Between Utopian Critique and the Politics of Affirmation: Art and Social Change in the Early Twenty-First Century

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Sociology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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Abstract

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This dissertation provides a critical reappraisal of central categories of Theodor Adorno's aesthetic and social theory by testing their ability to account for transformations in the aesthetic sphere from the middle of the twentieth, to the beginning of the twenty-first century. In chapter one, I contrast Adorno's work Pierre Bourdieu's; arguing that Adorno's dialectical approach better explains modern art's paradoxical position as *both* apologist *and* critic of the dominant social order. In chapter two, I examine the work of the Abstract Expressionists and the critic Clement Greenberg, employing Adorno's understanding of art's "dual-character" to explain this work's relationship to Cold War culture. Chapters three and four address the usefulness and limitations of Adorno's perspective for understanding work that falls outside of his high-modernist paradigm through two case studies: the Pop Art of Andy Warhol and feminist art including the body art of Hannah Wilke and Carolee Schneemann and the "deconstructivist" art of Cindy Sherman and Barbara Kruger. In chapter three I analyze shifts in the art world that occurred during the nineteen-sixties including the unabashed embrace of economic success and art's transformed relationship to popular culture, status, labor and

subjectivity. In chapter four, I point out that despite feminist art's disavowal of modernist practices, it shared Adorno's critique of the instrumental subject of post-industrial society and his faith in subjectivity and the aesthetic sphere as sites of utopian transformation. However, Adorno's and earlier feminist art's utopianism was countered by the influence of postmodernism on feminist aesthetic practices. I address such practices and the central theoretical tenets to which they point through an examination of the work of Judith Butler. This discussion demonstrates the implications of the disavowal of utopian thought for aesthetic and political practice. In the conclusion, I discuss the position of art and the art world of New York City within the contemporary social, political and urban context and assess the effectiveness of the analytical categories developed in the preceding chapters. Considered in light of the case studies, their limitations in terms of an analysis of *contemporary* art become apparent and these limitations in turn suggest further directions for a theoretical sociology of art.

Preface

There has been little sociological research addressing the complex and contradictory social position that art has occupied since the inception of modernism[1]. A sociology of art that leaves this specific quality of modernity and of modern art unexplored will also be unable to address the transformations that have occurred within the field (and, indeed, within society itself) over the past half century.[2] An adequate analysis of art as a changing product of a contradictory society would provide sociologists with powerful insights into various aspects of our current political and social landscape. The work of the Frankfurt School, with its grounding in a dialectical understanding of modernity continues to provide a promising beginning for such an analysis. Theodor Adorno, as the primary "aesthetician" of the Frankfurt School, foreground his approach to individual works of art in this dialectical understanding of modernity, and developed analytical strategies that allowed for a reading of even the most hermetic works as important social signifiers.

In this dissertation, I evaluate the continuing relevance of the work of Theodor Adorno for a sociology of contemporary art and culture. My interest in Adorno began when I was still pursuing a career as an artist. At the time, I found his work compelling

[1] According to most art historians, modernism as an aesthetic movement began in the late nineteenth-century with the advent of the French school (Clark 1986). Post-modernism, or, our contemporary art world, begins to take on many of the qualitites that are familiar today in the early 1960's (Sandler 1998). The qualitites of both modern and post-modern art will be discussed at a later point in this dissertation.
[2] Scholars outside the field of sociology, particularly within art art history and criticism, have written prodigiously on the "death" of modernism and the signifigant qualities of "post-modern' art. These analyses, however, rarely (with some important exceptions, e.g. Frederic Jameson (1991), TJ Clark (2001), Andreas Huyssen (1986)) intend to utilize such insights for a broader analysis of society. There have, alternatively been several attempts by social scientists to put the insights of the humanities to good use within the social sciences (examples include Harvey (2000)). However, rarely have actual works of art been analyzed in any depth.

because it addressed some of the central paradoxes that the sphere of art presents within the logic of capitalist society. His elaboration, for example, on art's "dual-character" shed light on the relationship between the art world and other spheres of both affirmative and critical social practice. By this figure, Adorno meant that 'autonomous[3]' art has the ability to serve as the occasion for democratic public discourse, social criticism and the expression of utopian sentiments. Once institutionalized, however, the same art can also function as an instrument for the representation of political power and national identity, a legitimization of class stratification and a signifier of exchange value.

Adorno, however, developed his categories and methods within a particular historical period, with particular, modernist objects of analysis. What interests me here is, do the insights that so effectively illuminated the position and meaning of art works during the last stages of late modern society still have resonance for art after this period? If, since the end of modernism, art no longer satisfies Adorno's requirements for "dual-character" how would we characterize this change in art's status sociologically? More importantly, what would the collapse of art's "dual –character" tell us about the larger social context in which we live, particularly vis-à-vis the critical capacity of other spheres of social action? For Adorno, the potential of art to maintain a moment of relative autonomy from the mechanisms of social integration into a society governed by the logic of capital spoke to the contradictory nature of modernity itself. Though Adorno bemoaned the advent of the "totally administered society," in which the capacity for subjective expression and true individuation would cease to exist, the existence of art, as well as his own critical thought demonstrated that such conditions were not yet absolutely binding. Today's society, characterized but such terms as "globalization" and "Empire"

[3] The criteria necessary for inclusion in this catagory will be discussed later in this dissertation.

appears at first glance to be even closer to a model of total administration than the Cold War reality of Adorno's own time. On the other hand, the anti-globalization movement, the burgeoning international anti-war movement and the growing rift between the ruling classes of first-world nations over the question of war in the Middle-East and the complete hegemony of US foreign policy suggests new possibilities for what David Harvey (2000) calls "spaces of hope." Given such a constellation, Adorno's category of "dual character" still has relevance for an analysis of current cultural forms.

For Adorno, however, art's dual-character was insured only through the special logic that governed the relationship between the artist and the language or art, or, artistic material. This logic led, in the context of late capitalism, to artworks characterized by unrelenting hermeticism, negativity and formalism. His pantheon of examples of "autonomous" art includes the most difficult works of modernism such as those by Beckett, Shoenberg and Joyce. Since the 1960's, the norms and conventions of modernism have been largely abandoned by the art-world, and have been replaced by artistic practices that in some cases are irreconcilable with Adorno's normative judgments. From this perspective, the question becomes, is it possible to reconstruct Adorno's conception of art's dual-character so that it does not depend on a modernist privileging of form? If so, what do contemporary critical artistic practices look like? And to what sorts of socio-political constellations do they refer?

Adorno's narrow conception - even within modernism - of artistic practice raises other serious questions. For example, he systematically rejects the strategies of social intervention and institutional critique deployed by what Peter Bürger (1984) refered to as "the historical avant-garde" (e.g. Dada Surrealism). This rejection is not only narrow and

dogmatic, but it also precludes the possibility of seriously considering the subversive or critical potential of most artwork post 1945. In addition, his hostility towards cultural forms arising from “the masses” (contemporary examples would include rock and roll or graffiti art) is symptomatic of his pessimism regarding the possibilities for productive political agency and critical thought (except for his own) in contemporary society. Such pessimism limits the sort of critique in which he (and I) would hope to engage to a melancholic exercise in cultural mourning and must be addressed if Adorno’s most enduring insights are to be reconstructed for our own period.

In this dissertation, I consider in detail three moments in the trajectory of late modernism through post-modernism - Abstract Expressionism, Andy Warhol, and feminist art - in light of Adorno's thought. By considering these very different art movements through Adorno's categories, I both "test" their adequacy to interpret these movements, and use the limits provided by these examples to point toward a more fruitful reconstruction of Adorno. My hope is that this reconsideration of a rich tradition in social theory, in a particularly volatile historical moment, will help to spark a new engagement with critical theory. It is my belief that such a tradition has never been more relevant than it is today, while at the same time, it seems to be fading from the discursive horizon. I will also demonstrate that works of art, and the worlds from which they emerge, are important destinations of social inquiry.

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This dissertation has been brewing for over fifteen years – longer that I have known that I would ever write a dissertation in sociology. Those who have made contributions to its fruition are thus too numerous to name, and indeed some names have even been forgotten. I would, however, first like to thank the members of my committee: Bill Kornblum, for helping me in so many ways including creating the opportunity for me to broaden my research horizons and, mostly, for providing a model of warmth, intelligence and decency as rare inside the academy as outside. I would also like to thank Phil Kasinitz for taking me on so late in the game and for our many provocative and useful conversations. Special thanks go to my advisor, Stanley Aronowitz, a true public intellectual. Without his belief in my project and the philosophical trajectory of which it is a part, I would not have been able to complete this work. I would also like to thank Professor Emeritus Rolf Meyersohn for welcoming me into the Graduate Center community despite my initial fears that I didn't belong. Several of the many friends and colleagues who have been part my emotional and intellectual support system as I moved through the sometimes lonely and frustrating life of a graduate student deserve my deepest gratitude. These include Costas Panayotakis who has remained my closest intellectual ally through the many transformations in our relationship; Amy Baehr, who has rescued me from myself on numerous occasions; and Alex Steinberg who has been generous with his time and knowledge. I would also like to thank my husband, Geoffrey Berliner and my son Theo Rothenberg Berliner for providing me with the love and reason to complete this task. Finally, I would like to thank my parents, Marcia and Melvin Rothenberg for supporting me emotionally, materially and intellectually in this and whatever else I have chosen to pursue over the years. This work is dedicated to them.

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Introduction

Why Adorno?

The sphere of art is at first glance inimical to the theories and methods of sociological analysis. The claims that art makes, at least after the Renaissance, are at odds with the rational, objectifying gaze of social science. Nonetheless, art was already the object of sociological study with Marx, Weber and Durkheim and over the past two centuries, the sphere of art has been subject to a number of more, or less, adequate, useful and revealing social analyses. Meanwhile, art, both as material object and social world has undergone its own transformation. Today, the sociology of art[4] is dominated on the one hand by a sociology of collective action, located within the tradition of symbolic interaction. This approach, as exemplified by the work of Howard Becker (1982) and subjected to the schematics of network analysis by sociologists such as Diana Crane (1989) and Richard Peterson (in Foster and Blau 1989), rehearses in great detail the symbolic processes engaged in by actors through institutions to create an elaborated system of contingent meaning via "art worlds.[5]" Such an approach, however, neither problematizes the objective structural forces that shape the interpretations and activities of art world actors, nor does it engage a serious analysis of works of art themselves. Alternatively, some sociologists of art (DiMaggio 1986, Blau and Blau 1986) employ an organizations approach, which, often using extensive quantitative data, also addresses the economic and political aspects of arts institutions. As with all middle-range approaches, these analyses are not able (and do not intend) to address art's position within larger

[4] The brief discussion of t the sociology of art that follows is in no way meant to be exhaustive. For a thorough discussion of the field see Zolberg (1990). For a sample of classic readings, see Foster and Blau (ed.), (1989).
[5] I borrow this term from Becker (1982).

processes of historical transformation. Finally, many sociologists of art are concerned with audience reception and preference (for example, DiMaggio and Unseem (1978), Peterson and Sherkot (1995), Shuster (1985). Such an emphasis explores the communicative qualities of art, and can be an important tool for social history. However, the absence of an acknowledgment of the objective structures by which taste is always already mediated situates these studies uncomfortably close to consumer research. The underlying assumption of such research is that, like for the rest of social life, the basic structure and meaning of the sphere of art can be gleaned through the observation and cataloguing of its surface features. And further, that the significance of this sphere can be exhausted by a description of its organizational structures and networks or the way in which participants construct meaning from objectively ambiguous material.

An important strand of Marxist influenced sociology does indeed theorize art's embeddedness in larger social structures, as well as emphasizing art's ideological and legitimating function in terms of class hierarchy. The most sophisticated version owes a great debt to the work of the late Pierre Bourdieu. Because of the extraordinary influence of Bourdieu on the contemporary sociology of art and culture, as well as its explanatory power, his work will be incorporated into the theoretical discussion in this dissertation. However, while Bourdieu is convincing in his analysis of the "function" of art in legitimating class hierarchies and in his description of the importance of seemingly unrelated factors such as demographics and labor markets in the transformation of the field, like the other approaches discussed above, his is unable to account for some of the most fundamental characteristics of art and its relationship to other spheres of social action. These characteristics include the critical or utopian nature of much modern art, the

shifts in the social role of art from the modern to the post-modern era, and the specificity of the work of art itself as a locus of social forces.

In contrast to the approaches just discussed, I argue that the critical dialectical tradition of Western Marxism, which developed alongside the many aesthetic innovations of modernism, offers a much -needed set of tools and concepts for analyzing some of the complex features of art today. An account both of the symbolic, social processes that 'create' a work of art, and of the mediation of these social processes through an always already structured society in which each individual moment is intrinsically related to the whole can be found, in particular, in the work of Theodor Adorno. In addition, Adorno explains why and how modern art could, while reflecting the constraints of an objective totality, at the same time contain a critique of society. In this dissertation, I intend to bring some of the central categories of Adorno's aesthetic and social theory to bare in an analysis of the transformations that have taken place in the aesthetic sphere from the middle of the twentieth, to the beginning of the twenty-first century. At the same time, such a critical use of these categories with inevitably bring to light their limitations in terms of an analysis of *contemporary* art and thus suggest further directions for a theoretical sociology of art.

Theoretical Considerations

Chapter one begins with a critical analysis of Pierre Bourdieu's sociology of art. After discussing the strengths of this work, I point to its limitations in terms of art's unique and contradictory character. Keeping these in mind, I propose a reconsideration of Adorno's sociology of art. Though profoundly critical of his work, I argue that (particularly) American sociology has been too quick to reject this perspective.

Bourdieu, like Adorno, ties his account of the development of art as an autonomous field in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to a discussion of the rise of bourgeois class power and domination. In contrast to Adorno, his focus is on the cultural field in general rather than on particular works of art. What he gains through this emphasis is a greater understanding of the function of art as a social institution. What is lost with his insistence on the interdependence of positions within the cultural field is an analysis of the formal qualities of the work itself of the level found in Adorno. Because what matters most to Bourdieu is art's "function" in the social matrix, his account shares many qualities with conventional social constructionism or institutional analysis (such as in the work of Howard Becker). However, he adds to this institutional analysis a richly detailed description of the role of power in the symbolic field. Bourdieu's notions of "habitus" and "field" allow us to identify the structures that shape the particular cultural dispositions of agents and the relationship of those dispositions to class - or – the economic field - thus providing a convincing account of the role of structure and agency in the maintenance of hierarchy and "distinction" in the cultural field. In this way, Bourdieu retains Becker's important insights regarding the social production of meaning in art worlds and the interests that actors have in promoting, institutionalizing, or de-stabilizing these meanings. He adds to this a discussion of the role of taste and culture in the formation and legitimation of the class structure of capitalist societies.

Bourdieu (1984) also describes how the ideology of the "pure gaze" – the belief in the autonomy of aesthetic experience – was developed in Kantian aesthetics and was reached its apex with the modern avant-garde. Bourdieu's discussion hinges on the function of this ideology in the legitimation of bourgeois class domination: the ability to

participate “naturally” in the world of disinterested “taste” becomes the marker of those of refined sensibility and thus the obvious bearers of power and status. However, he generally explains the valuation of autonomy and the devaluation of the economic sphere displayed by avant-garde art movements as part of a struggle within the cultural field accounted for by demographics and other institutional changes (Bourdieu 1993). He does not convincingly tie the emergence of the “pure gaze” to other aspects of modernity. Or, more to the point, while he does acknowledge the central tendencies of modern social life (increasing division of labor, urbanization, separation of spheres) he fails to draw out the specifically emancipatory or critical capacities that are unleashed, particularly within the realm of art, along with these developments. He also cannot account for the existence of avant-garde art – such as DADA, Bauhaus, or agit-prop theatre - that deliberately tries to destabilize the institutionalization of the aesthetic of “the pure gaze” Because he does not embed his account of modern aesthetic production in the contradictory nature of modernity, a path is not sufficiently cleared for understanding the implications of the transition from modern to post-modern aesthetics.

Adorno, however, true to his Marxist/Hegelian roots, maintains that the contradictions engendered by capitalism account for much of what characterizes modern art. He points first to art’s (ideally) autonomous nature – that it exhibits a relative independence from other spheres of economic and social development (it does not escape Adorno’s notice that insofar as it remains autonomous, art also remains powerless to affect social change). The separation of spheres characteristic of modernity, as well as the abstract and anonymous nature of the market has allowed art to maintain a degree of independence. Because of this independence, art is able to maintain a critical stance

towards society. Although art claims and to a certain degree fulfills the conditions of relative autonomy, it is also firmly embedded in, and answers to, prevailing economic, social and political conditions. This is what Adorno refers to as art's "dual-character". The notions both of autonomy and art's "dual- character" help Adorno to explain the increasing formalism and esotericism of modern art. Modern art is able to become esoteric because of its relative autonomy. On the other hand, this esotericism does not signal art's independence from society, but rather exists in response to the nature of late capitalist society. Art's obscurity reflects its alienation from modern society. According to Adorno, modern society demands, on the level of consciousness, conformity to the laws of the market in the form of the culture industry. In order for art or (or philosophy) to remain critical or independent it must resist the methods of communication employed by everyday interaction, most of which, according to Adorno, have already become instrumentalized. Hence, modern art tends towards negation and silence.

Most importantly, perhaps, Adorno provides a framework for a sociological reading of the work of art as opposed to the study of social institutions surrounding it such as museums, galleries or audiences. He maintains that within the work of art, because it is a social product, general social tendencies and contradictions will appear as formal, artistic problems. An example can be found in his discussions of dissonance[6] in modern music. The use of dissonance by a modern composer may appear to be a purely musical decision. However, for Adorno, this choice, indeed compelled by the formal demands of the music, reflects the actual state of any "true" subjectivity in late capitalism: that it is alienated from the larger social structure. Individuality cannot be

[6] Adorno addresses the question of dissonance repeatedly in his writings on modern music. See for example Adorno (1985). For an excellent secondary source on Adorno's writings on music, see Paddison (1997).

reconciled with the collective as it was in the earlier, classical stage of capitalism that produced composers such as Beethoven or Mozart. Following this notion, Adorno insists that the formally "most advanced" works of art contain "truth-content," (a category which acts, for Adorno, as a more appropriate standard by which to evaluate modern art than that of "beauty"), as they are able to accurately reflect the present social contradictions. The artwork's ability to do this also indicates its level of "autonomy." In light of contemporary art Adorno's theme of continual formal development as the identifying quality of "autonomous" art becomes problematic because much of this art has largely abandoned the project of formal (though not of technical) innovation.

Both Adorno and Bourdieu provide us with conceptual tools for understanding how it was possible for modern art to be relatively autonomous, while at the same time deeply entrenched in social structures. They also help to explain why the avant-garde, with its leftist sympathies and its devaluation of conventional economic success, often becomes the marker of bourgeois taste and a cultural tool to represent the nation state[7]. In addition, Adorno's analysis of the social basis of formal development provides us with a deeper understanding of the role that abstraction and opacity have played in modern art. These insights in many respects cover the most characteristic qualities of modern art and modern art movements. The last one - the primacy of formal development - fits neatly into mainstream canons of modernism, and was subsequently, in the nineteen sixties, rejected by a generation of artists and critics. This generation viewed the central characteristics of much modernist art and theory as complicit with a version of history and a definition of art that seemed to fall on the side of affirmation of the political,

[7] I discuss a classic example of this, the role of Abstract Expressionism in promoting Americanism abroad, in the fourth chapter of this dissertation.

economic and social status quo. To them, Adorno's account of the critical kernel of formal artistic development was unconvincing, and many artists adopted strategies from the "historical avant-garde," such as the devaluation of "pure" art, the transgression of boundaries between art forms, and the merging of art with everyday life. These strategies were subsequently absorbed into mainstream institutions such as galleries, museums and the market. The transformations that occurred within the New York art world between its emergence as the global cultural center in the nineteen-fifties and today is the topic of the next three chapters. A consideration of these transformations provides an opportunity to apply the conceptual categories developed in chapter one to concrete historical objects. In turn, these objects will suggest possible strategies for rethinking some of the problematic moments in Adorno.

Paradigm Shifts in the Art World: 1945 – 1990

Abstract Expressionism and the work of its most eloquent spokesman, Clement Greenberg, dominated the art world in New York and hence in the United States from the nineteen-forties until the end of the nineteen-fifties. Greenberg, along with many of his contemporaries, cut his aesthetic teeth on the emmancipatory ideals of Marx via Trotsky. They contended that the most advanced art, while unencumbered by political agendas, nonetheless expresses the spirit of freedom from the alienation of capitalism anticipated by socialism. Greenberg's work of the late thirties and early forties, like that of his fellow writers in the *Partisan Review* circle, grapples with the question of the appropriate relationship between art and emancipatory politics. Meanwhile, despite the influence of the western Marxist tradition within the discursive community surrounding Abstract Expressionism, this movement, often with the willing help of its spokesmen and

practioners, was being used by the United States government to promote an ideology of American cultural and political hegemony abroad. It was also, slowly, helping to create a market for contemporary American art that would soon become the strongest ever for contemporary art. In chapter two, I demonstrate the utility of Adorno's categories of "dual-character" and "autonomy" for a reconciliation of Abstract Expressionism's role in the discourse of Americanism with its claims to artistic purity. I also contrast Geenberg's with Adorno's account of the relationship between avant-garde art and mass culture, and of the formal development of art. This juxtaposition emphasizes the richness of Adorno's social account of artistic development, in that he is able to account both for the culture industry's role in domination and the production of subjectivity, and for art's continuing embeddedness in the social totality.

As the mood of the times changed, Greenberg's writings lost their radical affiliations, while retaining the valorization of pure formal development. At the same time, his became the hegemonic voice of the New York art world. Inevitably, he became the father for a younger generation to slay. The rebellion against Greenbergian formalism in the art world at the beginning of the nineteen-sixties was evident mainly in the work of pop-artists such as Lichtenstein and Warhol. These artists rejected a central tenet of both Adorno and Greenberg's version of "autonomous" art: that it should situate itself clearly in opposition to commercial popular culture. Warhol's lifestyle, if not the work itself, flaunted his affinity with celebrity dazzle and glitzy popularity, thus eschewing the "devalorization" of the economic sphere that Bourdieu links to the modern artistic spirit. In chapter three I take a closer look at the "Warhol phenomenon" and ask whether art's new relationship to the commodity form, epitomized by the work of Warhol, renders

Adorno's categories of "autonomy" and "dual-character" no longer useful when applied to this historical moment. In other words, does the lack of "dissonance", or difficulty in Warhol's work suggest that the conflict between the individual and society that such dissonance in modern works suggests no longer exists?

These questions lead to a discussion of the debate between Benjamin and Adorno concerning the use of techniques of mass reproduction, the decline of the aura and the consequent democratization of art. Ultimately, I suggest that, though problematic, Benjamin's optimism regarding the "collectivization of consciousness" and new media can be seen as a corrective to Adorno's unsatisfactory foreclosure of agency and insistence on formalist artistic practices. These issues are considered against the background of the larger social and economic transformations concurrent with Warhol, such as the full transformation of the United-States to a post-Fordist regime of production and consumption. These transformations, I contend, suggest the production of forms of subjectivity with which Adorno would have been unfamiliar. I conclude that Warhol's work characterizes a socio-historical and economic constellation that is, in many important respects, very different than the one theorized by Adorno. Consequently, the normative dimension of Adorno's modernist paradigm can only problematically be used to evaluate whether Warhol's art should be read as critical, or as symptomatic of the final and complete subsumption of aesthetic production by the imperatives of the commodity form. Adorno's hostility to, in particular, the forms of mechanical reproduction fundamental to Warhol's work must therefore be reconsidered in order to adequately assess contemporary art's critical capacities.

Slightly later, coupled with the strong influence of the political climate of post 1968, another battle ensued against the precepts of modernism. One of the central complaints voiced against the art world and it's products by the younger generation was that art that conformed to Greenberg's principles alienated itself from the pressing social and political concerns of the day: the war in Vietnam, civil-rights and the Women's Movement. This sentiment challenges Adorno's insistence that art be autonomous from direct political praxis and should prioritize formal development. Many artists in the late nineteen-sixties, influenced by the European Fluxus and Situationist movements, and by the charismatic figure of Joseph Beuys, instead advocated a more Brechtian or Sartrian notion of "engagement." This attitude manifested itself in a plethora of work that took as its subject the questioning or dismantling of social conventions, including the institution of art itself. One widely used strategy was the employment of media that inherently resisted comodification, such as performance and body art, site-specific, environmental art and conceptual art. Art's loss of objecthood, coupled with the recession of the nineteen-seventies, which affected all of the United-States, including the art market, fostered, for a moment, an environment in which art developed relatively unfettered by commercial concerns. Later, even these ephemeral art forms became the objects of exhibitions and collections in the form of photographs and videos.

I address one expression of this critical moment in the art world in chapter four through a discussion of several generations of feminist art, including what I call "essentialist" feminist art, feminist body art and "deconstructionist" feminist art. Here, I make the case that the earlier impulse in feminist art, (as well as in feminist theory and politics) shares several of Adorno's central themes and concerns. These include a critique

of the sovereign subject combined with an interest subjectivity and somatic, and cognitive experience as loci of social change, and the belief in the emancipatory, or utopian potential of art and aesthetic experience. At the same time, I argue, some feminist theory and art practices can be used to supplement, or address the limitations in Adorno's theory that have become salient in preceding chapters. Feminism's gendered distinction between the historical development of male and female modes of subjectivity and inter-subjectivity, for example, opens up Adorno's pessimist conclusions concerning the possibilities for both an emancipatory standpoint and collective social action. In addition, feminist body and performance art introduce artistic practices and a relationship to form and material that both (like Adorno's formalism) model a non-hierarchical relationship to nature and help to break up the constrictions of Adorno's brand of formalism.

In the second half of chapter four, I demonstrate that with the influence of post-modern art practices and the central theoretical tenets to which they point, feminist art is not longer compatible with Adorno's aesthetics. I address this claim through a discussion of the work of Judith Butler and the implications of her account of subjectivity and agency for the role of art and of politics in society. Butler's theory of performativity and the forms of agency that she associates with performativity are, I argue, anti-utopian. Within the limits of such a conception (and, I earlier claim that hers is a paradigmatic example of post-modern, or, post-structuralist thought on the subject), the possibilities for human practice and transformation are forever imprisoned within the confines of already existent reality. Adorno's concept of human emancipation, on the other hand, insists on the radical negation of empirical reality. Art, for him, through this negation, should point to a radical outside, or "other." Aesthetic practices suggested by theories such as those of

Butler may suggest reform within the existing terms of power, but reject the utopian moment inherent in aesthetics since the nineteenth-century.

Art's loss of utopian meaning is identified, in the conclusion of this dissertation, as the most salient characteristic of what could be called, in reference to Habermas, "the structural transformation of the aesthetic sphere." Here, I draw out the problematic dimensions - dimensions which have been identified in preceding chapters - of Adorno's normative proscriptions for art's utopian role, and reiterate that the insights of feminism might have allowed for a more robust understanding of art's critical potential even after the end of modernism. At the same time, even such an expansion of notions of agency and artistic practice would not have sheltered art from the loss of its utopian dimension today. This loss, I believe, stems from objective social conditions in which so many of the promises suggested by a contradictory modernity have been broken, and, for the moment, existing reality exerts what seems like an impermeable ideological and structural hold over individuals. I do not, however, believe that this state of affairs signals "the end of history'," or "”the death of the subject." Cracks, crevices and indeed the possibility of the re-emergence of utopian impulses may yet appear. Whether or not such re-emergence would signal a return of art to its utopian status is another question.

In the meantime, while art has, indeed, been emptied of its utopian energies, it still represents a mode of communication that is less crassly beholden to corporate interests than commercial media that rely on the "bottom line" concern of profit margins. Independent cinema, performance, sculpture and painting and music are able to articulate a political message. Thus, art-works have become crucial elements to a sadly shrunken

public sphere, and in this sense are perhaps more "important", though less utopian, than they were in Adorno's time.

Chapter 1

Adorno for the 21st Century? Toward a Dialectical Sociology of Art

In this chapter, I demonstrate that Theodor Adorno's dialectical approach to understanding the social position of art provides the foundation for a number of methodological and analytical insights that remain relevant to a contemporary sociology of art. Along the way, I address the various blind spots and historical limits of some of his convictions, while at the same considering possibilities for rethinking some of his conclusions in a contemporary context. I thus attempt a tentative reconstruction of Adorno's enduring insights in light of the inevitable social change that has occurred since his initial formulations, while acknowledging his work's persistent shortcomings. This reconstruction forms the theoretical framework through which, in subsequent chapters, I consider various art movements that have occurred since Adorno's writing.

Before beginning my discussion of Adorno, I address Pierre Bourdieu's work on art and cultural production. While Bourdieu's account of art in modern societies ultimately cannot grasp the contradictory nature of its object, his remains the most convincing and influential sociological analysis of art available today. Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital provides a fruitful starting point for the analysis of the affirmative function of art and its relationship to power. As such, it is able to capture one dimension of art's social position. Thus, many of the insights and categories developed by Bourdieu will remain important in the discussions of art movements and art works that follow. At the same time, by

identifying the most glaring inadequacy in his work – that it does not address the dual - or contradictory - character of art or, indeed, the contradictory nature of modern and post-modern societies – I set the stage for arguing in favor of Adorno's dialectical analysis.

The Development of the Autonomous Cultural Field

Following Weber, Bourdieu explains how the cultural field, such as other modern fields of social practice, emerged as the result of the increasing level of system autonomy and division of labor characteristic of modernity. Within the cultural field, actors agree upon a certain reward (cultural capital) and a set of (objective) positions determines access to this reward. Actors, then, struggle to defend or improve their positions within this field of forces. The struggles over positions within the field occurs within what Bourdieu refers to as a "space of possibles" – it is the specific nature and characteristics of this space, at any given point in time – that the sociologist seeks to reconstruct. By analyzing art worlds, and the works of art produced within them, in terms of a space of position taking and struggle, Bourdieu (1993,1996) claims that we escape the inadequacies both of an "internalist" reading of the work of art (reading works only in context of other works around them) and an "externalist" reading (imposing a meaning and significance solely defined by socio-historical factors to the work of art).

In his description of the field of cultural production as a "site of struggles" (Bourdieu 1993) (in this case a struggle over meanings and definitions rather than economic or political capital in a pure form), Bourdieu resorts to the imagery of

conventional conflict theory and what can easily be lost are the unique characteristics of the cultural field. These are eventually drawn out in Bourdieu’s discussion of two key features of this field: that of the field’s relative autonomy from (or, as he puts it – disavowal of) struggles for economic capital and the dual nature of this autonomy (Bourdieu 1993, 1996). These features, and the conflicts they engender, shape the discourse around, and the form of, cultural production in the twentieth century. As we shall see in our later discussion of contemporary art from the 1960’s to the present, the question remains whether the disavowal of economic capital continues to characterize artistic production. This question will remain important as we discuss the contemporary relevance of both Bourdieu's and Adorno’s notions of artistic autonomy.

The relative autonomy of the field of cultural production and the attendant privileging of “the pure gaze” are the result of a particular set of social struggles that took place in the nineteenth-century. Bourdieu reconstructs these struggles as they played out in the literary sphere and sphere of visual art in his essays on Flaubert (Bourdieu 1993, 1996) and Manet (Bourdieu 1993). In the case of visual art (and a similar claim can be made about literary production), early nineteenth-century French artistic production was dominated by the rule of the academy, which was in turn financed by and beholden to the state. Artists were consecrated by this academy and rewarded for the faithful reproduction of its standards, which included strict limitation of subject matter to politically efficacious material (history and battle scenes, portraits of rulers) and genre scenes deemed morally uplifting or educational (mythical and religious subject matter).

The style advocated was one of high finish and mastery of the standard techniques of illusionism. Artists rose through the ranks by virtue of a bureaucratic adherence to the academy and its teachers. With the advent of the industrial revolution and the swelling of the middle class, educated youth swarmed to the city to make their fortunes. Many were attracted to the world of arts and letters and attempted entry into these professions. The rigidity of the academy dictated a limited number of positions and many ambitious and talented would-be artists were turned away. According to Bourdieu, sheer demographics contributed to the rise of a heretic class of artists. These artists, fueled also by the pace, dynamism and relaxed norms of urban life, formed their own independent creative enclaves, eventually unseating the uncontested control of the academy. As a battle cry against the academy's slavish relationship to bourgeois political power and the artistic limitations engendered by this connection, they stood for "art-for-art's-sake". As we shall see later, the emergence of such unique bohemian enclaves, as well as the cycle of their displacement and re-emergence, has tremendous implications for the nature of art and art worlds in both Europe and the United States today.

The notion of "art-for-art's-sake," which can be traced back to the Romantic movement but rises to hegemonic status in the twentieth century, is perhaps the most salient characteristic of modern cultural production. Around it developed a web of discourses and positions that solidified art's dual relationship to power in the political and economic spheres. As Bourdieu further explains, while "art-for art's-sake" represents an apparent renunciation of cultural production aimed at economic or political gain (and

thus a symbolic rejection of the logic of capital), the market creates the very conditions – in both a positive and a negative sense - for its existence. First, because of its status as a symbolic good – a form which "necessarily lags behind the supply of the commodity" (Bourdieu 1993:114) – it must distinguish itself from, and thereby carve out a privileged space against other commodities:

> It follows that those "inventions" of Romanticism – the representation of culture as a kind of superior reality, irreducible to the vulgar demands of economics, and the ideology of free, disinterested 'creation' founded on the spontaneity of innate inspiration – appear to be just so many reactions to the pressures of an anonymous market (Bourdieu 1993:114).

So, the work of art, in order to maintain its value in a commercial market, has to differentiate itself from other products in that market. At the same time, the development of a distinct field of cultural production with its own laws, positions, rewards and consecrating processes was not just a reaction against the market. It also occurred in accordance with the process of differentiation of spheres that underlay the development of that market (along with politics, science, law etc.).

Bourdieu draws out another important contradiction inherent in the late nineteenth century's "art-for-art's-sake" movement. Within this restricted field of cultural production that is, the production of "autonomous" art, every artist is judged by their apparent disavowal of the market and economic concerns. A work can only succeed by the standards of this field to the extent that it proves its autonomy and hence its purity[8].

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[8] Importantly, this purity is judged in opposition to popular culture, or mass entertainment, which in this period is developing in tandem with the development of a modern market for consumer goods. In earlier periods, art and entertainment, or popular culture, belonged to the same field. Modern culture is in part

However, artists without access to capital at the outset are handicapped in this game of disavowal. Clearly "[t]here are economic conditions for the indifference to economy which induces a pursuit of the riskiest positions in the intellectual and artistic avant-garde, and also for capacity to remain there over a long period without any economic compensation.[9]" (Bourdieu 1993:40). What this means, of course, is that in order for such positions to exist, there must also exist a social class able to provide the economic and intellectual capital, along with the lack of social restrictions that would allow for the formation of this kind of artist. In other words, a disinterested attitude toward economic interests is only possible once the condition of economic success is met. In order for the position of economic disavowal to reproduce itself, these social and economic conditions must continue to be met.

But Bourdieu draws out an even more interesting contradiction with regards to this indifference to the market, and one which demonstrates that it is truly only "apparent." First, it must be remembered that "art-for-art's-sake" developed out of a conflict between the orthodoxy of hegemonic, state sponsored academic art that clearly and crassly served the interests of ruling class and the heterodoxy of the emerging bohemia. This conflict repeats itself even after the original battle against the academy has been won in the form of competition between what Bourdieu refers to as the dominant sector of the cultural field (the orthodoxy) and the dominated sector (the heterodoxy, or,

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characterized by a competition between these two levels of the cultural field (what Bourdieu refers to as the field of commercial and the field of restricted production). This, in a sense is Bourdieu's version of Adorno's insight that mass culture and "high art" are two halves of a torn whole.

avant-garde). The orthodox sector represents the tastes and interests of audiences with a great deal of economic capital and less cultural capital and tends towards classical and traditional expressions of "pure" art. Audiences for this kind of art may, at the very top levels, have the capital to invest in collecting already consecrated works of art, to purchase opera and symphony tickets, to travel to visit international museums, etc. The heterodox sector, or "avant-garde" is less endowed with economic capital and thus must resort to "subversive strategies" to "gain a foothold in the market." These strategies, however, always take place within the already agreed upon rules of the field (disinterestedness, purity), and in fact, are often meant to demonstrate that the dominated sector is in fact *more* genuinely committed to these principles[10].

The conflicts between orthodoxy and heterodoxy characterize the history of modern art and even seem to constitute a sort of principal of stylistic and formal development. But, according to Bourdieu, the claims of disavowal of economic self-interest that are so crucial to the identity of both camps, but in particular the side of the dominated, conceals an important contradiction. In fact, as in any gambling situation, the position of highest risk stands to reap the greatest gain. Production within the heterodox sector is risky. Many attempt and few succeed in actually achieving symbolic capital and consecration. However, those willing and able to invest in lesser-known, cutting edge

[9] This insight can, of course, also be applied to the intellectual field, where pursuit of knowledge for knowledge's sake is equally the province mainly of those who can afford not to learn a practical skill.
[10] Think, for example, of the various avant-garde strategies to wrest the work of art from its dual status as commodity. DADA, Conceptual art, performance art, earth art are all examples of movements that tried to undermine the orthodox cannon by „"out-disinterested" more conventional mediums such as painting and sculpture that could also be sold in the market. Of course, each of these movements was canonized and

artists (and this includes the artist herself who presumably can garner the economic resources to stay in the game for the long haul) have much to gain if the cultural endeavor manages to accrue symbolic capital. So, in a strange circular rhythm, economic capital converts itself into symbolic capital, which converts itself back into economic capital:

> Symbolic capital is to be understood as economic or political capital that is disavowed, misrecognized, and thereby recognized, hence legitimate, a 'credit', which, under certain conditions, and always in the long run, guarantees economic profits. (Bourdieu 1993:75).

What Bourdieu seems to be offering here – and this is particularly puzzling given his repeated disavowal of rational choice theory - is an account of the cultural field based ultimately on economic rationality. What he adds to a conventional rational choice account (as well as to the standard conflict analysis, which he also seems to recall) is that the key, psychologically and ideologically, to economic success is this field is the symbolic *repression* of economic interests.

> The challenge which economies based on disavowal of the 'economic' present to all forms of economism lies precisely in the fact that they function…only by a constant, collective repression of narrowly economic interest and of the real nature of the practices revealed by 'economic ' analysis. (Bourdieu 1993:74).

This insight – that the economism at the heart of the cultural field is unique because so much social energy and discourse is devoted to its repression- is repeatedly noted by Bourdieu. Its implications, however, are not adequately explored. He does note, in his work on the emergence of the modern avant-garde that the position of the "pure" writer or artist, such as that of the intellectual, is an institution of freedom, constructed against the "bourgeoisie…and against institutions – in particular against state

hence in some form (even if we only think of the photos of "Spiral Jetty" that must certainly fetch a good

bureaucracies, academies, salons etc." (Bourdieu 1993:176). However, he never reconciles the critical nature (that they are "institution[s] of freedom") of the emerging avant-garde with his economistic analysis. While he recognizes that the origins of such institutions must be explained at least in part as critical responses to bourgeois culture, this response seems to aim in the end only at beating culture at its own game. The possibility of autonomous art as a potentially revelatory or critical activity is not considered in any depth. Nor is the relationship between the notion of art as non-instrumental labor and the claims of emancipatory politics explored. In this sense - unlike Adorno, who is aided by the dialectical orientation of his analysis - Bourdieu is able to "read" the art works he addresses as little more than pawns in the competition over scarce and valued resources. Also, when the critical, or oppositional impetus of avant-garde art is glossed over in favor of the analysis just articulated, it is difficult to address the implications of the decline of the avant-garde in our own time.

The Ideology of the Pure Gaze

While Bourdieu may skimp on the critical moment of the ideology of "art-for-art's- sake's" development, he masterfully reconstructs the affirmative function of this paradigm. As has already been mentioned, artistic competence performs the important work of signifying and maintaining class distinctions in modern societies. We can see, then, how *formal* development, which has already been identified as key to the modernist sensibility, is uniquely situated to perform the work of creating distinctions. The

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price on the market) commodified.

primacy of formal development is a result, according to Bourdieu, of the field's struggle for autonomy (like all other fields, it turns its energy toward what it alone is able to accomplish). And, once the field is established, formal development results from the competition first between producers in the different mediums and later, between individual producers within the same medium, to come up with a product that is "original" and that pushed the limits of what that medium has thus far achieved and "… those least reducible to any other form of expression" (Bourdieu 1993:118).

This logic also explains the contradictory nature of the valorization of youth within the avant-garde. While youth tends to oppose power and tradition, it also upholds the "specific law of change" within the field of cultural production. The young artist or movement must produce change and difference and thereby mark the passage of time and valorize the present over the past. Interestingly, the importance of youth within the field of restricted production mirrors its value in the field of commercial production where, as we know, beauty, sexuality and desire are defined by their proximity to youth. And, as Walter Benjamin has pointed out, nothing is so distasteful to the follower of fashion than that which is out-dated (unless of course, it has reinvented itself as retro-chic). That both mainstream and alternative culture share in the valorization of youth, newness and "originality" (particularly as it pertains to individual authorship) is not surprising. Constant development, flux and change are fundamental to capitalist economic and cultural development. We might, however, still be interested in asking whether this movement, in the field of restricted cultural production, has significance beyond the

increasing reproduction and accumulation of capital - economic or otherwise. The latter is clearly its function within mass, or consumer culture. As Adorno points out though, constant invention in the commercial sphere is only apparent. What masquerades as change and difference in mass culture is really a surface repackaging of the same, identity. Can the same be said of invention in the "restricted" or "autonomous" sphere of cultural production? Is invention here "real" in any sense? And if so, what is the significance of the reality of aesthetic invention? If such invention is possible in some unique way in this sphere, does this not render Bourdieu's analysis inadequate - in that he tends to reduce the struggles that take place within the cultural sphere to the same sorts of struggles over (seemingly) scarce and valuable resources that take place within other spheres of capitalist society?

Bourdieu provides yet another valuable, if partial insight into the ideological significance of the valorization of formal development in the cultural sphere. A Marxist humanist position, such as that of Herbert Marcuse, Ernst Bloch, and even, to a certain extent, Adorno might see the autonomy of formal development (the primacy of form over function) in art as an example of the possibility of non-instrumental rationality at work. Such an analysis might also point to the "free and un-alienated labor" in which the artist engages in such production. Bourdieu, instead, not only explains that the primacy of form over function in the modern field of restricted cultural production represents the attempt of the field to legitimize its own existence. He also maintains that

> …the fixation on technique draws pure art into a covenant with the dominant sections of the bourgeoisie. The latter recognize the intellectual's and the artist's

> monopoly on the production of the work of art as an instrument of pleasure (and, secondarily, as an instrument for the symbolic legitimation of economic or political power); in return, the artist is expected to avoid serious matters, namely, social and political questions. (Bourdieu 1996: 128).

In other words, the ruling class allows the artist to have “freedom” and “autonomy” within the cultural sphere, as long as their production restricts its influence and dialogue to that sphere alone. The artist, by “buying into” the ideology of purity, agrees not to use her symbolic power to raise important “social and political questions.” One could go even further (as has been done, for example in the discussion of abstract expressionism’s role in the cold war[11]) and say that “pure” art not only keeps the artist removed from politics, but, in appearing to be a free and unfettered cultural product, demonstrates the free and non-ideological character of the society from which it emerges.

