey aesthetic experience still had the function of intensifying and thereby clarifying everyday experience. For Williams, on the other hand, this is no longer the normative frame. He conflates aesthetic experience and everyday experience and takes them both down to the level of "ordinary creativity." This deliberate disenchantment of art, undertaken with the democratic intention of eliminating cultural hierarchies, has been continued and radicalized in contemporary art.

and melodrama are exemplary cases of such an emotional excess and are therefore favorite objects of the *camp*-aesthetic. Other examples are silent movies in their openly staged theatricality, but also many low budget B-movies which inadvertently reveal that they were produced on a shoe-string budget. In the pre-*camp* world, overreaching is the first step towards failure; in *camp* it opens up new possibilities of aesthetic experience. For Sontag, *camp* stands therefore for a change in the recipient's attitude towards popular culture. This shift in perspective also leads to a different assessment of the cultural function of popular culture, for *camp* also subverts the ideological power the popular text was assumed to have over the recipient. It allows the recipient to gain a certain measure of ironic distance towards the text and thus undermines its potential to transmit its ideology. Even openly ideological elements are transformed by a change of attitude in the act of reception. A stereotype – as Umberto Eco has shown in his interpretation of a cliché-laden film like *Casablanca* – is no longer of interest as a false, distorted representation of reality. Because its formulaic character is so obvious, it loses its referential credibility and is turned into a sign without reference that can provide entirely new pleasures. Fittingly, Eco's essay, designed to explain the surprising resonance a mediocre film like *Casablanca* has found, is called "*Casablanca*, or the Clichés Are Having a Ball."

Camp can thus bring Lippard and Poe together again. It redefines Lippard's excess and transforms it, in the way of Poe, into an object constituted by aesthetic distance. *Camp* turns Lippard's wild imaginary into a storehouse of signs without reference and thus allows us to take a new attitude toward them. Similarly, the term "mere entertainment," which was created, as we have seen, to apologize for the absence of a notable aesthetic dimension, can now be reconceptualized as word for a text consisting of "non-representational signs" (*color, movement, rhythm, melody*) which are designed to draw attention to themselves as performance and can thus become an aesthetic object *sui generis*.[29] In fact, it is this de-semanticized dimension in which compositional elements can be appreciated for their own sake, that is, as "mere entertainment," which explains the interest many modernists have shown in popular culture. *Camp* can explain why modernism has often incorporated

29 Richard Dyer rightly claims that the ability to interpret such "non-referential" signs is still not yet sufficiently developed (4). With reference to the film musical he points out: "It [entertainment] thus works at the level of sensibility, by which I mean an effective code that is characteristic of, and largely specific to, a given mode of cultural production. This code uses both representational and, importantly, non-representational signs. There is a tendency to concentrate on the former, and clearly it would be wrong to overlook them – stars are nicer than we are, characters more straightforward than people we know, situations more soluble than those we encounter. All this we recognise through representational signs. But we also recognise qualities in non-representational signs – colour, texture, movement, rhythm, melody, camerawork – although we are much less used to talking about them" (3).

elements of popular culture.[30]

However, there is yet another chapter to the story traced here. And fittingly enough, the term "sensation" re-emerges in this chapter. In a programmatic essay entitled "One Culture and the New Sensibility," published in 1965, Susan Sontag extends the logic of a counter-cultural aesthetic and finally rejects a modernist aesthetic of defamiliarization. Instead, she now sees the potential of the aesthetic dimension in an extension of consciousness that includes corporeal dimensions like feelings and sensations:

> A great work of art is never simply (or even mainly) a vehicle of ideas or of moral sentiments. It is, first of all, an object modifying our consciousness and sensibility. … Sensations, feelings, the abstract forms and styles of sensibility count. It is to these that contemporary art addresses itself. The basic unit of contemporary art is not the idea, but the analysis of and extension of sensations (3).

Sontag continues:

> … the feeling (or sensation) given off by a Rauschenberg painting might be like that of a song by the Supremes. The brio and elegance of Budd Boetticher's *The Rise and Fall of Legs Diamond* or the singing style of Dionne Warwick can be appreciated as a complex and pleasurable event. … From the vantage point of this new sensibility, the beauty of a machine or of the solution to a mathematical problem, of a painting by Jasper Johns, of a film by Jean-Luc Godard, and of the personalities and music of the Beatles is equally accessible (304).

What Sontag now considers the major promise of aesthetic experience – its potential to extend our consciousness and to include aspects of human existence that are obscured by an insistence on meaning – can be provided by popular culture as effectively as by high art; in effect, popular culture may be even better equipped to stimulate and nourish such experiences.

The aesthetic hierarchy between high and low, from which this essay took its point of departure, is almost inverted here. Sontag's essay highlights a development in which popular culture has become an engine in the transformation of aesthetic experience. In its sensuous intensity and its promise of "immediate experience" (Robert Warshow), popular culture, far from being harmed by its "meaning"-deficits, has become a model of aesthetic experience in the postmodern age. In film theory, this has led to a renewed interest in phenomenological aesthetics, for example in the work of Vivian Sobchack, and it is by no means accidental that Sobchack has developed her influential theory in the interpretation of a mass medium like film. Her work can be seen in the context of a movement towards ever more direct and corporeal forms of aesthetic experience that popular culture has pioneered – a "corporealization" of aesthetic experience that is moving towards a point where an aesthetic experience may be authorized primarily by its power or intensity.

One might argue that this is the current state of things – but also the

30 On this point, see Kirk Varnedoe's and Adam Gopnik's *Modern Art and Popular Culture. Readings in High and Low.*

problem aesthetic theory currently faces. On the one hand, experimental highbrow art has been driven by the attempt to overcome the separation between life and art – a project that has now reached a state where "the end of art" is openly discussed.[31] This "de-aestheticization" of art has created a gap that has been filled by popular culture. Poe was ahead of his time, but Lippard – one might provocatively conclude – has won after all. In his search for strong aesthetic effects, he provided an early, still completely untheorized model for the transformation of art and traditional aesthetics into aesthetic experience. And while the term aesthetic is still the crucial word in the use of the term aesthetic experience by critics like John Dewey, we now seem to have reached a point where "experience" has come to define "aesthetic." Although they went in entirely different directions, Lippard and Poe have both contributed in their own way to a cultural development in which aesthetic experience is reconceptualized as the extension of sensations.

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31 For an analysis of this development see my essay "The Search for an 'Artless Art': Aesthetics and American Culture," reprinted in this volume.

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