

Adorno and the autonomy of art

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Adorno's unique brand of Western Marxism, in which the ideals of art for art's sake and absolute music remain salient, presents a complex and elusive treatment of the autonomy of art, which it is the task of this article to examine. It may seem puzzling how any kind of Marxist could believe in the autonomy of art. Autonomy is normally taken to mean that art is governed by its own rules and laws, and that artistic value makes no reference to social or political value.¹ Autonomy is taken to oppose the economic conditioning of culture assumed by classical Marxism. However, Western Marxism questioned the base/superstructure model, and Adorno's version of it offers the subtlest account of that relation.² It is a mark of the perspicacity of Adorno's treatment that he was able to do justice both to the social situation of art and music, and to their autonomy status – indeed he did justice to each through the other. Adorno delineates the functionlessness of art, and its social situation in virtue of that functionlessness. For Adorno, autonomous artworks have a social situation but – as I will put it – no direct social function: "Insofar as a social function may be predicated of works of art, it is the function of having no function".³ That is, autonomous art has as its "purpose" the creation of something without direct purpose or function – pre-bourgeois art such as religious or theatre music, in contrast, does have a direct social function. Another way of putting this claim is to say that autonomous art constitutes an autonomous practice that does not serve any other practice. That is, it is an end in itself – just as religious practice is also autonomous and lacks direct social function. Adorno's picture is that as the artist became free of church and aristocratic patronage towards the end of the 18th century, their work simultaneously became autonomous and commodified through entry into the capitalist market-place.

For Adorno, autonomy and commodification stand in a dialectical relation. Adorno's Aesthetic Theory thus develops a "social" interpretation of the autonomy of art. It might be argued – perhaps from the direction of Analytic philosophy – that his position involves two inter-related senses of autonomy, social and aesthetic, and that autonomy and commodification stand in a relation of mutual dependence. But for Adorno the social or sociological and the aesthetic are interpenetrating; there are not two "senses" of autonomy.⁴ The opposition between autonomy and commodification is too stark to count as mutual dependence. One might say that there is a dialectical relation between "social" and "aesthetic" autonomy, just as there is between (social) autonomy and commodification. However, these strands must inevitably be separated to some extent – as Bernstein puts it,

“for all aesthetic phenomena there will be a purely aesthetic or internal way of regarding them and an external, social characterisation”.⁵

It is important to stress that to treat autonomy as a defining feature of the modernization of art is itself an expression of modernism. The quasi-political narrative of the emancipation of music is not a neutral history but arises from the aesthetics of modernism of Adorno, and of other Frankfurt School figures such as Ernst Bloch. Hanslick’s formalism, though it had proto-historicist aspects, was non-ideological, while in complete contrast, classical Marxists dismissed the emancipation of music as bourgeois ideology and illusion. As Bernstein notes, the art of modernity is characterized by its developing autonomy, and “modernism is that increment in which art becomes self-conscious of its autonomy”.⁶

There is no one thing meant by the claim that art is autonomous, and here I do not discuss all its senses. (The autonomy of aesthetic judgment is a further question.) My aim is critically to assess Adorno’s account, but I believe that he sees the implications of the extraordinary and exotic phenomena of autonomous art and music as no other writer has done. Of course, his account requires qualification. Autonomous art is not as historically time-bound a phenomenon as he would have us believe – relative autonomy has occurred in other ages, before the onset of Western capitalism. Connectedly, his account of the changes in artistic patronage in the decades around 1800 must be debated. First, however, I will trace the origins of the concept of autonomous art in the philosophers that Adorno draws on.

1. Adorno and Kant: art for art’s sake

As with other philosophical works of great complexity and difficulty, Adorno’s *Aesthetic Theory* is best understood in relation to the writers that its author draws on and opposes. This strategy is particularly appropriate given that Adorno’s “Negative Dialectics” operates through a critique of existing systems. Although Kant’s primary concern was with the autonomy of the aesthetic, the philosophical origins of the autonomy of art are found in his work. But the issue must be handled with care. It is a surprisingly common misconception that Kant regarded artworks as functionless; however, it is true that implicit in the Critique of Judgment is a fundamental reorientation of art towards purposelessness.⁷ Kant regarded most of the arts as dependent beauties, and ones that were not, notably instrumental music, he believed fell below the level of fine or, as we say, “high” art.⁸ But his account of genius provides reasons for thinking of art as autonomous, while his concept of purposiveness without a purpose was the basis – admittedly rhetorical more than logical – for Adorno’s powerful treatment. Later writers took Kant’s concept of free beauty – of autonomous aesthetic judgment – as the origins of the doctrine of art for art’s sake.⁹ Hanslick asserted that music is