Needless to say, such an analysis lies at the crux of many critiques of modernism and clearly deserves some attention. Once again, however, the limitation of an undialectical reading must be pointed out. Adorno has affirmed (and in this sense could easily be accused of an excess of pessimism) the vulnerability of transparent (unmediated) communication in our society. In his time, as well as in our own, the most apparently critical, counter-cultural slogans and images have been quickly co-opted by consumer culture. (Examples abound. The use of the word “revolution” in advertising is an obvious one. Others include the peace sign as retro-fashion decoration, the Virginia Slims ad campaign of yesteryear, the use of ambiguous gender and sexuality to sell hip clothing,

[11] See Fascnia et.al. (e.d.) (2000).

and the ubiquitous image of Che Guavara on t-shirts, posters, etc.[12]). My point here is that an emphasis on formal development need not preclude the production of critical works of art, just as the imagined attention to an explicitly social or political language does not necessarily guarantee the production of more socially meaningful or relevant works of art. Bourdieu does a disservice to his theoretical edifice by forgetting the important relationship between form and content (a relationship, which he is clearly aware of in, for example, his many discussions of Flaubert's *Sentimental Education* (Bourdieu 1993, 1996

Contemporary Relevance

Bourdieu's contribution to understanding the relative autonomy of the field of restricted cultural production is especially relevant to any discussion of the social status of contemporary art. To place his analysis on familiar sociological terrain, recall that Bourdieu's (as well as Adorno's) autonomy theses rely Max Weber's contention that modernity is characterized by the progressive differentiations of social spheres. In this case, both the language (increasing internal formal reference) and the value system (disavowal of the economy) of art separate it from the laws of the market and of everyday communication. As a consequence of this separation, art becomes increasingly

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[12] This is certainly not the sole privilege of symbols that have their origins in critical or counter-cultural social movements. In the wake of the World Trade Center disaster it is disturbing but not surprising to note the rapid conversion of the American flag, resurrected from the lexicon of down-home Republican conservatism, used to decorate the windows of the most ultra-chic Soho boutiques, as well as appearing as a necessary accessory to the wardrobes of New York's (and probably the rest of the nation's) most trendy and avant-garde fashion set. My point here is that no symbol is immune from co-optation, by which I mean conversion of its symbolic value into a tool of advertising or object of consumption. This does seem to lend

illegible and obscure to those outside the field and hence begins to perform another social function: that of distinguishing those who are "in the know" from those who are not. This being "in the know, " Bourdieu correctly points out, is highly correlated with membership in the dominant class. But, to note the social "function" that modern art's increasing hermeticism performs does not exhaust the possible readings of the significance the meaning of this separation and its attendant consequences. An analysis of the critical, or, at least, ambiguous potential of an art that is partially "autonomous" in the work of Theodor Adorno.

But do Bourdieu's insights remain adequate to the *contemporary* field of restricted production? In order to fully address this question, I will clarify some of the most salient tendencies in contemporary art in later chapters. For now, I focus on characteristics of the field that Bourdieu identifies as central to his analysis. Based on this discussion, I begin to explore the ways in which the field has shifted such that Bourdieu's insights are no longer fully adequate.

The disavowal of commercial success and the split between commercial and cultural enterprises

Bourdieu has reconstructed the origins of a field "in which success in this world is suspect and asceticism in this world is the precondition for salvation in the next" (Bourdieu 1993:101). The bohemian artist is still identified in mainstream culture as the ideal type artist. Along with this association between artistic authenticity and disavowal of worldly comfort and success comes a clear differentiation between the sphere of crass,

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credence to Adorno's pessimistic contention that communication, at least communication within a set of

commercial cultural production (Adorno's "culture industry") and restricted cultural production, or, the avant-garde. This characterization of the cultural field is in some sense accurate through the end of the 1950's, at least for the United States. Although Jackson Pollock and others were catapulted to fame and economic success partly through the attention of the mainstream media, the general tone of their world and its commentators was one of total commitment to the cause of "pure" art and relative isolation from the rest of society. This marginalized yet, as Bourdieu points out, sanctified artistic status survived even through the nineteen-sixties and seventies in some corners of the art world. However, the sixties also saw a backlash against Abstract Expressionism: pop art that consciously appropriated images and techniques from the world of commercial production, and whose guiding light, Andy Warhol famously claimed that business was the most fascinating form of art.

Though pop-art's message may have been ambiguous - there was clearly an element of irony, if not outright critique, in Lichtenstein or Oldenberg's or Audrey Flack's representations of the shallowness of everyday life in the United States - it seemed to herald a new relationship between high art and popular culture. No longer must the artist eschew the representation of the surfaces and glitz of popular culture. In fact, as the decades wore on, it began to seem as though artists such as Naim June Paik and Bill Viola were in fact competing with popular culture on its own terms for the attention of a generation fed on Spielberg and MTV. This collapse of the distinctions between commercial and autonomous culture did not limit itself to artistic production.

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universally recognizable signifiers, is becoming less and less possible.

Again beginning with Warhol, but reaching a sort of zenith with the "art-stars" of the nineteen-eighties such as Julian Schnable, David Salle and Jeff Koons in the 1980s, the valorization of the "bohemian lifestyle" of economic and status disavowal became obsolete in the art world[13]. In that heady decade the price of contemporary art soared and art openings in Soho became photo opportunities not just for the artists and their coteries, but also for the television and film stars, models, media moguls and designers with whom they socialized. In addition - and this observation again requires a study of its own – bastions of "high art" such as the Guggenheim and the Metropolitan have featured among their blockbuster events of the past decade, a motorcycle show, an Armani exhibition, and an exhibited devoted to the life and fashion of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis. Not surprisingly, such curatorial choices coincide with an unprecedented rise in museum attendance. These factors together support the assertion that economic disavowal and the separation between commercial and autonomous culture no longer, or at least no longer in the same way, characterize contemporary art.

Importance of "formal" development and of stylistic and technical principles – de-ligitimation of pure gaze

Both Adorno and Bourdieu identify art's increasing preoccupation with the development of formal and technical problems intrinsic to the various artistic mediums as a central tendency of modern art. Although "art-for-art's-sake" predates the move towards abstraction in visual art, the formal analysis of abstract art builds upon the

[13] The relationship between the decline of bohemia and the real estate market in New York City has been explored by, among others, Zukin (1982), Deutsche and Ryan (1984) and Smith and DiFillipis (1999).

ideology the "pure gaze" (as is demonstrated by Clement Greenberg's self-designation as a Kantian). And, it is the unending push for formal innovation that provides the catalyst for many modern avant-garde art movements. Again, beginning with pop art, and continuing through the unanimous art-world attack on Greenbergian formalism the contemporary art world has witnessed a full-scale attack from within on the valorization of formalism. "Post-modernism," while a vague and indeterminate term in the art world, consistently implies an aesthetic of anti-formalism and a radical skepticism towards the notion of "progress." What this means practically is that "post-modern" art tends to be characterized by "pastiche" – meaning that a particular piece may exhibit symbols, images and stylistic moves from a variety of historical periods, as well as from a number of mediums (this is particularly salient with regards to the use of text together with painting or photography). The emphasis is against stylistic or formal unity, and the viewer is invited to make any number or narrative associations or interpretations, none of which will have final sway.

This tendency has clear repercussions for the fate of "the pure gaze" and for whatever latent function the social construction of such a gaze may have performed. This is worth commenting on further. It is interesting to note for now, however, that the de-throning of "the pure gaze" has not necessarily had the liberatory or democratizing influence on art anticipated by its critics. In fact, while the gaze must no longer be "pure" – in order to decipher the proper philosophical and political implications of much contemporary art, the viewer must be 'in the know' in more games than ever before. As

Bourdieu points out, the shift in the technical strategy (from that of formal development to that of historical quotation) does not change the overall stakes of competition in the art world, but rather seems to add another terrain on which the game is played – that of discourse:

> Never has the irreducibility of the work of cultural production to the artist's own labor appeared so clearly. The primary reason is that the new definition of the artist and of artists work brings the artist's work closer to that of the intellectual and makes more dependent than ever on 'intellectual' commentaries…. one has to be blind not to see that discourse about a work is not a mere accompaniment, intended to assist its perception and appreciation, but a stage in the production of the work, its meaning and value. (Bourdieu1993: 110).

In delineating the current state of the field and its attendant positions, Bourdieu here fails to draw out some of the implications of the situation he describes. Namely, he does not address the consequences of the collapse of the separation of spheres that has come to characterize modern art and indeed modernity itself. This is the case in terms of art's relationship to the economy and to other markers of social status, as discussed above. It also describes art's relationship to other forms of communication and signification. On the one hand, the modernist injunction against art's too cozy connection to mass culture has clearly been severed. On the other hand, the development of the highly mediated significatory systems that Adorno valorizes (that the development of a formal language of art allows for the communication of "truths" that are no longer available to everyday language because this language has been co-opted) has also ended. In other words, whatever may have been unique about the aesthetic experience (call it "disinterested," "pure," "non-instrumental") in modernist terms is no longer the goal of

contemporary art. Whether or not one thinks that the modernist enterprise was a worthy one in terms of either humanistic or critical potential what is clear is that art is more like other things than perhaps it once was.

Bourdieu explains the development of the specifically modern valuation of autonomy as part of a struggle within the field resulting from demographics and other institutional changes. However, he doesn't convincingly tie the emergence of art's autonomy to other aspects of modernity. Or, more to the point, while he does acknowledge the central tendencies of modern social life (increasing division of labor, urbanization, separation of spheres) he doesn't draw out the specifically emancipatory or critical capacities that are unleashed, particularly within the realm of art, along with these developments. Because he does not embed his account of modern aesthetic production in the *contradictory* nature of modernity, a path is not sufficiently cleared for understanding both the implications of the transition from modern to post-modern aesthetics and the importance of art's claim to autonomy.

Adorno's Dialectical Remedy

The limits of Bourdieu's analysis lie in his refusal - a refusal characteristic of the generation of French intellectuals to which he belongs – of dialectical thought. Adorno, on the other hand, born a generation earlier, and steeped in the tradition of German idealism rather than French empiricism and structuralism, reads his Marx unabashedly through the lens of Hegel, and thus presents a very different notion of history and society than that of the structural Marxism with which Bourdieu is temporally identified. Adorno's social theory, as well as his sociology of art, is thoroughly, if idiosyncratically, dialectic, in both its literary form and its content. And it is his reconsideration of the

dialectical tradition that enables him to identify categories such as "dual-character," which offer, as I will demonstrate, such rich explanatory potential.

Though not systematic *per se* (and this is a source of great frustration to some of Adorno's critics) Adorno's work is indeed shot through with inter-related themes and concepts, providing a sense of wholeness, or integration to his oeuvre. Though I am here primarily interested in his theory and sociology of art, it is impossible to approach this subject without first laying out some of the central themes of his more general social theory. I thus begin my discussion with a consideration of his social theory, as it emerges from his understanding of the nature of totality and dialectics.

Totality

Frederick Jameson claims that "Adorno's life work stands or falls on the concept of totality" (Jameson 1990). In order to better understand Adorno's conception of totality, it is useful to turn to one of Marx's seminal formulations of the relationship between the base, or relations and forces of production and the superstructure or the political and cultural institutions in a given society. In a well-known passage from the preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Marx clearly states his position:

> In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite state of development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness (Marx 1904:11-12).

For Marx the superstuctural moments of society are the perceptible manifestations (appearance) taken by the relations of production. In this sense, society constitutes a "totality" in that each moment (cultural characteristic, institutions, art forms) are intrinsically related to each other as expressions of a particular form of material reproduction (base). Thus, the premise of any Marxian cultural analysis is that particular social or cultural manifestations cannot be properly understood outside of an understanding of the underlying socio/economic base of the society and, at the same time, the basic socio/economic structure can be gleaned from an analysis of a given cultural or social particularity. Presumably, for Marx, in an emancipated society the social base would still appear in social institutions, but that base would not be one fraught with the contradiction between the social relations and forces of production that characterizes capitalism.

Adorno's conception of totality derives from Marx's account of the relationship between the socio/cultural manifestations of a society and its mode of production in that all social moments must are seen as determinations of the same coercive, contradictory and irrational underlying structure[14]. While Marx focused on a painstakingly detailed analysis of the commodity form in order to make visible the logic of the exchange economy, Adorno's objects of analysis are cultural institutions and objects. For Adorno, though the individual moments of the social totality are permeated by the same logic (which can be read in different moments as the logic of exchange, the logic of self-preservation, the logic of instrumental reason), the existence of a clearly defined base, and a hierarchy of base and superstructure, is less clear. In fact, Adorno seems to effect a

[14] This notion of the same underlying structures appearing in all cultural institutions and artifacts is also known as "expressive totality". See Lukacs (1971) and Jay (1984).

Weberian reconstruction of Marxist materialism with the concept of a totality in which material and social relations and cultural forms exist in a circular rather than a vertical relation.

However, totality is not, for Adorno, an inevitable category through which society must be analyzed. That our particular society exhibits this characteristic is both historically contingent and negative for Adorno. First, for Adorno, "totality" is a purely historical category, in that it describes a particular historical period, namely, monopoly capitalism[15]. In addition, it describes a particular form of domination. Modern societies for which the notion of totality is adequate are understood as

> a sort of linking structure between human beings in which every one and everything depend on everyone and everything; the whole is only sustained by the unity of the functions fulfilled by all its members, and each single of these members is assigned such a function while at the same time each individual is determined to a great degree by his membership in this structure…[T]his concept of society only receives its full realization today, at the stage of the total socialization of mankind." (Adorno, et. al., 1972:17).

This passage, taken from a text book on sociology produced by Adorno and Horkheimer for students of the Frankfurt Institute, illustrates the view that "socialization" is a coercive mechanism, and one that, contrary to Durkheim, or even a standard sociological formulation of the socialization process, is against the interests of socialized subjects. This insight makes sense particularly in terms of the tendencies that Adorno and Horkheimer perceived both in fascist Germany and in conformist, consumerist America: namely the increasing ideological integration of the working class into a system that in reality is opposed to their interests. In an attempt to explain this phenomenon Adorno and

[15] Totality, for the Frankfurt School was also used to describe Soviet Socialism, which , while not predicated on Western style monopoly capitalism, nevertheless functioned as a state organized form of

the rest of the Frankfurt School were compelled to abandon a traditionally Marxist faith that the working class could bring about radical social change. At the same time, they presented a theory of particularly modern forms of domination that prefigured Foucault's, while retaining the notion from Marx of an identifiable logic to the exercise of power.

Domination

As Adorno explains in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* and elsewhere, modern domination operates by promoting an ideology that insists on the false identity (that is identity of interests) of the particular, or individual subject, and the general, or, society[16]. A similar ideology of identity is described by Marx (1981) in his discussions of exchange value and of profit. First, the logic of exchange seems to imply an identity between the labor sold and the wage received – what is obscured by such an ideology is the origin of profit. This slight of hand is accomplished through the logic of exchange value in which both individual labor and its products are transformed into abstract, quantifiable and exchangeable portions of a universal equivalent. So, first, all value, including the value of labor is quantified. Then the exchange made for portions of abstract labor is said to be equivalent to the value of such labor. In late capitalism, however, in a move more ominous than the state of affairs described by Marx, it is not just the labor of the individual that becomes quantified and exchanged (at a loss to the laborer) but individuals themselves, like commodities, become *products* of this exchange system

> The last doctrine in which the Enlightenment used causality as a decisive political weapon, the Marxist doctrine of infrastructure and superstructure, now lags

exchange economy. My discussion will be primarily concerned with Adorno's analysis of Western-style capitalist societies.

[16] Society is almost always a negative category for Adorno, as no society exists in which the interests of human beings are expressed and fulfilled through the existing social structures. This, however, is not to be confused with the bourgeois-romantic conception of society as a force frustrating individual authenticity. For Adorno, it is only in the context of a 'good' society that such individual authenticity could be achieved.

> innocently behind a condition in which not only the machines of production, distribution and domination but also economic and social relationships along with ideologies are inextricably interwoven and in which living people have themselves become bits of ideology…In the total society all things are equidistant from the center. Such a society is truly as transparent and its apologia threadbare, as those people grow extinct who once saw through it. (Adorno 1978:267-8)

Here, "culture", in the form of the culture industry acts as a force of production: it produces subjects that are identical with the interests of a coercive society and thus thwarts the possibility of critical consciousness and practice. This discussion of domination becomes particularly relevant later, as we discuss the possibilities suggested by Adorno for emancipation and the role that art, as an opposing pole to the culture industry, plays in providing a model for the resistance of the logic of exchange.

Status of "Subjective" and "Objective" in Adorno

A structural/functionalist account of relationship between structure and agency holds that society can best be understood as an objective entity and agents (or subjects) can be seen as the product, or effect of this objective structure. In a Parsonian account, for example, agents, as products of a social structure, also work, albeit unconsciously, to preserve the form and integrity of this structure (parsons 1970). Thus, the structure is conceived as (ideally) non-contradictory and the identification of individuals with this structure is appropriate. Adorno, however, would not only point out the ideological character of such an understanding, but also the contingent nature of a situation for which such an understanding seems adequate. Society, for Adorno, is in fact nothing else but the product of human action. Apparently "objective" social structures are the reflection of categories of thought and modes of subjectivity of society's members, and are in fact, only apparent. However, in a society in which these modes and categories are hidden

from subjective understanding, they appear as objective. The very nature of our society is to obscure its (humanly created) structure, and hence to appear to its members as a force outside of themselves. Thus, the relationship between the subjective and the objective character of society is both ambivalent and obscured in ideology and sociological thought:

> Society [claims Adorno] is subjective because it refers back to human beings that created it and its organizational principles too refer back to subjective consciousness and its most general form of abstraction – logic- something essentially subjective. Society is objective because, on account of its underlying structure it cannot perceive its own subjectivity because it does not posses a total subject and through its organization it thwarts the instillation of such a subject. (Adorno, et. al. 1976:33).

This misrecognition of both objective and subjective relations can, at times, for Adorno, be traced back in classical Marxist terms to commodity fetishism, in which relations between people appear as relations between things. However, in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno and Horkheimer suggest that capitalist relations of production are merely the most recent and extreme forms taken by the reification of consciousness and the attending misrecognition of the relationship between the subject and society. According to *The Dialectic of Enlightenmen*t, as reconstructed metaphorically through the myth of Odysseus, the reification of consciousness has its roots in the "identity-thinking" and instrumental reason developed by Odysseus in his quest for self–preservation. This necessity, which was at the same time the source of his individuation, caused him to posit himself as over and above nature, to instrumentalize nature, and finally, to treat himself as an object to be managed by the same mechanisms developed to dominate nature. This logic of self-preservation sets up human consciousness over and against nature, and hence reduces nature to that which can be quantified, dominated, and

harnessed for the preservation of the self – everything which cannot be so reduced inhabits the status of the abject, the irrational, or is simply nonexistent. This process, in the ultimate act of reification, turns on the subject herself, as can be seen most obviously in a commodity based and consumer driven society, where people become mere statistics, to be harnessed by the advertising industry, human labor is reduced to its capacity to reproduce a system by which it itself does not benefit, and the imperatives of this system are so internalized by subjects that they in fact constitute the ego in itself.

The result of this process brings us back again to the notion of totality, which, in light of Adorno and Horkheimer's mythical reconstruction, cannot be fully explained in terms of material determinations. In fact, what emerges instead is actually a complex reformulation of what Marx saw as the potential for human freedom unleashed by human being's successful mastery of nature: For Adorno and Horkheimer, human beings have not mastered nature, but "extended nature in a heteronomous manner" (Adorno, et. al. 1976:12) through the framework of totality. What we have now, rather than the threatening and brutal imperatives of an untamed nature facing human beings who have nothing but their reason and capacity for cunning to offset its force and power, is a society created by human beings themselves -a totality - which now stands in the way of the fulfillment of human potential: "the inescapable spell of the animal world is reproduced in the brutal domination of a society still caught up in natural history" (Adorno, et. al., 1976:60). The process of reification, or naturalization, both occludes the origin of this domination in human activity and makes it appear "natural", while at the same time presenting this naturalized "social" as identical with the individuals that

compose it. Meanwhile, subjects are increasingly being produced[17] who are in fact identical with the totality.

Utopian Moments

While it is tempting to see Adorno as crossing the border between critical social analysis and absolute cultural pessimism, such an interpretation would miss the dialectical as well as the utopian nature of his project ("… one should not apologetically conclude from this that constraint is immutable." (Adorno. et. al. 1976:60)). The Frankfurt School, in its first phase,[18] sought to combine social science and philosophy: the empirical orientation as well as the "social" standpoint of social science should keep critical theory anchored in material reality while philosophy would provide a normative justification and framework for critique. In keeping with the goals of critical theory, Adorno's system (or anti-system) contains an implicit notion of what a better society might look such as. This vision is clearly within the liberal tradition in that it takes for granted the inherent potential for, and desirability of, creative and self-determined individual human development. This human potential, within the Marxist and many other liberal traditions, can only be fulfilled in a society in which human consciousness and activity is conscious and freely chosen. For this to be possible, society would have to be shaped by the conscious needs and desires of human beings, rather than human beings being formed to serve the interests of a coercive social structure (capitalism). This state of affairs would

[17] This discussion is incomplete without an extended consideration of Adorno's analysis of the culture industry. For Adorno, in contemporary society, culture is synonymous with the culture industry, which can in turn be thought of as one manifestation of the forces of production. This idea is discussed in detail in another section of this dissertation.
[18] For extended discussions of the history of the Frankfurt School see Jay (1996) and Wiggerhause (1994).

then unleash the true potential of individuation and self-development rather than subjective experience and potential being "produced" by a cohesive (though irrational) coercive mechanism, or "totality." A society of liberated humanity, would, according to Adorno "by no means be a totality." In fact, it would more accurately resemble, according to Jameson's formulation, "a utopia of the particular" (Jameson 1974:225). Like Marx, for Adorno the possibility for such as society was immanent in the structures of bourgeois society. Unlike Marx (though Marx never claimed the inevitability of such historical developments) and from a historical standpoint from which this insight is reasonable, Adorno points to the missed opportunity to unleash this emancipatory potential from bourgeois social relations

> [t]he concept of society which is specifically bourgeois and anti-feudal, implies the notion of an association of free and independent human subjects for the sake of the possibility of a better life, and consequently, the critique of natural societal relations. The hardening of bourgeois society into something impenetrably and inevitably natural is its immanent regression. (Adorno 1990: 25)

As we have seen, Adorno's account of the history of domination and the possibilities for overcoming it departs from Marx's in terms of whom or what the agent of social change is to be. Marx views human appropriation of nature, in the form of labor and technology as *the* source of potential human liberation, once the shackles of capitalist relations of production are overcome. These relations are to be overcome through the revolutionary praxis of the working class, or proletariat, the most advanced and therefore the only revolutionary class. The destruction of bourgeois relations of production makes possible a classless society, in which the emancipatory power of technology can truly be harnessed. Adorno, on the other hand, along with Horkheimer, in *The Dialectic of*

Enlightenment, implicates human mastery of nature *as such* in capitalist and other exploitative social relations. Capitalist relations of production are merely an extension of this drive towards mastery, which is actually the "first cause" of alienation. Furthermore, as Adorno and Horkheimer's reconstructed myth of Odysseus illustrates (Horkheimer and Adorno 1972), while the impetus for this mastery is first the fear of nature and the drive toward self-preservation, the drive to master and subjugate nature leads the subject at the same time to subjugate and reify itself. Though this process is the origin of modern individuation and ego development, it also ensures the existence of both objective alienation (human beings from nature) and subjective alienation (replication of objective structures of domination in the subject herself, causing diremption of subject from nature). Hence, for Adorno, an overcoming of capitalist relations of production, as the example of the Soviet Union shows, would not necessarily lead to a reconciliation with nature, which, for Adorno, is a necessary precondition for human emancipation. It is rather the current relationship between human beings and nature that must be transcended. Furthermore, the working class, because of the rise of the culture industry as a productive force of consciousness and subjectivity[19], does not stand opposed to bourgeois class relations but is equally a "product" of such relations, and hence is no longer a likely candidate as the agent of emancipatory social change.

Question of Standpoint

This brief sketch of Adorno's account of the origin and history of domination suggests some profound problems for treating Adorno's vision of emancipation and of potential liberation outside of a speculative philosophical context. The most obvious

[19] For the seminal discussion, see "Culture Industry as Mass Deception" in Horkheimer and Adorno (1972). This essay is treated in greater detail later in this dissertation.

question raised is who (since the proletariat is clearly demoted from the privileged position predicted by Marx) is to be the agent of social change and what sort of praxis should this process of social change employ? This question deserves an extensive discussion, which will continue to take place throughout this dissertation. For now, however, I suggest that the Adorno's social theory suffer from both an unnecessarily pessimistic view of agency and an underdeveloped account of the standpoint of critique. If we are to accept Adorno's powerful account of the reification of thought and the false identity between subject(s) and a society based upon the subjugation of these same subjects along with nature, how is the possibility for insight into the nature of the totality and consciousness of its contingency supposed to arise? Adorno correctly recognizes that the standpoint of the lone rebel, or bohemian is not sufficient to provide significant social insight or resistance. Nor would he agree with a post Marxist thinker such as Habermas, who argues that what Adorno and others of his generation missed was the tremendous rational potential inherent in the historical development of everyday communicative practices (Habermas 1987).[20] Adorno does contend that autonomous art contains critical capacities, and that negative dialectics as an intellectual process of resistance is possible. However, his account of the production of subjectivity in late capitalist societies leaves little room for the formulation of a subject capable of creating such art or engaging in such thought.

Adorno's notion of emancipatory potential, then, as well as the role that art plays in this potential, is weakened by this underdeveloped theory of standpoint. What I am

[20] Though compelling arguments are made on both sides of this debate, I do not have the space to rehearse the intricacies of this discussion in the present essay. I will point only to one often-cited weakness of this argument, which is that it does not properly acknowledge the coercive role of power implicit in every

referring to in particular may be partially remedied by close attention to the standpoint epistemology implicit both in Lukacs ' (1971) notion of class-consciousness and, more recently, in some feminist and critical race theory (e.g. Hartsock (1998)). What I mean to suggest is that identity with the totality may be more problematic with reference to social groups who are positioned - in order to buttress or legitimate the existence of coercion and domination - as binary opposites to the valorized forms of subjectivity. "Othering" - or the positing of an abject status based on (imagined) opposition to dominant forms - is a characteristic of all forms of social order. However, the "managing" (for Adorno this would take place for the most part, again, through identification with the products of the culture industry) of the always potentially disorderly marginalized groups rarely occurs with seamless efficiency. Hence, the possibility of critical consciousness may be more accessible to members of marginalized groups, both individually and collectively. Such a hypothesis is empirically supported, to take one example, by the predominance of Jewish thinkers and artists within various spheres of the critical modernist enterprise. If we take into account the resistance by marginalized groups to smooth integration into the social system, we may be better equipped to reformulate a framework through which to judge potentially emancipatory practices, aesthetic and otherwise. This theme will be developed later in the context of a discussion of the development of feminist aesthetic practices in contemporary art, but is important nonetheless to point out at the outset.

Totality Reconsidered

If Adorno's sociology of art is to provide a fertile starting point for the development of a framework for understanding the position of contemporary art in

actually existing communicative interaction. Nor does it properly elucidate how such power imbalances should be overcome. Hence, it is idealist and problematically abstracts.

society, it is important to demonstrate that his concept of totality remains a useful category today. Recent intellectual fashion has been characterized by a strong skepticism regarding the universalizing tendencies of philosophy and social theory based upon understandings of society, history and the subject handed down to us from the Enlightenment. This tendency is further buttressed by the collapse of the Soviet Union, and along with it the credibility of what has been seen as the most recent of such "universalizing," or "totalizing" discourses: Marxism. Some contemporary sociologists are skeptical about attempts to theorize society as a totality (or would even eliminate concepts of "society" itself)[21] and believe that oppositional politics can best be carried out "locally" by marginalized groups seeking inclusion and tolerance. Until the rise of the mass movement in opposition to corporate globalization that began in the mid-nineties, and the anti-war movement that has emerged, often in conjunction with the latter today, the only "universalizing vision" in recent oppositional politics would have to be that of pluralism, rather than one that appeals to a universalistic vision of social change. In addition, increasing lip service to the value of a multicultural curriculum in schools, and "diversity" in the workplace and other institutions has been paid in nations such as the US. On a superficial level, these developments point away both from Adorno's dire characterization of a "total society," as well as from the usefulness of this category in articulating social or political change.

The global economy, on the other hand, paints another picture: the increasingly nomadic and unbounded nature of multination capital as well as the collapse of the Soviet Union has introduced industrial production, and the exchange economy with all its

[21] For a various perspectives on this theme see Seidman (ed.) (1992).

attendant cultural characteristics including consumerism, as Marx famously prophesied[22] - to all corners of the globe. In addition to this, the widened reach of U.S. mass culture made possible by developed means of communication has created a global universe that may even have surprised Adorno in its success in the elimination of difference. And further, renewed military aggression by the United States in so-called "Rogue States" in the Middle East, and threats of further aggression towards those countries which do not immediately submit and obey to US directives (and thus insist on difference), set the stage for an increasingly total grip of American imperialist objectives.

Thus, a convincing argument exists for the continuing adequacy of totality as a useful descriptive and methodological category. As we have seen, for Adorno the concept is critical rather than affirmative or prescriptive[23]. Nonetheless, it is employed as an overarching category, an attempt to represent the whole of society. The implicit supposition is that while "the whole" may be "the false," it is nonetheless representable, and can be grasped from an objective perspective. Despite the temptation to view Adorno as a precursor to postmodernism, what he presents is not cultural or epistemological relativism or deconstruction, but rather a theory of society in the modernist sense. It seems that what many postmodernist theorists are critical of cannot be wished away by discarding the critical categories that render it intelligible. As Adorno himself would acknowledge, in an emancipated society, neither totality nor dialectics would be useful

[22] It is worth taking another look at the following passage from the "Communist Manifesto": "The bourgeoisie, by the rapid improvement of all instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication, draws all, even the most barbarian, nations into civilization. The cheap prices of its commodities, are the heavy artillery with which it batters down all Chinese walls, with which it forces the barbarians intensely obstinate hatred of foreigners to capitulate. It compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production; it compels them to introduce what it calls civilization into their midst…In one word, *it creates a world after its own image*." (italics mine). (Marx and Engels 1967:137).
[23] See Jay, (1974).

categories. However, the *apparent* fragmentation and diversity that characterizes our present society must not be accepted at face value. In fact, as Jameson points out, it could be that present society is in fact performing its integrative tasks with even more efficiency than earlier stages of capitalism. To take one example, one can easily point to the speed with which groups that were formerly labeled as "deviant" or otherwise marginalized - even once they have been organized politically - are converted into new marketing target groups[24]. As Jameson notes, (1991:341) even the "defense of difference is just liberal tolerance – and isn't today's tolerance just a result of homogenization, standardization and obliteration of difference?"

Jameson offers an interesting defense for "totality" and its continued relevance: his claim is that the power of a concept such as totality emerges from a period of history, namely monopoly capitalism, which calls into doubt the "possibility of grasping society as a whole." Aesthetic modernism as well as critical theories of society would then emerge as attempts to grasp and represent the seemingly fragmented nature of the contemporary reality. Our own postmodern and multinational era has been so successful in obscuring or eliminating the central tensions of the late modern experience that the urgency of finding a model of representation no longer seems relevant. In other words, Adorno's insights into the nature of the totality developed during a moment when contradictions within the totality were still apparent enough that a critical perspective - an

[24] Examples of this phenomenon abound. One can point, for instance, to the overwhelming corporate presence at a recent Gay Pride Party in D.C., the direct marketing of expensive clothing and alcohol to inner –city minority youth and fashion magazines aimed specifically at overweight women. Although the ability of mass marketing to rearticulate forms of cultural and political resistance as consumer preference has long been noted, this tendency is increasing rather than waning. A related phenomenon has long been apparent in the art world as well. The autonomous life of avant-garde art movements that call into question art's corporatization and institutionalization is notoriously brief and even works such as those of Hans Haake, that have the explicit intent of criticizing the institutions of the art world are commissioned for museum exhibition.

"outside" - remained possible and was in fact urgently felt. In today's fully globalized and corporatized world, although a Marxian derived critical category such as "totality" seems out of synch with the political and intellectual *Zeitgeist*, it may be more relevant than ever:

> [Adorno's] antiquated economics may now seem apt and timely…the outmoded doctrine of monopoly capital may be just the image we need, in the absence of our own image, since it incited him to track the system into its most minute recesses and crannies, without paranoia, with an effectiveness that can still set an example to those demoralizations of the current one, which offers rows of identical products…instead of the grim, windowless headquarters we thought we were looking for. (Jameson 1990: 249).

A Word about Method

1. Critical Sociology

Before turning to Adorno's sociology of art I will briefly discuss his thoughts on the limits of positivism as a method for gaining knowledge about social reality. This discussion will help shed light on Adorno's claim that the interpreted work of art *is* able to provide such objective knowledge. A word must be said here about the goals of social science for Adorno and other members of the Frankfurt School. First, the aim of social science should not be the collection of disparate analysis of various social phenomena. It should instead seek to develop a critical understanding of those "decisive structures" underlying all social phenomena, or to refer to the earlier discussion, the totality. The process of attaining objective knowledge of these social structures is not, however, to be thought of as a project undertaken by an outside observer (e.g. the research scientist), for the purpose of cataloguing observations in order to discover law-such as regularities in social life similar to those sought in natural science. If such regularities do exist, for Adorno at least, this is symptomatic of "the constancy of a society that actually does not

tolerate anything different…a society that drearily repeats itself in the details " (Adorno, et. al. 1976: 39) rather than an inevitable feature of social existence. Also, even when these regularities appear, a dialectical analysis will reveal the true contradictory character and irreconcilability of society. The critical sociologist, in contrast to the positivist, by articulating the underlying structures of what may appear to be disparate social facts, is (as in the process of psychoanalysis) bringing to consciousness the contradictions, or irrationality, of given reality. Like in the psychoanalytic endeavor, the conscious articulation of repressed contradictions leads potentially to change. The critical sociologist, then, is engaged in a practice oriented toward social change.

This project -in contrast to Weber's injunction to value neutrality -is also normative, in that a vision of what a better society would look like is fundamental to the analytic activity. The utopian moment of critical analysis does not, however, invite purely subjective insights. For Adorno, an objective state of affairs in fact exists, and it is the role of critique to shed light on this state of affairs. For example, to speak about the "social construction of reality" is both true and false. Human beings do in fact *create* meaning out of everyday social encounters and the satisfaction of human needs, but the sorts of meanings they create are always (as in Marx) already mediated by objective social conditions. A sociology that concerns itself only with the collection of information about what sorts of meaning people make and how they make it - that "takes as its starting point the self- understanding of individual subjects" (Adorno, et. al. 1976:8) - treats these facts as unmediated by underlying structures, and is never able to get at the truth, or objective reality of these structures. Without access to such truth, existing society is reified, and the possibility of it being otherwise is never considered: "Critical

theory is oriented towards the ideal of society as subject, while sociology accepts reification, repeats it in its methods, and thereby looses the perspective in which society and its laws reveal themselves." (Adorno, et. al. 1976: 34).

2. Critique of Positivism

One of Adorno's criticisms of positivism in the social sciences is that it is both too objective *and* too subjective:

> Positivism, to which contradictions are anathema, possesses its innermost contradiction…in the following. It adheres to an objectivity which is most external to its sentiments and purged of all subjective projections, but thereby simply becomes all the more entangled in the particularity of the mere subjective instrumental reason…they hypostasize the knowing subject, not as an absolute subject, or a source, but as the *topos noetikos* of all validity…of scientific control… (Adorno, et.al., 1976: 5).

Let us analyze this quote with reference to survey research – a method often employed for the collection of positive data in the sociology of art. Surveys in general rely on the self- reporting of subjective states by individuals to provide knowledge of preferences, habits, etc. in various populations. The implicit assumption of this method's claim that it provides unproblematic data is that the "tastes" being reported originate freely and spontaneously within the subject herself, or, if they do not, the source of their origin is not of primary importance. With this implicit claim, surveys loose the objectively mediated nature of subjective preferences, along with the mediated nature of the subject herself. Hence the social, or objective is artificially dirempted from the individual and the individual is posited as the independent source of knowledge about society. And it is precisely this insight - that the subject's consciousness and self- understanding is always

mediated by objective structures – that is foreclosed by the premise of this method. Furthermore, it is also this insight that allows for the possibility that human relations and self understanding could be structured differently. As mentioned above, one of the goals of social critique, then, is to reveal the irrational and contingent nature of social organization. Since positivism treats society as though it were already the rational product of human endeavor, it participates in obscuring the fact that this is not the case from scientific investigation.

At the same time, science in general does not recognize its own subjective nature. For Adorno, the most important tool of science, instrumental reason, is in fact a particularly subjective and limited form of reason, developed as a tool in the struggle for self-preservation. The operating principle of instrumental reason, as has been discussed, is its ability to objectify and quantify the outer world and thereby create homogeneous, interchangeable and utilizable entities out of a heterogeneous and particular natural world[25]. With the advent of sociology, the social world was similarly rendered reified and quantifiable. Again using the example of survey research, subjective responses are then organized into statistical averages (x% of people between the ages of 25 –45 prefer Jazz to Classical music) thereby forfeiting the outliers, and reducing the multiplicity of possible responses (which are already limited by the format of the survey) to an abstract generalization which is to count as a hard fact. Hence, while the existence of an underlying objective social totality is "dismissed as a mythological relic" (Adorno, et. al. 1976:8), any spontaneous response or evidence of particularity on the part of the subject

[25] Capitalism, and its attendent liberal ethos of abstract individual is then another instance of this phenomena. In the Marxian formulation, exchange in which all things are reducible to varying measure of a

(and this is the place, we will find later on, where objective knowledge in fact can be found) is lost:

> The regimented experience prescribed by positivism nullifies experience itself and in its intention, eliminates the experiencing subject. The correlate of indifference towards the object is the abolition of the subject, without whose spontaneous receptivity nothing objective emerges. (Adorno, et.al. 1976:58).

On the other hand:

> The state of universal mediation and reification of all relations between human beings sabotage the objective possibility of specific experience of the object…(Adorno, et. al. 1976:57).

Also, according to this critique, the fetishization of abstraction and methodology is not value neutral. In fact, it participates in the reproduction and legitimization of that very structure, the principle of exchange, which turns all concrete relations into abstractions, and all values into exchange value ("reducing human beings into agents and carriers of the exchange of goods establishes the control of human beings over human beings."). Positive social science repeats this exchange process by transforming the particular and concrete into abstractions, and is also incapable of seeing itself as deriving from the same objective[26] structures - the principle of exchange - as the object of its study. Positive social science also serves to legitimate the status quo in that the logic on which it relies - that of the principle of non-contradiction - provides no methodological framework for acknowledging (or even seeing) these contradictions. As we will later see, these criticisms become especially salient when Adorno's sociology of art is contrasted with

universal equivalent, is substituted for use value. Similarly, abstract equality substitutes a notion of universal…

[26] Since, according to Adorno, this principle of abstract exchange is one form that instrumental reason, a subjective capacity, calling it "objective" may sound confusing. It must be remembered, however, that

positive methodologies, particularly those that employ reception, or "effects" analysis. As mentioned above, these take as their field of analysis the responses of audiences to objects (in this case works of art). Such approaches assume that the social meaning, or content, of the work can be reduced to the subjective interpretation of audiences. In addition to the problem of unacknowledged mediation discussed above, this approach assumes that the work itself contains no meaning beyond what is read into it by viewers. For Adorno, works of art, by virtue of their "dual-character," do contain objective meaning, irrespective of subjective interpretation, and therefore require an analysis that is not limited to studying their effects.

Dialectics as Critique

What sociology needs, then is an approach that is able to overcome science's rigid distinction between subject and object – in other words, a method that can recognize *both* the socially produced, subjective nature of social reality *and* the objectively mediated nature of individual consciousness. In addition, if sociology is to understand the contradictory nature of society, it must be able to operate within a logical framework other than that of non-contradiction. Adorno finds such an approach through a re-evaluation and appropriation of Hegelian and Marxist dialectics. In the following, I briefly discuss the role of totality, contradiction and negativity in Hegel's dialectics. I then discuss the manner in which Adorno's appropriation of dialectics differs from Hegel, and from the Marxist tradition of dialectical analysis. Finally, I consider Adorno's project to rethink the role of dialectics in *Negative Dialectics*, and the implications of this project for sociological analysis.

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within the logic of the dialect that Adorno employs, these two terms – objective and subjective – must be thought together. This will be discussed in greater detail later.

The notion of totality (or, in metaphysical terms, the "Absolute") is central to Hegel's thought. For Hegel, what appear to be contradictory, or dichotomous categories, notions, concepts or forms of consciousness are actually moments in the development of a whole[27]. Hegel demonstrates in his *Logic* and elsewhere, that concepts generate their own contradictions immanently and in the sublation (*Aufhebung*) of these contradictions reach a higher level of articulation. This "higher level" constitutes another step in the path of the full articulation of reason[28]. This full articulation, in turn, cannot be adequately thought without going through all the moments of its differentiation from itself. Finally, for Hegel, it is only "the whole" that is "the true," and an understanding of this whole can only be achieved by grasping the process of self-differentiation and contradiction within the particular moments of its becoming. This process can only be understood through a mode of thinking adequate to itself, namely, dialectics.

Adorno, and his generation of Marxist intellectuals, were dependent on dialectical thinking as articulated through both Hegel and Marx[29] in order to distinguish their practice from mainstream social science. For Adorno, as we have seen, unlike in positivism, social phenomena are not reducible to abstract variables, but are always understood as connected to, and developing from, social contradictions. For example, a positivist analysis of economic stratification might attempt to establish whether a statistically significant relationship exists between income as a dependent variable and race, gender and education as independent variables. A dialectical analysis, on the other

[27] The whole that Hegel is concerned with is, of course, the movement of world spirit, or reason. This is not the same 'whole', the idea of social totality that concerns us here.
[28] Or, in Hegel's terms, spirit coming into full self-consciousness.
[29] It could be argued that Adorno incorporates two distinct moments of dialectical method in his work: the Hegelian, idealist version, and the Marxist, materialist one. To untangle theses two moments in Adorno's work would be an ambitious project in and of itself. At the risk of imprecision, I will move back and forth between these two levels in my brief discussion without further differentiation.

hand, would view economic inequality as a manifestation of the underlying contradictions of a class system, and the independent variables mentioned as particular moments within the class system viewed as a whole. In this way, neither the dependent nor the independent variables are meaningful outside of an understanding of the "whole," or totality of class society.

Further, dialectics, does not accept the principle of non-contradiction on which positivism is based (A=A, cannot =not A). Rather, as we have seen, notions, or concepts, generate their own opposites, or contradictions. It is the grasping of opposites in their unity that dialectics attempts. To use the most basic example from Hegel's *Science of Logic,* being cannot be thought without generating its opposite concept "nothing" (Hegel 1989). Hence, being, and nothing are not mutually exclusive, dichotomous concepts, but rather exist in a state of mutual interdependence. The deployment of dialectics on the sociological level allows one to be able to think particular and seemingly contradictory instantiations of social phenomena as well as the social totality together. In addition, it allows us to see the contradiction in the apparent unity, or identity, of a particular concept or idea. Marx's illustrates this principle elegantly in his discussion of the exchange value of labor: in capitalism, the worker both is, and is not, being paid an equivalent wage for her labor power. We can only understanding the contradiction in this form of equivalency by introducing the more inclusive notion of surplus value, which accounts for both equivalency and exploitation.

A similar dialectical movement can be brought in to play in the juxtaposition of seemingly dichotomous thought figures. We have already discussed the importance, for Adorno, of understanding the dialectical relationship between the subject and the object

as well as the general and particular (themes to which we will return). Throughout his work, Adorno repeatedly refers to another binary pair: nature and history. He demonstrates that these terms are not dichotomous, but rather mutually determining, and that each contains its opposite. In addition, each provides the key for demystifying the other. Nature is usually conceived of as that which is beyond human control (or at any rate humans attempt to control, but always reach their limits in terms of their own organic being), while history is thought of as the product of human will and endeavor. In fact, Adorno consistently argues, thus far actual human practice has not been historical in this sense, in that people blindly and unconsciously reproduce the existing social order rather than acting as agents of their own circumstances. This humanly produced social order then comes to assume the status of determining nature. In this way, historically produced concepts, such as “intelligence,” “race,” “gender,” “talent’, come to be seen as “natural”. In addition, the bifurcation of human being and nature needed to even conceptualize a dichotomy is a product of history. “Nature” is a social construct, and the recognition of this ‘truth’ is achieved through a dialectical analysis.

In addition to its ability to encompass the parts in relationship to the whole (including those parts that appear to be contradictory) dialectics, as Marcuse (1989) argues in *Reason and Revolution*, is a natural ally for the critical theorist because of its negative moment. Dialectics, according to Marcuse, begins with the idea that the world is unfree and human beings and nature exist in a state of alienation from one another. Because the world as it is inhibits its own potential for human freedom, it itself is negative. The purpose of critique, then, is to negate this negation, or to deny what denies freedom: “The progress of cognition from common sense to knowledge arrives at a world

which is negative in its very structure because that which is real denies the potentialities inherent in itself…reason is the negation of the negative." (Marcuse 1989: x).

Since dialectical thought operates on a principle of immanent critique, in that it interprets that which is on the basis of that which it is not, it is a negative movement. However, this negative movement, unlike the positivism that reifies the existing world, is positive in that it unleashes the potential for human freedom within a dialectical, negating movement: " negation is a positive act: that-which-is *repels* that which is not and, in so doing, repels its own real possibilities. Consequently, to express and define that - which - is on its own terms is to distort and falsify reality. Reality is other and more than that codified in the language of facts" (Marcuse 1989: ix.).

Marcuse's account of dialectical thought clearly explains its importance in the development of Marx's own thought as well as the Western Marxist tradition. It has already been discussed in terms of Marx's critique of the bourgeois principle of equal exchange. Dialectical thought also reveals the failure of bourgeois society to realize its claim to social equality. Within the Marxist tradition, it is only through the demonstration of internal contradictions at the core of existing reality that qualitative social change can be conceptualized.

Adorno's Negative Dialectics

Some of the elements of the Hegelian/Marxist dialectic that Adorno, as well as other critical theorists of his generation appropriated as a corrective to positive methodology in the social sciences have been pointed out in the previous discussion. Part of Adorno's project, however, was to rethink the aims and assumptions inherent in the Hegelian dialectic, and to reconstruct dialectics as a more radically critical tool than, in

its Hegelian /Marxist derivation, it turned out to be. As he states in the introduction to *Negative Dialectics*

> If Hegel's dialectics constituted the unsuccessful attempt to use philosophical concepts for coping with all that is heterogeneous to those concepts, the relationship to dialectics is due for an accounting insofar as his attempt failed.…The matters of true philosophical interest at this point in history are those in which Hegel, agreeing with tradition, expressed his disinterest. They are non-conceptuality, individuality and particularity …Philosophy's theme would consist of the qualities it downgrades as contingent…A matter of urgency to the concept would be what it fails to cover, what its abstractionist mechanism eliminates, what is not already a case of the concept. (Adorno 1992:8).

Several criticisms of Hegel's dialectics can be drawn from these opening comments to *Negative Dialectics*. The first is Adorno's explicit rejection of what could be termed the "hegemony of the concept." What this means is that although the Hegelian system acknowledged the interrelationship, or continuity between universals and particulars, or concepts and their concrete determination, in the moment of sublation, it is the concept that wins out. This "winning" on the part of the concept demonstrates the Hegelian dialectic's complicity with existing reality. It takes the first step of recognizing non-identity in identity. It doesn't however, realize, that it is the drive towards identity that generates the notion of non-identity: "Contradiction is non-identity under the aspect of identity; the dialectical primacy of the principle of contradiction makes the thought of unity the measure of heterogeneity." (Adorno 1992:8). Contradictions, for Adorno, are actually a product of our drive towards totality – meaning that they are both contingent and possibly historical (assuming that a society, and thought, without such a drive is possible). In Hegel's system, the contradictions are reconciled under a more adequate concept. However, what happens in thought (reconciliation) is false when applied to the real world, where reconciliation, especially the reconciliation between the subject and

society does not exist. In this sense, philosophical reconciliation mirrors the false reconciliation that is presented in ideology, where people are made to believe that their own interests coincide with those of the system, and finally people are produced whose own needs do indeed correspond with the system, but have lost the potential for freedom and self- determination, even as that term is intended in bourgeois political philosophy.

An alternative or "negative" dialectics would differ from the one employed by Hegel. If, as Adorno seems to claim, Hegel's error was that he did not question the history of philosophy's preference for the universal, or conceptual over the particular, then it should be the task of a negative dialectics to maintain the moment of non-identity or contradiction between the general, or universal and the particular, even to the point where the dissonance becomes painful. (This would help explain Adorno's valorization of atonality and dissonance in modern music). We should not allow the particular to be resolved in a greater totality, both because reconciliation would be false in our society, and because in a free society, contradiction would not be conceived as such because we would not labor under the totalizing drive. In other words, in a society beyond domination, the concept, or universal law, would not need to posit itself over and against instances of the individual or particular. A concrete example of what such a state of affairs might look such as can be developed by analyzing the concept of gender: gender as an organizing concept in our society subsumes particular instances of subjectivity under its overarching principle. Our ability to acknowledge the other as a human being is impaired until we are able to determine his/her gender category. We may be forced to develop new gender categories, or make the ones that we have more inclusive in order to successfully effect such a subsumption, however this in no way eliminates the totalizing

drive. In a free society, contradiction, or non-identity with, for example, the concept of gender would not be a philosophical or political problem because identity would not be the goal. The problem, then, with the Marxist\Hegelian tradition, is that it posits a universalizing movement, whether that is world-spirit or a world-historical proletarian subject. In either case, the insistence on identity implicit in both of these universals fails to transcend what Adorno would view as a more fundamental cause of human un-freedom, identity thinking, or in other words 'instrumental reason. Again, as in the discussion of instrumental reason in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno has found a principle of thought underlying exploitative relations of production he explains the relationship between the concept and material instances of un-freedom in the following:

> The barter [exchange] principle, the reduction of human labor to the abstract universal concept of average working hours, is fundamentally akin to the principle of identification. Barter [exchange][30] is the social model of the [exchange] principle, and without the principle there would be no exchange; it is through exchange that non-identical individuals and performances become commensurable and identical. The pressure of the principle imposes on the whole world an obligation to become identical, to become total…. If no man had part of his labor withheld from him any more, rational identity would be a fact, and society would have transcended the identifying mode of thinking. This comes close enough to Hegel. The dividing line from him is…drawn by our intent: whether…we maintain that identity is the ultimate, that it is absolute, that we want to reinforce it-or whether we feel that identity is the universal coercive mechanism which we, too, finally need to free ourselves from universal coercion…" (Adorno 1992:147)

In Adorno's reconstruction, dialectics would be negative in that contradictions would not be reconciled in a higher order concept but rather held in permanent tension. The relevance of the above to praxis oriented towards social change is far from obvious. As praxis philosophy, which was the purported aim of critical theory, we can assume that

[30] From now on I will substitutes exchange for 'barter' as this is a more accurate rendering of the meaning of Adorno's *eintauschen*.

Adorno imagined that the sort of reorientation of consciousness that he proposes could have social consequences. Further discussion of the issue already raised, namely, minus the proletariat[31], or any other collectively mobilized subject, how is social change possible, will remain a topic of inquiry. The critical project, then, would now consist in a phenomenology of what *cannot* be subsumed by the concept in thought - what, in the object, is non-identical with the subject, conceptual thought, and totality. For Adorno, it is the interpretation (what he calls micrology) of social objects, phenomena, or superstructural details that is actually capable of providing us with knowledge about the totality because what is already generalized (e.g. statistical data, aggregates) has been abstracted from its own internal contradictions. These contradictions still appear in the particular, and only they, properly interpreted, can give us knowledge about the general. In addition, to answer a concern that I raised earlier, this sort of analysis does constitute, albeit indirectly, an emmancipatory practice. For Adorno, it is not only the internal contradictions of the whole that are revealed in the detail, but the particular also manifests a moment of resistance to its own subsumption; an implicit attempt at maintaining individuation, which the critical theorist can somehow nurture through recognition: “Dialectic critique seeks to salvage what does not obey totality, what oppresses it or what first forms itself as the potential of a not yet existent individuation.” (Adorno, et.al. 1976:12).

Adorno’s work is rich in such “micrological” analysis. He turns his dialectical eye on diverse physiognomic particulars including marriage, manners, gift giving, fashion, interior decoration and astrology. There is one particular class of objects, however, which

[31] For a discussion of this question see Buck-Morss (1977).

occupies a privileged position in Adorno's analytical framework. The work of art is unique for Adorno because it is that which most explicitly exhibits signs of "not yet existent individuation" (Adorno 1973:12).

Sociology of the Artwork – Not the Audience

Works of art occupy a privileged position in Adorno's framework of social analysis and are able, when properly analyzed, to provide knowledge about society that is unavailable elsewhere. However, "autonomous" or "authentic" works of art, as opposed to products of the culture industry[32], are particularly resistant to a subjectively oriented, empirical analysis of the sort employed in reception research. It is in opposition to this method, which prioritizes the responses and attitudes of audiences over the actual art object, that Adorno posits his own approach to the work of art. And this approach, as we shall repeatedly see, is dependent on the positing of art-works as opposite (though at the same time dialectically connected) to products of the culture industry.

Products of the culture industry are created in order to produce particular effects in audiences (or consumers). Their success is then measured according to their ability to produce these effects. Then, new cultural products are created in order to satisfy the new needs that have been produced (and calculated into the production of) products of the culture industry. This process is circular and no "outside" or critical perspective is possible from within its hermetic movement[33]. As we have seen in an earlier discussion, empirical analysis participates in this circular movement by treating the effects that are

[32] Adorno's notion of the culture industry, or, commercially produced mass culture, which will not be dealt with in great detail here, is fundamental to his analysis works of art – in fact, in modern culture, the two (the culture industry and autonomous art) constitute "torn halves of an integral freedom, to which, however, they do not add up" (in Jameson (ed.) 1980:123)
[33] Most cultural studies theorists (see, for example, the work of Stuart Hall (1996) and the Birmingham School), reject this perspective. The criticisms raised by these theorists in opposition to the wholly negative

created in the consumer as unmediated subjective responses, ready to be treated by the sociologist as "social facts." Individuals are thus falsely reconciled (or read as consciously identical) with an imposed social reality. In such an analysis products of the culture industry *are* however correctly identified as wholly social.

Modern works of art present a particular sort of problem in that, while clearly also social products, they claim to be autonomous from the demands to represent a particular social or ideological world-view. Since the inception of commercial culture as an all-encompassing phenomenon, they also claim independence from the circle of needs stimulation and fulfillment epitomized by the culture industry. Also, until the nineteen-sixties, modern art-works[34] claimed to develop from the inner laws of artistic development itself, rather than laws that are imposed from spheres outside of art. In addition, while products of the culture industry are intended to communicate with audiences, works of art, in contrast, often refuse such communication (Adorno even claims that "[n]o matter what its maker thinks, no work of art is directed towards an observer…no artwork is to be explained in terms of the categories of communication" (Adorno, 1997: 109)).This does not, however, mean that the work of art is an object that exists outside of the social totality. It continues to contain both a subjective and an objective social moment because, as we shall see, the "content" of the work of art, like the subject, is ultimately social in origin. Since, for Adorno, "Art and society converge in the artwork's content [*Gehalt*], not in anything external to it." (Adorno 1997:228) the relation of art to society can be found in the production of the work of art, not in its

appraisal of culture industry reception of the Frankfurt School are discussed in later sections of this dissertation.

reception. Thus, reception theory, for example, by focusing only on subjective response, would leave out the moments of objective social reality in which both the subject and the work of art participate.

However, the social nature of the work of art is so highly mediated through the process of the transformation of the social material into artistic form that (the illusion of) a distance between the work of art and the totality of society is maintained. This distance, which also can be thought of as negativity or autonomy, and which is made possible precisely because art has been severed from social usefulness protects art from becoming simply, such as products of the culture industry, a vehicle of ideology. However, since works of art are nonetheless social, they are carriers of what Adorno calls "truth-content", or, valid knowledge about society. And it is this moment -that which is distanced from and not immediately recognizable by the viewer - that cannot be grasped through reception analysis. A sociology of art that acknowledges art's dual- character – that it is part of the social totality yet makes claims of autonomy – must, according to Adorno, be able both to analyze the conditions and effects of reception *and* grasp that content contained in the object that is not immediately revealed.

The Dual-Character of Modern Art – Its Social Character

Artworks are privileged entities in Adorno's social theory because of their dual-character. Let us explore this notion of the "dual-character" of art in more detail. On the one hand, works of art are social artifacts, and participate in the "bad totality". In this capacity, they are affirmative in that they help to legitimate and reproduce reified social

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[34] An important exception to this tendency is what Peter Berger calls "the historical avant-garde."(Berger, 1984). As I will discuss in a later section, these movements, such as Dada, Surrealism and Russian constructivism sought to criticize bourgeois art's separation from everyday life.

structures, through, for example, as noted by Bourdieu, creating "distinctions" in taste between classes. On the other hand, works of art, because they claim for themselves a moment of autonomy, at the same time point outside of the totality, towards the possibility of a different society. The latter moment is also social, but refers to social potential rather than empirical reality. In this sense, works of art are truly dialectical puzzles (and hence should require a dialectical form of analysis) in that they "confront society autonomously" but are themselves social, and are thus "caught up in heteronomous reality" (Adorno, in Arato and Gephardt (ed.) 1994:xi). This explains, for example, how it is that works of art can at one and the same time oppose their own transformation into exchange value, while also being offered up as commodities on the marketplace. This, according to Adorno, is not symptomatic of their failure, but rather "the simple consequence of their participation in the relations of production." (Adorno 1984:236). Finally, works of art containing this dual-character became possible with the advent of modern capitalism (the development of the market as a sphere independent from the commitments of tradition and the church) and its attendant forms of subjectivity and promise of individual autonomy.

The notion of "dual-character" has another, related meaning for Adorno. Works of art participate in the universal, or objective – that is, they are objective entities much like social institutions or Durkheim's "social facts." At the same time, however, they are subjective and expressive since they come in to being through the forming activity of artists. They are also particular in the sense both of uniqueness and also in terms of the Kantian formulation (that they cannot be subsumed under a concept) (Kant 1987). Again,

however, from a dialectical perspective, these seemingly dichotomous pairs (subjective\objective, universal\particular) are interdependent:

> Expression, objectivated in the work, and objective in itself enters as a subjective impulse; form, if it is not to have a mechanical relationship to what is formed, must be produced subjectively according to the demands of the object. What confronts artists with the kind of objective impenetrability with which their material so often confronts them, an impenetrability analogous to the construction of the given in epistemology, is at the same time sedimented subject; it is expression, that which appears most subjective, but which is also objective, in that it is what the artwork exhausts itself on and what it incorporates. (Adorno 1997:166).

Adorno's dialectical reading confounds the attempt to interpret the term "dual-character" since in both cases – the distinction between subjectivity and objectivity as well as that between autonomous and socially created – the integrity of the opposing categories falls apart. However, what is important about the thought figure "dual-character" is that works of art *appear* as such in our society. That subjectivity and objectivity, as well as autonomy and sociality appear as opposing or irreconcilable moments provides us with important information about our socio-hisotrical context.

This notion of the dual-character of artworks is particularly useful for analyzing works of modernism and the avant-garde, as it allows for an understanding of their ideological and commercial uses and functions while leaving in tact much of this work's consciousness of itself as oppositionally or negatively related to society. Eventually, we will want to ask whether dual-character is a useful category for understanding contemporary art. First, however, a better understanding of how art achieves its dual-character, and how this dual-character appears in individual works of art is needed.

How Dual Character is Achieved – Through Form and Content

Artworks derive from the world of things in their preformed material as in their technique. There is nothing in them that doesn't belong to this world. (Adorno 1997:134).

Works of art gain their dual character through the relationship between their content, which is derived from (or is "the sedimentation of") socio-historical relations and contradictions, and their "inner order" (*Formgesetze*). We must take a close look at both of these categories.

The content *(Gehalt*) of the work of art is for Adorno always social. But what is meant by content? Certainly, he is not referring to explicitly narrative material, as this would render abstract art a-social, when in fact, it is this form of art - developed in response to the invention of photography and the rise of commercial culture- in which, for Adorno, social content is most likely to be found. Content can, instead, be taken to include subject- matter, material (this includes or is at least related to, forces of production that exist in a given society), and formal techniques of construction. Each of these are not only social in origin, but also converge with extra-aesthetic social forces. The social origin of subject-matter is usually clear, although it becomes less transparent with abstraction[35]. The material, the "stuff ' or matter with which the artwork is fashioned, is social in that it is the product of the material development of the society at large. Though

[35] If we take subject matter to mean the object that is being represented in the work of art, then we have limited our definition of subject matter so that the term is only applicable with reference to representational art. What is meant by subject matter can perhaps be better thought of as 'theme'. This could include both the items assembled for representation in a still life by Chardin, but also the crisis of faith in subject-centered reason and the unity of the subject in general represented in cubism. As Adorno's discussion of Schoenberg in *Philosophy of Modern Music* demonstrates, subject-matter can include the imminent annihilation of the individual in late capitalist society.

some developments owe their origin specifically to needs that have arisen in the aesthetic sphere (the transition from wood supports in painting to stretched canvass), these advances are not possible without the availability of technology (always a social product). We can see, particularly in our own time, how technological developments, particularly those that are industrially\commercially based, have completely altered not only the perceptual capabilities of audiences, but also the social conception of art. In addition, the social relations of production are an integral part of the material aspect of the work of art, if for no other reason than that the separation of intellectual and physical labor on which our culture rests is the necessary condition for our conception of "art". Again, shifts in the division of labor, as well as the structure of capitalism itself change the nature and conception of the work of art. It has often been argued, for example, that the importance of the individual author\private genius is tied to the emergence of liberal capitalism when individual entrepreneurial enterprises and the attendant ideologies of individualism formed the basis of the development of capital. In our own time we find the predominance of an institutional, multinational capitalism that isolates global economic power in fewer and fewer hands and abstracts the investment of individuals from particular ventures or businesses to money markets and other funds. To continue this reading, we could attribute the decreased emphasis on originality and private innovation in the art world, as well as intellectual discourses that speak of "the death of the author" to the tightening grip of abstract corporate power, that is, to the social organization of economic life.

The social nature of techniques of construction, or form, is perhaps a bit less clear. The romantic notion of artist as genius\creator has the lone artist, in her studio, assembling the various elements mentioned above, in such a fashion that they express the inner-feelings, or subjective states of the artist. If the artist is truly a genius, this expression will correspond with a larger *Zeitgeist*. A more recent, formalist version of this story has the same lone artist struggling to resolve formal problems inherent in the language of the particular medium itself. Both of these formulations, for Adorno, are accurate. What they both miss, however, is that the nature of the problems of construction and compositional possibilities that present themselves to the artist are themselves social in the broadest sense. Here, Adorno illustrates this point with reference to music:

> The demands made upon the subject by the musical material are conditioned much more by the fact that that the "material" itself is a crystallization of the creative impulse, an element socially predetermined through the consciousness of man. As a previous subjectivity – now forgetful of itself – such an objectified impulse of the material has its own kinetic laws. That which seems to be the mere self-locomotion of the material is of the same origin as is the social process, by whose traces it is continually permeated. This energy pursues its course in the same sense as does actual society, even when society and energy have become totally unaware of each other and have come into conflict with each other. (Adorno 1973:33).

In a similar reading, the development of one point-perspective, for example, can be seen as an attempt to wrestle pictorially with the emergence of the subject as the center of knowledge and truth rather than being simply the solution to the representational problem created by three dimensional space and a two dimensional surface. The emergence of

cubism, similarly, may be the result of a crisis of faith regarding subject centered knowledge and the possibility of representing reality from such a perspective.

Furthermore, the obscure and highly mediated form of modern music, Adorno argues (in a move similar, as we shall later see, to the one made by Greenberg in “Avant Garde and Kitsch” (1965)) is necessitated by the increased permeation of commercial industry into the realm of art: in order for art to maintain its position as a separate sphere, it had to increasingly distinguish itself from the products of the culture industry. And, thought this new music may appear to be increasingly incomprehensible to the public, in fact “the dissonances which horrify them attest to their own conditions; for that reason alone do they find them unbearable.” (Adorno 1973: 9). The fact that the music he is referring to, in its “deepest currents” is dissonant and atonal and does not affect harmonic reconciliation in the classical sense, “proceeds…from exactly those sociological and anthropological foundations peculiar to that public.” (Adorno 1973: 9). The tonal system, in fact is a product of a mercantile society “whose own dynamics stress totality and demand that the elements of tonality corresponds to these dynamics on the most basic functional level.” (Adorno 1973:11) As we have seen, for Adorno, in modern society totality is reinforced artificially through products of the culture industry, which present harmony and reconciliation as though they already exist. In fact (objectively) modern capitalist society does violence to its subjects. It is a reified, fetishized structure that exists outside of authentic human needs and potential, but yet attempts to force an identity between individual subjects and itself. Modern music, then, takes up this contradiction as a formal problem, and rather than affecting a reconciliation in the tonal

structure, actually leaves unresolved, albeit in a highly mediated fashion, the actual conflict that exists between the objective social structure and the particular elements. In this sense, as we shall later discuss in more detail – such modern music is more true to the actual state of society than the most transparent or accessible Hollywood film.

Sociality and Autonomy Together Constitute Art's Dual Character

Besides the social nature of both that which is formed (content = *Inhalt*) and the process of formal articulation (which is also part of content = *Gehalt*), the dual-character of modern art in particular is marked by its moment of autonomy. The social origin of art's autonomy, as noted by Max Weber (1958) can be traced to the separation of cultural spheres characteristic of modernity, in which social institutions such as law, the economy, science, sexuality and even the subject itself, rather than remaining bound to the fetters of tradition and the church, are set free and begin to develop according their own, immanent rationality. The independent forms these institutions take, however, seen through Adorno's notion of totality, are always permeated by the same laws of exchange and instrumental rationality, though these may manifest differently in different institutions. In this sense, their independence is always in part illusory. On the other hand, the impulse towards autonomy, or separation of spheres has emancipatory implications. This is particularly salient with reference to bourgeois subjectivity, which, while mirroring the instrumental demands of the market in its abstract, universal moment, as part of its move towards autonomy demands for itself freedom from tradition and the coercion of the collective. The 'formed' character of the work of art, it must be remembered, is the trace left on the work by the social subject who forms the objective artistic material and thus leaves its imprint in the content. Hence, the autonomy

associated with modern art – that it follows its own formal laws and is no longer directly beholden to the interests of power – is related to the bourgeois consciousness of freedom that accompanied the emancipation of the subject. Of course, the power of kings and the church is replaced by the coercive mechanism of the market place. However, as in accounts of bourgeois individualism, this power is abstract, and its mark on the artwork is less crassly visible, thereby leaving room also for the articulation of individual freedom. We see then, that although this autonomy is also social in origin, it accounts for the appearance of art as increasingly disconnected from society when in fact what is occurring is simply that modern art's social content is more mediated than art of previous eras. Also, part of modern art's social content is related to the claims of freedom and autonomy made by the bourgeois subject, and these claims appear in the artwork as the liberation of formal articulation and individual expression.

The above suggests the possibility of a sociological analysis that begins with the art object rather than with the social subject. This analysis is based on the assumption that the form that art takes, not just its subject matter, has social meaning. And furthermore, the meaning that can be read from formal articulation, while it may be highly mediated, in fact provides more knowledge about the totality than purely subjective knowledge gleaned by the self- reporting of subjects. This is not to say that the "purpose" of the work of art is to provide the social scientist with objective knowledge about society, or that the social position of works of art is exhausted by the decoding of the information contained in them. But before we move on to the other function that Adorno attributes to the work of art - their oppositional and emancipatory qualities and

what that means in particular today -this notion of "objective knowledge," or truth content must be explored in more detail.

Truth content, Social Knowledge and Autonomy

Kafka, in whose work monopoly capitalism appears only distantly, codifies in the dregs of the administered world what becomes of people under the total social spell more faithfully and powerfully than do any novels about corrupt industrial trusts. (Adorno 1984: 230)

According to Adorno, works of art contain a certain kind of knowledge or truth content because of their autonomy or distance from the social totality although this autonomy does not mean that works of art exist outside of the social relations that permeate all spheres of social existence. And, the content of the work of art is derived from social and material existence. But something unique happens in the rearrangement, or forming (*Formgesetz*) of the elements of social existence in the work of art that explains both the resulting truth content and the work of art's potential for social critique.

Adorno develops his account of the knowledge-yielding capacity of art through the use of Hegelian categories. For Hegel, the history of human historical and cultural development can be recast as the path that spirit takes toward self-consciousness (Hegel 1972). It accomplishes this through the act of positing itself as other from itself, and then recognizing its identity with these sundered forms of existence. According to Hegel these forms, in order of historical appearance, include art, religion and philosophy. Art, because of its sensual nature, presents spirit to itself in a material, pre-conceptual form. The forms of art, then, reveal what it is possible for spirit to know of itself, but only through the highly mediated form of sensual illusion. For Hegel, the illusory, non-conceptual nature of art is ultimately inadequate to the task of spirit's full self-revelation and must be superseded first by religion, and then by philosophy. While Adorno does not

posit the eventual supersession of art as the appropriate form for the revelation of truth, he gains much from the notion that in art the truth of human being's social existence (what Hegel would call absolute spirit) is objectified, or given sensual form.

This notion can be translated into a materialist language by way of Marx: For Hegel, spirit posits art as a sundered form of its own existence. In *The German Ideology*, Marx explains that human beings come to recognize themselves as conscious beings and therefore different from animals through the production of their means of subsistence (Marx and Engels 1965). For Adorno, and for our purposes here, human beings, or society in a more general sense, produces works of art, and objectifies itself in them and comes to know itself through them - can see itself reflected back in them. Since the content of the work of art is itself, in Hegel's terminology, a form of absolute spirit, in Adorno's term social content, it is this content that appears reflected back. From the appearance of the artwork, if it is "true" to its content, existing social conditions can be identified. However, because of the *Formgesetze*, or inner order of the artwork, this content appears in a highly mediated form. It is this degree of mediation, or distance from empirical reality, and in particular the reach of the culture industry, that allows these contradictions to appear. The artwork, finally, is able to reveal a particular kind of truth about society because of three moments: 1) its content is objectified social material, and this appears in the sensuous form of the artwork 2) order is imposed on this content through the mediation of the subject. This subject is already a category of society, and hence imposes the logic of domination and instrumental reason on the material. But the bourgeois subject also makes claims to freedom and particularity. These claims also leave their stamp on the material, and distinguish artworks from products of the culture

industry, which accomplish the former, but not the latter moment of this process 3) the content is organized through an inner order that distances itself from the viewer, but also creates the illusion of affirmation and unity. This affirmative quality of the work of art, though it is the appearance of false-consciousness, is nonetheless true in that true consciousness does not exist:

> …Correct consciousness has not existed to this day, and no consciousness has the lofty vantage-point from which this separation [true from false consciousness] would be self-evident. The complete presentation of false consciousness is what names it and is itself truth content. (Adorno 1997:130).

Unfortunately, with the above quote Adorno does sufficiently explain why false-consciousness is true when it appears in the work of art but it is false when it appears, for example, in a toothpaste commercial. The point may be that in the work of art, this truth is negative, historical and dialectical. What is appearing, a kind of social essence, contains not only the present, repressive ideological state of society, but also the fact that this state is false in terms of true reconciliation with human potential (the appearance of reconciliation in art is the booby prize for the actual un-reconcilability of social reality), and also contingent, in that social essence could be organized otherwise. Thus art has the moments of objectivity, subjectivity, truth and finally, critique.

A criterion for aesthetic judgment can be constructed From Adorno's notion of truth-content. This criterion is universal, in that all works of art of quality must contain truth content ("there is no artwork whose consciousness is true that does not prove itself in terms of aesthetic quality" (Adorno 1997:349)). It is, however, historical, in that the content of truth is dependent on its particular sociohistoric context. This means that what counts as an artwork containing truth-content in one time period can be compromised by

the context in which the same object is placed in another. "Once artworks are entombed in the pantheon of cultural commodities [notes Adorno] they themselves – their truth content – are also damaged" (Adorno 1997: 232). A theme from Tchaikovsky, for example, adapted for a Hollywood film score, does not have the same status vis-à-vis truth content as a performance in the appropriate time period. This question of historical accuracy also explains why, for Adorno, the current practice of "sampling" or appropriating styles from past works for contemporary art-works is aesthetically and philosophically unacceptable, a theme which will be discussed in more depth later.

This notion of truth is historically contingent: content has progressivist connotations in terms of the historical trajectory of art's formal development. Much of Adorno's aesthetic theory can be read to imply both that, because of the increasing autonomy of bourgeois art, art's capacity to express truth content increases with modernity, and that the possibility of releasing this ability depends on progressive formal development – it depends – that is, on constant innovation of style and technique. First, it must be remembered that modern art is unique in its ability to express social contradictions in terms of form because it is not limited by explicitly ideological representational requirements. Modern art is also unique because it is grounded in modern notions of subjectivity, which, on the one hand represents the total grip of instrumental reason on all spheres of society, also contains a claim, or movement towards individual freedom not yet available in earlier periods[36]. As Adorno illustrates in his discussion of Stravinsky's "Sacre de Printempt" in *Philosophy of Modern Music*, works

[36] Perhaps this is best illustrated by the following quote: "…in real history it is not only repression that grows, but also the potential for freedom which is unanimous with the truth content of art." (Adorno 1997:190).

of art that revert to archaic artistic forms (in this case rhythmic), as opposed to working with the most advanced formal language, are regressive in that they imply a yearning for a form of society that did not offer even the promise of individuation. Hence, only art that is most advanced in its formal elaboration contains truth content. Adorno, in fact, makes this claim explicit:

> Truth content becomes historical by way of objectification of correct consciousness in the work…Ever since freedom emerged as a potential, correct consciousness has meant the most progressive consciousness of antagonisms on the horizon of their possible reconciliation. The criterion of the most progressive consciousness is at the level of productive forces in the work…(Adorno 1997:191).

The implications of this line of reasoning have led Adorno to be associated, in our time, with the more conservative tendencies of modernism. Also, the criterion of formal progress has an anachronistic ring to it in an age that questions all notions of linear progress. This becomes salient in an art world where borrowing and recombining forms from various periods of art history as well as the unabashed privileging of narrative and political content have become the dominant forms of artistic production. An analysis of contemporary art that wishes to hold on to Adorno's notion of truth content would have difficulty incorporating the following:

> Social struggle and relation of classes are imprinted in the structure of artworks. By contrast, the political positions deliberately adopted by artworks are epiphenomena and usually impinge on the elaboration of works and thus, ultimately, on their social truth content. (Adorno 1997:232).

Using the measuring rod implied by the above, most works of art today would not count as appropriate bearers of truth content, or as we shall later see, of emancipatory potential. Thus, we would have to conclude that ours is period in which either: 1) works of art are no longer able to provide the social function, and hence cannot be said to posses the dual-

character, that they once had or 2) the socio\historical moment that allowed for the possibility of truth, critique, and potential freedom, at least as expressed in works of art, is past. In this reading, our society is, in Adornian terms, “completely administered” and art no longer has a dual character because contradictions no longer exists that could even create the illusion of an “outside.” Art has been reduced to the status of affirmative decoration, or, entertainment. Or, finally, 3) Adorno’s criteria must be re-evaluated in light of changing social and cultural circumstances. They must be revised and expanded in order to provide for a reading of contemporary art that maintains some of Adorno’s categories, while calling others into question, or at least placing them within a historical a historical perspective which recognizes that as cultural forms change, so must analytical categories. Each of these possibilities will be considered in following chapters, and it will be through the in-depth scrutiny of more recent works of art and their social meaning that Adorno’s categories will be re-evaluated.

Before moving on, I next consider what, for Adorno, the work of art is potentially able to accomplish in terms of a category crucial to our cultural understanding of art’s function since at least romanticism: the notion of art’s utopian implications, or, its “Promesse de Bonheur”.

And Promess de Bonheur – Through Mimesis Reconciliation, Negativity

Art’s relationship to the promise of the good life has been thought of in a variety of ways: one can speak of art’s sensuous qualities, and its capacity to produce an almost physical pleasure (as Clement Greenberg (1986) puts it “the feeling of dancing six inches off the ground”). The beautiful has also at times been seen as the sensual appearance of the good. Art has been psychologized, and the creative experienced has been likened to

"jouissance," or the oceanic feeling first experienced by the infant at one with the body of the mother (Kristeva 1984). Modern art, as in the case of the Russian Avant-Garde, has been associated with the political avant-garde, and, as such, heralds the coming of a new society, and builds the foundations for an emancipated humanity. Adorno's dual-character construction also points to such an emancipatory moment in art. One side, or moment of art is its affirmative, ideological nature. This is the aspect of art that is firmly lodged in an exchange economy, and serves to legitimate class distinctions and domination. It is also the element of art that serves one version of the "promesse de bonheur" ideology: that it acts as a palliative, coaxing the audience into the illusion that unadulterated pleasure is possible, and that all is right with the world (think of Matisse's famous maxim, that he wanted his art to be such as a comfortable armchair for the tired businessman after work). The other side, or character, of art is that it is able to reveal truth, that it possesses a truth content, and that this truth content is necessarily critical. One aspect of this truth content is negative, in that antagonisms, or un-truths about society are revealed through forming of the artistic material. Think, for example about the refusal of atonality to provide the listener with reassurance that all will be reconciled, cubism's insistence on the unstable nature of subjective perception, Joyce's rejection of narrative structure and reconciliation, etc. This truth-content, however, as long as the possibility of a better society is latent in the actually exiting one (and this will become problematic for Adorno), has a potentially positive aspect, even if presented as negation. This utopian moment, for Adorno, is expressed once again through the relationship between existing reality, and the mediation of form.

For Adorno artistic material and the form given to it are social. And this sociality has been discussed in terms of its material, historical and institutional nature. But artistic content is also social in that it has a relationship to the development of reason discussed in an earlier section. To briefly recapitulate: Reason, a capability of human consciousness, took the form of instrumental reason through a historical process that begins with the necessity of gaining control over the threatening forces of nature. The latter is achieved by positing a dichotomy between human beings and nature, and treating nature as an object. As we saw with Odysseus in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the subject eventually learns to treat even itself, as well as other subjects as objects of domination and control. Finally, in capitalism, the very processes of instrumental rationality originally developed to allow human beings a measure of self-determination vis-à-vis nature are seen as a natural force, over and above the individual. In capitalism, instrumental reason is treated as a necessary and inevitable force, even as it acts against the interests of human self-development. Rationality, then, in the form of instrumental reason, has turned into irrationality. For Adorno, the work of art suggests a redemption of rationality, and a relationship to nature and the subject outside the logic of instrumental reason: "A liberated society would be beyond the irrationality of its faux frais and beyond means end rationality of utility. This is enciphered in art and is the source of art's social expressiveness." (Adorno 1997:227)

Works of art, then, for Adorno, are not the repository of the irrational, containing the untamed drives and desires repressed by civilization. In order to redeem reason, they must also proceed from reason, or rationality, but must leave open the possibility of a non-instrumental reason – one that first is not primarily harnessed in the service of self

preservation (and this is where the universal, oceanic element of aesthetic experience becomes operative) – and secondly one that does not take as its primary modus operandi the subjection of nature (in this case artistic material). This redemption of reason is achieved in several ways. First, Adorno does not conceive of the artist as the singular creator, forming the material to express her innermost feelings or talents. The material is socially, but not subjectively determined, and, as discussed, the authentic work of art follows an immanent logic of formal development. The artist, then is more of a midwife to the delivery of the work of art than its sole creator. This relationship of the artist to her material is one that involves logic, but it is a dialectical logic that recognizes the mutual social constitution of the artist-subject and the artistic material, and hence suggests a different sort of relationship between external existence and human manipulation. It also, for Adorno, gives the lie to the apparent inevitability of actually existing relationships of domination, in that it demonstrates the possibility that categories that human beings have used in order to dominate, could actually be conceived differently:

> Through the domination of the dominating, art revises the domination of nature to the core. In contrast to the semblance of inevitability that characterizes these forms in empirical reality, art's control over them and over their relation to materials makes their arbitrariness in the empirical world evident. As a musical composition compresses time, and as a painting folds spaces into one another, so the possibility is concretized that the world could be other than it is. Space, time and causality are maintained. Their power is not denied, but they are divested of their compulsiveness. (Adorno 1997:138).

The above also helps to explain an issue that will be explored in greater detail in a later chapter: Adorno's consummate rejection of artworks that make political or utopian claims directly, that is, un-mediated through formal development. In good modernist

tradition, Adorno insists that art remain free from illustrational demands. Art should not be 'used' to make a political point, because in doing so, artistic material would be instrumentalized, rather than developing according to its own logic. (" If artworks tried directly to register an objection to the gapless world they would become completely entangled" (Adorno 1997:130). In political art, art is rendered useful to a demand outside itself. If allowed to exist in another relationship to human manipulation, it is actually able to express the idea of a radically transformed society.

There is also another, materialist moment in Adorno's account of art's utopian character. Let us turn briefly to Marx's important formulation regarding the relationship between the forces and the relations of production. In a well known passage from his "Preface to the Critique of Political Economy", Marx and Engels write that

> [i]n the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces….At a certain stage of their development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production….From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters." (Marx 1904: 12)

One possible reading of this passage is that the possibility of a different kind of social relation lies dormant in the most advanced productive forces. Adorno draws on Marx's account of the potentially liberatory impulse latent in forces of production in the following: "There are historical moments in which forces of production emancipated in art represent a real emancipation that is impeded by the relations of production" (Adorno 1997:33). For Adorno, as for Marx, these forces of production are just as social as social relations of production, in that they are the products of human material practice and

consciousness. In fact, Adorno claims that the force embedded in the technological process is actually the subject itself "congealed as technology" (Adorno 1997:42). It is this subject, or the possibility of this subject as self-determining, that is fettered by existing social relations. Because of art's autonomy and its purposelessness, it is able to encompass the most advanced productive forces "without necessarily being bound by the censorship dictated by the relations of production'. (Adorno 1997: 43). In other words, works of art can hint at what the advanced forces of production (and hence the potential of subjective determination) might represent for human beings were they "no longer distorted by profit, exchange, and the false needs of a degraded humanity." (Adorno1997:227).

The above also explains why, for Adorno, it is only the most advanced aesthetic forces of production that have an emancipatory implication. Unfortunately, he does not clearly and consistently articulate what he means by forces of production in the aesthetic sense, and, depending on how we choose to understand this formulation, we face differing problems. If aesthetic forces of production follow the material ones that Marx had in mind, we can take them to mean something such as technological developments as well as developments in the division of labor. In this case, Adorno should privilege, for example, photography over painting, electronic over acoustic music and film over theater. Using this definition one would have a clear evaluative framework for contemporary art: the work of Naim June Paik, for example, would be of greater aesthetic value than that of Robert Ryman. One suspects, however, given the artists generally chosen by Adorno as examples, that while technology certainly counts as an element of the forces of

production, consciousness, as in consciousness of autonomous formal development must also be seen as a component of aesthetic productive forces. This, however, is difficult to reconcile with the former notion of productive forces, as new technologies can pose formal and expressive problems not available to other older artistic materials (and vice-versa). Hence, it becomes difficult to untangle these two levels of progress. Equally difficult (and this is a complaint that Adorno lodged against Benjamin's optimistic prognoses for mass communications technologies) is the level of aesthetic autonomy possible for technologies that have been developed precisely by industry, for commercial use. These are questions we will explore in more detail in a later chapter.

Form, Content, Opacity of Works Today

Adorno's exemplars of relevant and important art are almost always chosen from the canon of high modernism. The artists that Adorno points to most frequently include Schoenberg, Kafka, Beckett, Klee and Picasso, to name a few (and Adorno tends to restrict himself to just a chosen few). Though the work of these artists sometimes spans the time period from before the First World War until after the second, none can be said to have come of age "post-Auschwitz." The First World War already announced the triumph of the irrational, or, the turning of instrumental reason wholly against humanity. However, it was the holocaust and the grip of fascism that signaled for Adorno the beginning of a new epoch in the "totalization" and irrationality of western societies. In post–Holocaust society, for Adorno, any intimation that a space of freedom in which a non-alienated subjectivity and particularity could develop is simply an illusion. Art in

this society must " free….[itself] from the illusion of a subjectivity that bestows meaning." (Adorno 1997:31)

It can do this through the use of techniques such as montage, for example, that creates a sense of distance and juxtapose images that are not resolved in a unity of form. Such techniques, then, are more "authentic" than those that privilege the voice or the touch of the individual artist:

> Art wants to admit its powerlessness vis-à-vis late capitalist totality and to initiate its abrogation. Montage is the inner aesthetic capitulation of art to what stands heterogeneously opposed to it. The negation of synthesis becomes a principle of form. (Adorno 1997:155).

In a post-Holocaust world, the utopian impulse can only be expressed negatively, and communication must be renounced, as communication itself has been shown to be another potential ally in domination. That language, and representation of all kinds (especially mass media) were so effectively harnessed by fascism (as well as by industry in the West), means that truth can only be guarded in that which denies communication – meaning, for Adorno, the most esoteric and hermetic works of art:

> The acute reason for the social inefficacy of artworks – those that do not surrender to crude propaganda – is that in order to resist the all powerful system of communication they must rid themselves of any communicative means that would perhaps make them accessible to the public. Artworks exercise a practical effect – not by haranguing but by the scarcely apprehensible transformation of consciousness. (Adorno 1997:243)

Along with an authentic art's refusal of communication and unity, it must also renounce the pursuit of beauty. Beauty in art not only provides an escape from the ugliness of everyday reality, making it more bearable and thus perpetuating it, but it also

serves a repressive function: it sublimates that which a society bent on a repressive relationship between human beings and nature must disavow: sexuality, violence, and death. In this sense, beauty performs the work of the domination of the concept, in that it subsumes the non-identical – the ugly or abject into itself. Contemporary artwork, though it cannot deny the horror of contemporary society, nor, as Adorno explicitly states over and over again, can it provide a 'picture' of a better society, can still rescue the particular through refusing to subsume the ugly. Paradoxically, though Adorno's historical trajectory seems to be one of a negative teleology, as the situation of society becomes more desperate, art's ability to tell the truth about this society increases. Classical art maintained the categories of unity, beauty, harmony and style, but this does not mean that those categories were identical with classical society ("If today nothing is harmonious, this is because harmony was false form the beginning" (Adorno 1997:158)). Rather, it suggests that art had yet to achieve the moment of autonomy and critical distance possible with modernism. Art, for Adorno, as a form of collective consciousness, *is* able to reflect upon the failure of these categories to actually be accurate to society.

How, then can we evaluate contemporary art, in light of Adorno's theory? This will be a guiding question throughout this study, but a few problems have already been raised in the last part of our discussion. As Terry Eagleton has pointed out (1990), *Adorno's* historical location (a Jew surviving the Holocaust) has profoundly influenced his sense of historical catastrophe and his view of society as a descent into barbarism. From his vantage-point, the argument could indeed be made that art-works must be negative to be true. More than half a century later, brutality, genocide and terror still

characterize many political regimes. More subtle forms of domination and repression (in part deployed by the culture industry) exist in all other societies. Arguably, however, the horrors that characterized the holocaust and widespread fascism have actually not been perpetuated, at least on such a large scale, in our own time. Under such circumstances, Adorno's insistence on authentic art's rejection of the sensually pleasurable, in favor of a mimetic relationship to alienation and suffering, seems *too* dramatic. Alienation certainly still exists, but the historical consciousness of death, terror and pain that must have followed Adorno throughout his post -Holocaust life, does not play the same kind of role in our historical consciousness today. Likewise, Adorno's closeness to fascism, coupled with his Eurocentric myopia, led him to a knee-jerk application of this diagnosis to forms of cultural expression with which he in fact had little familiarity (e.g. Jazz and blues). In order to understand the art forms of in a multi-cultural society such as the U.S., Adorno's instinctive rejection of popular and folk art forms, as well forms that have been imported from non-western cultures must be rethought.

On the other hand, Adorno's skepticism concerning the possibility of non-coercive communication in our media dominated society is well worth considering. When slogans originating in social protest can almost immediately be appropriated by advertising, and the techniques of visual reproduction and manipulation actually have the power to (for example) coerce millions of young women to starve themselves to death, one wonders if art works that try to speak can even be distinguished from the constant bombardment of industrial communication that we experience. What can communication mean in a society in which instrumental communication is constant? However, the silent

protest through meaninglessness that is all that Adorno still leaves to art has been deemed inadequate by generations of post-war artists. And, as we will discuss in a later chapter, this dissatisfaction is registered in art's return to narrative forms and explicit, representation content. Were we to take Adorno's advice and reject these works of art out of hand, we may miss the opportunity to gain from them important social information.