fully autonomous and self-referential – autonomous in being no longer under the hegemony of a literary model, and in being autonomous from non-art.¹⁰ By stressing the value of music independent of text, dance or scenic action, Hanslick helped to defend its artistic autonomy. Adorno developed this position further, dialectically and historically. Because Adorno is an heir to its tradition, it is important to say something about aestheticism or art for art's sake. This late 19th and early 20th century cultural movement was associated with modernism, reacting to the ills of modern industrial society by withdrawing from social engagement. Hobsbawm comments that before the failed bourgeois revolutions of 1848, "art for art's sake" could not yet compete with art for humanity's sake, or for the nations' or the proletariats' sake.^{11,12} In the decades after 1848, however, the bourgeoisie ceased to be the revolutionary class, and commodification became a prison rather than a liberation for the artist. With "art for art's sake", art withdrew from political action; in the modernist era that followed, progressive art lost its self-confidence and turned against the bourgeois culture which produced it.

There are various possible definitions of art for art's sake and aestheticism:

(1) Moderate aestheticism or separatism = the thesis of the separation of the value spheres: There is a concept of aesthetic value separate from moral and other values.¹³

(2) Radical aestheticism (i) Aesthetic value is superior to moral and other values (Nietzsche, Oscar Wilde); (ii) formalism: moral qualities are irrelevant to the evaluation of an artwork as an artwork, though so also are non-moral qualities such as representational content or meaning.

(3) Contemplation thesis: The aesthetic is the domain of disinterested, distanced contemplation, involving a special attitude, the preserve of experts or "aesthetes".

(4) Independence thesis: Art is or ought to be divorced from life. Wilde asserts that Art "has an independent life, just as Thought has, and develops purely on its own lines".¹⁴ One implication is that art has its own laws of development. This article considers (4) in the form of the autonomy of art. It rejects (3), holding that the aesthetic does not involve a special attitude, the preserve of experts or "aesthetes", but is a ubiquitous and democratic phenomenon. Definitions (1) and (2) are considered elsewhere.¹⁵

2. Adorno and Marx: art as commodity or social fact

To reiterate, Adorno is an heir to the traditions of art for art's sake, and absolute music, but his adherence is filtered through a distinctive interpretation of Marxian dialectics, which we will now examine. His sociological critique treats art in the con-

text of its situation in industrialized societies. He holds that while autonomous art lacks the direct social purpose of pre-autonomous art, it functions as a commodity; at the same time, he holds, its autonomy is not mere bourgeois ideology but has an essential critical function. Adorno develops or qualifies Kant's pure autonomy aesthetic through the Hegelian concepts of truth-content and the historical conditioning of artworks, and through the Marxist concept of art's social determination. Progressive art embodies and exists within late bourgeois culture whilst denying by its truth-content that very culture; it deconstructs late capitalism as a false totality. As Adorno puts it, "truth-content [is] the task of critique".¹⁶ The central dichotomy in Adorno's aesthetic theory is therefore between art as autonomous (from Kant) and art as commodity (from Marx); art has a "double character as both autonomous and fait social [social fact]".¹⁷ Adorno's key claim is that although autonomy and commodity status are in tension, yet each requires the other – they are in dialectical opposition: "something severs itself from empirical reality and thereby from society's functional context and yet is at the same time part of empirical reality and society's functional context".¹⁸

What exactly does Adorno mean by this "autonomous art" which appears during the later 18th century? His modernist picture, which I find a convincing one, is that Western art before the Enlightenment had largely been tethered to social functions arising from court, aristocracy or church. Music lost its direct social function with the ascendancy of bourgeois culture from the late 18th century; aristocratic and church patronage declined, and a non-functional "art music" developed. Focusing, as Adorno does, on the case of music – which may lead to biases, as we will see – it appears that it was no longer the primary role of composers to write for religious services, military bands or the theatre, or to produce *Tafelmusik* (literally table-music) for aristocratic banquets. If artists no longer work for specific patrons in church or court, and offer their work for sale to those whose identities are not fully specified in advance – that is, they begin to function within the market – it becomes easier for them to produce works that embody their own values rather than those of their patrons, thus increasing their autonomy.¹⁹ Growing autonomy therefore goes hand-in-hand with the commodification of artworks; as Jacques Attali pithily put it, "The artist was born at the same time as his work went on sale".²⁰ It is not so paradoxical to say that capitalism emancipates, as Marx of course recognized. It emancipates from feudalism, but forges new chains of its own.