Toward a Critical Reconstruction

The previous discussion regarding the role of truth and utopia in Adorno's aesthetic theory poses several questions. Albrecht Wellmer grapples with these in his essay "Truth, Semblance and Reconciliation: Adorno's Aesthetic Redemption of Modernity" (Wellmer 1991). It is worth looking more closely at the essay both for the antinomies in Adorno that Wellmer brings to the fore, and for his cogent commentary of one of the most effective critic of Adorno's social theory and criticism - Jurgen Habermas (Habermas 1987). Wellmer points first to two antinomies that Adorno sets up in his claim that art both has truth, and emmancipatory content. To resolve these antinomies, claims Wellmer, we must, following Habermas, reject Adorno's narrow understanding of discursive reason and its role in human development as articulated in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

According to Wellmer, Adorno sets up an antithesis between artistic beauty and instrumental reason. In *Negative Dialectic* Adorno explains how instrumental reason permeates all forms of thought, including philosophy, through the tyranny of the concept, which subsumes all particulars into Concepts, or universals. The structure of the artwork, on the other hand, presents an artistic synthesis in which all individual moments

are fully articulated, while at the same time acting together as a totality to produce a semblance of reconciliation. This is how aesthetic unity and a model of a different mode of cognition is achieved, and the unreconciled reality is negated. On the other hand, as we have seen, for Adorno, authentic artworks also contain truth, and this truth, according to Wellmer, contains two moments: that of aesthetic rightness or validity (that the work of art coheres as a unity of particulars) and representational truth (that reality is made manifest). The fulfillment of these two moments of truth, then, sets up an impossible task for the work of art. Wellmer quotes Adorno

> Art is true to the extent that it is discordant and antagonistic in its language and in its whole essence, provided that it synthesizes those diremptions, thus making them determinate in their irreconcilability. Its paradoxical task is to attest to the lack of concord while at the same time working to abolish discordance (in Wellmer 1991:9).

In addition, art is doomed to in its efforts to carry out this task, because, as we have seen, being a moment in the social totality, it is at the same permeated by instrumental reason and reification. Hence, to point outside of society, it must also point outside of itself, and thus renounce meaning and tend toward disintegration. It must "both produce and negate meaning". If art is aesthetically successful, then, its negative moment has been subsumed, and it is thus untrue in the sense of manifesting reality.

This antinomy, for Wellmer, stems from Adorno's notion of utopian, which he posits as the other of instrumental reason, and, in so doing, sets up "such an immeasurable gap between historical reality and the condition of reconciliation that the task of bridging it can not longer constitute a meaningful goal of human praxis: (Wellmer

199:12.). This "theological" or "utopian-messianic" perspective is, according to Wellmer, what really renders art incapable of moving outside of the circle created by the requirement to fulfill both kinds of truth claims. The circle, according to Wellmer, can be broken by via Habermas by reconceptualizing Adorno's critique of instrumental reason through the potential of rational communicative discourse inherent in language, and thus admitting that discursive reason, as we know it, already contains an emancipatory potential, and can be made manifest through the work of art. According to Habermas (Habermas, 1984), language, the medium of all human thought and praxis, contains *both* the intersubjectivity and mutual understanding achieved through communication, *and* the ability to objectify reality for instrumental purposes. Adorno, according to Habermas, actually buys in to the subject centered reason that he condemns by not acknowledging this first, intersubjective moment of reason. Any utopian-communicative action (what he calls mimesis – "those forms of behavior which are sensually receptive, expressive, and communicative" (Wellmer 1991:4) for Adorno must then take place outside of conceptual thought. It is in the work of art that mimesis and rationality come together but only as a negation of historical reality. If he were, like Habermas to have seen elements of mimesis as always already embedded in language, he would have recognized that those moments could potentially be liberated in a historical reality, through historical processes already in place.

Notwithstanding the contestability of Habermas's theory, Wellmer's argument offers some interesting prospects for a reconstruction of Adorno's aesthetic theory. We have seen already that following it too closely leads us to the unpleasant conclusion that a

better society, along with a role for art in the articulation of such as society, is, if not impossible, at least so far away that thematizing it must take on messianic/ utopian colors. If what we want to do is acknowledge art's complicity in the reproduction of a society that is far from utopian, while at the same time demonstrating that critical insight and expression is still possible, we must account for the real possibility of a better society. Habermas's optimism regarding the utopia inherent in communication per se is not the subject of this chapter, but it does direct us to one of perhaps several possible exit points from Adorno's negative circle.

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A reconstructed critical sociology of art would, on the positive side, have to reconsider Adorno's wholly negative assessment of the current possibilities for conscious, subjective articulation of social critique and utopian desires. On the other hand, the figure of the "dual-character of art" must also be reassessed. The dual character of modern art in part developed because a relatively autonomous space existed in which a bohemian intellectual and artistic counter-culture could flourish. This was possible in places such as Paris, Berlin and New York for a variety of reasons including the existence of a cohesive, institutionalized but increasingly stale and regressive cultural tradition against which to rebel, a cultural and intellectual avant-garde enervated and united by various versions of the emancipatory discourse of socialism and anti-fascism, the as yet limited popular appeal of modernist forms, and an urban landscape that offered the physical and economic possibility for the development of bohemian enclaves. Today, the interests of the real estate-market, the disintegration of liberatory narratives, the expanded

reach and popularity of a corporatized museum culture as part of the tourism and entertainment industry, and the professionalization of artistic and intellectual labor have all contributed to the narrowing –or even virtual collapse- of some of the structural requirements for art's dual-character to persist. In order to continue to explain contemporary art in terms of its dual-character, the social, institutional and structural conditions that allow for this character must be accounted for. In what follows, I explore the actual conditions in which forms of art have developed in the United States, particularly in New York City, since the period that serves as the object of most of Adorno's analysis – that is, the period of late capitalism, or post-modernism. Through an assessment of these conditions, and an analysis of the works of art produced within them informed by Adorno's insights and analytic categories, I am finally be able to engage a discussion of the social position of works of art today, while at the same time re-assessing Adorno's important contributions to the a sociology of art.

Chapter 2

Complicity and Dissent in Abstract Expressionism

Introduction

Just as Paris was, at least for cultural critics such as Walter Benjamin (1986), the "Capital of the Nineteenth Century," so New York emerged after the Second World War as the undisputed capital of the Twentieth. This was reflected in the overwhelming dominance of the city in global finance. However, it was the city's emergence at mid-century as the world center of artistic creativity and production that elevated its renown beyond commerce and made it the global center of modernism (Guilbaut 1985). Cutting-edge artistic production and museums housing extensive collections of modern art acted as symbols of New York - and hence America's - position in the world. The story of New York's emergence highlights once again the central, and at the same time conflicted role of art and culture in shaping and maintaining national hegemony. At the same time, artistic production during this period had strong roots in the socialist tradition, and embodied a rebellion against the conformity characteristic of American cold-war culture and the alienation and massification of post-war Fordist production. The most important art movement that emerged from this period – Abstract Expressionism – thus exemplifies Adorno's characterization of art's dual-character.

In this chapter I closely examine Abstract Expressionism and the work of its most influential champion, Clement Greenberg in their socio-historical context. At the same time, I hold the movement itself, specific examples of its products, and Greenberg's account of this art up to the light of the Adornian insights developed in the previous chapter. In so doing, I arrive at a series of conclusions concerning this movement and its

social position that transcends evaluations of this work either in terms of its function within Cold-War culture or as the heroic high-point of the modernist trajectory.

Historical Considerations

As was the case in the intellectual world, the persecution of cutting-edge artists in war and fascism torn Europe fueled a massive immigration of avant-garde talent and energies to the new world, and, in most cases, to New York City. This influx of creativity fertilized the development of the American visual avant-garde, represented, at the beginning at least, by the work of the Abstract Expressionists[37]. Many of these artists - such Gorky, de Kooning and Hofmann - were European in origin, but felt a certain allegiance to their new homeland, which, given the options available, provided them the opportunity and conditions to pursue their work in relative freedom. Throughout the nineteen-thirties and forties affordable housing (downtown, in the East or West villages) was available, as well as quick money and part-time employment opportunities essential for the material maintenance of artistic activity. These artists eschewed, for the most part, excessive material success and later, the cold-war values of conformity and patriotism (Craven 1999). Many of them, at least before the late nineteen- forties, were at least sympathetic to socialism and, through their work with the WPA projects during the depression, developed a collective consciousness and an allegiance to the American working class (Shapiro 1990).

Although some of these artists, like Jackson Pollock, had apprenticed with important Regionalist painters (in his case Thomas Hart Benton), by the nineteen-forties

[37] Modernist movements certainly existed in visual art in the US prior to Abstract Expressionism, and many of these artists (Alfred Steiglitz, Georgia O'keefe, Stuart Davis, Piet Mondrian to name just a few) were

artists who came to be identified with Abstract Expressionism had grown profoundly critical of Regionalism and the Socialist-Realism that often characterized such works, but remained deeply influenced by the Mexican muralism of painters such as Orozco and Diego Rivera. Not the populist content, but the grandiosity, all-over composition and emotionalism of the muralists continued to influence painters such as Rothko, de Kooning, and Pollock as they grew increasingly impatient with the dictates of the Communist Party to produce a politically engaged art. Factors such as the Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact, the invasion of Finland, and the Moscow trials led these artists away from engaged political sympathies towards a more hermetic, experimental and formal art (Sapiro 1990). This tendency was fed by the rich legacy of European modernism that was increasingly available for examination in New York City of the 1940's. The critic Harold Rosenberg describes the emigration of these artists away from a politically committed art towards autonomy in these hyperbolic terms:

> Many of the painters were "Marxists" (WPA unions, artists congresses) – they had been trying to paint Society. Others had been trying to Art (Cubism, Post-Impressionism) – it amounts to the same thing.
>
> The big moment came when it was to decided to paint…just *To Paint*. The gesture on the canvas was a gesture of liberation, from Value – political, aesthetical, moral (in Shapiro (ed.) 1990: 79).

Both the formal abstraction of the School of Paris painters, and the psychologistic legacy of surrealism provided important influences for Abstract Expressionism. The first strain of influence, from Cezanne through Picasso and Matisse was inherited directly by

important precursors to the Abstract Expressionists. It was with the inception of the latter, however, that American modernism achieved an *international* significance.

artists such as DeKooning, Gorky, Hoffman (who taught many of these artists) and Rothko and was exhibited in their attention to the use of drawing and color to activate the plasticity of the picture plane. Like their European predecessors, these artists understood painting to embody a tension between the flatness of the picture place, and the spatial activity provided through drawing (Picasso) and color relationships (Matisse). The goal of painting (later to be articulated schematically by Clement Greenberg) was not the naturalistic rendering of optical space, but the pushing of the limits of the space uniquely available to the rectangular painted surface – such a space, in contrast to an academic or renaissance painting, makes no reference to illusion or one-point perspective (there is no "depth" in the sense of a piercing backward into the canvass), but rather works within a shallow but energetic two-dimensional space.

Though these artists rejected the literalism and illustrational tendencies of surrealism and symbolism, from this strand of European modernism, along with the influential psychological theories of Jung and Freud, they appropriate a concern for the unconscious and expressivity. This, together with the influence of archaic and primitive art, was to create an art that was mythic but at the same time universal in its implications " a universal symbolism in a timeless art," one which was to counteract what they saw as the chauvinistic and conservative symbolic intent of Regionalist painters such as Thomas Hart Benton and Grant Wood (Shapiro 1990). Hence, though much of the work was abstract (non-representational) in appearance, the intention of these artists was to create an art that both spoke to the tradition of modernism and was also prophetic and relevant to the character of the times. And since these times, as many artists duly noted, left little opportunity for the experience of sublime exaltation, it was left to the artist to give voice

to such an impulse through the modern guise of the individual. Barnett Newman articulates his profoundly humanist position in 1948:

> We are reasserting man's natural desire for the exhaled, for a concern with our relationship to the absolute emotions…. We are freeing ourselves of the impediments of memory, association, nostalgia, legend, myth, or what have you, that have been the devices of Western European painting. Instead of making *cathedrals* out of Christ, man, or "life", we are making it out of ourselves, out of our own feelings. The image we produce is the self-evident one of revelation, real and concrete, that can be understood by any one who will look at it without the nostalgic glasses of history. (in Shapiro (ed.) 1990: 328).

Or, as Mark Rothk claims in more humble terms:

> I do not believe that there was ever a question of being abstract of representational. It is really a matter of ending this silence and solitude; of breathing and stretching one's arms again (in Shapiro (ed.) 1990: 400).

One of these artists emerges as paradigmatic, for a variety of reasons including his presentation of self, his artistic innovations, and perhaps most importantly, that the most powerful and important critic of this period, Clement Greenberg, was a tireless champion of his art. Jackson Pollock, unlike many other Abstract Expressionist artists who were either born in Europe, or in urban America of parents who had narrowly escaped persecution in Europe, was born in Cody Wyoming in 1912. By the time he emerged on the New York scene in the early 1930's, he already exhibited the qualities of mythic American masculinity for which he was later to become famous. By the nineteen-forties, Pollock's signature anguished, hard drinking, machismo and individualism had made him a perfect anti-hero (and symbol of American virility) in an age characterized by massive conformity and repression. Andy Warhol described this masculinity a decade later:

> The world of the abstract expressionists was very macho. The painters where all very hard-driving, two fisted types who'd grab each other and say things like 'I'll knock your fucking teeth out'…. In a way, Jackson Pollock has to die the way he did, crashing his car up…. The toughness was part of a tradition, it went with their agonized, anguished, art (Warhol 1990: 12-13).

Some critics have speculated that it was this personal style, in contrast to the European intellectualism of many of his contemporaries, that contributed to his rise as the most important and popularly acclaimed artist of his period. This popularity was marked by a full page spread in *Life* magazine that asked the question: "Is he the greatest living painter in the United-States?" in 1949 and the publication, beginning in 1950, of Hans Namuth's famous photographs immortalizing the artist at work. Even by contemporary standards of accelerated stardom, Pollock's climb to success (though never yielding the financial gains enjoyed by today's art stars) was rapid and steep. In 1943, eight years after his arrival in New York, Pollock had his first solo show at Peggy Guggenheim's Art of this Century gallery, and sold his first painting "She-Wolf," to the Museum of Modern Art one year later. By the early fifties he was having regular solo shows first at Betty Parson's gallery and later at Sydney Janis. At the time of his notorious death in 1956, many critics, including Clement Greenberg, felt that his talent had, in the last few years of alcoholic haze, finally deteriorated. Nonetheless, Jackson Pollock has remained an American icon and the last canonical painter of modernism.

Pollock's earlier works departed little from the Piccassoid influenced painterly semi-abstractions of many of his contemporaries, except perhaps in terms of their level of emotional intensity and his obvious struggle with the medium (unlike other Abstract

Expressionists such as the Europeans Gorky and de Kooning, drawing and technical facility did not come easily or early to Pollock). In his drip paintings, however, which he began, working on in 1947, he pushed form and method further than his colleagues. With these paintings, Pollock abandoned the easel and the traditional tools of painting altogether and developed a technique of picture making which involved the flinging of loose paint, usually from sticks, onto a huge piece of canvas on the floor. This maneuver represents a radical departure from the traditional relationship between the artist, the artist's body, and the material. His famous quote "I am nature" is illuminated by his description of his relationship to painting in 1947:

> When I am in my painting, I'm not aware of what I'm doing. It is only after a sort of "get acquainted" period that I see what I have been about. I have no fears of making changes, destroying the image, etc., because the painting has a life of its own. I try to let it come through. It is only when I loose contact with the painting that the result is a mess. Otherwise there is pure harmony, an easy give and take, and the painting comes out well. (in Shapiro (ed.) 1990: 357).

Here, the usually laconic painter is describing a non-hierarchical relationship to the object and materials – in which, in a sense, the materials and himself are equally a part of nature. The painted object, finally, contains the artist just as the artist is himself created by, and at the same time creates, the object. Though most probably not consciously aware of Adorno and Horkheimer's critique of instrumental reason and its objectifying gaze, Pollock seems to perform an alternative to such reason in his painting technique.

Pollock's relationship to the critic Clement Greenberg will be examined in more depth later. Given Greenberg's hegemonic status in the art world from the early 1940's through the end of the 1950's, it is not surprising that their close relationship, which

began in 1942, was instrumental in Pollock's critical and commercial success. For Greenberg, Pollock was the painter who, for a time, most clearly illustrated his narrative of artistic development leading up to the triumph of abstraction. In addition, for Greenberg, Pollock's work, especially after 1947, also demonstrated the superiority of American abstraction.

Community

The Abstract Expressionist artists and critics formed a fairly close-knit community, most of them residing around the East Village and the Lower East Side, and drinking and talking together nightly at the Cedar Street Tavern, the Club, and Studio 35. Though characterized by venomous in-fighting (Rubenfeld 1997, Ashton 1992), this community was held together by a shared moral universe and a belief in the immanence of abstract art and the importance of culture. Their interpreters also juxtaposed their art to what they saw as an increasingly insidious and degraded mass culture (Greenberg 1961, Macdonald 1983). A critic whom I interviewed links together the outsider status of this group with the sense of a higher calling: " People [artists] in the '40's and '50's lived marginal lives. It was part of their project - almost political - living morally exemplary lives". In contrast to the fragmentation, relativism, and entrepreneurial model that characterizes the contemporary art world, an artist in his late seventies whom I interviewed described the community like this:

> During the days of abstract expressionism, they had consciousness of a group. They had come out of the depression and the WPA. DeKooning talked about how poor everyone was. When people started making money everything changed. Now, the goal of galleries and artists is only to make money. Art being a cultural entity is not important in the U.S. (Kantor in Rothenberg 2002).

This statement implies that it was poverty itself that accounted for the greater cohesiveness and solidarity of the Abstract Expressionists, and that material and commercial success is responsible for the current state of the art-world. Even Clement Greenberg, the critic most responsible for lifting this group out of obscurity seems to wax eloquently when remembering the early days:

> Worldly success seemed so remote as to be beside the point, and one did not even secretly envy those who had it…I contemplated taking up painting …the highest reward I imagined was a private reputation of the kind Gorky and De Kooning had amid their poverty (Greenberg 1965: 20).

Ironically, it was this very group of artists (in particular Jackson Pollock, one of the few among them actually born in the United States), who were funded, promoted and exhibited abroad by institutions that were directly funded by, or had close connections with the CIA and other arms of the American government (Frascina (ed.) 2000). This work, because of its scale, its boldness, and its clear reflection of the ethos of individuality, all qualities associated with Americanism, was well suited to the task of ringing the bell of U.S. freedom and cultural superiority around the world. Very quickly, the Abstract Expressionists (Pollock in particular) gained a notoriety and market value[38] that changed forever the relationship between the cultural avant-garde, nationalist discourse and the market place. Between 1939 and 1946 the number of galleries in New York quadrupled to 150 and their sales tripled between 1944-45 (Szanto, in Halle (ed.) 2003). About the art-world by the end of the nine-teen fifties, Dore Ashton, an art historian and contemporary of the Abstract Expressionists observed "Instability was the

[38] Also, as Szanto points out, economic success succeeded notoriety by at least five or six years.

norm in New York, and community was a dream that very few artists could seriously entertain as the fifties drew to a close. By 1960 there was almost nothing left of the camaraderie that small numbers can sustain." (Ashton 1973: 54).

Political-Economic Context

As is the case with most bohemian communities, the Abstract Expressionists were fairly isolated from the everyday life and concerns of the majority of Americans of their period. The economic and political context of this larger society nonetheless infused their work in profound ways. As David Harvey points out, though Fordism began in 1914, it wasn't until 1945, in other words, the period coinciding with the rise of Abstract Expressionism, that it reached maturity in the United States (Harvey 1990). Workers resistance to this regime of rationalized, alienated production and consumption, according to Harvey, was finally broken by active intervention to "Americanize" workers into thrifty consumers, the motivation of the "war effort," the defeat of the radical working-class movements, and the institution of the Taft-Hartley act of 1952.

In exchange for accepting this new, highly automated and dehumanized labor process, the post-war American worker was offered the standardization, cleanliness, and affordability of new suburban housing developments as well as a whole host of new consumer products and entertainment, continuously thrust upon them by the ever-enveloping reach of the culture industry. As ethnicity and craft affiliation disintegrated as forms of identity, the American worker was invited to partake of the new universal culture of mass consumption. And, as all aspects of production became highly bureaucratized by scientific management, marketing, planned obsolescence, product

design, and consumer research, this culture, under the guise of greater product choice, became ever more standardized. As Harvey explains

> Post-war Fordism has to be seen…less as a mere system of mass production and more as a total way of life. Mass production meant standardization of product as well as mass consumption; and that meant a whole new aesthetic and a commodification of culture… (1990: 135-36)

The highly idiosyncratic, and hand-made quality of Abstract Expressionist painting, the control over their own processes of production, and the economically marginal and materially ascetic lifestyles of the artists must be seen against the background of the larger social tendencies described above. The questions can then be asked: what kind of society can accommodate these seemingly contradictory social forms? And, in what ways are these cultural forms responding to, and commenting on the terms that organizes the society from which they emerge?

Clement Greenberg: Intellectual Roots

> *Someday it will have to be told how "anti-Stalinism," which started out more or less as "Trotskyism," turned into art for art's sake, and thereby cleared the way, heroically, for what was to come.* (Greenberg 1965: 230).

And the biography of Clement Greenberg, the author of the above quote, tells this story with poignant accuracy. Greenberg's history is indeed emblematic of so many New York intellectuals from his period's often-rapid drift from Soviet inspired communism, through Trotskyism, to the final destination of Cold-War liberalism. What is so fascinating about his particular trajectory, however, is that he managed to bring American art, both in terms of its content (because of the extreme influence that he had over so many artists), and in terms of its discourse along with him. Greenberg's account of modernism began, like his politics, with a materialist-influenced and critical account of the emergence of the avant-garde in a deeply anomic late capitalist society. As his

politics transformed and his status as a cold-warrior became more entrenched, his art criticism became explicitly informed by Kantian formalism, while espousing a view of progress with Western capitalist society, and it particular the United States, at the helm. Eventually, Greenberg's art criticism became as contested as it was once revered, and out of this contestation emerged the discourse of postmodernism. It remains to be seen whether, in the process of overthrowing Greenberg's modernism, contemporary critics have rejected, or embraced his political complicity.

A number of authors have provided detailed accounts of the New York intelligentsia's break from the Communist Party and embrace of Trotskyism and their eventual Cold-War Liberalism (e.g Cooney (1986), Wald (1987)). This trajectory, and the accompanying debates and resolutions concerning the relationship between art and politics that emerged from it, is too complex to be addressed here in full. I will however, touch briefly on the history of *Partisan Review*, which was, during its hey-day, the leading Marxist intellectual literary Journal. It was also the publication in which Clement Greenberg's essays, "Avant-garde and Kitsch" (1939), and "Towards a Newer Laocoan" (1940) first appeared. These essays, seminal texts in the development of the discourse of modernism in the United Stated, will be discussed in detail.

The first issue of *Partisan Review* was published in 1934 and was meant to be the literary wing of the *New Masses,* (Cooney 1986), a political journal with direct links to the Communist Party. It was the intention of the editors, Philip Rahv and William Philips to enlist writers and artist in the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat. Early on, however, the editors of *Partisan Review*, though wary of the excesses of modernism,

were aware of contradictions between artistic freedom and the idea of presenting art as a model of utopia, and the strictures of Soviet style Socialist Realism. Like Adorno, they believed that a cosmopolitan modernism need not be antithetical to the overthrow of capitalism. Also like Adorno, they viewed "the cleavage between commercial and intellectual art" (Cooney 1986: 53) in bourgeois society as central and significant. In fact, many of the central theoretical concerns of the *Partisan Review* crowd when Greenberg entered the scene, such as the relationship between modernism and revolution, form and content, and the role of politics and art, echoed the preoccupations of Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Ernst Bloch, George Lukacs[39] and other spokesmen of European Western Marxism.

Soon after its first publication, however, *Partisan Review* began to come into conflict with the Communist Party, primarily because of their disagreement with the strategies of the Popular Front. They folded in 1936, and when they resumed publication in 1937, it was with a more focused orientation against the Communist Party and towards a reconciliation of "Marxist ideology with formal and artistic experimentation" (Orton and Pollock in Frascina (ed.) 2000:215). Their Soviet thinker of choice was to be Trotsky, who maintained the emancipatory ideals of the Russian revolution while openly critical of the instrumentalization of art and culture under Soviet bureaucracy (Trotsky 1992). It was against this intellectual background, steeped in questions of the relationship between modernism, bourgeois culture and revolution that Clement Greenberg, shortly before

[39] See Jameson, ed. (1995).

becoming the editor of *Partisan Review* in 1940, published two of his seminal texts which we will now consider in some detail.

Greenberg, the Avant-Garde and the Culture Industry

In "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," it is Greenberg's intention to account for the origins of both avant-garde art and kitsch –or, commercial culture- at the end of the nineteenth century. His approach here is historical and materialist, as he describes the social basis and conditions of capitalism that led to the development of such apparently contradictory phenomena. He describes this historical context as one of profound anomie, which he refers to as "Alexandrianism" – in which our society "becomes less able to justify its norms [and therefore] conventions of communication break up" (Greenberg 1965: 3). A successful ruling class, according to Greenberg, is able to legitimate its rule, and hence its cultural forms. Bourgeois society, however, was and is no longer able to justify itself to the masses, and therefore cannot create an art that can be universally understood. But, like Adorno, Greenberg does not view the cultural tradition of the bourgeoisie as without merit – to be replaced ideally and as soon as possible with a "proletarian culture." Rather, the self-criticism characteristic of modernity and the scientific revolution have created the conditions for the development of avant-garde art, a cultural form that must be preserved even in the event of revolution.

The first bohemian artists, Greenberg points out, identify themselves in opposition to bourgeois society. And, although the artists and intellectuals of Paris were steeped in the politics of the French Revolution, Greenberg claims that by the inception of the artistic avant-garde (he probably means by the beginning of the twentieth century,

though his specific time-line is vague) the original avant-garders gave up politics. They saw their job instead as to "keep culture *moving* in the midst of ideological confusion and violence[40]" To this end they sought autonomy from the rest of culture and to raise art to the level of an absolute (art for art's sake). It is this search for purity and the absolute that leads finally to abstract, non-objective art and poetry

> The avant-garde poet or artist tries in effect to imitate God by creating something valid solely on its own terms….Content is to be dissolved so completely into form that the work of art or literature cannot be reduced in whole or in part to anything not itself. (Greenberg 1965: 6).

Instead of imitating God or the absolute, the artist ends up imitating the "discipline and processes of art and literature themselves." (Greenberg 1965: 6). He turns away from subject matter and towards the medium of his craft. These become the subject of art (e.g. Ulysses is a novel about writing a novel). According to Greenberg, attention to only the internal language of art is the only method by which art can still "move" in the face of the increasing alienation, violence and confusion of modern society.

Because of this specialization art does loose contact with its audience – including the audience it is supposed to represent, those who own it. Here, Greenberg acknowledges the complex relation that exists between patron and avant-garde artist. He articulates the necessity of class society for the existence of avant-garde art, yet does not draw out the contradictory nature of their relationship:

6. A simple perusal of the biographies of French modernists from the end of the nineteenth through the middle of the twentieth century demonstrates that many indeed professed and practiced strong political views – which often informed their stylistic and subject matter choices (e.g. Camille Pissaro, Picasso, Braque, etc.).

No culture can develop with a social basis – without a stable source of income. And in the case of the avant-garde, *this was provided by an elite among the ruling class of that society from which it assumed itself to be cut off, but to which it has always remained attached by an umbilical cord of gold*. [Emphasis mine] (Greenberg 1965: 8).

And, as society becomes more democratic, this elite is shrinking; we are in danger of loosing our avant-garde. Greenberg, like Adorno, notes the dual-character of modern art - that is - it both rejects, and is dependent on the bourgeoisie. However, his account of the increasingly esoteric nature of art differs from Adorno in some important respects. Although Adorno would agree that art becomes obscure in an effort to protect/distinguish itself from instrumental forms of communication, for Adorno it never looses its social basis. Formal developments, no matter how esoteric or rooted in the autonomous development of language of the medium, are always deeply imbued with social meaning – in fact, for Adorno, the appearance of obscurity allows art to speak even more truthfully about social conditions. And furthermore, it is not the audience's inability, but rather its unwillingness to comprehend the painful social reality that the form calls forth that adds to this appearance of obscurity. Adorno sums this up in a discussion of Beckett:

> Even the avant-garde abstraction, which provokes the indignation of philistines…is a reflex response to the abstraction of the law, which objectively dominates society. This could be shown in Beckett's works. These enjoy what today is the only respectable fame: everyone shudders at them, and yet non one can persuade himself that these eccentric plays and novels are not about what everyone knows but no one will admit…. They deal with a highly concrete historical reality: the abdication of the subject. (in Arato, ed. 1994: 314)

Greenberg, on the other hand, also notices that art becomes increasingly hermetic in its attempt at self-preservation. But his critical response, as we shall later see, is to view this

hermeticism in terms of his own version of Kantian formalism, which judges the artwork purely on its merits as work of art. He thus abandons the attempt to read social processes into the artwork's formal articulation.

As in Adorno, for Greenberg considering art's opposite number, what he calls kitsch, or mass culture, is crucial to understanding the culture of modernity. Like the avant-garde, "Kitsch is a product of the industrial revolution which urbanized the masses of Western Europe and America" (Greenberg 1965: 9). However, while the avant-garde developed in, many ways, as a self-conscious opposition to the massification of industrial work, and appeals only to a select few (thus functions, as Bourdieu has pointed out, as a form of distinction), kitsch develops precisely to satiate the newly literate urban masses. These masses, upon moving to the city and engaging in industrial labor, have lost their desire for the folk culture of the village and long for a form of distraction commensurate with their new ways of life. Prior to the industrial revolution, according to Greenberg, the only market for formal culture was the ruling class, who also had the privilege of cultivation. With universal literacy, everyone, not just the cultivated, could read and write. Peasants who moved to cities learned to read but they still didn't have the leisure and education to appreciate the "city's traditional culture" (Greenberg 1965: 10). They had, however, lost their taste for folk culture. In response to the needs of the masses, society invents kitsch. Here, Greenberg provides a description of kitsch, as well as an account of its origins:

> Loosing…their taste for the folk culture whose background was the countryside, and discovering a new capacity for boredom at the same time, the new urban masses set up a pressure on society to provide them with a kind of culture fit for

> their own consumption. To fill the demand of a new market, a new commodity was devised: ersatz culture, kitsch, destined for those who, insensible to the values of genuine culture, are hungry nevertheless for the diversion that only culture of some sort can provide…. Kitsch, using for raw material the debased and academicized simulacra of genuine culture, welcomes and cultivates this insensibility. It is mechanical, formulaic, fake, changes according to style but always remains the same. Kitsch is the epitome of all that is spurious in the life of our times. (Greenberg 1965: 10).

It is interesting to compare Greenberg's vitriolic account of kitsch with that of Adorno. Both identify it as a debased product of industrialization, created to pacify the masses who are trapped within a reality of alienated labor broken up only by limited leisure time, during which they are too numbed or exhausted to cultivate the intellectual practices necessary for the appreciation of "high culture." However, for Greenberg, though he does describe kitsch as an industry and sense a source of surplus value, it is these masses who "set up a pressure" on "society" to create such products. The latter implies a functionalist view of society, inconsistent with Greenberg's self-proclaimed Marxism, in which society is that which "responds" to the desires of the majority by delivering what is asked for. Here, he mirrors the sentiments of those inside apologists for the culture industry who claim that they are only giving people what they want – that the culture industry, and consumerism in general, is responding to needs rather than creating them.

As we have seen, such a view is antithetical to that of Adorno for whom the culture industry plays an indispensable role in modern forms of domination. Indeed, he argues that socialized subjects of late capitalist societies not only accept, but also welcome the terms of their own domination. However, he also repeatedly points out that

subjectivity under late capitalism is increasingly "produced" by the culture industry. The culture industry, for Adorno, like folk, or popular culture, is truly "produced" from above in order to maintain an illusion that a true culture, one commensurate with the labor process, exists:

> By subordinating in the same way and to the same end all areas of intellectual creation, by occupying men's senses from the time they leave the factory in the evening to the time they clock in again the next morning with matter that *bears the impress of the labor* process they themselves have to sustain throughout the day, this subsumption mockingly satisfies the concept of a *unified culture*…. [emphasis mine] (Horkheimer and Adorno1972a: 131)

In other words, that products of the culture industry resemble so closely both the labor process and the products of this process is not an accident. And, again, these subjects for whom the culture industry has been created, have also been "molded [by the culture industry]…as a type unfailingly reproduced in every product. All agents of this product…take good care that the simple reproduction of this mental state is not nuanced or extended in any way." (Adorno and Horkheimer 1972a: 127).

Adorno also agrees with Greenberg that the masses are not interested in "high-art," but this is not because, as it is for Greenberg, the masses no longer accept the legitimacy of the ruling class, but rather, that they have been systematically deprived of the luxury necessary to appreciate such art – and furthermore, that access to the worker be banned is a necessary condition of bourgeois art:

> The purity of bourgeois art, which hypostasized itself as a world of freedom…was, from the beginning bought with the exclusion of the lower classes….Serious art has been withheld from those for whom the hardship and oppression of life make a mockery of seriousness, and who can be glad if they can

> use time not spent at the production line just to keep going. (Horkheimer and Adorno 1972: 135).

Greenberg, on the other hand, rejects even the notion that a preference for kitsch over avant-garde art may be a response to either lack of choice or repeated exposure:

> …neither in backward Russia nor in the advanced West do the masses prefer kitsch simply because their governments condition them toward it…..No, conditioning does not explain the potency of kitsch. (Greenberg 1965:13.

Indeed, so powerful is the desire of the masses for kitsch that fascist governments adopt it as the state aesthetic, not out of philistine proclivities, but rather because “the encouragement of kitsch is merely another of the inexpensive ways in which totalitarian regimes seek to ingratiate themselves with their subjects.” He does concede that he ruling class of such regimes find kitsch to be more amenable to ideological manipulation than avant-garde art, but this is not because avant-garde art and literature is too potentially critical, but rather that “they are too ‘innocent’, that it is too difficult to inject propaganda into them, and kitsch is more pliable to this end.” (Greenberg 1965: 19. Again, while sharing with Adorno the elite modernist ‘s distaste for kitsch, and valorization of avant-garde culture, Greenberg’s view of the social content of art diverges sharply from that of Adorno, who, as we recall, makes the case for avant-garde art’s fundamentally critical character.

To return to a point raised earlier, Greenberg provides an account not only of the masses’ preference for kitsch, but of their antipathy towards high culture, and this is tied to the declining ability of the ruling class to legitimate itself and hence its cultural

products. Though a hierarchy of culture has always existed in class societies (i.e. folk art vs. courtly art) in a stable society the poor agree to the values of the rich. According to Greenberg

> the axioms of the few are shared by the many; the latter believe superstitiously what the former believe soberly…. the masses are ale to feel wonder and admiration for the culture, on no matter how high a plane, of its masters.(Greenberg 1965: 16).

However, it is "[o]nly when he [the masses] becomes dissatisfied with the social order they [the ruling class] administer does he begins to criticize their culture." (Greenberg 1965: 17). This criticism, according to Greenberg, takes the form of puritanicalism and conservativism. Such moralistic distaste for the avant-garde has certainly been noted as a tendency of the working class and petty bourgeoisie in Bourdieu's *Distinctions* (1984). And, it has appeared with a vengeance during the culture wars of recent decades. However, at least since the nineteen-fifties, it is much more likely that the more conservative portions of the ruling classes will complain of the decadence of avant-garde art than that such art will even be noticed by what Greenberg refers to as "the masses." In fact, in our time, products of mass culture (especially those, such as rap, that appeal directly to marginalized groups) are just as likely to come under fire from conservatives as is "high art". It is certainly the case that as art veered towards abstraction, and the habits of the avant-garde often included attempts to "èpater le bourgeoisie," products of high art have been highly contested rather than universally embraced as in earlier periods. This is however, I suspect, due less to the deligitimation of ruling class power in general than the particularly contradictory qualities of modern and post-modern art – while it is indeed a

class signifier for the elite, it is at the same critical of all strata of society. This criticism is perhaps better tolerated by those who understand themselves to be securely in power than by members of the middle-class whose position is still tenuous.

Greenberg closes "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" with a reminder that although the avant-garde is indeed a product of capitalist society, such a society is no longer fit to be the guardian of its most elevated products. It is therefore up to socialism to preserve the fruits of a withering social form. Thus, despite its lapses into an undialectical elitism, "Avant-garde and Kitsch" serves as an example of a materialist and historically grounded account of the emergence of modern cultural forms, as well as expressing a utopian hope for a socialist future. While Adorno's discussion of the both avant-garde and Kitsch reveals a much deeper pessimism concerning the role of both in capitalist society than does that of Greenberg, it is Greenberg's very optimism regarding both the 'purity' of art and the reformability of capitalist society (or, put another way, his pessimism concerning revolution) that paves the way for his later position as a Cold-War Liberal.

Greenberg's Early Account of the Inner Dynamic of Modernist Art

In "Towards a Newer Laocoan" also published in *Partisan Review* in 1940, Greenberg further develops his theory of art's progress towards greater abstraction and purity, and defends the supremacy of abstract art at the time of his writing. While at this point he still claims to be a Marxist, there is already a tension between a critical cultural analysis and his burgeoning formalist agenda in his work. It is in this essay that he lays the groundwork for his defense of Abstract Expressionism as the most advanced art form yet.

Throughout European history, according to Greenberg, each age has had its dominant art form, which all other art forms in some way imitated, or followed, while at the same time denying what was unique to themselves in terms of formal and expressive possibility. By the middle of the seventeenth century, this art form was literature, and pictorial art had become a minor decorative, courtly form. By the early nineteenth century, pictorial art had developed the level of skill to "deny its own medium" (in other words, it could produce surfaces and effects that hid the mark of the brush and the struggle to render three dimensions on a flat surface), but was still tied, through the dictates of the court to representational, literary tasks. The Romantic revival at first seemed to offer relief - in the form of the notion that feeling or expressiveness was the most important quality in art –from the stultifying influence of literary representation. However, according to Greenberg, in the Romantics' cult of personality, the notion of the arts as a discipline was lost and in the end painting suffered. Finally painting degenerated into the academicism of the mid-nineteenth century.

Romanticism, according to Greenberg, was the last movement that received its inspiration from bourgeois society. From this point onward, in order for art to develop, it had to reject the values of the society from which it originated, to cut itself off from mainstream society: Greenberg does not develop this point, and its implicit critique of capitalism, beyond the following:

> After that [Romanticism] the impulse [to create art], although indeed it had to originate in bourgeois society, could only come as a denial of that society, as a turning away from it. It was not to be an about-face towards a new society but an emigration to a Bohemia, which was to be art's sanctuary from capitalism. It was to be the task of the avant-garde to perform in opposition to bourgeois society the

> function of finding new and adequate cultural forms for the expression of that same society, without at the same time succumbing to its ideological divisions and its refusal to permit the arts to be their own justification. The avant-garde…becomes the embodiment of art's instinct to self-preservation. (in Frascina (ed.) 2000: 63).

This self-imposed isolation from society, then, allowed art (and we can assume that here Greenberg was primarily talking about painting) to develop as an autonomous medium, which (and this is not fully explained) also was to provide "adequate cultural forms" for this society. What Greenberg may have meant - and this is drawn out in an analysis of his later work - is that the increasing autonomy of artistic media falls in line with the distinctly modern and Kantian injunction that spheres of knowledge should concern themselves, first and foremost, with an investigation into their own particular limits and regulations. This spirit of immanent investigation, applied to painting, then, would constitute an adequate or appropriate cultural form for high modernism.

And so begins the story which Greenberg was to reiterate many times over in coming decades: modern painting, beginning with Courbet and Realism begins to pay attention, through its quest for "materialist objectivity and science" (in Frascina (ed.) 2000: 64) to the flatness of the canvas. Impressionism, also through a scientific concern with the role of optics and the representation of nature, was at heart preoccupied with the relations and vibrations of color on a two-dimensional canvas rather than with nature. Out of this movement came Manet who depicted subject matter with "insolent indifference" thereby calling the spectators attention first and foremost to the problems of the

medium[41]. Gradually, the illusionistic, literary aspects of painting fall by the wayside. The picture place becomes shallower and shallower, as perspectival space is abandoned in favor of the acknowledgment of the flatness of the canvass. The destruction of a representational pictorial space is finally accomplished with cubism when "the picture plane itself grows shallower and shallower, flattening out the fictive planes of depth until they meet as one upon the real and material plane which is the actual surface of the canvas..." (in Frascina (ed.) 2000: 68). Finally, and this is the prelude to his conclusion

> [t]he arts, then, have been hunted back to their mediums, and there they have been isolated, concentrated and defined….to restore the identity of an art the opacity of its medium must be emphasized. For the visual arts the medium is discovered to be physical; hence pure painting and pure sculpture seek above all else to affect the spectator physically." (in Frascina, (ed.) 2000: 65-66).

Ultimately, Greenberg's justification for the present superiority of abstract art lies in a kind of historical inevitability: in order to rescue themselves from the degenerative influences of bourgeois society, each art form had to take refuge in its own unique sphere of capabilities. For painting, this was the delineation of the ocular in relation to the flatness of the picture plane. Gradually, what was external to this project – namely – representation and illusion – had to be eliminated. Inevitably, the most advanced art of our age then turns out to be abstract – to represent nothing put pure painterly visual experience. As he rearticulates several years later, in a review of the Whitney Biannual:

> Just as naturalism at the time of the Bellinis in Venice was the only tendency which promised a future to painting…so abstract art today is the only stream that flows toward an ocean. It is the only mode by which

[41] For a compeling alternative view of manet and the impressionists' relationship to their subject matter, see T.J. Clark (1986).

> painters and sculptures can still master new experience; it furnishes the only profoundly original contemporary art….(Greenberg 1965:171).

Greenberg's history of the increasing autonomy and abstraction of western visual art ends up serving as an effective basis for the his eventual promotion of the specifically *American* modernism of the nineteen-forties and after, in the form, first, of Abstract Expressionism, and particularly, at least for some time, as quintessentially achieved through the figure of Jackson Pollock. And, as we shall see, Greenberg's "discovery" of Abstract Expressionism dovetails neatly with his drift away from Marxism and toward Cold-War liberalism.

Greenberg's "Triumph of American Painting" with Pollock at the Helm

The actual parameters of Abstract Expressionism, like most stylistic designations, are fuzzy and open to interpretation. Painters such as Clyfford Still, Franz Kline, Robert Motherwell, Willem Dekooning and Jackson Pollock certainly did not form a "school" in any conventional sense of the word. In fact, perhaps more than work from many other periods, the individual authors of these paintings are immediately recognizable through signature brush strokes, compositional conventions, and color or thematic choices. Indeed, the movement as such was in part defined by such authorial idiosyncrasies. Abstract Expressionist paintings share a number of other defining characteristics that link the various practitioners to an overall stylistic tendency. Abstract Expressionist works tend to be large in scale, to have an "all-over" or non-hierarchical composition, they are primarily abstract (though occasional figuration, as in Dekooning's *Women* series does occur), and, as in Cubism, the space is highly compressed. Instead of an illusionistic

"deep-space," which draws the viewer into the pictorial space, if anything the spatial illusion in these paintings moves outward, towards the viewer. It was these characteristics that Greenberg recognized, and, after the middle of the nineteen-forties, hailed as the most advanced tendencies in modern art.

According to Greenberg's writing at the time, and as encapsulated in his slightly later account of art in the nineteen-forties "American Type Painting," written in 1955, the work of the American abstractionists falls squarely in line with the modernist trajectory up through Cubism, in fact "the art in question is subject to discipline as strict as any that art obeyed in the past" (Greenberg 1965: 210). But the Cubist solution to the confines of the frame (the four edges of the canvas) provided a sense of limitation for these artists, and the solution to this dilemma pushed American painting to the forefront:

> With time, the obvious reference of every line and even stroke to the framing verticals and horizontals of the picture had turned into a constricting habit, but it was only in the middle and late 1940's, and in New York, that the way out was discovered to lie in a surface so large that its enclosing edges would lay outside or only on periphery of the artist's field of vision as he worked. In this way he was able to arrive at the frame as a *result*, instead of subjecting himself to it as something given in advance (Greenberg 1965: 219-220).

Greenberg continues, in this essay, to enumerate the ways in which various Abstract Expressionists took on this task. DeKooning, whom he describes as having aspiration larger than any artist at time had as his "apparent aim… a synthesis of tradition and modernism that would grant him more flexibility within the confines of the late Cubist cannon of design. The dream of a grand style hovers over all of this – the dream of an obviously grand and obviously heroic style" (Greenberg 1965: 213). Pollock

"twisted Cubist space to make it speak with its own vehemence", until, after 1946, he discovered drip-painting, which "filled [the canvas] from edge to edge with evenly spaced motifs that repeated themselves uniformly such as the elements in a wallpaper pattern, and therefore seemed capable of repeating the frame into infinity." (Greenberg 1965: 217. In accomplishing this….[H]e is alone in his power to assert a paint-strewn or paint-laden surface as a single synoptic image." (Greenberg 1965:217). Newman, Rothko and Still used color to create "a new kind of flatness, one that breathes and pulsates….[T]heir surfaces exhale color with an enveloping effect that is enhanced by size itself" (Greenberg 1965:226). In these paintings "What is destroyed is the Cubist, and immemorial, notion and feeling of the picture edge as a confine; with Newman, the picture edge is repeated inside, and *makes* the picture, instead of merely being *echoed*." They have thus escaped the "object" - they are not easel paintings, but "fields." These paintings have escaped the Cubist confines of the picture plan much as the burgeoning US Empire, after the Second World War began to transcend the geographical confines of the nation-state.

And, beginning around 1946, Jackson Pollock emerges, for Greenberg as the reigning maverick of this field – one whose work not only embodies the qualities of expansiveness and innovation already discussed, but who also seemed to exhibit the rugged individualism, masculinity and control associated with the United States in the reigning cold-war discourse. In a 1946 review Greenberg pays particular attention to the unfettered, phallic subjectivity – aggressive and at the same time controlled - displayed in the artist's work:

> …Pollock's superiority to his contemporaries in this country lies in his ability to create a genuinely violent and extravagant art without loosing stylistic control. His emotion starts out pictorially; it does not have to be castrated and translated in order to be put into a picture (Greenberg 1965:75).

Later in the same essay, the work of this " most powerful painter in contemporary America" is described as "Gothic, morbid and extreme" and, significantly, as "radically American." In a review from roughly the same period, Greenberg notes that Pollock's work "…dwells entirely in the lonely jungle of immediate sensations, impulses and notions, therefore is positivist, concrete…" (Greenberg 1965: 166). Taken together, these comments from Greenberg describe a highly subjective art that centers on concrete sensory response while at the same time fitting in to an objective trajectory of formal pictorial development. Unfortunately, Greenberg does not delve any deeper into the social meaning of this paradoxical art. In 1948, the same period of Greenberg's work now under consideration, Adorno published a study of the composer Arnold Schoenberg in his book *The Philosophy of Modern Music*. In writing of the composer's expressionistic phase he says

> that the anxiety of the lonely becomes the law of aesthetic, formal language…betrays something of the secret of that loneliness. The reproach against the individualism of art in its later stages of development is so pathetically wretched simply because it overlooks the social nature of this individualism (Adorno 1985: 43).

This quote, in another context, could also apply to the work of Jackson Pollock. And, considered from such a perspective, important questions about the "social nature" of Pollock's "lonely jungle of sensations" could be asked. And, these questions might lead

to a more complex understanding of the particular nature of such lonely individualism in an era of increasing conformity and political repression, along with unprecedented wealth, productivity and consumerism. In this way, an analysis of Pollock's work could indeed reveal important social information concerning the historical period in question. Unfortunately, the work of art, submitted only to Greenberg's insights, remains mute as a social document.

Greenberg offers another discussion of formal innovation that, in the presence of an understanding of artistic form as revelatory of social tendencies, could have provided a fertile subject for the analysis of such tendencies. In his essay from 1948, "The Crisis of the Easel Picture" he presents the argument concerning the innovations of American modernism that he is to later re-rehearse in "American-Type Painting." He traces the evolution of modern painting again back to Manet, who began to radically flatten out the picture plane through his use of starkly contrasting tones and his elimination of most modeling and one-point-perspective. Manet, however, by retaining a differentiation of shapes into light and dark, and keeping them in a state of imbalance, maintained the integrity of the easel picture as an illusory, box-like cavity. Monet was the first to threaten this convention by creating paintings that begin to create an all-over skein of colors, values and shapes, which make an illusionistic spatial reading more and more difficult.

This tendency Greenberg calls "polyphonic," and defines as all-over, "decentralized," " [a] polyphonic picture… relies on a surface knit together of identical or closely similar elements which repeat themselves without marked variation from edge of

the picture to the other. It is a kind of picture that dispenses, apparently, with beginning, middle, end". He acknowledges the origin of the term in music and its relationship to the notion of equivalence:

> Just as Schoenberg makes every element, every sound of the composition of equal i*mportance* – different but *equivalent* - so the all-over painter renders every element and every area of the picture equivalent in accent and emphasis. Like the twelve-tone composer, the "all-over" painter weaves his work of art into a tight mesh whose scheme of unity is recapitulates at every meshing point (Greenberg 1965:156).

He then explains how this tendency was pushed further by Picasso and Braque with Cubism and taken to its extreme with Abstract Expressionism. While Greenberg treats its evolution as part of the progressive, but "internal" development of modernism, he does begin to suggest another reading of the evolution of polyphony in modern painting. It may, he conjectures, refer to a particular aspect of contemporary sensibility, one that rejects the notion of hierarchies and distinctions:

> The very notion of uniformity is anti-aesthetic…the dissolution of the pictorial in to sheer texture, into apparently sheer sensation, into an accumulation of repetitions, seems to speak for answer something profound in contemporary sensibility. Literature provides parallels in Gertrude Stein…The "all-over" may answer the feeling that all hierarchical distinctions have been, literally, exhausted and invalidated; that no area or order is intrinsically superior, on any final scale of values, to any other area or order of experience….for the time being, all that we can conclude is that the future of the easel picture as a vehicle of ambitious art has become problematical (Greenberg 1965: 157).

He also concludes that despite the social implications of the "all-over" pictorial surface, what is most interesting, or at any rate relevant about the phenomenon is its implications for the future of art as an autonomous sphere, distinct from social reality.

Again, Greenberg has masterfully described a significant formal innovation in the history of painting without really exploring the possibilities outside of the sphere of art to which such an innovation might point. Adorno's discussion of Schoenberg's use of musical form once again suggests an alternative strategy. Here, Adorno points out that the true 'subject' of modern music is the lonely, isolated, bourgeois individual – in other words, modern music (and, presumably other art forms), while it may appear to be "abstract," takes as its subject matter the condition of this subject within late capitalist society. For Schoenberg, the musical form most representative of this subject is a pure polyphony, which, like harmony allows for extended, unreconciled dissonance between the individual sounds. Each sound, then, has the quality of an individual, expressive voice, never reconciled to a harmonic whole. In this way, through the vehicle of art (as opposed, always, to the culture industry) "the subjective drive and the longing for self-proclamation without illusion, become the technical organ of the objective work" (Adorno 1985: 59). As we later learn, such a musical solution destroys the possibility of thematic development, and hence the power of music to contain meaning at all. Schoenberg's eventual solution to the problem of reconciling thematic unity and the expression of the individual voice, the twelve-tone technique, eventually becomes, for Adorno, another example of the dialectic of enlightenment, in that the individual voices become enslaved to an abstract reason imposed by the technique itself.

The parallels between Adorno's discussion of musical material and the formal developments in Abstract Expressionism, as described by Greenberg, are by no means a perfect fit. I use the example of Adorno's discussion of polyphony and dissonance only

to illustrate both his contention that artistic form can be read as expressive of a level of social reality not easily accessible through the examination of conventional historical data, and that such a reading could greatly enrich our understanding of painterly forms in the mid-twentieth century.

Greenberg's Concurrent Political Orientation

The affinity of Greenberg's account of the triumph of American modernism, with Jackson Pollock at the helm and his burgeoning status as a Cold-warrior has not been overlooked by critics and commentators. By the end of the nineteen-forties Greenberg's public reputation and influence were well established. While, as we have learned, he was originally hostile to the introduction of the avant-Garde into middlebrow culture, he had become much friendlier towards the mainstream press by the early nineteen-fifties. As O'Brian (Greenberg 1993 V.3) points out in his introduction to Greenberg's essays, his 1949 resignation from *Partisan Review* can be seen as a turning point in his political, and, to a degree, his aesthetic world-view. As evidence of this turn (and possible explanation of his decision to resign) O'Brian points to his letter to the editor of the *Nation* of 1951 protesting the publication of a column by the pro-Soviet commentator J. Alvarez del Vayo, and echoing the sentiments of many former members of the Left, who, along with their disillusionment with the Soviet Union, were drifting increasingly towards a staunchly pro-US stance:

> I find it shocking that any part of your – and our – magazine should consistently act as a vehicle through which the interests of a particular sate power are expressed. It makes not difference which state power: the scandal lies in the fact of the commitment….The operation of J. Alvarez del Vayo's column along a line

> which invariably parallels that of Soviet propaganda is something that I protest as both a reader and contributor (Greenberg V.3 1993: xxvi).

This letter initiated a bitter rift and public scandal between *Partisan Review* and Greenberg, which was covered in such mainstream magazines as *Time* and *Newsweek*. While the letter was surely an expression of Greenberg's true sentiments, O'Brian speculates that there may have been a timely motive for its appearance. Shortly beforehand, Greenberg had become of founding member of the American Committee for Cultural Freedom (ACCF), a subsidiary of the Congress for Cultural Freedom established in 1950. This agency, later revealed to be funded by the CIA, was founded with the explicit purpose of fighting communism on the cultural front. In the paranoid Cold-War atmosphere, the ACCF, chaired by Sidney Hook, may have been subtly pressuring its members, many of them former Leftists, to provide proof of their new ideological commitments. Greenberg provided just that with his open attack on the *Nation*. Soon afterwards, Greenberg became firmly established in the executive policy making clique of prominent Cold-Warriors including Daniel Bell, Irving Kristol, William Phillips and Arthur Schlessinger jr. (O'Brian in Greenberg 1993).

Not surprisingly, Greenberg's cultural, as well as his art criticism showed signs of his new allegiance. If we recall, Greenberg's early work, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" demonstrated a definite hostility and cynicism towards the products of mass culture, as well as pessimism toward the culture of modernity as it was manifested in late capitalist society. In this essay, the avant-garde is clearly presented as a critical force, threatened by the onslaught of a dangerously mediocritizing mass culture (in which products of middle-

brow culture were included). With his 1953 essay "The Plight Our Culture," Greenberg presents a revised assessment of these phenomena. The premise of the essay is a response to a book by T.S Eliot in which he blames the downfall of high culture on increasing democracy and mass culture, an argument with which he would have earlier agreed (with the addendum that democracy and high art might be possible at the same time with socialism). Here, Greenberg defends not only democracy and universal literacy, but also the rationalization of work, the work ethic and industrialization. He agrees with Marx that industrialization is necessary for a better society, but counters Marx's claim that industrialization eventually creates the conditions for the abolition of constant labor. He points out instead that the new society *democratizes* work in that now everyone must work hard. No class is free from the obligation to long, hard and focused toil. Rather than leading to cultural decline, in our current situation "[m]ost of the Western world eats better prepared food and lives in pleasanter environments than it used to; and whatever the rich may have lost in formal graces, those less rich are certainly gentler than they used to be." (Greenberg V.3 1993: 128). And further, while industrialization has pushed work to the center of life, and leisure to the periphery, leisure has become more purely leisure – less adulterated by the dictates of work, but sharing the focus and intensity that characterizes work life. Art, as a branch of leisure, would also flourish as the conditions for its focus on the questions of its own medium and competency are enhance by the separation of work and leisure and the newfound intensity that could be brought to each field when undiluted by the other. And, with the raising of the standard of living and of education generally, we would see in the future "high urban culture on a mass basis." This

high culture, like the high culture of "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" seems, according to Greenberg, to be happily devoid of oppositional content, and fully complicit with the culture of capitalism. Modern art has thus, in Greenberg's revised account, lost its dual-character.

Late Greenberg, Late Abstract-Expressionism and the Kantian Ideal

The above account also foreshadows the increasing influence of Kant in Greenberg's work, and as was mentioned, the loss of the dialectical concept of "dual-character" in his understanding of modern art. Nancy Jachec (1998) associates this movement in Greenberg's politics and his art criticism with a "kind of positivism central to post-war liberal ideology." Such an attitude, typical of Cold-War theorists such as Greenberg's political mentor Arthur Schlessinger jr., according to Jachec

> espoused an essentially positivist approach to social, economic and political planning, i.e. pragmatic, piecemeal and open to scientific and technological advances seen, however, as not leading inevitably to social improvement. In short, while adhering to the Enlightenment project, it was critical of its optimism and cautious concerning its benefits.

Furthermore, critique should be offered up to a marketplace of ideas in order to create a healthy atmosphere of cultural pluralism. How such a political ideology relates to Greenberg's increasing Kantianism and the development of his aesthetic criticism in general may not at first be obvious, but a close look at some of his work from the late nineteen-fifties and early sixties will render these relationships more apparent.

Early on in Greenberg's work, when the development of the avant-garde and the increasing autonomy of art in Western society was still, for him, tied to a specific stage in

the development of capitalism, his argument for modern art had a distinctly Kantian orientation. As each art form on the one hand became more intrinsically focused on its own methods and parameters, and on the other hand became disengaged from explicit representational functions (autonomous) it was able to legitimate itself solely in the Kantian terms of disinterested judgment. Art becomes that which we can evaluate from a position of disinterest – we can judge the artwork based on its internal cohesion or "rightness" rather that on its ability to fulfill a physical or emotional need (Kant 1987). This criterion (that it could be evaluated based on pure, disinterested but universal aesthetic standards) becomes that by which Greenberg was to judge the validity of a work of art, and the degree to which it met this, presumably universally perceivable (but ultimately as judged by Greenberg himself) requirement of rightness became the arbiter of its quality.

In the late fifties and sixties, Greenberg finds a way to link the achievement of an art form, which so successfully meets the Kantian criterion for aesthetic judgment, with the superiority of Western, and particularly American forms of life, and in particular the functional ability of late capitalism to correct for structural imbalances and to maintain social and spiritual health. In "The Case for Abstract Art" first published in the decidedly middle-brow *Saturday Evening Post* in 1959, Greenberg first makes a case for the necessity of disinterested contemplation in a happy and satisfied life. He admits however, that "the climate of Western life, and particularly of American life, is not conducive to this type of thing; we are all too busy making a living" (Greenberg V.4. 1993:76) Luckily, however, for Greenberg, societies all have the capacity for self-correction "if the tradition

goes too far in one direction it will usually try to right itself by going equally far in the opposite one" (Greenberg V.4. 1993:76). In the case of Western society, we have invented abstract art as an antidote to our extreme proclivity for purposeful activity and material production. And, he assures the reader; it is in fact, "Western abstract art that challenges our capacity for disinterested contemplation more than anything else I know of in art." This he opposes to the Oriental tradition of contemplation, which is not to be confused with true disinterestedness because "…so much of Oriental contemplative and aesthetic discipline strikes me as a technique for keeping one's eyes averted from ugliness and misery." (Greenberg V.4 1993: 76). It is thus only Western societies, and especially American society, that have managed to create *both* the conditions for material plenty and the elimination of want, *and* an aesthetic tradition uniquely capable of satisfying the human need for disinterested contemplation. This account, though functionalist in its orientation, avoids the important questions raised by Bourdieu concerning the function of the ideology of aesthetic disinterest in maintaining class legitimacy. Also, in assuming that the conditions for a just and harmonious society have been met, swallows the contradiction that Adorno would point out in the ideology of pure aesthetic contemplation – that it is bought by the few at the expense of the misery of the many – and that the ability of certain works of art to generate such moments represents a hope for the future, but also a condemnation of a present in which such experience must be divorced from everyday social practice.

Greenberg's use of a Kantian framework to argue for what Jachec refers to as a "positivist" orientation to art becomes explicit in his essay of 1960, "Modernist Painting"

which was originally delivered as a radio address for Voice of America. Here, Greenberg begins by reaffirming the uniquely Western goals of the Enlightenment. Western civilization, he notes, has gone farther than any other towards questioning its own foundations. And modernism, with Kant as the quintessential modern thinker, has most acutely harnessed this tradition of self-criticism. Greenberg does differentiate between the critical essence of the Enlightenment, which criticizes from outside, versus that of modernism, which criticizes from the inside, by “ the use of characteristic methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline itself, not in order to subvert it, but in order to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence” (Greenberg V.4: 1993:85). This Kantian version of self-criticism, according to Greenberg, forced the arts to justify themselves on their own terms, and to demonstrate that “the kind of experience they provided was valuable in its own right and not to be obtained from ay other kind of activity.” And further “that the proper competency of art coincided with what was unique in the nature of the medium” (Greenberg V4. 1993:86). Thus, art sought to establish and defend its “purity”, and, in a rearticulation of the now-familiar account, modern painting, through the various stages of modernism, established flatness, as the only condition not shared with any other art, as its own standard of uniqueness. In this later account, however, color-field painting, as practiced by artists such as Morris Louise, Kenneth Noland and Jules Olitsky had begun to outstrip the work of the Abstract Expressionists in the achievement of the goals of purity and flatness.

Greenberg ends this essay by explicitly relating the goals of art to those of science, particularly as defined by the limits of positivism.

> That visual art should confine itself exclusively to what is given in visual experience, and make no reference to anything given in any other order of experience, is a notion whose only justification is scientific consistency. Scientific method alone asks…that a situation be resolved in exactly the same terms as that in which it is presented….[M]odernist art belongs to the same specific cultural tendencies as modern science, and this is of the highest significance as a cultural fact.(Greenberg V.4. 1993: 91).

With this quote, Greenberg's earlier comments regarding the value of Pollock as a painter "in the positivist tradition" begins to make more sense. He viewed the activities of Pollock, and later color field painters[42], as "experiments" undertaken in studios rather than laboratories, sticking to a self-defined, internally bounded problem, which could be solved through subtle tinkering within its own methods and materials. Such a critical approach to the work of art both drains it of social meaning outside of the boundaries of art itself, and is as the same time complicitous with the notion of piecemeal reform characteristic of Greenberg's now firmly established liberalism. Greenberg's aesthetic position, as Nancy Jachec points out, " fits neatly into a liberal context because they share the same political goals, i.e., the disavowal of an ideology of total social reorganization in favor of piecemeal *criticism* from a plurality of interest groups" (Jachec 2000: 117).

In his late work, Greenberg has thus managed to create a powerful account of late modernism that, in its achievement of a Kantian purity, has been severed from the underlying social structures that, according to Adorno, need to be comprehended in order

[42] It is interesting to note Greenberg's shift from the more emotionally charged vocabulary of abstract expressionism to the cool detachment of color field painting. Clearly, by the beginning of the 1960's his adaptation of a "pure" Kantian aesthetic caused him to see the painterly mannerisms that he had earlier seen as masculine and heroic as evidence of remaining "impurity" in visual art.

to achieve true knowledge in any sphere. Art, for Greenberg, like positivist science, should consist in the manipulation of given "facts" by a knowing, absolute subject. This activity is connected to the social totality, for Greenberg, only insofar as it emerges from a more general version of modernism as characterized by the act of self-critique within specific disciplines. Any traces of a dialectical understanding of the relationship between disparate disciplines, or their relationship to an underlying totality are absent. This absence, and the related rigidity of Greenberg's later formulations have not, as we shall see, been lost on a later generation of interpreters. The mistake has sometimes been made, however, of damning the work along with the interpreter. I have tried to demonstrate that by keeping in mind some of Adorno's important categories, while also taking seriously Greenberg's insights as important historical information, an alternative reading of this art is possible.

The Fading of Abstract Expressionism and Greenberg

By the late nineteen-fifties, the heyday of abstract expressionism was over. While artists such as de Kooning and Pollock had many imitators and one could even speak of the "second Generation Abstract Expressionists," much of this work was shallow and imitative, and even Greenberg referred to it at this point as Kitsch. Pop art, Minimalism, Conceptual art and Color Field Painting had already begun to emerge in the field. While Greenberg railed against the first three movements, he viewed the latter as heir to Abstract Expressionism in the triumphant march towards a painting of pure disinterested opticality. Meanwhile, though Greenberg remained a powerful force in the art world, his reputation also began to come under fire. A new generation of artists and critics thought

his influence and power had gone too far and that his narrow formalist vision had become irrelevant. The public attack on Greenberg by one of his closest students, Rosalyn Krauss, for his interventions in the sculptures of David Smith[43], left a bitter taste in the mouths of many. But it wasn't until the seventies that several currents of criticism against both Abstract Expressionism and Greenberg became wide- spread. These criticisms were launched on two fronts, and in both cases had their roots in the reigning interpretation of much postmodern discourse.

The first line of criticism was historical and empirical and emerged from the critical reaction against formalism. Its aim was to introduce social history, institutional analysis and sociology into the discipline of art history. Works of art and movements were now viewed not as examples of a hermetic aesthetic progression, but in terms of their relationship to power, to politics and to the economy. In this light - familiar to sociologists but relatively new to art history - the period of American art that coincided with the cold-war took on new meaning. The linkages between this work, and the institutions and figures that promoted it, and the rise of worldwide US global hegemony were explored by a variety of writers.

Max Kozloff published the first of these articles in *ArtForum* in 1973 (in Frascina, (ed.)1985) followed, in 1974, by Eva Cockcroft's "Abstract Expressionism,

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[43] Clement Greenberg had been named executor of David Smith's estate after his death in 1965. Greenberg had long urged the sculptor to eliminate color from his metal pieces, many of which were painted. Although the sculptor refused to heed Greenberg's suggestions during his lifetime, after his death, Greenberg stored the pieces outdoors, where exposure to the elements caused the paint to peel off. Greenberg then had the paint on many pieces completely removed. Krauss who completed her dissertation on Smith began, in 1974 5o make public Greenberg's actions and they parted ways in a series of bitter exchanges

Weapon in the Cold War" (in Frascina, (ed.)1985). In this essay, Cockroft presented convincing evidence that the Sate and State agencies were financially and politically invested in the creation and promotion of art and culture in the 1950's as a self-conscious part of the cold-war effort. It would have been difficult, according to Frascina, to publish such a document before early 1970s, even though the undercover role of CIA had been revealed in 1960s in a series of *New York Times* articles that detailed false-front CIA organizations and the secret transfer of funds from CIA to State Department or United States Information Agency for scholarly publications or real or dummy research foundations. Among these was the Congress for Cultural Freedom, thought to be an organization of liberal intellectuals. According to Frascnia, it was the climate of discord and social unrest of the late sixties and early seventies that paved the way for the publication of work such as that of Kozloff and Cockroft: "It was only in September of 1970, after a year of staggering events – including revelations about My Lai, Altamont, police killings of Black Panthers, the US bombing of Cambodia, deaths of students at Kent State – that *Artforum* explicitly asked questions about artists and politics." (in Frascina, ed. 1985:3) . By this point, then, the concerns of the anti-war and civil-rights movements had entered the art-world.

Some critics felt that Abstract Expressionism was particularly providential for the CIA's agenda in promoting American cultural hegemony and leading a worldwide crusade against communism. It's large, bombastic nature was in line with the Cold-War vision of American force and might, and it's focus on signature styles seemed appropriately opposed to what anti-Soviet ideologues labeled as communist conformity. Even its

abstract nature, though reviled by right-wingers such as congressman Dondero, was proof of its autonomy and its freedom from propagandistic uses, again in contrast to the art and culture of the Soviet-Union. In addition, as we have seen, the accounts of formalists such as Greenberg, Michael Fried and Irving Sandler stressed an almost inevitable progressive formal development from European modernism, with its headquarters in France, to the more advanced, more original (because free from the weight of the past under which the Europeans labored) post-war version of American modernism originating in New York.

Critics such as Kozloff, Crockoft and Guilbaut provide important institutional analyses of the role of art in the maintenance of dominant political and social structures. They convincingly detail the parts played, wittingly and unwittingly, by cultural institutions such as the Museum of Modern Art, and cultural gatekeepers such as Clement Greenberg both in deploying certain kinds of art in order to promote a cold-war version of US supremacy abroad and creating an intellectual account of the supremacy of such art at home. Bourdieu's insights regarding the ideological nature of the discourse of "the pure gaze" are particularly apt in the case of Greenberg's version of American modernism. Such investigations reinforce the lesson that all culture is ideological and that art, no matter how strident its claims to autonomy, becomes valorized and recognized through complex processes that are always infused by relations of power, privilege and interest. These realities are more obvious when art, as in earlier times, has an explicitly representational function. With modernism, art has become, for the most part, free from such representational duties, but, as the history discussed reveals, is thus even more available to perform such functions covertly, much more in line with other modern forms

of power. And similar stories have, and will, be told about more recent art movements' implication in the maintenance of and promotion of dominant political and social structures.

Such accounts, however, from the point of view of the Adornian insights developed in chapter one, are, on their own, seriously limited. They suffer from the same narrowness of focus as much sociological analysis, including, to a degree, that of Bourdieu: they are concerned almost exclusively with the *function* of works of art once these works are released into already structured social world. In this sense, they assume that existing dominant structures are immovable and exhaust the range of social possibilities. A painting by Pollock, Rothko or de Kooning is indeed both a product of, and is let loose into, a world infused by such structures. Yet, if we are to follow Adorno's dialectical understanding of both the work of art and of modern society itself, the work is not exhausted by a rehearsal of these structures. An investigation of the work itself, which, again following Adorno, is the concrete manifestation of contradictory social forces, reveals a complex account of both society and the work. Here, Greenberg's "thick description" and historical reconstruction of art's formal development may prove useful. His various accounts do provide us with a rich understanding of the formal developments that constitute Cubism, the crisis within Cubism, and the "solutions" provided by the American Abstractionists. The challenge is to find the relationship between these developments and underlying social structures. How, for example, does the emphasis on the unique signature of the Abstract Expressionist brushstroke relate to the automation and mass production that began to so thoroughly characterize the Fordist production

process in the middle-forties? Is this symptomatic, as Craven (in Frascina (ed.) 2000) claims, of Abstract Expressionism's incipient romantic anti-capitalism? And in a post-atomic period in which instrumental reason had come to dominate the organization of all aspects of social and natural life, what do we make of Pollock's statement "I am nature," and Abstract Expressionism's adherence to the proclivities of the materials themselves? And what of the bombastic individualism of this work, especially in relation to its self-purported goals of universalism? According to Greenberg, Abstract Expressionism finally broke the vise of Cubism's slavish adherence to a narrow set of painterly solutions in relation to the flatness of the picture plane. It seemed to open up the painted surface both to subjective expression and to the evocation of a timeless and unbounded sense of the sublime. Ultimately, however, this art represents an end rather than a new beginning, since the art world was soon to experience a profound shift away from the paradigms of modernism embraced by Abstract Expressionism. Especially because it hovers on the edge of this shift, this work must be read as a profound expression of the failure of modernist humanism to triumph over what Adorno would call the encroachment of a "totally administered society." But is this because the modernist impulse to preserve subjectivity exhibited in this art was bankrupt to begin with, as Post-modernism would claim? Or, alternatively, does the failure of this work represent the falseness of the existence of such subjectivity within late capitalist society?

Challenges From Feminism and Post-Modernism

Another critique has been lodged against Abstract Expressionism, particularly as it relates to, and even seems to epitomize, principles of modernist formalism in general.

This line of criticism is based in the post-modern and feminist theory that became dominant in the academic world in the 1980s and 1990s. Like the institutional criticism discussed above, it does not rely solely on an account of the socio-political function of the art movement, but addressed the ontological assumptions that are seen to be fundamental to the work and to the discourses that surround it. And, for the most part, some critics argue, these assumptions are rooted in modernism itself. Many critics[44], following Foucault, have pointed to the privileging of the subject, or author implied in the idiosyncratic subjectivism of the marks and brush-strokes of much abstract-expressionism, along with the heroic mythologies associated with such artists as Jackson Pollock. These mythologies, it is claimed support the autonomous individualism so central to the ideology of the post-war period.

A related, feminist critique points out the masculinist, heroic individualism of the common image (conjured up by such figures as Harold Rosenberg and immortalized in the photographs of Hans Namuth) of the lone artist "genius" battling the canvas and society in the privacy of his studio. Such an image is implicitly juxtaposed against a feminized domestic sphere in which such creativity and freedom is inhibited. And the fruits of the male genius/artist's labor are in turn explicitly juxtaposed with the products of a feminized consumer culture (Jones 1996), one which is, again, rooted in domestic and beauty consumption.

Furthermore, the narrative of progress from Impressionism to American Abstraction endorsed by Greenberg, along with his later Kantian inspired universalism

[44] See Caroline Jones (1996) for discussion.

regarding judgments of taste, represented what was most abhorrent in "grand narratives" to many post-modern thinkers. According to Amelia Jones, the disembodied formalism of a thinker such as Greenberg is authoritarian, and by hiding the specific, masculine nature of both the author and the artist, presents an interested art as universal:

> …Greenberg's Kantianism becomes authoritarian: he assures the reader that his interpretations, which are ostensibly disinterested, are "pure" judgments that merely translate to the reader what the divinely inspired author embedded within the forms of the work of art. The ideological dimension of his judgments are always occluded through such a system, which disembodies precisely in order to veil the particularities of the body/ self of the interpreter [in this case masculinist] …. (Jones 1998: 76-77).

Much artwork of the nineteen-sixties and seventies emerged as a direct response to these criticisms of the late modernism of the nineteen-forties and fifties. It will remain to be seen whether such work in fact remedies the complaints made against both "the Enlightenment" and "Modernism" as conceived by a generation of commentators.

Continued Influences

While the reaction against the version of modernism that drove Abstract Expressionism drives much art of the following periods, this work, especially that of Jackson Pollock, has been tremendously influential, particularly as it relates to body art, performance art and art that focuses on the primacy of the material (see Jones (1998), Ratcliff (1996), Kaprow (1993)). The influence of the work of Pollock on these later forms can be understood by reading Abstract Expressionism not through Greenberg's formalism, but through the existentialism of the critic Harold Ronsenberg, a contemporary of Greenberg's. Though Rosenberg does reiterate many of the tropes of masculinity and

autonomous individualism about which feminist and post-modern commentators complain, he also opens up another reading of what could be called the "Abstract Expressionist performative." His essays emphasize not the continuity of Abstract Expressionism with earlier forms of modernism, but rather the notion of a kind of "epistemic break" with earlier conceptions of the act and purpose of painting. For Rosenberg, this movement challenged the "objecthood" of art, and instead conceived of the creative moment as one characterized by action. And, rather than viewing the artist as he who masters his materials, Rosenberg saw the painting as an almost incidental product of an "encounter" between the artists and the canvas:

> At a certain moment the canvas began to appear to one American painter after another as an arena in which to act – rather than as a space in which to reproduce, redesign, analyze, or "express" an object, actual or imagined. What was to go on the canvas was not a picture but an event….the painter went up to [the canvas] with material in his hand to do something to that other piece of material in front of him. The image would be the result of this encounter (in Shapiro (ed.) 1990: 76-77.).

In Rosenberg's reading, this relationship between the artist and the painting is decidedly non-hierarchical. The canvas, rather than being a surface which the artist must bring to life, is " a "mind through which the painter thinks by changing its surface with paint". The canvas "talks back" to the painter in order to "provoke him into dramatic dialogue" (in Shapiro (ed.) 1990:81). This approach to painting, according to Rosenberg "breaks down every distinction between art and life" (in Shapiro (ed.) 1990: 78). As a moment in the artist's life, it is "of the same metaphysical substance as the artist's life itself". (1990: 78). Such an interpretation of the relationship between the subject (artist)

and the object (painting) is clearly reminiscent of the utopian moments of Adorno's *Negative Dialectics*. In Rosenberg's version of abstract expressionism, the subject does not subsume the object, but allows it to speak in all of its particularity. In so doing it models a non-instrumental relationship to nature and a relationship between subjective interest and objective reality in which the interests of both are truly identical. At the same time, Rosenberg is acutely aware of the risks of "action painting's" reception in a status and consumer driven society such as ours, in which subjective experience is as commodifiable as any object:

> the painter himself changed into a ghost inhabiting the Art-World. Here the common phrase, "I have bought an O" rather than a painting by O becomes literally true. The man who started to remake himself has made himself into a commodity with a trademark. (in Shapiro (ed.) 1990: 82).

Rosenberg's statement becomes remarkably prescient as we examine the work of the nineteen-sixties and seventies. Much of this work consciously attempted to evade both objecthood and commodification. And, like the avant-gardes before it, failed in this mission as the increasingly voracious art-market and cultural field either canonized or commodified each movement in turn.

Chapter 3

Considering Andy Warhol: Art, Populism and the Commodity Form

Adorno's theory of art is not a simple reflection theory. His insights into the meaning and significance of modernist cultural forms (in this case autonomous art) are nuanced reflections on the social implications of the transition from Entrepreneurial to Fordist capitalism – a transition which was marked for him by the waning of the bourgeois subject in an increasingly rationalized, administered society. It is here that his notion of "totality" can be invoked: works of art do not "illustrate" or "represent" particular stages of capitalism in some transparent sense. Rather, they exist as moments in the totality of capitalist society and thus are permeated by the same objective determinations, contradictions and limitations that characterize capitalism itself. Within the limits of modernism - the cultural form of the stage of capitalism that concerned Adorno - the work of art was still, in the words of Frederick Jameson "minimally and tangentially a critique of the commodity and the effort to make it transcend itself" (Jameson 1991:17). According to Adorno's narrative of the trajectory from entrepreneurial capitalism through industrialization and its attendant rationalization of all social relations and subjectivities, culminating in Auschwitz, the future of the work of art, and society itself, is grim indeed. However, by claiming that modernist works of art exhibit a dual-character and can claim a relative autonomy from the instrumental imperatives that drive capitalist society, he implies that at least until the post-war period, tentative spaces existed within the capitalist totality for the expression of a critical stance towards the commodity form. And this resistance to the commodity form, for Adorno,

meant resisting the logic of exchange: the subsumption of the individual, the unique, the particular, by the abstraction and standardization of the market - a standardization which, for Adorno, left its imprimatur not just on objects as such, but also on human beings.

Abstract Expressionism was the last movement in the visual arts to un-ambivalently embrace the basic tenets of modernism, including an antipathy towards commercial culture; a belief in the creative, expressive power of the individual artist; the claim that art is, or at least should be autonomous from other spheres of culture, and a general preoccupation with the formal language and devices of the medium over questions of narrative or representation. While many of the Abstract Expressionists reached artistic maturity only in post-war, Fordist America, most were born during the period of Entrepeneurial capitalism, prior to the first world war, and came of age during a time in which the positions of the individual and of the form of collectivity and mass society that characterized Fordist society (and so alarmed Adorno) were still highly contested. And the Abstract Expressionist ethos was indeed ambivalent concerning both autonomous individuality and the role of society and collectivity. The skepticism felt by these artists and the critics who supported them regarding modern forms of collectivity and rationalization were well founded against the backgrounds of Fascism, Stalinism and mass consumerism, while at the same time, these artists had lived through - and benefited from - social programs such as the WPA, the socialist communities of the John Reeds Clubs, their own identification as a community of urban bohemians, and to a degree, the economic boom of post-war Fordism. Although the mainstream social and political injunction towards conformity and consumption abounded in the forties and early fifties, its form was simplistic, and its boundaries easily identified. The fact that the coming of

"mass society" was so feared by artists and intellectuals demonstrates that mass society's primary cultural form, consumption, did not yet dominate all spheres of existence. While Abstract Expresssionism speaks, sometimes in sentimental and overwrought tones, to the withering of a social structure that still provided a site (though only in the impotent sphere of art) for the individual, subjective voice, it still was "of" such a society. This work can still be understood in terms of Adorno's claim that autonomous art, while recording the damage done by and to the heroic bourgeois subject, also can provide a model for another, non-dominating, non-heirarchical subjectivity.

By the early nineteen-sixties, fundamental changes in the organization of production, labor, accumulation and consumption were taking place – changes that effected not only the production of commodities, but of subjectivities and collectives as well. These changes, described by Marxist theorists as the transition from Fordism to post-Fordism, have been explored by a number of political economists, geographers and social theorists[45] and several key themes have emerged[46]. Beginning in the mid-sixties, the US economy began to experience a number of challenges to its post-war growth and global dominance, challenges in which "the inability of Fordism and Keynesianism to contain the inherent contradictions of capitalism became more and more apparent" (Harvey 2000: 142). These challenges, Harvey goes on to explain, could not be met within the inherent rigidities of the Fordist model of production. The response of capital to the threat of economic stagnation took several forms, each of which was both assisted

[45] I will here refer to literature that addresses these changes primarily in terms of political economy. The vast literature on postmodernism as a cultural phenomenon, while ubiquitously present in the background of my discussion, is not the subject matter of this dissertation.
[46] The situation of the postmodern economy has generated complex discussion and debate over the past thirty years. I do not have the time or space to rehearse the specificities of this important literature. For my purposes here, I will rely primarily on David Harvey's (2000) account. I will also consider Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's (2000) disscusion of labor in the post-modern economy.

by, and at the same time contributed to, the concurrently increasing speed of globalization processes. The various responses of capital to the threat of economic stagnation included, according to Urry and Lash, among other things, the dismantling of the power of labor through offshore production; the decline of the welfare state; the decline of manufacturing industries; the rise of service and organizational industries; increased sub-contracting and global production systems and the decline of industrial cities (Urry and Lash 1987). These changes were accompanied by the shift from mass production to small batch production and specialized production (Hardt and Negri 2000).

This form of production, sometimes referred to as "Toyotism" in contrast to 'Fordism" responds directly to market demand instead of producing and storing large volumes of stock. This manner of "just in time" production is made possible by sophisticated systems of communication, which allows producers to react immediately to consumer demand. These systems of communication also affect the "space-time compression" (Harvey 2000) and make possible the "deterritorialization" of production integral to the process of globalization. Thus, the ability to develop and manipulate these new information technologies becomes crucial for competition in the new capitalist economy, as the importance of cybernetic intelligence of information and communication technologies comes to replace traditional industrial machines. (Hardt and Negri 2000). Thus, as Hardt and Negri (2000) point out, the model of labor characteristic of Fordist production, the machine, is replaced by the computer.

Along with the increasing reliance on technology and the intellectual labor needed to fuel technological expansion, another crucial shift in the nature of labor (at least in fully industrialized countries) accompanied the shift from a Fordist to a post-

Fordist regime: the migration of jobs from industry to the service sector, which includes sales, health care, entertainment, education, finance, advertising, cultural production, marketing, etc. And both the laboring processes and the products of these industries are not material goods as such, but include, among other things, the production of knowledge, affect, desire, style and subjectivity. Again, in terms of Adorno's analysis of the resemblance, or relationship of the work of art to the totality of social relations, the question of labor and its relationship to the commodity form, is relevant. As discussed in earlier chapters, modernist works of art respond to industrialization and mass production ambivalently - sometimes they resist the alienation inherent in mass production by insisting on uniqueness, originality and gesture. At other times, such as with the twelve-tone music of Schoenberg[47] or the machine aesthetic of the futurists, they embrace the logic of industrial production. We might, then, expect post-modern works of art to also respond to *contemporary* conditions of labor - sometimes mirroring labor's production of affect and style as in Andy Warhol's cultivation of image - sometimes resisting the immateriality of cyberspace, as in the body art of Carolee Schneeman or Marina Abramovic.

Small-batch production and the use of communications technology to create increasingly sophisticated mechanisms for marketing and product development were also instrumental in the proliferation of new sites of consumption across the body and psyche of the subject, and new signs of consumption, or the inducement to consume, began to dominate the visual landscape on an un-precedented scale. In fact, according to Baudrillard (1981), capitalism had shifted its concern with commodity production to the

[47] See Adorno (1973) for full discussion of Schoenberg's twelve-tone technique in relation to rationalization.

production of signs themselves. In line with the new economy of the image, corporations began allocating vast funds for the marketing not of their products, but of their name and logos as representatives of hip-ness, the good life, youth, sexiness or taste. As part of this effort they began to collect art and sponsor art exhibitions, concerts and other cultural events as well as investing heavily in development of image technologies and harnessing the talent and creativity of image makers. As the visual and textual landscape became dominated by the signs and symbols of advertising and the ability of the commodity form to infiltrate all aspects of the life-world became more nuanced and sophisticated, cultural theorists lost interest in the theme of "mass society," which, after all, was now a reality, and instead turned their attention to "the society of the spectacle" (Debord 1994) and "the culture of narcissism" (Lasch 1991).

Against the background of these shifts in the nature of capitalist production we can expect to see important shifts in the social position of art. First, the most salient visual form, for artists and viewers alike, was now the commercially produced image. It was no longer nature, industry or even the urban landscape that shaped and permeated the psyche of the contemporary subject, but rather the imagery of advertising and consumption that formed a ubiquitous backdrop to everyday activities, both social and solitary. Secondly, as we have seen, during the Fordist regime, mass production produced uniform products, including cultural products, that were marketed in part as symbols of conformity with the American lifestyle to an immigrant and working class populace eager to assimilate into mainstream American society (Ewen 1976). Works of art, then, stood in sharp contrast to objects of mass consumption. Within the post-Fordist environment, we see not only a shift from mass to small batch

production, which allows for a proliferation of kinds of commodities, marketed to a vast profusion of consumer or "lifestyles" categories, but we also see a commodification of "lifestyle" itself, with the expansion of the service industries, commodifying the intangible spheres of love, health, motherhood, sexuality, ethnic identity, youth etc. In this culture-scape it becomes more difficult to separate objects of exchange, produced with the instrumental intention of creating profit (albeit through the manipulation of the non-rational spheres of emotion and desire) from objects such as works of art, that may have incidental exchange value, but claim primarily to fulfill other cultural, spiritual or psychological needs.

In addition, within the constellation of Fordism and Keynesianism, the state played a regulative role both in terms of the expansion of capital and the control and integration of populations. With the end of the Fordist regime, capital becomes increasingly free from state regulations and the management of populations becomes privatized. Capital, then, takes over the role of social organization previously reserved for the state, further strengthening the role of the symbols of corporate power, rather than the state, in the articulation of cultural identity. And this privatization of more and more aspects of communal life has repercussions for the metropolis, which, throughout modern history, has been the fertile breeding ground of artistic bohemia. As the eccentric and unpredictable public space of the Flaneur takes on the corporate monotony of suburbia, and access to newly privatized space becomes more tightly controlled, the energy and electricity that nurtured artists' communities is lost. Finally, as gentrification takes hold, artists, who during the 1940's and 1950's were able to occupy favorable workspace on,

for example, the island of Manhattan, are increasingly squeezed out of the new, privatized urban spaces.

One final and more concrete shift in the nature of the art-world of the nineteen sixties must be noted. With the advent of pop-art, the art-world experienced a tremendous financial boom, which had the effect of including dealers, critics, and artists alike in the economic plenitude of post-war America, and consequently of "de-marginalizing" bohemia from mainstream society. Not surprisingly, the modernist distaste for vulgar commercialism[48] and the attendant conviction that art should provide a sphere for the reflection of values and experience outside the market began to fade. While, as we shall, see various art movements since the nineteen-sixties have adopted strategies of resistance to the increasing comodification of art, the larger, historically more significant trend has been in the opposite direction. In the consecrated spheres of today's art world – that is, museums and commercial galleries – it is not uncommon to view objects produced solely for the market, but presented as works of art. Recent examples include an exhibition of Armani fashion at the Guggenheim, a motorcycle show, also at the Guggenheim and an exhibition of fashion photography at the Museum of Modern Art.

I would like to return to the claim made at the beginning of this chapter: Adorno can best be seen as a cultural theorist of the transition from Entrepreneurial Capitalism to Fordism. Not, it must be remembered, that he viewed

[48] This distaste also points to Adorno's notion of "dual-character" as it appears on the level of social organization. While works of art at least since they have been freed from the bonds of the church, clearly contain exchange value, and function economically as objects of investment and displays of wealth. While the art world has generally conspired to downplay this aspect of the work of art and to concentrate, instead on its spiritual or intellectual value (see earlier discussion of Bourdieu), both levels of value are always at play.

cultural production as related to the economy in terms of a simple base-superstructure argument. For Adorno, the capitalist organization of material production may drive cultural production. However, it is, it is, more importantly, the expression of something fundamental to human society and to the individuation of the subject: the development of instrumental reason. But, nonetheless, Adorno's analysis of cultural forms, and art in particular, takes as fundamental to these forms capitalism's relationship both to objects and to social relations. And he duly noted the profound shift in these relationships, integrally connected to the shift from a laisser-faire, entrepreneurial-based capitalism to a bureaucratic, state-managed, Fordist regime, taking place during the first half of the twentieth century. How then, can we characterize the social position of art in the United States post-Abstract Expressionism, given these shifts in the nature and form of capitalism that began to take place by the nineteen-sixties? And, can the categories with which we have been working so far, categories derived from Adorno's particular socio/historical position within both modernism and Fordism, still be of use to us given the fundamental shift in the relationship between the world of art and that of commercial culture that have accompanied this transition? The tenuous space that was still reserved, until the end of the 1950's, for "art" as a form of social practice that existed "in" the market, but was not fundamentally "of" the market, shifts when the basic construction of subjectivity, that is, our notions of who and what we are, begins to be so intimately shaped by the needs of the market. Though it could be argued that all bourgeois social forms have been, to a degree, shaped by these needs, it was first in post-war America that these needs have been made our own through such a sensuous, visceral and productive power – namely – the power of images – a power vastly enhanced by contemporary

cyber-technology. Just as the Catholic church, as the fundamental and driving force of medieval society shaped the entire visual, sensuous and aesthetic inner and outer landscape of its subjects, so does the commodity form shape our own. And, to continue the analogy, we do not speak of "autonomous" Medieval art: art of this period is, by definition, like all other spheres of society, tied in spirit and in purpose to the Church. Does this become in some sense, the case with art in late capitalism? Or, has art, as a field of critical practice, been able to maintain a moment of mediation, or critical reflection, even in the face of the total encroachment of what Adorno and Horkheimer called "the Culture Industry"?