The dialectical development of autonomy and commodification involved various processes in different artforms, in which, until the mid-19th century, music lagged behind the other arts. These included, in the visual arts, the development of an art market and the creation of art galleries and museums for public viewing; in literature, the development of a bourgeois reading public for the novel and other high art literary forms; and in music, the appearance of public concerts, often

involving payment by subscription, and later, after 1800, the mass publication of works for the bourgeois amateur. The 19th century music publisher is the equivalent of the 20th century record company in mediating between artist and audience. Though the term "sheet music" has connotations of 20th century popular song, its suggestion of the culture industry as filtering mechanism applies to the 19th century too. Beethoven and Chopin had suffered, or sometimes profited, from the appearance of rival editions, but the development of copyright further helped to secure a precarious economic independence for composers. Adorno's picture is that as composers and artists gained independent social status and tenuous economic power in Europe's burgeoning capitalist market of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the liberal, "bourgeois" art exemplified by Beethoven celebrated the class it represented, and epitomized the socially and artistically progressive.

Adorno does not say that works of art "ought" to become autonomous; for him the autonomization of the work of art is an inevitable historical process. Though they may embrace the fact, reject it, or appear unaware of it, socially autonomous works also have no choice but to be commodities. Like his successor – and critic – Peter Bürger, however, Adorno does not clearly distinguish, and presumably does not wish clearly to distinguish, descriptive and prescriptive claims about autonomy.²¹

Adorno's account is suffused with Marx's critique of commodity fetishism, according to which the principle of exchange is now the dominant principle of social relationships. Like other products of labor under capitalism, Adorno argues, artworks hide the work that has gone into them and appear to have a life of their own; since they are without uses, they inspire an almost superstitious reverence. They therefore question a society where all is subject to the principle of exchange. Their fetish character is not mere delusion, as orthodox Marxism claims, but a condition of their truth, including their social truth. Adorno's key dialectical thesis is that autonomous art's (indirect) social functions arise precisely because of its apparent (direct) functionlessness; just as it is only through commodification that art can become autonomous. These indirect functions can be both progressive – social critique – and conservative or regressive.

For Adorno, high art's claims of autonomy – an artwork's implicit claim to be more than a mere thing, to have a non-exchangeable dignity – are strictly illusory. From the social perspective of commodification, the autonomy of music is a kind of illusion, and vice versa – each position is false from the terms of the other. They are not two sides of one coin, but are irreconcilable. In seeming to recognize the truth in each position, Adorno's dialectical standpoint is both more subtle, and more elusive, than either art for art's sake or orthodox Marxism. He regards art aesthetically (as autonomous) and sociologically (as product) simultaneously. In positing any position, Adorno holds, its opposite is also present through its exclusion. His

Negative Dialectics constitute a rejection of what he terms "Identity Thinking".²² The relation between autonomy and commodity, Adorno maintains, is dynamic, and two apparently contradictory features stand in a reciprocal or symbiotic relationship.²³ Music is not simply a reflection of society, and aesthetic values are not simply subordinated to social and economic ones in the manner of classical Marxism. That at least is Adorno's account. He shows how the development of autonomous art is not of merely sociological interest, but has fundamental philosophical implications. It is a process whereby art seems to be freed from narrowly didactic and merely pleasurable purposes, as moralizing, propaganda and mere entertainment. The "social" autonomy of art fosters an individualist as opposed to social taste and aesthetics, and thus the development of the "aesthetic" autonomy of art. For instance, composers of the first Viennese School – Mozart, Haydn and Beethoven – aimed to subvert the listener's expectations in a way that their predecessors, more subservient to a social aesthetic, did not. However, when we come to examine criticisms of it, we will see how difficult it is to keep Adorno's picture in focus.