In the next two chapters, I explore several contradictory moments in theart world that emerged during, roughly, the period of transition described above: the pop art of Andy Warhol, and two generations of Feminist art. The first example is that of an artist whose work was produced on the cusp of the transition that I describe above, and who also exhibits explicit, but potentially ambivalent, signs of cooperation with art's increasing commodification. Feminist art, on the other hand, seems to invite a critical reading, but not by the standards which Adorno sets up for autonomous art. Given the paradigm shift within the art world away from the modernist values lauded by Adorno, and the actually shrinking autonomy of the art world in terms of its cooptation by market imperatives I ask whether this art demonstrates a potential for critical reflection, and if so, in what terms? Must we conclude that, because of his emersion in the parameters of the modernist aesthetic, Adorno's proscriptions will be of little help in identifying these moments of critical potential? Or, is it possible that, once we recognize the historical limitations of Adorno's horizon – that he could not articulate the critical categories of a

post-modern art because it was not yet visible to him – we may still find his attitude and approach to works of art to be relevant? Part of my project in the next two chapters is to reconstruct those categories from Adorno's thought that remain useful to us today.

Pop Art and Andy Warhol
Background

The influence of Clement Greenberg and Abstract Expressionism remained strong in American art of the late 1950's and early 1960's in the form of the color field painting of artists such as Barnett Newman, Morris Louis and Helen Frankenthaler. At the same time, several other currents developed that explicitly rejected the modernist tenets of both Greenberg and Adorno's versions of modernism. These developments, often in contradictory ways, reflected *both* the increasing commodification of all aspects of culture in the United States *and* the burgeoning anti-authoritarianism and hedonism of youth culture. Common to many of the new art practices was the attempt to collapse - or at least question - the boundaries between art and everyday life[49]. And since, in the United States, everyday life meant the ubiquitous presence of mass culture and the commodity form, these elements, along with other (literal) detritus (as in Robert Rauschenberg's combines) or visual signs (as with Jasper Johns' use of the American flag) made frequent appearances in the work of American artists as early as the mid-fifties. Some artists, like Claes Oldenberg, who emerged out of the distinctly countercultural and Beat influenced "happenings" scene[50], explicitly satirized the

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[49] This practice had a strong precedent in the work of the European Dada and Surrealist artists of a half a decade earlier. The American artists discussed here were well aware of this work, and therefore the stylistic tendencies discussed were not original. However, they take a unique form and have a unique history in the American context.

[50] This scene also produced another characteristic, counter-modernist tendency, which we will later discuss: the challenging of the notion of the artwork as static product of a singular genius. As the term "happening" implies, much of the art that emerged form this scene was fleeting, performative, spontaneous and collective.

commodity status of art when he opened a “store” in 1961 called the Ray Gun Manufacturing Company in a storefront on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. There, patrons could purchase, for reasonable prices, Oldenburg’s sloppily constructed facsimiles of everyday appliances and food products. Ironically, the works of this generation of artists, while openly appropriating sacred symbols of US patriotism out of context, or parodying America’s obsession with consumption, were hastily shown in successful commercial galleries and purchased by major museums[51].

No artist of the late 1950’s or early 1960’s has generated more attention and controversy than Andy Warhol[52]. Like the artists mentioned above, Warhol appropriated iconic elements of American culture to produce work that was ambiguous in its message yet highly commercially and critically successful. His work, however, goes much further than that of other artists of his generation in its eschewal of traditional modernist art-world values and in terms of its incorporation into extra-artworld American culture. In other words, Warhol, like Johns or Rauschenberg, is not only an art-world icon, but also a household word. In terms of Adorno’s social and aesthetic theory, Warhol’s work is antithetical to the association of art with a sphere of potentially autonomous and critical thought. Warhol’s work, and indeed his entire persona, exemplified the erosion, in the art-world of the 1960’s, of the boundaries between commercial art, or “the culture industry” and the sort of liberatory and critical aesthetic experience that works of art, according to Adorno, potentially offer. Measured against

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[51] I.e. Jasper Johns had his first show at Leo Castelli in 1958 and sold four works directly to the Museum of Modern Art. Though Johns, Oldenburg and Rauschenberg did not set out explicitly to create works that were antithetical to the creation of exchange value, the commercial success of their ambiguously critical work sets an important precedent for later artistic developments. For example, artists in the 70’s such as Robert Smithson set out to deliberately create “earthworks” – site-specific works of art, tied to natural environments and meant to be temporary. These works also were also, finally, turned into objects of conventional gallery display and consumption in the form of photographs and videos.

Adorno's standards, Warhol's art must be viewed as symptomatic of the full and final co-optation of all spheres of human consciousness by the totalizing force of a post-industrial, exchange society. In such a society, not only is the possibility of autonomous art obliterated, but also the possibility of critical thought and true human individuation. However, keeping in mind the observations made above concerning the economic and cultural shifts in the nature of capitalism *after* the period of Adorno's most enduring insights, the critical connotations of Warhol's work must be re-thought. Andy Warhol's work, I argue, characterizes a socio-historical and economic constellation that is, in many important respects, very different than the one which Adorno theorized. In this respect, one must search outside Adorno's modernist paradigm to evaluate whether, and it what sense, Warhol's art as a characteristic example of its period can be read as critical, or as symptomatic of the final and complete subsumption of aesthetic production by the imperatives of the commodity form. Thus, I argue that we must end up revising some of Adorno's notions concerning what forms of art might contribute to a project of critical engagement with social totality. However, I also maintain that Adorno's understanding of art's relationship to this totality – most importantly his claim that art is an objective and in some sense privileged social text – remains relevant despite shifts in the nature of totality.

Warhol's Commercial Roots

Business is the step that comes after Art. I started as a commercial artist, and I want to finish as a business artist. After I did the thing called "art" or whatever it's called, I went into business art. I wanted to be an Art Businessman or a Business Artist. Being good in business is the most fascinating kind of art…Business art, Art Business, The Business art Business (Warhol 1975: 92).

When Andy Warhol moved to New York from his industrial home town outside of Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, his ambition, realized by the end of the 1950's, was to become a successful commercial artist. In retrospect, his evolution from commercial artist to gallery star seems to follow inevitably from the trajectory of post-war American art. However, with his usual surface disavowal of critical reflection, he claims that his choice of commercial art over gallery art was merely expedient: "I guess if I had thought art was that simple, I probably would have gone into gallery art rather than commercial, but I liked commercial."(Warhol 1975: 122). In fact, in 1963, when Warhol was preparing to make his first foray into the gallery world, he showed two versions of paintings of coca-cola bottles to the dealer Emile Antonio - one in the painterly style of abstract expressionism and the other illustrational and diagrammatic. He asked Antonio which of these stylistic avenues he should pursue in order to "make it" in the art world. Antonio recommended the diagrammatic rendition and thus began Warhol's New York art-world career. Indeed, Warhol remained stubbornly coy during the many interviews in which he was repeatedly asked to link his formal choices to current art historical directions. For example, he explains his early choice to work in a serial format to Benjamin Buchloh

> I don't know. Everybody was finding a different thing. I had done the comic strips, and then I saw Roy Lichtenstein's little dots, and they were so perfect, so I thought I could not do the comic strips, because he did them so well. So I just started other things. … If only I had stayed with doing the Campbell's soup can, because everybody only does one painting anyway. Doing it whenever you need money is a really good idea, just that one painting over and aver again, which is what everybody remembers you for anyway. (in Michelsen (ed.) 2001: 120 and 124).

Whether these comments are naïve or cynical, they signal an important shift in art-world sentiment. What Warhol has done here is to refuse, both in his statements and in his actual work, to affirm the notion of art as an autonomous sphere of creative practice. For Warhol, artistic production is commercial, just as commercial production can be creative. The gallery artist, like the commercial artist, is a businessman, an entrepreneur who must take into account both the vicissitudes of the market and the tastes of an audience. Even if these both dovetail with what might seem, to the critic, the necessities of formal, art historical development, they are the result of instrumental action on the part of the artist, who has, primarily her own commercial success in mind. While art-market success may have always been a primary concern for artists (at least since we have been able to speak of "the market" as such), the taboo against uttering this fact publicly had been honored by art-world practitioners up until this point. Artists like Duchamp, with his "ready-mades" had already unmasked the socially constructed nature of aesthetic judgments, but no practitioner, at least in the world of visual art[53] had so nakedly exposed the role of commercial interest in the decision making process of the artist. After Warhol, it was no longer necessary to maintain an attitude of monetary or commercial disinterest in order to achieve art-world success. And, as we shall see when we examine Warhol's art in more detail, it was not only in the world of discourse that the historical separation between fine and commercial art was diffused, but also in production and appearance.

Warhol's open preoccupation with commercial success, despite some initial disapproval from old-garde art-world gatekeepers did bear fruits in the form of increasing media attention and sales. In the strong post-war economy Warhol and pop-art

[53] One can cite numerous literary examples of the mercenary role of the artist the literary world, including Balzac (2001)

in general, eventually won out over color-field painting to become an art-world critical and commercial success. Not surprisingly, the accessibility of pop art attracted not only collectors, but also the larger commercial media to New York's art world and the art market experienced an unprecedented boom[54]. This economic boom was also unprecedented in its international nature. Warhol's work was not only a hit on the American market, but also sold well in Europe after Elleanna Sonnabend, the ex-wife of Warhol's New York dealer LeoCastelli opened a branch of her gallery in Paris. Warhol's work, regardless of possible underlying critical messages, had the glamour and accessibility to appeal to a growing market of collectors anxious to convert their financial capital to cultural capital. And, with the permeable boundaries between artists, who no longer identified themselves as outsiders, and popular culture icons "questions about merit would increasingly be settled in the marketplace. The bond between art and money had cemented." (Szanto in Halle (ed.) 2003: x).

The general tenor of the times combined with the easy, fun and decorative nature of Warhol's work transformed the social atmosphere of the art world. During the heyday of Abstract Expressionism, gallery openings and other art-world social events were serious, bohemian affairs, characterized by heavy drinking, smoking and debate, sometimes leading to fistfights. These events were attended mostly by artists, critics and other members of the intelligensia, with occasional select collectors, like Peggy Guggenheim, came from old money, education and culture. In the "Warhol sixties" gallery openings evolved into parties, where media celebrities mingled with artists, hangers on and smartly dressed middle-class or nouveau rich collectors like

[54] See "Pop Art Sells On and On" in New York Times Magazine, 1964, John Canaday (May 31, 1964) and "Sold Out Art: More Buyers than Ever Sail into a Broadening Market" Life 55, no. 12 (September

Robert and Ethel Scull (Wolf 1966)."[55] Indeed, these gallery-goers' clothing matched the pictures on the wall, which included Warhol's silk-screened series of celebrity icons (notably Marilyn Monroe, James Dean and Elvis Presley) and his commissioned "Society Portraits[56] in which some of the attending public literally viewed images of themselves. According to the historian Carolyn Jones (1996), Warhol's style as well as the content of these works filled the important social function of quelling the class-anxieties of the growing class of newly moneyed entrepreneurs and professionals by inserting them into the world of art and culture traditionally reserved for more established elites.

Again, this new art world did not attempt to neutralize or euphemize its commercial nature. Earlier, the commodity nature of the artwork was disavowed by artists, and even dealers soft-pedaled the ugly market transaction necessary to make a sale by conducting such events quietly in the back room of the gallery. By contrast, in 1964, Bianchini Gallery opened an exhibition called "The Supermarket" in which Warhol's Campbell's soup canvasses were installed next to a pyramid of the real thing signed by Warhol and sold at the going rate of 20 cents a can. While such an exhibition could be read as critical of the post-war economy's obsession with consumption, it could just as easily be interpreted as a celebration of such consumption. In this artworld, the conspicuous disavowal of the economic, which Bourdieu cites as a fundamental characteristic of the sphere of high culture, is absent.

20,)1963)

[55] See also Canaday (1964).

[56] These were commissioned portraits of, generally "nouveau rich," members of high society such as Ethel Scull. Warhol would send these patrons, usually women, to a photo-booth and ask them to return with several strips of artless photo-booth pictures of themselves. From these, would produce a series of silk-screened portraits (Jones 1996.).

Warhol's artworld, unlike the earlier bohemia described by Greenberg in "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," was not hostile to, but rather embraced, the popular consumer culture that surrounded it. While this was true in terms of the social networks that criss-crossed this world – it was even more the case in terms of the actual works of art. The changing function and nature of the art world in "the Warhol Sixties" cannot be fully understood through an examination of hierarchy, social networks, and patterns of consumption. The works of art themselves also do the important "work" of representing the changing relationship between the individual and consumer society.

The Work of Warhol's Works

Someone said that Brecht wanted everyone to think alike. I want everyone to think alike. But Brecht wanted to do it through Communism, in a way, and Russia is doing it under government. It's happening here all by itself without being under a strict government; so if it's working without trying, why can't it work without being Communist? Everybody looks alike and acts alike and we're getting more and more that way. I think everybody should be a machine. I think everybody should like everybody. (Warhol in Swenson 1963).

According to Adorno, the modernist artwork, ideally, acts as a privileged site for the articulation of subjectivity in a world in which contradicting the imperatives of the collective has become increasingly difficult. And the dissonance that characterizes so many modernist works of art reflects the contradiction between the drive of the subject to have an authentic, individuated voice, and the demands of the (false) collective (either the Fordist society of commercially administered culture or the equally oppressive state controlled society of Fascism or Stalinism) to conform and submit to its organization. Such dissonance is also what accounts for the "difficult," inhospitable nature of much modern art. It does not appeal to the uninitiated audience because it

expresses the unpleasant truth of social conditions. Unlike, for example, television sit-coms or Hollywood films, the characters represented in many modernist works do not neatly resolve their dilemmas or fit into comforting but shallow categories. And, likewise, the formal qualities of modernist works of art can rarely be described as "pleasing," "decorative" or even "beautiful". In fact, such adjectives are usually considered pejorative when used to describe modernist art.

Warhol's work, by contrast, does not engender a sense of struggle and is "designed" to appeal to a wide audience of art "consumers." Indeed, his work seems intent on erasing the very premise of individuality or subjectivity at the levels of mode of production, of technique and of imagery. While he makes an ironic gesture towards the romantic notion of artworks as the last refuge of the hand-made in an era of production by having his mother sign his works in her eccentric, old-world script, Warhol's art is meant to evoke both the culture industry and the assembly line. In 1963 he and his entourage took over an old factory on 47th street in Manhattan, which they called "the factory." There, Warhol assembled a staff and physical process that allowed him to produce his art with the rapidity and organization of an assembly line. While he often denied his own role as creative master-mind (again rejecting modernist notions of "genius") he clearly functioned in a managerial role, looking on while his "staff" produced his series of silk-screened images – images that were then marketed to an emerging class of elite professionals as symbols of sophistication and urbanity.

The photo- silk-screen method employed by Warhol was first developed in the nineteen-fifties, by Robert Rauschenberg. Rauschenberg, however, used silk-screen transfers, a printing method traditionally employed in advertising and political

posters, to combine images taken from various sources in order to create a "collage" or "montage" effect, much like the one praised by Adorno and Benjamin in the films of Eisenstein. Such an effect invited the viewer to enter the image, and perform the creative of work of making associations between images, or of allowing the sometimes - contrasting images to resolve themselves in a higher unity or level of meaning. In this sense, such a technique is inherently both dialectical and dialogic, inviting the viewer to participate in, and potentially be transformed by, the creative process. Warhol's silk-screens, on the other hand, are composed of single photographic images. The subject matter is sometimes iconic, like his portraits of celebrities such as Marilyn Monroe, Elvis Presley or Chairman Mao. At other times, it is culled from news stories, as in his "Disaster Series" but is almost always identifiable to a large viewing public. This public, however, is steadfastly denied the opportunity to engage in a multi-layered, associative relationship to the image by its flat decorativeness and seriality (Warhol usually created a run of almost identical works from one image). When, for example, an image of an electric chair is presented repeatedly, with only the background changing from one glaring primary to another, the effect is numbing yet entertaining. The electric chair looses its societal associations (one no longer thinks of death or the injustices of the judiciary system) and the viewer becomes transfixed, like an infant studying a brightly colored mobile, by the flat, contrasting colors. Similarly, with his many portrait series, the human being represented in the portrait becomes dehumanized through repetition, the superimposition of deliberately artificial color, and the simplicity of the image. At the same time, the viewer as well becomes less of a reflecting subject, and more a collective consumer of "eye candy."

The production, consumption and appearance of the silk-screened canvases described above clearly and aggressively claims the priority of the social over the individual. The artist's unique mark, or gesture, fundamental to Abstract Expressionism, is conspicuously absent. In fact, these paintings are produced collectively (though, like production in the Fordist and post Fordist economy, clear hierarchies and managerial strategies are in place) rather than individually and belong to Andy Warhol, in some sense, as a particular pair of pants produced in China might "belong" to Tommy Hilfiger, or hit song that is really the result of various studio technologies can be said to be "by" Brittney Spears. At the same time, the images in these painting are culled from mass society – and the society of mass consumption. The faces of celebrities, brand-name house-hold products such as Campbell's soup and Brillo soap pads, images drawn from news sound or vision bites loose their association to the use value of soup or soap pads, the particularity of a human being, or the actual social relevance of an event. They become, rather, signs of consumption, spectacle and glamour in a generic and universal sense. Gone are the eccentric objects and faces of modernist still-lives and portraits. Even the detritus of everyday life – theatre tickets, playbills, cigarette buts, chair-caining – represented in cubist paintings invited association with particular people and events. This is not the case with Warhol's subject matter, which, like the image on our TV screen, is meant to be passively and universally consumed. Such an art is brilliantly, and, as I will argue, ambiguously representative of the social structure from which it emerged: it clearly reflects the power and reach of the late capitalist imperative to consume – not just commodities, but signs themselves - into all spheres of social action and reflection,

including that of art, which, traditionally, has tried to maintain a critical stance vis-à-vis consumer society.

Does Warhol, then, tell the story of the cooptation of the sphere of autonomous art, and in so doing reveal the truth that an art that claimed autonomy would only hide? Or, was he merely a symptom of that cooptation – demonstrating in his work a complete complicity with the commodification of art? In the past decades, critics have hotly contested this point. The art historian Thomas Crow, for example, maintained that Warhol was a profound social critic who

> continuing to ground his art in the ubiquity of the packaged commodity…came to produce his most powerful paintings dramatizing the hollowness of the consumer icon; that is, events in which the mass-produced image as the bearer of desires was exposed in its inadequacy by the reality of suffering and death.(Crow 1996: 86).

Benjamin Buchloh goes even further, reading in Warhol's embrace of popular culture and collective modes of production the embodiment of democratic tendencies. Warhol, he claims

> freed himself from the obsolete concepts of originality and authorship and had developed a sense of the necessity for "teamwork" and "collaboration" and a Brechtian understanding of the commonality of "ideas" – those universally prevailing forms of social production from which, traditionally, only the specialized and condensed talent of the artist as unique and singular creator had been exempted (in Michelson (ed.) 2001: 7).

Other critics, such as, for example, Robert Hughes, saw him as cynical and self-serving and claimed that Marxist critics (such as Crow and Buchloh) had been duped into reading Warhol's art as subversive by their own critical agenda. Hughes comments ironically that

> People could immediately see and grasp what Warhol was painting. They were used to soup cans, movie stars, and Coke bottles. To make such bottles in a factory in the South and sell them in Adu Dahbi was a capitalist evil; to paint

> them in a factory in New York and sell them in Düsseldorf, an act of cultural criticism. (Hughes 1992: 53).

In what follows, I will consider the terms against which we can evaluate Warhol's work, and its significance within the rapidly changing cultural landscape of post-war America. I will next consider the important conversation between Adorno and Walter Benjamin concerning mass culture and techniques of mechanical reproduction in order to further think through some of the problems raised by Warhol, and to further explore the limitations of some of Adorno's most strongly held convictions.

The Benjamin-Adorno Debate and its Relevance to Warhol

Mechanical means are today, and using them I can get more art to more people. Art should be for everyone (Warhol 1966).

Pop art is for everyone . I don't think art should be only for the select few. I think it should be for the mass of American people and they usually accept art anyway (Warhol 1967: 5).

Born in 1982, Walter Benjamin was a decade older than Adorno, and, while Adorno initially admired Benjamin when they met in 1923, by 1928 Adorno was becoming increasingly critical of Benjamin's support of the work of Bertlodt Brecht and of the Soviet Union. In particular, he disagreed with Benjamin on key points concerning the relationship between art, politics and culture. Though Adorno's senior, Benjamin's thoughts on the importance of techniques of mass reproduction, and his embrace of the breakdown of art's elitist status were much more in line with the thinking of avant-gardists both in his day and today than was Adorno's total commitment to a more esoteric version of modernism. The two men voiced their disagreements over the role of the aura,

mass reproduction, democratic access, and the implications of collective reception in a series of letters and essays, which remain important today.

As we have seen, Adorno's judgment regarding the products of mass culture and the techniques used to create these products was uncompromisingly negative. Unlike many contemporary approaches to cultural analysis[57], Adorno did not see any potential for industrially produced cultural products to be subversively appropriated, or to contain latent critical potential. On the other hand, while Adorno did acknowledge that autonomous art bears both the marks of and some of the responsibility for the damaged society from which it comes, he by and large embraced its canonical works. And, like Greenberg, he considered modernism's elitism and obscurity, a necessary condition for art's survival. Benjamin, by contrast, recognized the duplicitiousness of the culture industry, while at the same time pointing out that elements of the technical means and modes of reception deployed by the culture industry also have democratic and, indeed, revolutionary possibilities. At the same time, he was critical of the mode of reception necessary for the consumption of "high" art, as a remnant of an earlier time when class hierarchy was legitimated through recourse to mythical forces.

Benjamin ties these themes together in his 1936 essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." In this essay, he discusses the state of art since the advent of mechanical reproduction, which he views as instrumental in the creation of the conditions for a new definition and function of art in society. Ultimately, he believed that, like the mode of production for Marx, these techniques of cultural production could be harnessed in the interest of the abolition of capitalist society. Mechanical reproduction - including prints, photography, film, techniques of sound

recording, and today we would also have to consider computer generated images, text and sound - destroys the “aura” that surrounds classical and modern art. This aura, itself a remnant of art’s earlier relationship to religion, refers to the distance from the artwork felt by the viewer, and the sense of awe and un-approachability that such works inspire. The notion of aura, for Benjamin, functions much as “distinction” does in Bourdieu: in both cases, works of art are associated with the ruling class, and through either their inaccessibility to the masses, or their “aura” serve to create a dividing line between those who have access to the works (either intellectually, culturally, economically or spatially) and those who do not. Works that result from mechanical reproduction, on the other hand, are neither unique nor irreplaceable. They do not (or did not in Benjamin’s time) hang in museums, churches or official buildings. Rather, they are produced in bulk, can be bought and owned by the average citizen, and can be held close, inspected, and manipulated at the viewer’s will (not true, obviously, of film). Hence, they no longer function as symbols of authority but rather, can potentially function as instruments of liberation insofar as they challenge traditional culture: “permitting the reproduction to meet the beholder or listener in his own particular situation….lead[s] to a tremendous shattering of tradition...” (Benjamin 1986: 221.)

Adorno and Benjamin were working against the backdrop both of fascism and of an increasingly powerful and all encompassing consumer capitalism. Both of these socio-political tendencies are associated with the creation, harnessing and manipulation of a collective subject. As we have seen, Adorno identified this form of collectivity, or “mass society” in all of its forms with repression and the dissolution of the individual. Like Marx, who identified the spread of homogeneous, capitalist culture with

[57] See Grossberg (ed.) 1992.

the increasing potential for a universal and liberatory class consciousness (Marx 1967), Benjamin had a less pessimistic view of the collective subject of late capitalist society. Though he certainly recognized the negative consequences of "bad collectivity" as exemplified, for example, in fascism, he believed that the mass collective created by the economic, political and social conditions of late capitalist modernity was capable both of critical consciousness and of transformation. He also regarded the cultural forms associated with this mass as potentially ambiguous – that is, they too were open to critical, transformative interpretation.

Works of art that harnessed the techniques of mechanical reproduction, in particular film in contrast to painting, created, for Benjamin, potentially revolutionary habits of reception. To begin with, traditionally "auratic" works call for a solitary and subjective attitude of contemplation. Such a mode of contemplation, for Benjamin, like the kind of reception demanded by film, is antithetical to the project of collective liberation. First, there is no potential for the masses to organize their reception of, for example, modern paintings, collectively (this was not the case with religious works of art in the middle ages which were meant to appeal to a collective audience and were viewed in the context of collective worship) and hence the development of modern painting has not been congruent with the developing sensibilities of a collective audience. Expert opinion and laymen's response have grown increasingly divergent, as painting becomes less socially relevant. This results in an audience for painting for whom "the conventional is uncritically enjoyed, and the truly new is criticized with aversion" (Benjamin ?) Film, on the other hand, was developed alongside the existence of a mass audience – in other words, a mass audience is presumed from the outset, and the views of

the expert or critic in a sense come "after" this audience response. Hence, with film, not only do "the critical and receptive attitudes of the public coincide" (Benjamin 1986:234) but also, this same public is apt to respond in a positive manner toward innovation in film (Benjamin 1986: 235). Film, then, because of its collective nature, is more able to harness aesthetic technical innovation in a socially relevant manner than is painting, which, for Benjamin, has become socially irrelevant, due in part to its orientation towards solitary reception.

Benjamin's second point concerning the reception of a mass medium such as film in contrast to painting has to do with the notion of distraction. Painting, when viewed in the context of a modernist aesthetics of contemplation, absorbs the viewer. For Adorno, this kind of aesthetic experience allows the viewer to identify with the object, even, in some sense to mimic it. As we have seen, for Adorno, such an aesthetic experience is liberatory in that it provides and alternative to an instrumental, objectifying appropriation of the object. Benjamin, on the other hand, is interested in the distracted mode of aesthetic experience characteristic of mass society, in which, rather than *being absorbed by the work of art*, "the distracted mass *absorbs the work of art* [emphasis mine]" (Benjamin 1986: 240). Benjamin points to architecture as a prototype for this mode of distracted reception. Buildings, he points out "are appropriated by use and by perception…not so much by attention as by habit" (Benjamin 1986: 240). It is this mode of appropriation, not aesthetic contemplation, which, for Benjamin, is most likely to lead to progressive social transformation because "the tasks which face the human apparatus of perception at the turning points of history cannot be solved by …contemplation alone. They are mastered gradually, by habit" (Benjamin 1986: 243).

Benjamin is here re-affirming the necessity of praxis in any conception of social change, and, by implication sees aesthetic contemplation as theory without praxis. Art that is perceived in a state of distraction, such as architecture, is integrated into everyday life and activity and thus can act as a catalyst, in the habits of consciousness that it cultivates, for the transformation of everyday life. Painting, and other forms of art that demand a "purely" aesthetic form of perception, are restricted in their effect to the aesthetic sphere, which is one of contemplation. Film, for Benjamin, is the technical means by which the masses can be mobilized by and through art precisely because it is able to appeal to the viewer through this distracted state.

Adorno's Objections

Adorno's principle objections to Benjamin's argument hinge first of all on the interpretation of "technique" and secondly on each thinker's respective views concerning the collective subject. Benjamin's cultural argument follows, in what will, according to Adorno, turn out to be a vulgar and undialectical version, Marx's account of the historical movement between the relations and the means of production. Techniques of mechanical reproduction represent an advance over traditional means of representation and can, potentially, contribute to the collapse of tradition social relations. They do this first by destroying the aura, and secondly by helping to form a collective audience.

Adorno, whose attitude toward technology is, to begin with, ambivalent[58], disagrees with Benjamin's claim that mechanical reproduction indeed represents a technical "advance" over traditional forms of art-making. In fact, he equates these technologies not with a potentially liberatory advance in the means of production, but

rather with a cynical development in the harnessing of technology to manipulate the individual :

> The concept of technique in the culture industry is only in name identical with technique in works of art. In the latter, technique is concerned with the internal organization of the object itself, with its inner logic. In contrast, the technique of the culture industry is, from the beginning, one of distribution and mechanical reproduction, and therefore always remains external to its object (Adorno 1975: 14).

For Benjamin, it is these techniques that help to collapse the "aura," which, as we have seen, he associates with the repressive function of traditional art. And, while Adorno agrees with Benjamin about the repressive function of traditional auratic art, and he also agrees that art in the contemporary world tends away from the auratic, he objects to Benjamin's characterization of autonomous works of art as auratic. For Benjamin, the destruction of the aura made possible by technologies of mass reproduction relies on the development of technique. This dismantling of the aura seen in autonomous art, for Adorno, also relies on technical development, but Adorno disagrees with Benjamin's definition of aesthetic technical development, and particularly with his automatic association of technological means with progressive potential. Autonomous art, for Adorno, exhibits an immanent development of its formal laws. In so doing, it takes, as in the case of abstract painting, its own formal structure as its object, or content: art about art. Hence, it tends to 'lay bare,' or demystify the conditions of its production, thus dismantling the aura, which relies on the state of awe that it produces for its distance. The techniques of mechanical reproduction which hold so much hope for Benjamin, argued Adorno, owe their existence to commercial interests: they were developed, or at least

[58] And, it turns out, Adorno's skepticism regarding the possibility of technology liberating the working class is ever more founded, as robotics, computers and other advanced in the productive apparatus have

immediately harnessed by the culture industry –in order to transmit specific content. Benjamin attempts to equate techniques of mechanical reproduction with means of production in the Marxian sense, and then to claim that the means of production have evolved in such a way as to make revolutionary transformation possible, and now it is up to social relations to complete the process. Adorno, on the other hand, exhibits a more skeptical attitude toward technological development fully in line with his critique of instrumental reason. And further, again following the argument of the dialectic of Enlightenment, rather than demystifying aesthetic or cultural production, such technologies, particularly film, are ideal vehicles for the reinvestment of the cultic in the form of the star system.

Adorno also contests Benjamin's claim that techniques of mechanical reproduction lend themselves to perception in a state of distraction, and that such a mode of perception represents a revolutionary advance over traditional techniques. As we have seen, Adorno's argument concerning the emancipatory qualities of autonomous art hinges on such art's ability to reflect society in its totality, rather than as fragmented, or isolated moments. For Adorno, it is only in its totality that the contradictions and unfulfilled promises of society can be seen. The genius of the methods employed by the culture industry lies, in part, in its ability to fragment reality into seemingly unrelated bits and pieces: story lines in which, as individual moments, contradictions can be satisfyingly resolved. In addition, the culture industry fits neatly into the work habits demanded of subjects by modern society: the modern worker (presumably both industrial and white collar) returns home from a day of exhausting yet meaningless and repetitive activity too tired to concentrate on demanding; forms of entertainment. She is presented instead,

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only served to intensify the labor process on a global scale.

through radio, television and film, with entertainment that both mirrors her work activity in its mindless repetition, and is easily consumable in the state of distraction in which she is left by her day's labor. Such distracted habits of perception, as encouraged by the same technologies lauded by Benjamin, actively prohibit the kind of critical consciousness required to apprehend the real nature of social existence. Here, Adorno makes the case with regards to radio's audience:

> They cannot stand the strain of concentrated listening and surrender themselves resignedly to what befalls them, with which they can come to terms only if they do not listen to it too closely….deconcentrated listening makes the perception of the whole impossible (in Arato (ed.) 1994:288).

Furthermore, Adorno rejects Benjamin's theory of distraction as an acceptance of social conditions which ought to be transformed:

> …I do not find your theory of distraction convincing. – if only for the simple reason that in a communist society work will be organized in such a way that people will no longer be so tired and stultified that they need distraction (in Jameson (ed.) 1980: 123)

Finally, it is Adorno and Benjamin's opposing views on the emancipatory potential of collective consciousness that accounts for their most profound differences. Against the historical background from which both Adorno and Benjamin originate, the notion of "the masses" is especially significant. First of all, both thinkers descend from the tradition of western Marxism which, following Marx himself, analyzes history and social change from the perspective of class formation and transformation and views the proletariat as the modern revolutionary class. Also, George Lukacs' seminal work, *History and Class Consciousness* (1971), a text devoted primarily to the analysis of modes of revolutionary consciousness and arguing that the working class is the privileged agent of social change, was central to the development of the Frankfurt School's version

of critical theory. Secondly, as mentioned above, the period in which both thinkers worked, from the 1930's through (in Adorno's case) the 1960's, Western culture, through urbanization, the proliferation of consumerism and increasing bureaucratization, came to be characterized in terms of "mass society". This cultural transformation was noted in social science, literature and politics. Consequently, both Adorno and Benjamin's work responds in complex ways to both versions of this preoccupation with the increasingly "collective" nature of society. And, as we have seen, for each thinker the argument concerning technical changes in art and culture is seen through this preoccupation. Not surprisingly, Benjamin is the more optimistic of the two men concerning the potential of mass, or collective consciousness. Though fully aware of the dangers of mass manipulation as demonstrated through the success of fascism and consumer society, Benjamin nonetheless regarded the collectivization of consciousness dialectically, and, true to his Brechtian orientation, viewed art, ideally as a catalyst for collective action and reflection.

Adorno, however, as we have seen, tended to collapse the constructed consumers of 'mass society' with the collective consciousness of the proletariat, and saw each as equally detrimental to the survival of individuality and subjectivity. Though Adorno would certainly agree with Marx regarding the importance of relations of production – that is – class in understanding the social totality, for him there is nothing inherently progressive about the working class. The proletariat, like the ruling class, are a product of bourgeois society. And because of their condition of subjugation, they are even less such likely than the bourgeoisie to be able to appropriate cultural forms for their own self expression. With regards to music, he claims

> The proletariat was never permitted to constitute itself as a musical subject; such a creative function was made impossible both in terms of its position within the system – where it was nothing more than an object of domination – and through the repressive factors which formed its own nature.[59] (Adorno 1973: 130).

And furthermore, even if their ever existed a revolutionary potential in the working class as such, for Adorno this potential would have been squelched by the ability of the culture industry to reach into the very consciousness of its consumers and turn the into passive receptacles of ideology. Consequently, Adorno would not be won over to the virtues of techniques of representation and reproduction that appeal to a collective subject or that participate in the formation of a collective subject.

Adorno began to express more ambivalence concerning techniques of mechanical reproduction toward the end of his life. In his essay "Culture Industry Reconsidered" for example, he implies that the fact that the culture industry must continue churning out an endless series of products in the attempt maintain its hold on consumers demonstrates that human subjectivity still constitutes some kind of limit to reification (Hanson 1982: 192). In "Transparencies on Film", he reaffirms his view that film, because of its inherently representative nature, leaves less room for the mimetic reconstitution of the object that is a key value of the aesthetic experience. This empirical orientation, however, does not render film unable to reflect social totality, but rather confirms the need for a sociological interpretation rather than an aesthetic one:

> society projects into film quite differently – far more directly on account of the objects – than into advanced painting or literature. That which is irreducible about the objects in film is itself a mark of society, prior to the aesthetic realization of an intention. By virtue of this relationship to the object, the aesthetics of film is thus inherently concerned with society. There can be no aesthetics of the cinema, not even a pure technological one, which would not include the sociology of the cinema (Adorno 1982: 202).

[59] This position is particularly problematic in view of Adorno's treatment of jazz.

In other words, while perhaps not fully amenable to a purely aesthetic mode of apprehension, films are important objects of sociological analysis. And furthermore, with this marriage of aesthetics and sociology, through film Adorno is able to rescind his earlier verdict regarding the desirability of culture's appeal to a collective audience:

> That, among its functions, film provides models for collective behavior is not just an additional imposition of ideology. Such collectivity, rather, inheres in the innermost elements of film….It would not be incorrect to describe the constitutive subject of film as a "we" in which the aesthetic and sociological aspects of the medium converge…The liberated film would have to wrest its a priori collectivity from the mechanisms of unconscious and irrational influence and enlist this collectivity in the service of emancipatory intentions (Adorno 1982: 203- 204).

These two essays represent a less extreme, condemning Adorno, and one who may be more sympathetic in today's intellectual milieu.

Revisiting Warhol

Considered in terms of the conversation between Benjamin and Adorno, the question of whether to view Warhol's work as affirmative or critical requires an equivocal response. Benjamin wanted art to appropriate the technological means developed and deployed by the culture of consumer capitalism in the name of the radical enlightenment of the masses. Adorno warns against such an overly optimistic view both of these technologies and of the revolutionary potential of the masses. Andy Warhol accomplished the first part of Benjamin's program: he employed the technologies of the culture industry in the production of artworks. But he did this only by confirming Adorno's skepticism. Warhol's work has meaning against the background of an art world that was in the process of a profound structural transformation, in part due to the political, economic and cultural transformations discussed at the beginning of this chapter.

Modernism was shaped by an understanding of the artwork as both an autonomous and a privileged site within industrial capitalist society. This autonomy was possible because the logic and demands of the market had not yet completely permeated all spheres of what Habermas refers to as "the life-world". Abstract-Expressionism, reflecting its position at the cusp of the transformation to a Fordist economy and the permeation of the culture of consumption, still looked back, nostalgically, to the autonomy of the previous era's modernism and spoke to the skepticism still felt by artists and intellectuals concerning bureaucracy and mass society. Its tenuous historical position can be seen in the fact that, on the one hand as the product of individual expression and "genius," it was not understood by all viewers and thus appreciating or collecting Abstract Expressionist art still functioned as an important marker of cultural capital. On the other hand, Jackson Pollock was lionized in a 1949 *Life* magazine article which featured a two-page spread of one of his drip paintings flanked by a fashion model wearing a dress with an identical "drip" motif.

In Warhol's art-world, by contrast, the commodity form had become more enticing and individualized while the notion of individual genius lost its resonance as a cultural value. These tendencies called the notion of the art world as a privileged field into question and were potentially democratizing. Art lost some of its status as marker of cultural capital, but gained an ability to reach, and hence be appropriated by, a public whose interest potentially lies in social change. However, if artworks are no longer privileged sites of cultural, rather than purely market value, they are in danger of being wholly subsumed by the market – in other words, they become indistinguishable from other commodities, thereby loosing their ability to model values and social organization

outside the market system. In addition, Warhol helped to destroy the “aura” that surrounded the traditional work of art: viewers, faced with a work by Warhol are amused rather than intimidated – they are facing the familiar, everyday images that surround them in their kitchens, their gossip tabloids, and the evening news. Warhol’s work speaks to a collective, rather than a privileged consciousness. On the other hand, the collective consciousness to which it speaks has already been shaped by the images of advertising, consumption and trivialization. And Warhol’s work does not ask this audience to question its fascination with such images (or “ideology”) but rather instead makes a bland appeal to habitual modes of appropriation. Warhol’s work can truly be viewed in a sate of distraction.

On the one hand Warhol’s antics were cynical and self-serving. But on the other hand they both expose capitalism’s ability to turn everything into exchange value, and also speak to what may be some problems with the modernist hermetic solution. Modernism gained ‘purity’ but it lost relevance, especially in the context of the proliferation of the culture industry. The consciousness of the masses is indeed shaped by the images of pleasure, plentitude and reconciliation created by the culture industry. Therefore, in order for an art to maintain any relevance outside of the narrow audience of specialists, it must address these images, and not simply through negation. Adorno’s bitter dismissal of the culture of consumer desire narrows his scope, whereas Benjamin’s version of dialectical thought would view signs of consumer culture and consumption itself as potentially nuanced (see Buck Morss (1989)). They imply a version of universal plentitude and the good life which capitalism is increasingly unable to fulfill. By appropriating these symbols of unfulfilled plentitude, Warhol does at least acknowledge

the existing conditions of consciousness. Unfortunately, his work remains profoundly pessimistic in that it suggests no mechanism for transformation or liberation. It is positivist in that it merely presents conditions as they are.

Chapter 4

Utopia, Feminist Art, and the Limits of Modernism

You should have a practice in art that actually looks forward to a moment that will be different. Mary Kelly (1986a)

Introduction

Questions concerning the lonely hermeticism and political quietism of Adorno's privileged aesthetic practices run through the preceding chapters. These practices, in complicated ways, hint at a version of utopia in which the true particularity, both of the subject and of the object, will be free to flourish. Unfortunately, this hint is forever, for Adorno, to be imprisoned in a sphere (the aesthetic) which *must necessarily, in order to maintain its integrity* become increasingly impotent and detached from the rest of society. The opacity of the aesthetic practices that he endorsed tells the truth, for Adorno, of the impossibility of either individual or collective agency in today's society. Such a conclusion is unsatisfying not only because of its totalizing pessimism, but also because it fails to account for the standpoint of critical theory itself. Thus, a reconstructed Adorno must address the limitations of his conception of artistic material and of his notion of standpoint.

In this chapter, I begin the task of a critical reconstruction of Adorno's aesthetic theory through a consideration of feminist art practices. Feminist art, emerging just a half-decade after the heyday of pop art's success, has its roots in the neo-avant-garde that accompanied the rise of the New Left. The artistic movements connected with this avant-garde vehemently rejected modernist aesthetic dogma while at the same time deploying various strategies meant to subvert art's commodity status and to enlist aesthetic practice

in the service of utopian social change. Feminist art, like the other neo-avant-garde tendencies, exhibited an explicitly utopian political impulse while enlisting decidedly anti-modernist practices. Despite its rejection of modernist formal strategies, however, many dimensions of the feminist critiques from which this work draws are congruent with Adorno's critique of the Enlightenment and of post-industrial society. Interesting intersections can be found as well between Adorno's "utopia of the particular" and the goal of much utopian feminist thinking: a society in which women (and men) can flourish outside of the oppressive and hierarchical binary axis of gender norms. Also, both feminism and Adorno, view subjectivity and somatic experience as important sites of social transformation. However, the aesthetic terms pursued by both first and second-generation feminist artists oppose Adorno's prescriptive version of autonomous art. In addition, feminism (and feminist art), by including the specificity of gender identity in their understanding of subjectivity, agency and collectivity opens up an emmancipatory potential to these categories that was foreclosed in Adorno. It is my claim that feminist theory and feminist art practices, while already having much in common with Adorno, can also inform his theory in ways that will help to resolve some of its more troubling moments.

While most of the Feminist art that I discuss resonates in important ways with Adorno's aesthetic theory, a later impulse in feminist art and feminist theory poses fundamental challenges to the normative utopian categories crucial to both. By examining the work of Judith Butler and in particular its Foucauldian influences as an influential example of this impulse, I look more carefully at the nature of these challenges utopian thought and the notion of subjectivity on which Adorno's utopianism rests and hence to

the special status that Adorno assigns to art. Finally, I argue that the loss of utopianism represented by theories such as Butler's points also to a fundamental change in the category of "art".

The Subject and Domination

Even pre-dating the influence of post-structuralism and postmodernism on feminist theory, the feminist criticism of women's oppression in patriarchal society has focused on the construction of subjectivity and the gendered nature of knowledge claims. Like Adorno's critical theory, feminist theorists as early as Simon DeBeauvoir (1993) combined the insights of psychoanalysis and Marxism in order to demonstrate the socially and historically constructed nature of subjectivity and to point out that the roots of domination lay in the intersection of the psyche and society. Many versions of feminist analysis flourished from the early 1970's onward[60], along with the development of feminism as a social movement, which was to have a profound effect on society on the institutional, personal and ideological levels. Despite the many points of disagreement among feminists and different strands of feminism, what most share with Adorno is an understanding that domination occurs on the level of consciousness – it is in fact constitutive of the subject. In other words, the locus of domination is not explicitly (or, in Western societies, even primarily) in the letter of the law, but in the deeper recesses of our emotional and cognitive selves. For this reason, both Adorno and feminism have focused their analysis on the level of culture and of cognition – for it is in society's cultural expressions and modes of cognition that ideology is formed and reproduced, and

[60] The purpose of this chapter is not to provide a complete history of feminist theory. Instead, I touch on some of the more general tendencies within feminist theory in order to discuss their relationship to Adorno. For a more in-depth treatment of some of the feminist thought discussed here see Moi (1989), Tong (1989), Nicholson (ed.) (1990).

it is through culture and cognition that subjects are made complicit with their own domination.

Adorno's mytho-historical narrative of the birth of the rational subject has important resonance with feminist theory. Adorno's subject, we recall, exists as such only through an alienated relationship with itself and with the natural world. In order to differentiate himself from the primitive collective and from nature, the subject must treat himself as omnipotent and the natural world (the object) as an "other" to be mastered and dominated. Then "[o]nce radically parted from the object, the subject reduces it to its own measure; swallows the object, forgetting how much it is an object itself." (Adorno in Arato, ed. 1994:499) The negative consequences of this process manifest themselves on an individual level in terms of the subject's alienation from himself as a sensuous being, connected to and engaged with the natural world of which he is a part. They also have overwhelming social consequences, ones that shape our whole mode of collective being and define the most pressing problems of late modernity including environmental degradation, poverty and war. This critique of subject-centered reason (which I have indicated here only in short-hand), as articulated by Adorno and Horkheimer, Herbert Marcuse and other members of the Frankfurt School, was pivotal for the New Left in the 1960's and 1970's in Europe and in the United States, at precisely the period that second-wave feminism emerged.

What feminists soon added to this narrative was a gendered notion of this subject of instrumental reason – that the differentiated, omnipotent subject to which Adorno and Horkheimer referred is always implicitly a male subject, whose fantasy of omnipotence depends not only on dominating nature but also on relegating women to the status of

object and nature. As feminist theorist Luce Irigaray puts it, speaking of the Copernican revolution:

> [Man], [r]ising to a perspective that would dominate the totality, to the vantage point of the greatest power, he thus cuts himself off from the bedrock, from his empirical relationship with the matrix that he claims to survey….[W]hile woman counterbalances with the permanence of a (self)recollection which is unaware of itself as such…..and which…can continue to support the illusion that the object is inert. "Matter" upon which he will ever and again return to plant his foot in order to spring farther…. (Irigaray 1985:134).

This account of the objectifying nature of subject-centered reason, and indeed the subject who dominates, becomes pivotal in terms of the utopian role of aesthetic experience for both Adorno and for feminism. However, as we shall see, the implications of a reconstituted subjectivity for politics and aesthetics differ in important ways in Adorno and in feminism.

Early feminist artists and theorists, in keeping with the rise of neo-avant garde strategies at the time, believed that aesthetic practice contained the possibility of non-hierarchical, liberatory modes of communication and action. One of the goals of feminist art in the 1970's, according to feminist critic and art historian Lucy Lippard, was "to reintegrate the aesthetic self and the social self, and make it possible for both to function without guilt or frustration" (1980:362). In order to for this reintegration to occur, many feminists insisted, the dominant (masculinist) strategies of modernism must be rejected. The modernist conception of the artist as solitary genius, working in isolation on formal problems or 'self-expression' must be replaced by the model of artists aworking communally as conscious social actors "cultural workers supporting and responding to their constituencies." Feminists, according to Lippard

know that it is impossible to discuss [art] without referring to the social structures that support and often inspire it…We take for granted that making art is not simply expressing

oneself, but is a far broader and more important task: expressing oneself as a member of a larger unity, or community (1980: 363).

Adorno, while also pointing out the objective, social character of art, comes to remarkably different conclusions. At the height of the student movement, in the late 1960's, Adorno explicitly eschewed the sorts of collective action practiced by the youth movement of the day[61], and called for in Lippard's commentary, and instead sought to complete his final work, *Aesthetic Theory*. In this text, and elsewhere, he explains in complex philosophical detail the manner in which autonomous works of art, not communal action, offer the most convincing challenge to the current conditions of late capitalist society. And, as we have seen, he describes the work of autonomous art with reference to exclusively modernist categories.

Autonomous art, to briefly recapitulate, not only provides a model of a society in which particularity, or difference, can exist within a whole without contradiction. It also, for Adorno, provides a model of subjectivity liberated from instrumental reason on the level of production by way of the unique relationship between the creator (subject) and the medium, or 'language of art." This relationship should, ideally, according to Adorno, be a non-hierarchical one, in which the creating subject engages in a complex dance with the material (which, itself is historically and hence objectively determined). The actions of the creating subject follow the internally necessary development of this material, interjecting a moment of subjective awareness, but never dominating it conceptually. Drawing on Kant's discussion in the *Critique of*

[61] Also, Martin Jay points out, In June 1967, Adorno provocatively asserted his choice of aesthetics over politics through the gesture of refusing to change the topic of a lecture he planned to give on "the Classicism of Goethe's Iphigenia' in Berlin shortly after the killing of the student Beno Ohnesorg by the police during the visit of the Shah of Iran. (Jay 1984:154)

Judgment (1987) Adorno explains that, on the level of reception, the instrumentalizing work of conceptual thought is rendered impotent, as works of art cannot be forced into conceptual categories, or generalizations, and hence remain examples of non-subsumable individuality. Also, works of art are sensuous objects, and call forth a sensual, embodied response in the viewer. In this manner, they overcome the mind/body diremption characteristic of objectifying thought and remind the viewer that she is indeed part of nature. Adorno sometimes calls this mode of reception of the work of art "aesthetic comportment", and sometimes he refers to it as "mimetic comportment." Here, by utilizing the concept of "mimesis," Adorno invokes both the mimetic qualities of artworks themselves - they in some sense "imitate" nature – and also the receptive and somatic state of consciousness that must be in play in order to receive the work of art and "imitate" or – better - empathizes with, the work of art itself. Characteristic of this state is the ability to shudder:

> Ultimately, aesthetic comportment is to be defined as the capacity to shudder, as if goose bumps were the first aesthetic image…. Consciousness without shudder is reified consciousness. That shudder in which subjectivity stirs without yet being subjectivity is the act of being touched by the other, Aesthetic comportment assimilates itself to that other rather than subordinating it. Such a constitutive relationship of the subject to objectivity in aesthetic comportment joins Eros and knowledge. (Adorno 1984a:331)…. what is essentially mimetic awaits mimetic comportment. If artworks do not make themselves such as something else but only such as themselves, then only those who imitate them can understand them. (Adorno 1984a: 113).

What Adorno refers to here can perhaps best be described as being "moved" by a work of art. This state, as most of us are familiar with it, is both physical and emotional and seems to overtake us without coercion (this differentiates works of art from the of the culture industry) yet "against our will." Because ordinary communication

has been so colonized by instrumental reason (and the culture industry stands as the prime example of such colonized communication) this kind of experience is uniquely available only through autonomous art, whose form is so highly mediated as to be unavailable to ordinary communicative experience, which relies on a ritualized, stereotyped relationship between signs and meaning. It is for this reason that Adorno's examples are always taken from the most hermetic moments of modernism such as in Joyce, Beckett or Schoenberg, in which any transparent or usual association between form and meaning has broken down.

At the same time, autonomous art not only provides the opportunity to engage in modes of thought and behavior that are in general foreign to social experience in late capitalist societies. It also bears the distinct marks of the society as it is, and reminds us of our own conditions of subjugation. It is this "dual-character" that ensures that art maintain its truth-value – its ability to comment on actually existing conditions. However, the 'work' of autonomous art occurs only on the level of the individual. Autonomous art, though commenting on collective experience, is created by the solitary individual[62] , and aesthetic experience, as we have seen in Adorno's critique of film, to be liberatory, must also be solitary. Indeed. Adorno was steadfastly opposed to the revival of the sorts of collectivist practices that defined much of the alternative culture, including feminism, of the 1960's and 1970's. In fact, he describes the pre-modern, tribal societies that often served, in idealized form, as models for counter-cultural social experiments as "the undifferentiated state before the subject's formation", characterized by "the dread of the blind web of nature, of myth" A return to such a state would signify "a regression to real barbarism" (Adorno in Arato, ed. 1994:499). And, if we recall the "Culture Industry as

Mass Deception", and in Adorno's many analysis of the psychology of fascism, it is just this regression to collective modes of consciousness, that, in their present form, signifies the greatest threat to late modern societies. Though unrelentingly critical of the bourgeois subject of late capitalism, it is still, for Adorno, precisely the bourgeois promise of individual agency and freedom that must be retained through immanent critique.

Adorno's account of the liberatory, or utopian function of the work of art is fraught with problems when considered in light of aesthetic practices that reject the most basic tenets of modernism. And feminist art, along with other examples of critical art after the 1950's must reject modernist practices first of all because such practices are no longer adequate to the larger social, historical and political constellation faced by the subject at the end of the twentieth century. But feminist art also critically evaluated modernist categories on other grounds: these categories (such as, for example, the category of the creating subject), like most of Western thought before the interventions of feminism, are presented as universal. The implicit truth of the universalistic claims rejected by many feminists - that such claims in fact rely on excluding or relegating the "other" to a state of nature – often led to a dogmatic rejection of modernism *tout court*, and to the exploration of other aesthetic strategies. Nonetheless, feminist art takes on the challenges presented by Adorno's complex aesthetic theories in interesting and fruitful ways, some of which we will now explore.

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[62] Though, to be fair, even the individual, for Adorno, is in part an epiphenona of collective experience.

Chicago, Shapiro and Essentialist Feminism

The first wave of Feminist art, which began in the late nineteen-sixties, emerged almost concurrently with the Second –Wave feminist movement. Women who had been active participants in the New Left and anti-war movements became increasingly aware of their marginalized status within a radical culture that claimed to be fighting for the dismantling of all social hierarchies and modes of oppression. Many came to believe - often in direct opposition to a party line that claimed that gender equality would come about automatically when race and class oppression were overthrown - in the urgency of the struggle for women's liberation. This urgency was felt in the art world as well, where, despite the proliferation of institutional critiques of art's role in legitimating power and art's affirmative relationship to the market, the question of gender was often avoided, and all sectors of the art world remained decidedly male dominated[63].

Like other cutting-edge, oppositional work of the time, early feminist art violently rejected the tenets of Greenbergian modernism, which included formalism, abstraction, the sharp distinction between high and popular art, the view of the artist as a privileged but isolated genius/creator, and the emphasis on objecthood. They launched this opposition, however, with an understanding that these practices were tied to the

[63] Feminist organizations formed to counter discrimination against women in the art world. The first was Women Artists in Revolution (WAR) which was founded in 1970 from within the Art Worker's coalition in reaction to organization's sexism. In 1971 War sent letters to museum protesting under-representation of women in its annual exhibition. Of 143 participants only 8 were women. They demanded that 50% be women "They stages a large rally outside the museum and engaged in guerilla tactics, such as leaving tampax and raw eggs around the Whitney Premises. The Museum responded by increasing the representation of women to 22 percent" (Sandler 1998: 118). Unfortuntrly, though such efforts did much to promote a sense of community among female artists, the effect on the artworld was less successful. In the mid-1970's approximately 66 percent of bachelor's degrees in studio disciplines and art history were awarded to women, and 50 percent of the professional artists in the US were women. Yet only 15 recent of the one-person shows in New York's prestige galleries were devoted to women, an increase of just 1.5 percent over 1970….the ratio at the Museum of Modern Art from 1980 through 1985 was roughly 13 to one, at the Guggenheim fifteen to one; at the Whitney, twenty-two to four…." (Sandler 1998:138).

development of art and canonicity within a specifically patriarchal history. Their assault on the barrier between high and popular culture, for example, took the form of appropriating decorative arts such as quilt making, pottery and sewing -arts that have traditionally been practiced collectively by women - in work meant for art world consumption. Judy Chicago's, *Dinner Party* (1973-78) provides a canonical example of this strategy. In collaboration with teams of craftswomen from around the country, Chicago created thirty-nine place settings, each meant to stand in for a notable female historical figure. Guests included Queen Elizabeth, Susan B. Anthony, Emily Dickinson, and, as Lorraine O'Grady (1992) points out "the lone black guest at the table" - Sojourner Truth. Each of the plates, in addition to referring to the biography of one guest, was molded or painted with explicit vaginal imagery.

Chicago's use of vaginal or womblike imagery in *Dinner Party* provides an example of another strategy adopted by early feminist artists. These artists sought to express the unique nature of women's experience, which often meant the expression of women's sexual and physical experience. Chicago and Miriam Shapiro, with whom she and group of students from Fresno State College organized *Womanhouse* in 1972 had this to say about the search for a specifically "female imagery" in 1973:

> What does it feel such as to be a woman? To be formed around a central core and have a secret place which can be entered and which is also a passageway from which life emerges? What kind of imagery does this state of feeling engender? ….We are suggesting that women artists have used the central cavity, which defines them as women as the framework for an imagery, which allows for a complete reversal of the way in which women are seen by the culture. That is, to be a woman is to be an object of contempt , and the vagina, the stamp of femaleness, is devalued. The woman artist….takes that very mark of her otherness and by asserting it as the hall mark of her iconography, establishes a vehicle by which to state the truth and beauty of her identity.

Chicago and Shapiro's aesthetic strategies take up critical questions concerning women's representation and exclusion in art. However, they are modeled on an essentialism that by the end of the nineteen- seventies, would be rejected by most feminist theorists[64] in favor of an understanding of how women (and men) are constituted in and through social practices. For example, Barry and Fliterman-Lewis, writing in 1980, refer to strategies such as those of Chicago as "an aesthetics of simple inversion". Such an approach, they claim, "in a reversing of the traditional Western hierarchy of mind over matter" (Barry and Flitterman-Lewis 1980) glorifies an essentially female power or experience, which is located somehow in the body and in sexuality. Ironically, the result of this inversion is to affirm and naturalize patriarchal culture's relegation of women to bodily experience. Also (and this criticism becomes a point of contention in the women's movement in general, such essentialising erases the differences, bodily and otherwise, of women's experience in a culture, which is also oppressive along the axis of class, race and sexuality. In addition, as Griselda Pollock (1988) insists, the goal of feminist art should not be simply to "speak about, document, and investigate women's lives" so that "the alienated woman spectator can enthusiastically identify as part of a political process known as "consciousness raising". In other words, it is not enough to describe, or even celebrate women's experiences, but "structural determinations need to be excavated and tracked" in order to produce knowledge.

The question that remained for feminist artists was how exactly one was to "produce knowledge" within the realm of a uniquely *aesthetic* experience (as opposed to cognitive experience), especially when the categories of aesthetic modernism had been consigned to the dustbin of history. The arguments of Pollock and other

[64] See, for example, Kelly (1986b), Pollock (1988) and Barry, Judith and Sandy Flitterman (1980).

feminist critics also highlight the crucial questions of mediation. For Adorno, the tools of aesthetic modernism provided the distance from the object (society) that allowed for criticism of society that did not take the form of domination inscribed in conventional thought and language. Feminism needed to also find an aesthetic language that would do more than describe conditions as they existed. Arguments critical of essentialist art-making practices, such as many explicitly political discussions of art, point convincingly to the conceptual weaknesses of such strategies without really engaging their objects *also* as works of art.

Adorno's argument against identitarian logic would reject the theoretical premises of essentialist feminism as a guiding analytical framework on many of the same grounds as the theorists discussed above. As we recall, he points throughout his work to the historically constructed nature of subjectivity – and while he views the development of an individuated, modern subjectivity as an inherent human capacity, it unfolds only through specific socio-historical processes. It is also through these historical processes, correctly identified by feminists as patriarchal, that gender categories are created and gain their binary form. Consequently, the category "woman" cannot be conceived as a radical other to men, with some sort of pre-social being or character. In fact, as Adorno points out in *Minima Moralia* "the feminine character, and the ideal on which it is modeled, are products of a masculine society" (1978: 95) In other words, uncritically embracing "femininity", or "womanhood", as a subject position from which to oppose masculinity, only serves to reaffirm the categories produced by a masculinist, gendered society[65]. Indeed, the vision of liberation that informs a womancentric

[65] Though never explicitly discussed, Adorno would probably level the same complaint against all identity politics. The categories, or subject-positions embraced by marginalized groups (gays, African-Americans,

essentialist positions such as Chicago's is none at all, in that it invokes womanhood only through the categories that have been reserved for women in an oppressive gender order. And, as in the existing gender order, this womanhood is defined primarily through women's sexual and reproductive organs. Its oppositional moment takes the form of privileging the unique nature of female sexuality. Such a vision does not offer the possibility of liberation outside of the narrow, binary limitations of gender, which is already a reified category of an unfree society. Furthermore, Adorno's critique of identity thinking provides a useful correlative to discussions of difference within feminist theory (a subject to which we will later return). According to his critique, the contents of the category 'woman' are not identical to the concept, first, because all "women" are as radically different from one another as they are from men and the material object "woman" will always contain something more than can be captured by the concept. Hence, on a number of counts, Adorno's thinking resonates clearly with at least some strands of feminist thought.

Artists like Chicago and Shapiro, Adorno would argue, are affirmative rather than critical, not only insofar as they mirror society's binary application of the gender categories and their contents. In addition, they instumentalize their aesthetic material by forcing it to espouse this message and none other – and - consequently, the viewer is denied the constructive and liberatory moment of "aesthetic comportment." The relationship between the subject as creator and the object as work of

the disabled) are already products of oppressive social relations. Such categories would not exist, for Adorno, in a liberated society. Therefore, a politics of liberation must be based on transforming the society that creates these categories rather than reaffirming them.

art is still one of domination. Despite the "message" that such artworks intend to deliver (that women's lives and experiences should be celebrated instead of reviled), the language in which the message is coded silences the object, much as women are silenced in patriarchy. The example of Judy Chicago's *Womanhouse* and *Dinner Party* are fairly easy to reject aesthetically and politically in Adornian terms. As we have seen, criticism internal to both feminism as a political movement and feminist art have leveled similar criticisms against this work. Another strand of work from the period offers a more complex subject of analysis.

Feminist Performance Art

The work described above drew on a version of Radical Feminism grounded in an ontology of gender that espoused separatism, an ahistorical belief that patriarchy was the fundamental axis of oppression and the essential uniqueness of the female experience[66]. Feminist artists and theorists recognized that the subject represented in so much of Western philosophical historical and aesthetic discourse was implicitly male, and that women, constructed as "other," were excluded from the grand narrative of genius and success that characterized most disciplinary accounts of Western culture. The solution to this problem, for many artists and art historians of this period was, first, to represent and publicize the work of women artists who had been underrepresented, ignored or forgotten (e.g. Berthe Morisot, Angelica Kauffman, Artemesia Gentileschi), to provide a sociological account for the dearth of women artists (e.g. Linda Nochlin "Why are there no Great Women Artists?" (in 1988), or, as in the work of Chicago and Shapiro,

[66] I am, necessarily out of space considerations, grossly oversimplifying one version of Radical Feminism. For a study of primary sources see Crow, ed. (2000). In addition, there are a number of equally important strands of feminist thought, including Socialist Feminism and Liberal Feminism that emerged concurrently

to appropriate craft media traditionally used by women and to attempt to define a uniquely "female imagery.") By the middle of the nineteen-seventies, psychoanalytically informed Feminist thinkers such as Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva and later, in the U.S, Nancy Chodorow, Carol Gilligan and Jessica Benjamin among others also took up the unique nature of female experience by exploring the ways in which femininity was produced and performed in patriarchal society as the chaotic and unstable object of the male gaze. It is this linguistic, psychoanalytic and performative turn in feminist theory that most informs the work of feminist performance artists, to which we will now turn.

One strand of first generation feminist art drew heavily on avant-garde developments in performance art and dance, often incorporating text, video and film. Performance art began in late 1950's in San Francisco (Crow 1996) and had its origins in contemporary modern dance movements. The Dancer's Workshop Company, for example, which included dancers such as Trisha Brown, Simone Fortie and Yvonne Rainer who created works which drew on everyday movements and could be performed without professional training. In the late 1950's and early 1960's, many of these performers moved to New York and began performing in alternative, non-commercial venues like Yoko Ono's loft. Later, these events began to center around the work of George Maciounas, the Judson Dance Group and the Judson Theatre Workshops, formed by disciples of John Cage, and Fluxus[67]. These experiments, with their commitment to egalitarianism, communalism, blurring the distinction between art and life, and anti-professionalism embodied much of the utopian and political spirit of both avant-garde art

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with Radical Feminism. These are not discussed here because they had fewer obvious implications for feminist art of the time.

[67] This background discussion of performance and body art is based primarily on Crow (1996). A more in-depth discussion can be found in Jones (1998).

and the New Left of the 1960's and early 1970's. In the words of Yvonne Rainier, these performances rejected "nuance and skilled accomplishment, accessibility to comparison and interpretation….introversion, narcissism and self-congratulatoriness" (in Crow 1996: 126).

Performance art, whose early practitioners included Bruce Nauman and Vito Acconci, developed from these early experiments with dance and movement incorporating elements of theatre, film, dance and text. Early on, female artists, most of whom were, to some degree, self-avowed feminists, were attracted to performance art first, because of its relative lack of male-dominated historical precedents: female performance artists did not have to face an already established "old-boy's network." Secondly, the form of performance art flowed naturally from the values and practices of early feminism like consciousness-raising and non-hierarchical collective experience. In addition, performance art, particularly as it evolved to focus on the particular body and experience of the performer, allowed for the articulation of the unique embodied emotional and physical experiences of women as well as a more general critique of the (masculinist) tendency to dirempt intellectual from embodied experience, privilege intellectual experience and to relegate physical experience to the realm of femininity. Performance art, by presenting physical experience as "art," traditionally thought of as a product of cognitive, and hence male experience, was uniquely situated to confuse this binary separation of cognitive and physical processes. An early example of such work is Carolee Schneeman's 1964 performance of *Meat Joy*. This piece included " a scandalous degree of nudity and forbidden bodily contact with the raw flesh of fish and chickens; individual actions were lost in continual change; blood and paint smeared male and

female bodies alike as, the numbers of which varied as onlookers where brought into the melee" (in Jones 1998:125). In addition, by including members of the audience (as with this piece and other examples of "Happenings"), such performances subverted the distance between artist, artwork and audience necessary to maintain the "aura" of traditional art.

By the late nineteen-sixties, explicitly feminist artists had appropriated performance and body art and much of the work became more overtly political and spoke more exclusively to questions of power, subjectivity and the female experience. In 1972, for example, Faith Wilding performed a piece called *Waiting* at Chicago's Womanhouse in which she recited, in a dead-pan manner, events for which women wait: to wear a bra, to go to a party, to be asked for a dance, for pimples to go away, for Mr. Right, for an orgasm, etc." (Sandler 1998: 124). Eleanor Antin, one year earlier, began her "theatre of the self." In her first installment, *Representational Painting*, she comments ironically on female narcissism and the gaze by applying makeup using the video monitor as a mirror. Later, she points to the constructedness and mutability of identity by casting herself as four different surrogate selves: a ballerina, a king, a black move star whose roles are "to rule, to star, to help and to turn ones blackness in a white culture into a Virtue and a Power" (Antin in Roth (ed.) 1983:76) .

Hannah Wilke and Carolee Schneeman further explored sexuality and the gaze. Both of these artists were interested in celebrating eroticism and reclaiming the female body from the male gaze. In *Starification Object Series* (S.O.S) (1974-75) Wilke and bystanders chewed gum, which she then folded into vaginal shapes and stuck onto herself. They then read as both vulva and scar. Because Wilke was conventionally

beautiful, he work inspired much debate in feminist circles. Some critics argued that by publicly presenting her naked body, she was complicit with the male gaze. Others, such as Lucy Lippard, defended her work: “When women use their own bodies in their art work, they are using their *selves*; a significant psychological factor converts these bodies or faces from object to subject.” (1974:124). Later, after a bout with breast cancer from which she eventually died, she continued using her naked body in her work – this time truly scared, missing one breast, bald, and bloated from medication.

In 1976 Carolee Schneeman pushed the limits of body art even further with her *Interior Scroll*, in which she extracted a scroll from her vagina from which she read. The text was inspired by a snub from a female art critic but was about a male post-structuralist film-maker who refused to look at Schneemann’s films, because “much as he found her personally charming,” he simply could not abide the “Personal clutter/ the persistence of feelings…” (Roth (ed.) 1983:14). Her work also inspired controversy within both the feminist and the art communities - it was seen as lacking in systematic theoretical grounding. She replied that these critics were alienated from their bodies and lived experience ant that they “stuff their vaginas with their theories” (in Sandler 1998:132).

Other examples of body art are less programmatic and more abstract than the work of Wilke or Schneeman. Marina Abramowitz, an Eastern European performance artist, for example, staged a series of performances with her collaborator based on uncomfortable experiences such as pain, embarrassment, and boredom. In one performance she and her (male) collaborator took turns slapping one another on the face, gradually increasing the force of the blow with each, evenly spaced slap. In another

performance, they each stood, naked, facing each other, on opposite sides of a doorway, which viewers were forced to pass through in order to circulate through the gallery. Here, the implicit injunction against nudity and bodily contact are made explicit in the discomfort of the audience as they try and pass through the door without touching the naked bodies on either side.

By the 1980's, much of the body art described above was rejected by a new generation of feminist critics influenced by French post-structuralism for privileging the self, and, because of its immediacy, failing to truly challenge the terms of the male gaze . And, we can imagine this work being rejected on Adorno's terms on similar grounds. Like the feminist theorists just mentioned, Adorno would criticize the immediacy of such work. Though he would oppose the Brechtian strategies of distanciation proposed by Pollock (1988) and others, he would note that missing from performance art is the objective moment that (it seems) only inert material can provide (remember, for Adorno, the artist must form *something,* and this something must be both related to, but different from, the artist herself). The performance artist, by taking her body as medium and her subjective experience as content would seem to bypass the objective moment necessary to achieve Adorno's "truth" content. However, conceived in feminist terms, body art may offer the possibility of both reflecting on objective social relations - the "totality" - and providing a utopian moment generated through a uniquely *aesthetic* experience. Here, Adorno's limited conception of standpoint comes into play. In failing to recognize that the subject of instrumental reason whom he critiques is a *gendered* subject, Adorno is as guilty of leveling difference as those whom he condemns. His approach also does not allow him to recognize the subversive potential of subjectivity

that has been relegated to the margins by the terms of the dominating subjectivity of instrumental reason.

The body, as conceived by feminist performance and body art practices, holds a number of contradictory moments in a state of dialectical tension – it is *both* history *and* nature, a source of oppression and of liberation, subject and object. Like the objective, historical material that is the medium of Adorno's autonomous art, the body is objective material – nature - that has at the same time been shaped by historical experience. But the body, as the site of sensual experience and difference, is also subjective. Implicitly taking the masculine body as his object, Adorno would like to appeal to bodily experience (the shudder) as in the body taken over "against the will" in his description of aesthetic experience. In other words, he assumes that a dirempted body along the model of masculinity will be "moved" by the (objective) aesthetic experience, and, consequently, a subversion of this diremption of mind over nature will occur. What he misses here, by neglecting the question of standpoint, is that objective, historical circumstances have caused men to be alienated from their bodies. These same historical pressures have constructed the feminine body (and the woman as body) as the limit of feminine experience. By implying that the form which serves as the occasion for Adorno's shudder be external to the subject making it, Adorno is again assuming a particular, (historically) male relationship to the body.

Feminist body art does not introduce the priority of the body over cognition in a simple inverse relationship – but rather in response to women's experience of embodiment both as limit and as possibility. The feminist performance artist also, like in Adorno's view of emancipatory, autonomous, art, constructs an aesthetic/utopian

model of cognition both by reapropriating her body as object, but also acting on and with her body as object toward expressive, rather than instrumental ends. Her body is material, and, like Adorno's objective form, this material is allowed to speak along with, but not dominated by, the subject's act of forming. And, the aesthetic content produced by body art is indeed mediated if we keep in mind that the body is always already mediated in and through socio-historical experience.

Julia Kristeva, though a problematic figure for feminists on a number of counts (e.g. Butler (1999), Caputi (1996)) draws on Lacan's (2002) account of the subject's entrance into the symbolic order and the relationship to the maternal body to formulate a theory of poetic language, which realizes both the specificity of gender and the potentially subversive or utopian potential of aesthetic experience. According to Lacan, in the mirror stage, the infant enters the realm of the symbolic, which is dictated by the Law of the Father. At this point the infant/child becomes prepared to coherently structure linguistic signification, but only through the renunciation and repression of primary libidinal drives. According to Kristeva, libidinal, bodily drives are not *repressed* in the acquisition of language. In fact, language is, in part, fueled by the expulsion of material bodily processes and drives. Furthermore, these drives are bound up in the relationship between the infant and the maternal body as the source of their satisfaction and of *jouissance*. These drives are not lost in language, but rather appear in the form of the semiotic – the element of language that is concerned with language as bodily experience rather than as, abstract, formal, symbolic signification. The semiotic is concerned with rhythm, sound, polyvalence and equivocally and forms the basis of the

transference experience in psychoanalyses, of psychosis, and, most importantly for our purposes, of modern literature and poetry, where it remains in tension with the symbolic.

Theories of language that focus only on the symbolic, Kristeva maintains, demonstrate Western, capitalist society's renunciation of history, the body, and finally of significance itself: "And yet" she maintains

> this thinking points to a truth, namely, that the kind of activity encouraged and privileged by (capitalist) society represses the process pervading the body and the subject, and that we must therefore break out of our interpersonal and intersocial experience if we are to gain access to what is repressed in the social mechanism – the generating of significance (Kristeva in Oliver, ed. 2002: 27).

At the same time, the capitalist mode of production, she explains, both produces and marginalizes the semiotic in the form of the modernist literature of, for example, Mallarme, Joyce and Artaud. Capitalism, because it has "attained a highly developed means of production through science and technology, no longer need remain strictly within linguistic and ideological norms, but can also integrate their process qua process[68]" (Kristeva in Oliver, ed. 2002:29). Kristeva acknowledges that throughout history there have been numerous examples of signifying practices (such as magic and carnival) that have attested "to the limits of socially useful discourse and attest to what is repressed" Kristeva in Oliver, ed. 2002:30). But in the past, such practices have rapidly been assimilated into communal (as in religious or ethnic) signifying systems and hence have functioned in the service of social cohesion rather than subversion. What are the conditions, she asks, that tolerate these kinds of signifying practices as art qua art, or, in Adorno's terms, as autonomous art? Is it possible, she wonders, that such esoteric signifying practices, by "displacing the boundaries of socially established signifying

[68] Both Bourdieu and Adorno make similar moves when they explain how artistic avant-gardes are co-opted by a capitalism that is flexible enough to incorporate criticism in the form of the aesthetic.

practices" could be indicative, or "correspond" to "socioeconomic change and even to revolution?" (Kristeva in Oliver, (ed.) 2002:30).

It seems to me that what Kristeva is offering here is theory of the utopian dimension of art in many ways homologous to Adorno's. Both thinkers link ontogenesis and phylogenisis with an account of a primary act of repression on the level of subject and of society. And this repression, in both cases, is predicated on renouncing pleasure, the body, heterogeneity and multivocality in favor of a statis and reification of thought necessary to reproduce an ethos of productivity and the illusion of control over nature. At the same time, the renunciation of the body produces the subject of capitalism subjected to the division between mental and physical labor and the deferral of pleasure[69]. Art (for Kristeva, literature in particular), in modern societies, retains some kind of link to a pre-renunciatory state, the terms of which, in the case of Adorno, I have already elaborated in detail. That this state is allowed to appear is paid for by the fact that such art is marginalized or made esoteric or, even more dangerously, that it is used to of legitimize the status-quo (as in Bourdieu's (1984) "distinction"). Nonetheless, for both Kristeva and for Adorno, art, by clinging to an element of *jouissance*, or "non-instrumental" though, holds out the possibility of a different society. However, while both Adorno and Kristeva point to modernist forms of aesthetic production, Kristeva, by emphasizing the gendered and embodied dimension of poetic language, leaves open the possibility of the sorts of feminist bodily practices that I have described. Since, for Kristeva, the maternal body, the body that is objectified and made abject in patriarchal society, is directly implicated in the kinds of pleasures or satisfactions of drives that are

[69] See, also, Marcuse (1966).

allowed in semiotic language but not in actual societal structures, the speaking, female body could be construed as a privileged site of utopian aesthetic experience.

Deconstruction Art

What I have termed “first-generation feminist art,” and the feminist theory that helps to support and explain this art, while rejecting the formalist modernist strategies upon which Adorno insisted, shares some important features with Adorno’s conception of the social role of art. Specifically, first generation feminist art, historically concurrent with the explosive emancipatory politics of the late nineteen-sixties and early nineteen-seventies, shared with Adorno an uncompromisingly utopian vision of social change and of art’s role in such change. By the beginning of the nineteen-eighties, the failures of both the radical movements of the sixties and the Soviet alternative to capitalism, the rise of neo-liberalism signaled by the Reagan-Thatcher alliance and the incipient hegemony of post-modernism and deconstruction as the dominating discourses in academia and critical theory all conspired to cast radical doubt on any and all articulations of utopian political projects. Utopian claims thus came to be regarded with suspicion by both the left and the right, and, alongside the abandonment of such claims, the nature and role of art, including socially critical art, was radically altered. As we shall see, the trajectory of feminist art follows the new modes of theorizing and new sets of constrains. This new feminist paradigm was based in a radical anti-essentialism, and espoused work that explicitly sought, through a critique of representation, to reveal the manner in which the visual iconography of consumer culture as well as language itself produces both “femininity” and “masculinity” as binary opposites, with masculinity standing in as the privileged subject position, and femininity as the ideological effect of

the spectatorial gaze. (See Girselda Pollock (1988), Mary Kelly (in Buchloh, (ed.) 1983), Laura Mulvey (in Jones, (ed.) 2003).). Critics encouraged work that self-consciously spoke to the socially and linguistically constructed nature of subjectivity, desire, and even the body, and that unveiled the fictive nature of the transcendent "I". I now take a look at the historical and theoretical background of this work, as well as several examples of the works themselves. In the conclusion to this chapter, I argue that the examples cited are indeed situated outside of any field to which it would make sense to apply an Adornian analysis. The conclusions that such an encounter with the limits of Adorno's analysis imply are explored in the concluding chapter of this dissertation.

Roots of the New Paradigm

The feminist art criticism of the late nineteen-seventies and through the 1980's was grounded in a larger shift in the dominant discourse in art history and criticism that had begun a decade earlier. In 1970 a group of art historians and critics broke form the art world's professional association, the College Art Association, and formed the New Art Association. Their intent was a radical rejection of formalism and the myth that art was the product of individual genius and free from the ideological determinants of other spheres of cultural life. In their initial newsletter, they declared their opposition to

> the artificial segregation of the study of art from other disciplines…and its careful protection from social issues. We are against the fragmentation of knowledge which suppresses the real implication of our cultural heritage by providing an ideology which upholds the racist, patriarchal and class structure of our society (in Sandler 1998: 332).

As with the sociology of art, these critics were not interested in formal analysis of works of art and believed that art must instead be understood in terms of the specific historical,

economic and cultural conditions of its production. In addition, they claimed that art works were texts like any other, and as such had no special status or vantage point. In other words, though in practice, by virtue of their avocation, these critics clearly privileged the work of art, they would have rejected Adorno's contention that works of art have some sort of "dual-character," or "truth-value" not accorded to other cultural products such as those produced by the culture industry. While implicit in this position was a kind of aesthetic relativism, in truth these critics found the work that could easily be read, and most readily illustrated, in terms of the increasingly hegemonic interpretive method of deconstruction[70], the most interesting and worthy.

In 1976 Rosalind Krauss, Annette Michelson and Jeremy Gilbert-Rolf founded *October* – which was to become the major art theoretical journal in the United-States. This journal (with the subheading Art/Theory/Politics) featured artists whose work had a political theme, or, like Hans Haack, Marcel Broodthaers and Daniel Buren, explicitly took on the instrumental and economically driven nature of art world institutions. They unanimously opposed painting and tended to almost exclusively profile artists, who, worked in mechanical media, especially photography, (which, incidentally, was fast developing market status in the art world). These critics conflated Greenbergian formalism and modernism *tout-court*, and rejected both in favor of the fashionable line-up of French theorists including Roland Barthes, Jaques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Jean Baudrillard, Jaques Lacan and Louis Althusser. Though *October* claimed to have a Marxist orientation, its writers rejected the humanist and Hegelian versions of Marxism that characterized so much of Western Marxist thought (including Adorno). They instead

[70] I mention deconstruction as a method of art and literary analysis here only in passing. For an in depth discussion see Culler (2002).

favored Althusser's (1997) deterministic reading of Marx, which viewed the subject as an epiphenomena of economic structures and left little room for a theory of agency, collective or otherwise. In addition to featuring artists whose work lent itself to the critical techniques of deconstruction, these writers were also interested in work, which, like Warhol's, spoke explicitly to the productive power of advertising and the media in late capitalist culture. In fact, like the Frankfurt School, critics such as Craig Owens noted that modern art and the notion of an independent artist was a product of industrial capitalism, with its stress on autonomy and self-determination. In late capitalism, the social in the form of the culture of consumption has eroded the notion of originality and creativity. In today's consumer s society[71], the subject is outer-directed, and presents herself through the appropriation of bits and pieces of consumer culture. Consequently, the work of artists in this new phase of capitalism is to choose from preexisting art and media imagery to create works of pastiche and appropriation which, again, illustrate the fiction of the original and creative subject of modernity. Because the culture of consumption was so often implicitly coded as feminine, the appropriation of elements of consumer culture ends up having particular implications for feminist art.

The approach to art criticism and art making described above became hegemonic in the art world by the middle of the nineteen-eighties and was espoused by most art-world gate-keepers[72]. Thought the underlying politics of the *October* crowd and deconstruction in general was theoretically anti-hierarchical and, as part of its relativizing posture, often advocated art that came from "the margins," this new paradigm assumed

[71] See Lasch (1979) and Bell (1973) and (1976).
[72] With the exception of the cultural conservative, Hilton Kramer and his colleagues at *New Criterion*.

authoritarian and exclusionary power in the art world similar to that wielded by Clement Greenberg several decades earlier. As Irving Sandler (1998) notes:

> The editors of October used art theory to gain art-world power, and they wee expert at playing art and academic politics. Much as Krauss rejected formalism, she had learned from Greenberg how to acquire tastemaking power: Assume an identifiable aesthetic position with a relatively few identifiable remises, repeat them again and again until they seem "natural," and apply them to a relatively few privileged artists, whose work….seems closely related to and even illustrates the art-critical premises. At the same time identify and opposing aesthetic and attack it vehemently or dismiss it as beneath serious consideration. (341).

Also, in addition to deconstruction inspired art's market appeal (it was generally portable and, like pop art, contained familiar references and figuration) it was particularly effective at replacing the "disinterested" or "pure" gaze as a source of intellectual distinction for the post-modern age – a familiarity with the jargon of deconstruction, easily applied to these works, separated those audience members who were "in the know" from the rabble.

Feminist Theory and the Post-Modern Turn

The postmodern theory that inspired the more general critical shifts in the artworld had particular implications for feminist theory and feminist art-making and critical practices. As mentioned above, a primary target of much of such theory was the Enlightenment conception of the subject as the stable, transcendent, origin of truth and meaning. Postmodern theorists, following the critical tradition of Neitzsche and Heidegger[73] (Habermas 1987), associated this Enlightenment subject and the totalizing discourses that flow from it, with the will to power, domination and subjugation and with

[73] Interestingly enough, these theorists rarely cite the Frankfurt School as important influences on their critique of the subject. As we have seen from our previous discussions of Adorno and Horkheimer, the

all of the evils of modernity including imperialism, slavery, racism, the oppression of women and environmental degradation. Post-modern theorists argued that what we have come to regard as the stable and originary subject, is instead a historically contingent, multifaceted, always shifting effect of language and power - constituted rather than constituting. Connected to this critique of the subject was the criticism of the "meta-narrative" (Lyotard 1984) or totalizing discourses that issued from that subject, and claimed to provide universal accounts of nature, history, art, etc. from an Archimedean standpoint. The post-modern antipathy toward radical utopian politics and truth claims stems from this critique.

Feminist theory and feminist art, with its insight that the universal subject (including the subject of artistic genius) was always, in fact, a fragile and historically constructed masculine subject clearly resonates with post-modernism's insights. The solution, as we have seen, for some earlier feminists, was to resurrect "great women" or provide sociological accounts in order to demonstrate that, given a level-playing field, women were as capable of achievements as the masculine subject (Chicago, Nochlin), or to define a uniquely feminine form of subjectivity (Kristeva, Irigaray, Rich) from which to wage political and cultural struggle. By the middle of the nineteen-seventies and into the eighties, feminist art critics such as Mary Kelly, Griselda Pollock (see Jones, ed. 2003) and Mary Ann Doane (1982), were concerned with the socially constructed nature of vision itself, and the role of the male gaze in producing women as fetishized objects. These critiques interrogated the role of representation in the formation of ideology, particularly in our own, visually saturated culture, and

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latter had very similar complaints concerning the form of reason associated with this subject, but as we shall later discuss, came to very different conclusions about subjectivity.

recommended that the artist deploy "textual strategies" to "exploit existing social contradictions." In successful works along these lines, according to Sandy Flitterman-Lewis and Judith Barry (1980) "[t]he image of woman is not accepted as an already produced given, but is constructed in and through the work itself."

Because of the intense interest in text and the skepticism regarding visuality and its association with the objectifying gaze of patriarchy and science, much art of this period eschewed purely visual means, and instead, like the work favored by the *October* contributors, utilized some combination of images and text in artwork that either explicitly or implicitly "deconstructed" hegemonic notions of femininity. Such works generally obliged the viewer to engage in cognitive rather than aesthetic (in the sense that we have been using this term) processes: in order to engage with these works, the viewer was sometimes required not only to read large amounts of text, but to be familiar with the theoretical references, often from deconstructionist or psychoanalytic literature, buried in this text. In an early example, the artist and theorist Mary Kelly created a six section, 135 frame work entitled *Post-Partum Document* (1973-79). This piece, which includes items associated with her son's infancy such as stained diapers, scribbling, and her own written comments, describes and chronicles events in her relationship with her son from birth to age five. These items are accompanied by a Lacanian text which describes the mother's subjectivity under patriarchy. Kelly's intention in this piece was to indicate the constructed nature of femininity and motherhood. According to Kelly

> what's discovered in working through the *Post-Partum Document* is that there is no pre-existing sexuality, no essential femininity. By examining the processes of their construction, one could see the possibility of deconstructing representations that justify the subordination of women in society (Kelly 1982:35).

While Kelly questioned the "naturalness" of motherhood using images and text, more often artists were interested in the ways in which commercial culture constructs femininity as the narcissistic object of the male gaze. The artist Barbara Kruger, much like Andy Warhol's successful involvement with commercial art, had been a graphic designer for *Mademoiselle*. In her artwork, she deployed the visual vocabulary of graphics and advertising to create an accessible critique of gender and representation. Kruger used a combination of black and white photographs from magazines, photographic manuals and how-to handbooks, which she then enlarged, cropped and spliced and combined with brief texts in the typeface of advertisements. She then photographed the whole and framed it with bright red enameled strips. Kruger's text often articulated truisms concerning femininity, masculinity, and representation itself, sometimes ambiguously juxtaposed with nostalgic or dramatic images from the recent past. One well known example contains the text "your body is a battleground" on top of a black and white photograph of a woman's face, one half of which is in reverse negative. In another, the shadowed face of a man wearing a fedora, finger to lips is covered with the words "your comfort is my silence." (1981) Still another example shows a black and white photograph of a pair of fine leather gloves (probably an old advertisement) with the words "you are seduced by the sex appeal of things inorganic" (*Untitled*, 1982).

Despite her commercial success[74], Kruger was a political activist[75]. Her work clearly speaks in a critical voice concerning the pernicious nature of gender

[74] Criticisms of Kruger as political artist began when she joined Mary Boone Gallery in 1987 because this gallery featured mostly macho, neo-expressionist painting, few women and a glossy profile. Critic Robert Storr (in Sandler 1998:17) asked "is [it] excessive to e asked repeatedly to overlook the contradictions of showing work critical of "late capitalism" in galleries that owe most to the "simulated" prosperity of the '80's. Likewise, the irony of women being given the celebrity treatment of their brush-wielding male

oppression,[76] and the manner in which subjectivity is constructed along the axis of this oppression, particularly in the media. Again, however, reference to the debate between Adorno and Benjamin outlined in the previous chapter can help us to understand the fundamental fissure between works such as those of Kruger, and what Adorno (and, as we have seen, some feminists) viewed as the uniquely utopian, or liberatory possibilities of art. Following Benjamin's injunction, Kruger harnesses the democratic potential inherent in commercial visual production – her work is accessible, relies on mechanical reproduction and indeed looses little when mechanically reproduced and combines text and image. While possessing a high degree of design appeal, technically and formally her images resemble sophisticated advertisement, much like those found in the pages of *Vogue* magazine. Such visual appeal indeed contrasts with the critical message of the text. However, instead of perhaps reminding the viewer of the gap between the plentitude offered by commercial culture and the poverty of our lives in consumer society, the same visual appeal renders these images safe for commercial consumption. The moment of resistance is instantly subsumed by the recognizable and seductive vocabulary of advertising. What is absent in this work is a particularly *aesthetic* strategy – one which might point, through the use a uniquely aesthetic language, to a radical social alternative. What I refer to here is not meant to be a normative evaluation of Kruger's work. My intent is rather to suggest the ways in which this work is indicative of a general cultural

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adversaries by notoriously chauvinistic promoters is a phenomenon not easily explained away by postmodernist casuistry."