3. Progressive and regressive indirect functions of autonomous art

I have defined autonomy as lack of direct social function, since in his characterization of art as social fact, Adorno recognizes that all art has a social function in some sense – the dialectical opposition of autonomy and commodification reflects this fact. Commodification implies an economic function – the artist acquires a means of living in exchange for their artistic labor. Particular concerts, for instance, will have various social functions; the Adornian claim under consideration is that in general they have no intrinsic or direct social function of the kind that characterizes heteronomous music. (I am putting Adorno's claim in my own terms, trying to make sense of it without, I hope, distorting it too much.)

I referred earlier to how autonomous art has social functions that are both progressive and regressive. First, we will examine what for Adorno is the principal social function of autonomous art in the era of modernism: social critique. He holds that it is only through becoming socially autonomous, that art becomes self-conscious and socially critical. For Adorno, the key representative of art's growing autonomization was Beethoven:

If he is the musical prototype of the revolutionary bourgeoisie, he is at the same time the prototype of a music that has escaped from its social tutelage and is aesthetically fully autonomous...His work explodes the schema of a complaisant adequacy of music and society.²⁴

This “complaisant adequacy” is the hallmark of heteronomous art, which serves society rather than challenging it. For Adorno, autonomous art’s critical role arises with the growing concentration on form which arises with autonomy, of which Beethoven’s music is a model.

Since it no longer fulfils a direct social function, Adorno holds, the autonomous artwork can create its own inner logic, which does not refer to anything external. In its consistency and total integration, form and content become identical; the work is its idea. Heteronomous art, in contrast, imitates, represents, or expresses things outside itself. Since it arises in virtue of the artwork’s form not its content, autonomous art yields more than the superficial social critique offered by political or propaganda art that appeared with modernism – “[what is] social about art is its immanent movement against society, not its manifest opinions”:

*Art...is social not only because of its mode of production...nor simply because of the social derivation of its thematic material. Much more importantly, art becomes social by its opposition to society, and it occupies this position only as autonomous art.*²⁵

Adorno stresses that through its dynamic, organic form – the thoroughgoing development of thematic material exemplified for instance by the opening movement of his 5th Symphony – Beethoven’s music epitomises socially progressive forces. This dynamic form constitutes a truth-content that is critical of ancien régime aristocratic society:

*The kinship with that bourgeois libertarianism which rings all through Beethoven’s music is a kinship of the dynamically unfolding totality. It is in fitting together under their own law...that his themes come to resemble the world whose forces move them; they do not do it by imitating that world.*²⁶

There are broader reasons why autonomous art functions as social critique: “In a society that has been functionalized virtually through and through, totally ruled by the exchange principle, lack of function comes to be a secondary function”. Something which by the standards of ordinary life is useless, is for Adorno a salutary violation of the Enlightenment principle of universal functionality, and thereby acquires an “irreplaceable dignity”:²⁷

*By crystallising in itself as something unique to itself, rather than complying with existing social norms and qualifying as ‘socially useful’, it criticises society by merely existing...through its refusal of society, which is equivalent to sublimation through the law of form, autonomous art makes itself a vehicle of ideology.*²⁸

It is precisely through their refusal of social function that, according to Adorno, autonomous music and art acquire a critical function. By standing apart from society, autonomous art becomes more genuinely critical than political art. It is a model of emancipation, of life lived under non-oppressive conditions; as Bernstein puts it, it "[emblematises] the possibility of real individuation in opposition to social heteronomy".²⁹ This is the most one can expect from art in the present age – the only glimmer of hope from Adorno, who is a thoroughgoing pessimist about art but not a Marxist cynic.

For Adorno, as Zuidervaart puts it, bourgeois society produces artworks "whose primary functions have not been the accomplishment of purposes directly served by other institutions, whether economic, political, religious or academic". Zuidervaart adds that the primary functions of such works have been rather unique to art: "maintaining an image of humanity, expressing 'irrational' needs and desires, satisfying aesthetic contemplation...".³⁰ I would say that these functions are not unique to high art – anything at all can satisfy aesthetic contemplation, for instance – but they are peculiarly satisfied by it.