[75] She participated in "Disarming Images – Art for Nuclear Disarmament (1984-86) a show sponsored by Bread and Roses, the cultural organ of National Union of Health Care Employees, AFLCIO, Also, her piece, "Your Body is a Battleground" was used as advertising for a 1989 March on Washington in support of Roe vs. Wade.

withering of radical and utopian social visions. And this withering, connected to larger historical tendencies, which I have indicated, also has profound implications for how we should view art as a sphere of social practice.

Judith Butler

As we can, the ability of feminist theory and art practices to speak to, or help to reconstruct Adorno reaches its limit with postmodernism. Despite some attempts to reconcile the two, fundamental differences exist between the most basic tenets of post-modernism and Adorno's utopian, Hegelian-Marxist foundations. It is worthwhile, nonetheless, to take a closer look at these differences, particularly in light of questions of subjectivity and its relationship to normative and utopian ideals of emancipation and agency, and the implication of this relationship to a historical shift in the nature of art. To this end I will contrast Judith Butler, one of the most influential post-structuralist[77] theorists of subjectivity, gender and agency with Adorno, focusing on their contributions concerning the nature of the subject and subjectivity and the possibilities for critique and transformation that each implies. Again, I bring up the subject of Butler to further elaborate the nature of the paradigm shift concerning art, and in particular its emancipatory tendencies, that has taken place at the end of the twentieth century, and the limits that this shift presents to Adorno's theory. The following is not intended to be an exhaustive discussion of Butler's nuanced and contested theoretical contributions and the many theorists who have influenced her. Instead, I will touch only on her theory of the performative nature of the subject and its implications for political and aesthetic practice.

[76] Kruger's concerns are not limited to gender. Much of her work deals with themes of capitalism, environmental damage, and free-speech.

Butler is not simply skeptical of, but indeed unrelentingly hostile not only toward notions of the founding, autonomous and constitutive subject of humanist discourse, but also to a more Marxist formulation of the collective subject of emancipatory projects. To insist upon such a subject is, for Butler, not only to misunderstand the nature of subjectivity, but, in the case of politics at least, has, dangerously authoritarian and anti-democratic ramifications. In *Gender Trouble*, she explains this claim in her critique of identity in feminist politics[78]: "there is no single or abiding ground from which feminism can or should speak – these would be exclusionary practices " maintains Butler. Instead, she insists, we must aim for "a new kind of politics…that will take the variable construction of identity as both a methodological and normative prerequisite, if not a political goal." (Butler 1990:5). Towards this end, Butler presents a theory of the constituted subject that at the same time leaves room for the possibility of political agency and, to a degree, social change.

According to Butler, following Foucault, subjects are the result, or effect of power and the discourses through which power operates. They are, she claims, "the resulting effects of a rule-bound discourse…a consequence of certain rule-governed discourses" (Butler, 1990:145). However, the subject is never an effect frozen in time, but always a temporary result of a given performance of social norms, or "discourses." In other words, the subject is always also a subject in process, in that subjectification is never fully complete. In order to appear as a subject, one is compelled to compulsively and compulsorily perform a set of norms. Certain discourses - for example, the ones which

[77] Butler herself prefers the term "post-structuralism" to "post-modernism", a term, she believes, is usually articulated " in the form of a fearful conditional or sometimes in the form of paternalist disdain toward that which is youthful and irrational" (in Benhabib et, al. ed. 1995:35).

establish sex and gender dimorphism[79] - are particularly implicated in the performance of subjectivity for Butler, and, consequently, their performance is mandatory in order for subjects to appear on the social screen as "bodies that matter" : "the practice by which gendering occurs, the embodying of norms, is a compulsory practice, a forcible production." Without it, the individual is denied entrance into the world of subjects that matter, politically and socially, and enters instead "those unlivable and uninhabitable zones of social life…" (Butler 1993:145). Gender, then, as fundamental to the subjectivating process, is always already a site of normalization and social control. Femininity, in particular "is indissoluble from relations of discipline, regulation and punishment." (Butler 1993:232) And, such as other forms of identity (and as in the Marxist notion of ideology), fundamental to the successful performance of gender, is the masking of the fact that it is performance - in other words, (gender) identity is naturalized.

The performance of identity, however, is not an un-ambivalent achievement. Indeed, the successful iteration of, in particular, normative sex and gender identity, inevitably takes place through violent acts of exclusion because the discourses which establish these norms operate through the abjection, denial, and disavowal of their binary opposite. In fact, Butler explains that "gender identity appears to be primarily the internalization of a prohibition that proves to be formative of an identity" (Butler 1990:63). Furthermore, this internalization is "melancholic" because it is a response to the loss of the same-sex love object. Because, for example, the girl is forbidden to posses

[78] "through what exclusions has the feminist "we" been constructed"? she asks in "contingent foundations" (in Benhabib, et. al. ed. 1995).
[79] In *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies that Matter*, Butler not only points out the performative nature of gender identity, but also makes a compelling case for viewing the sexed body itself as a performative construct.

her mother as a romantic love object, she compensates by internalizing her mother's gender identity.[80]

Butler is careful to continually reiterate that there is no founding subject behind or before the performance of identity through which subjects appear. Gender, for example "is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed. " (Butler 1990: 25). However, and this is what is most interesting about her theoretical contributions, the subject's constituted status does not foreclose the possibility of agency. In fact, she maintains that the constituted and performative nature of this subject is indeed "the very *precondition* of its agency." (Butler 1990:48, emphasis mine). Humanist versions of agency and politics, she explains, assume that actors confront an external political field on which they can act to change the conditions of their existence. For Butler, by contrast, the actor is a product of this discursive, or political field. Therefore, actors have no access to political possibilities *outside* of the discursive terms that constitute *both* the subject *and* the political field. However, they *do* have recourse to all the levels of discourse by which they are constituted- the productive and the limiting, the apparent and the repressed - through which they can attempt to re-articulate or destabilize the terms of the field. As she explains in *Bodies that Matter*:

> The paradox of subjectivation is precisely that the subject who would resist such norms is itself enabled, if not produced by such norms. Although this constitutive constraint does not foreclose the possibility of agency, it does locate agency as a reiterative or rearticulatory practice, immanent to power, and not a relation of external opposition to power. (Butler 1993:15).

[80] Like much of Butler's use of psychoanalytic categories, I find this formulation confusing. If gender is always a "doing which precedes the deed," how can categories such as "internalization," that imply some sort of stable identity through time, be applicable within Butler's performative framework?

Not only does the constituted nature of the subject provide terms through which to subvert, or oppose power, but the performative aspect of the subject insures that acts of destabilization will occur. Since, first, "signification is not a founding act, but rather a regulated process of repetition" (Butler 1990:145), each norm must be established and re-established through, what we have now learned, is the forcible (but tenuous) exclusion of its opposite or abjected category (e.g. to perform heterosexuality, homosexuality must also always be performatively disavowed). Consequently, the possibility of mis-performance, or "slippage" always exists, and it is through such "slippages" that the constructed nature of identity is revealed (Butler 1990:28). Again, in the case of gender, she explains:

> Gender, the embodying of norms, is a compulsory practice, a forcible production, but for that reason not fully determining. To the extent that gender is an assignment, it is an assignment which is never quite carried out according to expectations, whose addressee never quite inhabits the ideals s/he is compelled to approximate (Butler 1993:231).

In Butler's earlier *Gender Trouble*, she seems to suggest that these slippages are primarily accidental, or "unconscious"[81], while in *Bodies that Matter*, she takes the example of the drag ball as a conscious subversion of gender norms. In this case, the "attempt to approximate realness [subverts gender norms by] "exposing the norms that regulate realness as themselves phatasmatically instituted and sustained" (Butler 1993: 130).

Butler does acknowledge that exposing gender norms as fictitious (as in drag) rather than natural does not guarantee their destabilization or subversion. Indeed, she

[81] See footnote 30.

notes that "at its best, drag can be read for the way in which hyperbolic norms are dissimulated as the heterosexual mundane" (Butler 1993:x.).

In the case of the drag balls described in her chapter on the documentary film "Paris is Burning", it is the reformulation of kinship ties that the subjects enact through their participation in drag balls as a way of life that is subversive. The participants depicted in "Paris is Burning", most of whom had been rejected and/or abused by their families of origin and society at large, formed "houses" complete with "mothers" that they used both as a base of competition in the drag ball and as a source of love and emotional support. In this way, claims Butler, "the redeployment of categories of dominant culture [such as "mother" and "house"] enable the formation of kinship relations that function quite supportively as oppositional discourse" (Butler 1993:241.).

Butler's analysis of the community that developed around the drag balls provides one example of the manner in which terms of power can be "re-territorialized" through performance and citation. In this case, the resignificatory practices led to an expansion of the terms through which kinship ties and community operate. Butler also points to a potentially more radical version of the resignificatory process in her distinction between "performance" and "theatricality. " This term, as developed in *Bodies that Matter*, refers to a "consciously parodic or hyperbolic citation of a term or a norm, with the explicit intent of "occupation or reterritorialization of a term that has been used to abject a population [in order so that it] can become the site of resistance, the possibility of an enabling social and political resignification." (Butler 1993:23). Here, Butler offers the example of the reappropriation of the term "queer" by gays and lesbians. She also cites the "die-ins" and other forms of staged civil disobedience associated with aids activism

as examples of the effective politicization of theatricality.

Thus, within the terms of performativity, theatricality and resignification, Butler describes the means by which subjects can generate an "effect" within the matrix of power of which they themselves are but an effect. This effect, however, as far as I can discern from Butler's texts, only ever 1) reveals that what society presents as "natural" is in fact a construct of power and/or discourse. In this case, as she notes, revelation is not necessarily followed by subversion or transformation, or, 2) resignifies or "reterritorialized" the terms of oppression - that is, turns terms or norms that have been used to exclude or degrade (e.g. "family," or "queer") into positive categories that marginalized identities can re-appropriate. In other words, she makes a compelling argument that not only is identity performative rather than constituting, but that its performative quality constitutes a basis for agency. However, the agency she describes is severely circumscribed by the fact that there is no outside to discourse or power from which the subject can act and, for Butler, by the inherent undesirability of positing such a utopian "outside". Thus, her radical contestation of the foundationalist subject leads her to an anti-utopian politics of reformism. In her own words:

> Performativity describes this relation of being implicated in that which one opposes, this turning of power against itself to produce alternative modalities of power, to establish a kind of political contestation that is not a "pure" opposition, a "transcendence" of contemporary relations of power, but a difficult labor of forging a future from resources inevitably impure. (Butler 1993:241).

Though, to my knowledge, Butler has not explicitly addressed the implications for, or impact of her work on artistic practice, her influence in the art world has been felt, in terms both of the explicit references by art critics and commentators and strategies deployed by artists. Artists such as Barbara Kruger and Jenny Holzer, as we have seen,

call the artificially naturalized media and commonsense iterations of gender norms into question through decontextualized, parodic, or repetitive reiteration. Other artists have taken the performative nature of the self as both the subject and sometimes the medium of artistic production. The photographer Cindy Sherman is an example of an artist whose work was appropriated by critics such as those of the *October* crowd as an example of the successful aesthetic deployment of theatrical performativity, which takes the self as that which is perpetually re-enacted. Sherman first began to attract the attention of theoreticians with her show of *Untitled Film Stills* at Artist's Space in 1978. In these 8 x 10 black and white photographs, Sherman dressed up as stereotyped female figures from 1950's B-movies – such as career girl, model, star, actress. In 1989 she again photographed herself in a series based on Old master paintings, in which she dressed up in historical costume but attached prosthetic devices such as breasts, noses and bald pates to her body. In the 1990's, a number of performance artists articulated, shifted and juxtaposed various subject positions within one piece. The artists Sarah Jones, Danny Hoch and Heather Woodbury, for example, effortlessly cross several racial, ethnic, gender and class boundaries in each performance, thus demonstrating the performative and provisional nature of these categories. Their work often, especially in the cases of Hoch and Jones, refers to current events, such as recent incidents of police brutality or draconian drug policies, and contains explicit anti-racist, anti-homophobic and anti-authoritarian messages.

Butler and Adorno

Post-modern accounts of the subject and of agency such as the one offered by Butler are incompatible with the utopian, privileged role that Adorno assigns to works of art , and the implications of the utopian promise of art for the subject. Although a superficial reading might find some similarities between Butler and Adorno, I would such as here to elaborate the irreconcilable moments of both accounts in order to better understand the precise nature of their normative implications.

Butler, as we have seen, begins her argument with a radical deconstruction of the constitutive subject of Enlightenment politics and philosophy. Thus, she sets up this figure in opposition to the constructed, performative subject of post-modernism (or post-structuralism). Adorno also supplies a critical, but more nuanced and historisized version of this subject. For Adorno, the subject has a complicated but coherent history[82], in which it vacillates between the promise of autonomy and the reality of heteronomy. [83] At the beginning of this chapter I discussed the alienation of human beings from nature (including their own nature) that, for Adorno, attended the development of subject-centered reason. But, as is drawn out in Adorno and Horkheimer's reconstruction of the myth of Odysseus, it is precisely because nature was divested of her mysterious and dangerous powers that the possibility of individuation and freedom from slavish obeisance to magic rituals and the collective emerged. The Enlightenment triumph of reason brought "coherence, meaning and life into subjectivity, which is properly constituted only in this process" (Horkheimer and Adorno 1972a: 90). The subject-

[82] It is interesting to note that although Butler relies a great deal on Foucualt in her analysis of power and subjectification, as far as I can tell she pays little attention to the various historical shifts in Foucault's genealogy of the subject. In other words, Butler's performative subject appears, by contrast to both Adorno and Foucault, to be a timeless of effect of power.

centered reason possessed by the now sovereign self however, not only presents the opportunity for individuation from the collective. It also has an elective affinity with the needs of a capitalist economy, which depends on the same principles of instrumental rationalization that served to free the subject from the bonds of nature and myth. This aspect of the sovereign subject, then, prevails over the expressive potential of individuation, and, finally, in late capitalism

> the transcendental subject of cognition is apparently abandoned as the last reminiscence of subjectivity and replaced by the much smoother work of automatic control mechanisms. Subjectivity has given way to the logic of the allegedly indifferent rules of the game, in order to dictate all the more unrestrainedly. (Horkheimer and Adorno 1972a: 30).

Thus, freedom, as a historical idea, was suggested by the Enlightenment, but foreclosed by an instrumental reason which led back to the domination of all people and things by the abstract exchange principle. Because the tools of logic, quantification, exchange and self-interest were adopted as social principles (as in capitalism), human beings were reduced to the state of unfreedom to which they have formerly reduced nature. And, in late capitalism, the collective *as* coercive nature has once again triumphed over the possibility of individuation.

Nonetheless, and despite his many pessimist prognostications concerning the present and future fate of humanity, as we have seen in previous discussions, Adorno's work is shot through with intimations concerning the nature and content of utopia. And thinking this utopia, for, Adorno, always passes through the stage of the Enlightenment subject (thus, in an opening line to *Negative Dialectics*, "Philosophy lives on because the moment to realize it was missed". (Adorno 1992: xix). Consequently, for Adorno, liberatory practices can only take place on the level of the individual because it is with

[83] See *Dialectic of Enlightenmen*t and Chapter one of this dissertation for extended discussion.

the individual that, historically, the promise of freedom arose, and the with the return to the oppression of the collective that this promise was foreclosed. Hence

> [t]he unity of the manipulated collective consists in the negation of each individual: for individuality makes a mockery of the kind of society which would turn all individuals to the one collectivity. (Horkheimer and Adorno1972a: 13)[84]

Despite Adorno's valorization of the individual over the collective, he is clear that true individuation cannot be thought outside the parameters of a free society. It was the subjective moment of Enlightenment philosophy, which conceived freedom as individual rather than social, which is implicated in the triumph of instrumental reason on the level of the social. While the liberatory practices that Adorno describes aim to salvage the promise of individuality, his version of utopia is social through and through, because

> ....it is only in a free society the individuals would be free. Along with outward repression, the inner one would disappear....Where traditional philosophy, acting in a spirit of repression used to confound freedom and responsibility, responsibility would now turn into every individuals fearless active participation in a whole that would no longer institutionalize the parts played, but would allow them to have consequences in reality (Adorno 1992:264).

In stark contrast to the views of Butler, then, relations of power and domination are symptoms of the 'unfree' world in which we live, and behind these exists the potential for "freedom". And this notion of freedom, determined by the social condition of freedom

[84] Elsewhere, Adorno is more pessimistic about the present potential for the individual to ever free herself from the domination of the collective. Consider the following from *Minima Moralia*: "To think that the individual is being liquidated without a trace is over-optimistic. For his cursory negation, the abolition of the monad through solidarity, would at the same time prepare the ground for saving the single being, who only in relation to the general becomes particular. The present situation is very different. The disaster does not take the form of a radical elimination of what existed previously; rather the things that history has condemned are dragged along dead, neutralized and impotent as ignominious ballast. In the midst of standardized, organized human units, the individual persists. He is even protected and gaining monopoly value. But he is in reality no more than the mere function of his own uniqueness, an exhibition piece, such as the fetuses that once drew the wonderment and laughter of children.... " (Adorno 1978:135). In order to remain consistent with the theme of the present text, I address Adorno's earlier, more positive formulations.

rather than an individual one, suggests a utopia free from the agonistics of relationships of power.

Nonetheless, Adorno's account of the subject of subject-centered reason shares a number of features with the one described by Butler: it is first of all not transcendental, but contingent (for Adorno on history, for Butler on power). Secondly, for both Adorno and Butler the identity and (fictive) stability of the subject take place through processes of reduction and exclusion. And finally, both Butler and Adorno are suspicious of liberatory practices that occure on the level of identity. Butler as we have seen, calls into question both the abstract rights associated with the autonomous subject and the category of "women" as the starting point of political struggle. Adorno, burdened with the historical legacy of the rise of fascism and Stalinism, rejects the notion of a collective subject of emancipation,[85] while at the same time pointing out the catastrophic consequences of subject-centered reason. These similarities, as I have already noted, are primarily superficial, for underneath them exists a fundamental axis of contention: the conditions that both Butler and Adorno describe as constitutive of both the subject and society (namely, "power" or "an unfree society" are unproblematic for Butler and an object of critique for Adorno. For Butler, as we have seen, there is no "outside" to power, discourse, or society. For Adorno, the "outside" position of critique, utopian imagination and individuation are (or at least could be) constituted dialectically through the same process that constitutes oppression and domination. In other words, the position "outside" is part of the "inside". The subject, for example is both a construction of power *and* a promise of freedom, and it is Adorno's dialectical premise that allows him to think

[85]See Susan Buck-Morss' discussion in *The Origin of Negative Dialectics* (1977: 28-32).

in utopian terms. This difference becomes clear through a consideration of liberatory practices suggested by each thinker, and the implications of these practices for art.

We have already addressed how Butler hopes to somehow subvert, or open-up the binary, naturalized categories through which we are compelled to perform our identity. To the terms of this performance, there is never an "outside", only the possibility of slippage, re-territorialization, or re-inscription of already existing terms. These terms also, by implication, constitutes the limits of aesthetic, or artistic practice, which may effectively highlight, parody or confuse dominant discourses, but will not point away from them toward something radically other. For Adorno, emancipatory practice can take place at the level of thought, and at the level of the work of art and would indeed point to a radical alternative : the preservation of particularity, or individuation, both in terms of the subject and of the object. And this preservation is made possible by the practice of reason without domination. In *Negative Dialectics*, he argues for a philosophical practice counter to the Hegelian dialectic in which differences between the universal and the particular, or, concepts and objects are reconciled.[86] Instead, thought must recognize that "objects do not go into their concepts without leaving a remainder" and that "the concept does not exhaust the thing conceived." (Adorno 1992: 5.) The point, then, of the continued practice of philosophy, would be to engage in a thought process about "nonconceptuality, individuality, and particularity....A matter of urgency to the concept would be what it fails to cover" (Adorno 1992: 8). The goal, or 'cognitive utopia' of this process would be to "use concepts to unseal the non-conceptual with concepts, without making it their equal" (Adorno 1992: 10). In other words, human beings, in their interaction with nature, should understand objects are not made fully transparent to

humans through concepts. And it is what remains outside the grasp of concepts, the particular, which must be preserved. Within such a cognitive framework, human beings, who are also objects, should be understood as irreducible to abstract universal categories.

Similarly, Adorno suggests, autonomous art is able to present a model of non-dominating rationality and the preservation of the particular within the universal. This occurs because of the unique relationship between the subject, who acts on the objective material that constitutes the art-work, yet at the same time does not dominate the material but allows it to articulate its own particularity

> No work of art, not even the most subjective, can be completely identical with the subject that constitutes it and its substantial content. Every work possesses materials that are distinct from the subject, procedures that are derived from the materials of art, as well as from human subjectivity. Its truth content is not exhausted by subjectivity but owes its existence to the process of objectification. That process does indeed require the subject as executor, but points beyond it to that objective Other. This introduces an element of irreducible, qualitative, plurality. It is incompatible with every principle of unity, even that of the genres of art, by virtue of what they express. (Adorno in Teideman. (ed.) 2003: 375).

Works of art, then, like negative dialectics, are utopian, in that they model on the cognitive and material levels, a version of social and individual life that is free from domination, in which the particular is allowed to flourish within the universal.

For Adorno, then, unlike Butler, social construction, or "discourse" does not constitute the limits of subjectivity. There is an "outside" of discourse, in the form of both objective historical forces and the materiality of the body and of nature – both of which are also contained within the parameters of the subject. For Adorno the subject can be more, or less autonomous from social structure, just as the subject's relationship to nature, to its other and to difference can be more, or less dominating. The subject, for Adorno, is the site of both domination and of liberation, and the extent to

[86] See chapter one for extended discussion.

which liberation can be realized is the outcome of the totality of social relations - a totality with objective, describable, determinations. Adorno would concur with Butler's description of the self as that which is performed in and through socially proscribed scripts, but he would maintain that this state of affairs is symptomatic of an unfree society rather than an a-historical inevitability. Thus, as opposed to Butler, he is able to associate the subject with emancipatory practices that point to a radically different form of both subjectivity and the social relations that constitute subjectivity.

For Adorno, works of art incorporate that which is outside of art, that is, empirical reality, only to reveal the disjuncture between empirical reality and the reality of the work of art. In the end, art "recoil[s] from empirical reality…tend[s] toward the formulation of a sphere qualitatively opposed to that reality" (Adorno in Teideman (ed.) 2003: 383). For Butler, on the other hand, artistic practice can only be privileged as perhaps a more "conscious" version of the performance of identity. Without dialectics, the web of discourse that constitutes empirical reality, including the reality of the subject, is identical with itself. Thus, while, as we have seen Adorno's normative-utopian theory of art can be effectively supplement by earlier versions of feminist theory and artistic practice, it cannot be reconciled with versions of post-modern feminism such as that offered by Butler. The implications of such theories for a more general assessment of the position of art today will be discussed in the concluding chapter of this dissertation.

Conclusion

…[T]he end of art threatens the end of mankind, a mankind whose sufferings cry out for art, for an art that does not sooth and mitigate. Art presents humanity with the dream of its doom so that humanity may awaken, remain in control of itself, and survive. (Adorno in Teideman (ed.) 2003: 385).

Historical and Methodological Considerations

In this dissertation, I have evaluated the relevance of Adorno for a contemporary sociology of art on a number of levels. I offer, in this conclusion, some final remarks based on this evaluation, while at the same time presenting some questions and possibilities that have been suggested, but not fully addressed, in this work. According to Marx, we are reminded by Peter Bürger (1984), analytic categories have full validity only for and within those conditions whose products they are. Adorno's aesthetic categories developed in relation to historical conditions at the twilight of modernism, and, for the most part, took as their objects the cultural products of this period. As Adorno himself points out, art occupied a unique position within the context of capitalist modernity – a position which granted it a degree of autonomy and distance from other spheres of social activity. It was this distance, preserved through the highly mediated nature of the formal language of art, which allowed art to reflect critically on the rest of society, even as that society became increasingly dominated by the logic of the commodity form.

The conditions that characterize today's art world, its products, its relationship to other spheres of social activity, and the discourses that legitimize the field to itself and to the outside are qualitatively difference from those encountered by Adorno. Different enough, in fact, to indicate what Thomas Kuhn may have referred to as a "paradigm shift" (Kuhn 1996) in the art world. I have mentioned several of these differences in the

preceding chapters and will briefly review them here: Modern art asserted its identity in contrast to some of the most salient but troubling features of modern capitalism. In contrast to objects of mass production, modern art was original and handmade. Modern artists, though hoping to profit financially from their work, isolated themselves from market imperatives and rarely expected large financial gain. Unlike popular culture, which was easily accessible and widely available, modern works of art became increasingly obscure and available only to a limited audience of experts. Today, the art world no longer relies on its binary opposition to mass production and consumption for its identity. Contemporary works of art are often produced in quantity, using methods of reproduction and "borrowing" imagery from myriad sources, including popular culture – practices which call into question the very nature of the "original" or even "originality[87]". And artists' labor, rather than representing the antithesis of commodity production, today serves as a model for flexible labor in the post-Fordist economy. As the artist Andrea Fraser (2004) recently pointed out "artists have become the poster girls and boys for the joys of economic insecurity, geographical displacement, cultural uprooting, and social alienation, as if it's all just one big sexy lifestyle choice." In addition, after the Warhol phenomenon of the 1960's and, later, the boom art market of the 1980's, when young artists such as Julian Schnabel and Jean Michel Basqiuat became, overnight, popular culture royalty on the order of sports or movie stars, the image of the artist as self-consciously isolated from market concerns has become an anachronism.

[87] It should be noted that it was precisely these features of contemporary for which Benjamin had such high hopes and toward which Adorno expressed so much hostility. As I point out in chapter three, Adorno was correct in that the widespread deployment of such practices led not to the unleashing of art's revolutionary capacities but instead to the greater commodification of art.

It is perhaps on the level of reception, where modern art's trajectory towards obscurity, inaccessibility and cultural remoteness has been reversed, that the erosion of the modernist paradigm is the most obvious. Today, much of what claims the lion's share of art world status and critical approval is characterized by its accessibility and populism, and museums and galleries bank on its ability to draw diverse crowds of tourists and entertainment seekers. A survey of the last several years of exhibition choices at the Guggenheim Museum in New York highlights this point. The Guggenheim, once a temple to high modernism has, over the past several years, hosted an array of shows whose themes were unabashedly opposed to the modernist valorization of inaccessibility and oppositionality toward mainstream culture. These included "the Art of the Motorcycle" in 1998, a Giorgio Armani exhibition in 2001, and a Norman Rockwell retrospective in 2002. Most recently, the blockbuster, and highly critically acclaimed "Cremaster Cycle" by art-world darling and former fashion model, Mathew Barney, at the Guggenheim illustrated that even "genuine" (as opposed to the tongue-in- cheek aspect of, say, the Rockwell exhibit) art world products are able to draw crowds of extra-artworld spectators by using techniques that effectively blur the lines between art and Hollywood spectacle. Even museum exhibits of controversial, cutting-edge art such as the 1999 "Sensations" show at the Brooklyn Museum become popular tourist destinations on the order of Disneyworld when they receive dramatizing press[88].

The above also points to another important feature of today's art world: To an unprecedented degree "culture" including art, had become integral to the vitality of the post-industrial urban economy. Indeed, culture, along with information and finance has

[88] This, of course, is not a new phenomenon. Think for example of the *Entartete Kunst* exhibition organized by Hitler to display works of decadent modernism.

replaced industry as the primary site of urban capital accumulation. Not only has "culture" as the product of artists' labor assumed a central position in the new urban economy. Artists and art communities have also been deployed in the commodification of space and place that accompanied this urban transformation as front end troops in the gentrification process (Zukin 1982), (Smith 1996), and as laborers in the graphics and communication industries. Ultimately, however, artists' communities, while instrumental in bringing about the 'mallification' or 'disneyfication' of our urban centers, have also brought about their own demise. First, they have helped to transform their own enclaves, which, traditionally - as in the case of the Abstract Expressionists - have fostered a degree of cohesion and shared alternative norms among artists, into trendy, upscale neighborhoods, unaffordable to any but the urban elite. Subsequently, artists, at least in cities such as New York, have been scattered far and wide, thus weakening the fragile bonds that artists and intellectuals have traditionally maintained with one another, and through which they define themselves against mainstream society. With the increasing commodification of space as a cultural terrain, inevitably comes a loss of the energy and unpredictability that had defined the modern city since Baudelaire. In this sense, the transformation of urban space must also be considered as a significant feature of contemporary art production.

And these transformations in the nature of urban space have important implications for the production of subjectivities as well. The city is the material manifestation of capitalist modernity, embodying the dynamism, contradictions and utopian potential that Marx (and Adorno) found in capitalism itself. From the urban spaces of industrial and post-industrial capitalism emerged particular social types,

including artists and art communities who in turn produced specific works of art. As the nature of the urban environment changes, so too do the types of cultural workers produced by the environment. Adorno explained how, in the work of art, the fragile tension between the historically specific subject and the object was maintained. As city spaces increasingly foreclose the production of the contradictory subjectivities of modernity, Adorno's account of this relationship becomes inadequate to describe the manner in which the contemporary subject manifests in the work of art.

The above factors have important implications for the continuing applicability of the categories of "autonomy" and "dual-character," as they have been conceived by Adorno, to the current art-world. Not only has art work been effectively integrated into commodity culture to an unprecedented degree[89], but the distance, or "mediation" on the level of form that Adorno thought necessary for art to resist becoming *just* a commodity no longer exists as an art world norm. Nonetheless, such a paradigm shift does not point to the inadequacy of these categories for an understanding of *modern* art. In fact, they can operate as powerful tools for the comparison of the present to the recent past and hence are fruitful points of theoretical departure. An alternative perspective on these categories is also available. For Adorno, in an administered society such as that of late capitalism, art is the *only* cultural product that is capable of containing a critical moment. Products of the culture industries for him are fully reconciled with the logic of that industry and thus are not open to critical interpretation. More recent tendencies in cultural studies (e.g. (Hall 1993), (Hebdige 1979), (Fiske 1989), on the other hand, regard products of

[89] As Miriam Hansen points out in her introduction to Negt and Kluge's *Public Sphere and Experience*, Adorno does not fault art because it has become commodified. In fact, he recognized that the rise of the capitalist market was the very condition of art's autonomy. The difference, for Adorno, between works of art and product of the culture industry, is the former were *also*, not *just* commodities (1993:xxi).

popular culture as potentially multivocal signifiers, capable of complex and multiple meaning. At the same time, such theories challenge Adorno's pessimistic conviction that human beings in late capitalism have become "social dupes," completely hoodwinked by the culture industry and incapable of recognizing on a conscious level the terms of their own oppression.

Similar considerations were explored in the previous chapter on feminist art. There, I pointed out that Adorno's version of radical utopian social critique is problematic both because he rejects the notion of collective action and collective consciousness, and, in a related move, because he is too "totalizing" in his account of the colonization of consciousness under late capitalism. Feminism explicitly addressed the first issue when it sought to develop new modes of communication and to recognize difference in commonality within the women's movement. Feminism also serves as a reminder to Adorno, who believed that the "masses" had, by and large, been duped by the culture industry into complicity with their own oppression, that even under capitalism all standpoints are not identical. The production of subjects of instrumental reason requires the positing of an "outside" or "other" and women, gays, Jews, people of color and the disabled, have, at various times been forced to the margins and made to occupy the category of otherness (while being constituted through the category)[90]. The standpoint of the "other" cannot, then, be identical to the standpoint of the universal. And, though Adorno would certainly point out that even this "otherness" is a product of instrumental reason, and hence not really a standpoint "outside," it could also be argued that because of their exclusion from the universal, they are less easily integrated into the totality.

Feminism asserted just this position: because of their standpoint, women are uniquely situated to recognize and to reject the terms of their oppression.

While the continued relevance of categories such as "dual-character" and "autonomy" can be put to the test of concrete historical objects (e.g. do they adequately describe contemporary phenomena?), the continuing relevance of categories central to Adorno's methodological approach can only be defended or rejected according to the world-view of the analyst. For example, I began this dissertation by supporting Adorno's assertion that works of art are important historical and social documents because they can grasp and objectively represent society as a whole – in its totality. The interpreter/sociologist, following this premise, can interrogate works of art with the intention of gaining historically particular knowledge about society. Such an assertion takes for granted - indeed, posits the desirability of - a number of assumptions concerning the existence of a representable, objectively binding socio-historical reality. As we know, such a view has been compellingly attacked by postmodernists and thus cannot be taken for granted as the starting point of sociological inquiry. Though the existence of such a reality cannot be demonstrated with ontological certainty, I agree with Fredric Jameson (1991) concerning the political desirability of framing the social world in terms of a coherent historical narrative. Without such a narrative concerning the totality, Jameson argues, political struggles are limited to reformism or even the reproduction of existing dynamics. What can be retained from Adorno, I believe, is the conviction that these existing dynamics appear in works of art in contradictory but revealing ways.

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[90] As I pointed out in chapter four, Adorno discusses the relegation of women and Jews to the status of nature and hence of object at various moments throughout his work. He does not, however, draw out the

Utopian Claims

Adorno's contributions must also be assessed on the normative level. In keeping with the Frankfurt School's rejection of a Weberian value-free social theory, Adorno's social and aesthetic theory hinges on a radical critique of existing society based on a normative-utopian vision of human liberation within a just and rational society[91]. Despite Adorno's pessimism about the possibility of achieving such a society, his understanding and analysis of the aesthetic sphere of, in particular, modernity, accords to certain kinds of art a privileged position vis-à-vis the utopian dimension of his thought[92]. The analytic categories discussed above thus become normative judgments concerning some aesthetic tendencies (Schoenberg's atonality, for example) versus others (e.g. pastiche in Stravinsky). For Adorno, as we have seen, works of art can be judged by their accordance with an emancipatory moment, as articulated through the categories he has developed. I have discussed some of the problems associated with Adorno's rigid adherence to modernist formal strategies, and the manner in which a consideration of feminist performance and body art might help break the grip of these strategies, while retaining the notion of the aesthetic sphere as an important utopian model of a more liberated society and mode of cognition.

In chapter four, I chose to juxtapose Adorno's aesthetics with feminist art because for the latter, the aesthetic sphere, or aesthetic experience, also plays an important role in social critique and the formation of the terms of liberation. At the same time, the trajectory of feminist art from the 1970's to the present provides an example of

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results in terms of the production of subjectivities that such status implies.

[91] See chapter one of this dissertation for an in-depth discussion of the Frankfurt School's critique of positivism and of the impulse toward a "value-neutral" sociology.

[92] See chapter one for extended discussion.

some general tendencies within the art worlds of advanced, industrialized society[93]. For both Adorno and earlier examples of feminist art, art is a model of unity within diversity, cognition without domination, a realm of Eros and play, and a sphere that is (relatively) protected from total incorporation into the instrumental (and patriarchal) imperatives of the culture industry. The familial resemblance between feminist art and Adorno ends, however, somewhere in the late 1970's, with the rise of the theories and practices of deconstruction that we have discussed. It is further severed in the 1980's with the continuing hegemony of the post-modern turn in politics, theory and art. I believe that the inapplicability of Adorno's theory to (much) feminist (and other) art of this period has mostly to do with the disappearance of a culturally salient notion of the aesthetic, or aesthetic experience, as unique from other sorts of experiences. And, I think this disappearance can be accounted for more fundamentally by the disappearance of the idea of utopia. As Marcuse (1965) pointed out in *Eros and Civilization*, the notion of the aesthetic has played the utopian opposite to a world ruled by work and utility since the dawn of the industrial revolution. Kant's purposefulness without purpose and free play of the faculties and Schiller's play impulse were invoked precisely when capitalism began to create the possibility of a society beyond material needs while at the same time as it necessitated the drudgery and immiseration of the masses. For Schiller, industrial society subjugated the sensuous impulse, which must be regained if human potential is to be fully

[93] So far, in this dissertation, I have not addressed questions of generalizability between artworlds from very different nations and societies. My discussion has centered on the artworlds of New York City, and I suspect that much of what has been said could be applied to the artworlds of other city centers with international artworlds such as Cologne, Paris, London or Berlin. With today's global information and financial exchange networks, artworlds in other major cities outside of the Atlantic periphery, such as Sydney, Tokyo, Mexico City, and Tel Aviv probably possess very similar characteristics to their European and North American counterparts. On the other hand, art communities surely exist in territories that have not yet been fully absorbed into the market and norms of the global art world. An examination of such local

realized, and it is only through the play impulse that is at the heart of the aesthetic that this might be accomplished. “The impulse,” Marcuse explains, “does not aim at playing “with” something; rather it is the play of life itself, beyond want and external compulsion – the manifestation of an existence without fear and anxiety and thus the manifestation of freedom itself” (1965: 187).

In our world, and this was already the case by the end of the nineteen-seventies[94], the notion of the utopian in art, as well as in politics was in most circles considered comic at best. The gradual marketization of the communist bloc, along with the egregious assaults on free speech in other sectors of the socialist world, combined with the increasing global hegemony of the neo-liberal vision heralded by the Reagan-Thatcher alliance made any reference to an alternative seem dead in the water, which, by the end of the nineteen-eighties, socialism literally was. This period also saw a growing backlash against the gains of the nineteen-sixties and seventies in terms of civil rights, affirmative action and women’s rights, the increasing media presence of the moral majority and Christian Right along with the inauguration of “the Culture Wars”. These forces combined to promote, even among those who considered themselves “leftists” a distrust of the (now failed) extremism of the New Left vision, and a turn instead to a piecemeal, reformist politics of inclusion and representation. As George Yudice points out “this is a politics that…signals the transformation from what was traditionally deemed properly political to cultural mediation” (2003: 164).

In other words, on the critical left, that field from which both artists and intellectual generally emerged, utopian politics, based on a radical vision of social

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differences and particularities would make for a fascinating study, but, however, it is not the subject of this dissertation.

and individual change, was replaced by an identity politics of inclusion, a demand, according to David Reiff, for “a piece of the capitalist pie” (in Yudice 2003:163). And “culture,” which now included both art and mass culture, was enlisted as the battleground for this politics. The aesthetic sphere, then, rather than serving as a model for a utopian society, was politicized in the interest of inclusion and diversity. While this may on the surface appeared reminiscent of Adorno’s goal of particularity within universality – or, like the artwork, a whole that can accommodate its particular moments, on closer inspection the model resembles more a functionalist vision of social integration: here, diversity (as defined not by the individual but by membership in a group which, itself, is a product of a society based on inclusion) can indeed be effectively absorbed by new, more flexible forms of the capitalist totality. In such a vision, the aesthetic as a model of utopia has been replaced by the capitalist politicization of art.

And, as I hope to have demonstrated through the case of feminist art, theory and art have been largely complicitous in this transformation. Postmodern critical theories, such as that of Butler, whom we have discussed, or Foucault, whose influence has been even more profound, are characterized by an uncompromising hostility both to totalizing theories of power and oppression and an anti-humanism and anti-universalism that would mitigate against large scale social transformation, or indeed, even the naming of the terms of such transformation. Utopia is now seen as a symptom of what has been wrong all along rather than a desirable goal. What we are left with instead is a politics of the local, or of representation, and, as in the case of Butler, of the performative. Works of art such as those of Barbara Kruger, for example, take on the theme of representation. They effectively deconstruct the ideological representations of, among other things,

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[94] See, e.g. Jacoby (2000) for a negative evaluation and Fukuyama (2002) for a positive one.

women in the media. And, indeed, they harness the master's tools so well that they are almost instantly taken up not only by the art market, but also, in an ironic circular movement, by the advertising industry itself. While all works of art are also potentially commodities, and so, even by Adorno's terms, are, as we have discussed, not less effective because they end up participating in the market, the rapidity with which works such as Kruger's have been commodified speaks to the degree to which their "message" can indeed be incorporated into the existing society. The same, I believe, can be said of works such as those of Cindy Sherman. They are often aesthetically appealing, in Kant's appetitive sense, while at the same time they can be read as critical in the terms which Judith Butler has implied: Sherman's staged "performances" of gender are meant to subvert the "naturalness" of gender stereotypes. But again, as effective as these images are on their own terms, they are not intended to provoke an "aesthetic experience" in the sense that Adorno or even Kristeva had in mind. They may subvert gender categories, but they do not (do not intend) to subvert the very terms of cognitive or somatic experience. Such as with Kruger, Sherman's adherence to the signifying terms of mass culture drains her work of the possibility of looking "outside" of that culture. These observations are not intended as art criticism. My intention is rather to demonstrate that this work can only be understood in relation to the manner in which the social role of art is altered when the notion of the aesthetic sphere as a model of utopia, a notion that had been in place for over a century, is no longer operative.

Adorno, despite his sometimes overwhelming pessimism, made a convincing case that modern art, as a monad of modern, capitalist society, demonstrated a utopian tendency that was part and parcel of the terms of its social critique. That art no

longer presents such a moment indicates the withering of this potential within society itself. To take utopian claims such as those asserted by Adorno seriously today, much less their manifestation in works of art, appears hopelessly antiquated and irrelevant. However, I would argue that it was never more necessary than it is today to retain the possibility of thinking outside of existing conditions. Even though utopian models may not at present exist on our horizon, this does not mean that they never again will. Thus, a continued engagement with work like Adorno's serves to keep alive a much needed model of radical, utopian social critique to serve as counterbalance to the resignation and despair that our current situation engenders.

Post-script

Contemporary Considerations: Art in the Public Sphere

Art's loss of utopian implications was an inevitable result of the end more generally of utopian politics. This does not mean, however, that art and culture in general no longer have a role in critically framing social experience. The strategies deployed by critical contemporary artists grow, on the one hand, out of the spirit of activist art that has remained alive in some circles since the 1970's. Such work consists in the attempt to interject art into everyday life and follows from an alternative history of modernism that Adorno would reject[95]. As we have seen, new social movements such as those based on AIDs activism, have enlisted the strategies of theatrics, carnival and performance, as have the anti-globalization movement and, more recently, in protests against the war in Iraq and other policies of the Bush administration. Such uses of art lack the mediation necessary, by Adorno's standards, to suggest a utopian alternative. However, as public expressions of resistance they can potentially contribute to what Negt and Kluge called the 'structuring of experience.' (1993).

In the post-9/11 moment, the role for art has also emerged as a potential antidote to the mainstream media's unrelentingly affirmative framing of current events. During the year following the terrorist attacks on New York City and D.C., I took part in a research project that sought to determine the impact of the attacks on various communities in New York City. My piece of the project was to study the impact on the art community in particular. While the material conditions of life for many artists that I interviewed had deteriorated due to the loss of jobs, housing, and tourism as a result of both 9/11 and the recession, some also spoke of new sense of awareness of their

potential, as artists, to both frame and document historical events. This awareness was exacerbated, perhaps, by the fact the repercussions of Bush's "war on terror" seemed especially egregious to cultural workers who had previously taken their own civil liberties for granted. Subsequently, much of the work that I saw being produced in artists' studios in the New York area made use of mass media technologies such as video, computers and film. Artists deployed these media to reframe both the events of 9/11 and the US response in an effort to problematize, rather than flatten, questions of nationalism, imperialism and US culpability, and to represent the complex emotional dynamics of terror, rage and mourning in terms other than the fragmented and sentimental spectacle offered by the mainstream media. Such efforts are not utopian, either in Adorno's hermetic sense or in terms of a Brechtian or Benjaminian project to appropriate the tools of the consciousness industry in the interest of social revolution. Instead, they represent a more modest attempt to contribute to a public dialogue that has not already been manufactured and packaged to accord with ruling political and economic interests. Although these works constitute a cultural politics of resistance rather than of alternatives, they do provide evidence that critical consciousness is still possible today. A reconstructed Adorno, less mired in mandarin pessimism and the confines of modernism might imagine utopian energies emerging from these early twenty-first century subjectivities, working within the language of contemporary media, in a society that is both totalizing but still contradictory. Such a thought experiment is the topic for another dissertation.

[95] For a discussion of activist art in New York City from the 1970's until the present, see Shollette (1999).

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