While for Hegel, art affirms the society to which it belongs, Adorno stresses its critical role. These positions may be consistent, because bourgeois art is progressive when it affirms nascent bourgeois values, and regressive when it later affirms them under the conditions of late capitalism.¹⁰ Autonomy is modernist art's resource against administered society, but as Bernstein puts it, it is a heavily qualified one, thoroughly conditioned by what it opposes, verging on emptiness, complicit despite itself, and indefinitely vulnerable: "If art cedes its autonomy, it delivers itself over to the machinations of the status quo; if art remains strictly for-itself, it nonetheless submits to integration as one harmless domain among others".³² (Though Adorno thinks that it is not entirely "harmless".) Modernist art, though presented to an audience, is uninterested in their reaction – which is discomfiting for them. Unlike functional art, it confronts and challenges the audience, and its artistic success does not depend on their appreciation. (Though I would argue that it does in the fullness of time – the test of time and artistic value constitute a holism of interdependent concepts.) While modernist works become ever more difficult and hermetic in avoiding appropriation by the culture industry, they may also become empty. A "false reconciliation" with society has "paved the way in the sphere of radically abstract art: Nonrepresentational art is suitable for decorating the homes of the newly prosperous".³³ Adorno's concern is that the history of autonomous art is drawing to a close, with the systematic reduction of all art to the status of entertainment.

The negative function to which autonomous art is vulnerable, exploitation or cooption by the capitalist marketplace through which it "cedes its autonomy" as Bernstein puts it, is illustrated by corporate hospitality events at Carnegie Hall or the Tate Modern, which trade on the perceived social value of functionless art. It

is precisely because of their dignity as functionless that artworks acquire the cachet that makes them worth appropriating for such causes. A work might function as social critique and yet also have a regressive function – these are matters of degree. If the Tate Modern were totally dominated by corporate hospitality events, the autonomy of the artworks displayed there would be undermined. A vivid example of civic appropriation of art is Dubai's agreement with New York's Guggenheim Museum in 2007 to create a "world-class" art museum; it is also negotiating to build a "Louvre": "Dubai already has giant shopping malls, beach hotels and skyscrapers. What it lacks is culture", reports *The Economist*. "So [it] has stolen a march on its rivals by buying a good chunk of such stuff – off the shelf". Dubai's rulers seek the prestige that arises from art's functionlessness. The aim of Middlesbrough's more modest Institute of Modern Art, in a former industrial region of North-East England, is the more concrete one of economic regeneration, while the Los Angeles' Music Center, which includes Frank Gehry's remarkable Disney Hall, is a key element in the Downtown renovation programme.³⁴ In these last cases, somehow, the arts are meant to function as an economic magnet or generator through their mystique.

These functions of autonomous artworks are related to Bourdieu's analysis of them as cultural capital and expression of social status.³⁵ Knowledge is power, and knowledge of the arts can both impress and oppress. However, one cannot infer from these sociological truths that the classics are inherently a bourgeois category, and that an alternative "people's art" is required. For by the same token, "street credible" knowledge of popular music is power also – intimate knowledge of hip-hop is cultural capital too. The classics are not a merely a bourgeois category, and it is not elitist to say this.³⁶

4. Direct and indirect social function

Not all functions of art are social. The representational or depictive function of painting, while serving social functions such as enhancing an aristocratic patron's prestige, is not itself social. The kris, a ceremonial sword from South-East Asia, originally had a practical function, but now its social or religious function predominates. But for Adorno, the loss of social function has special significance in the development of art.

What is direct or primary, as opposed to indirect or secondary, social function? A direct or primary social function, I would argue, is one which has to be grasped in order to have any understanding at all of the event or process in question. Until I understand that a certain event is a religious service rather than a university graduation ceremony – both, for instance, are held in Durham Cathedral – I will not be in any position to know what secondary functions, such as expression of national

or civic pride, or oppression of the working classes, it may have. Such events are defined by their function. The direct function of a graduation ceremony is to graduate the students; of a religious service, to worship God, or remember the dead. If the ceremony did not have the function of graduating students, it would not be a graduation ceremony; if it did not have the function of worshipping God, it would not be a religious ceremony. "What is this event?" "It is an exercise in civic pride/corporate image-building/employment-creation". One cannot even understand, let alone assess, such claims if one does not already know that the event in question is a concert, a church service, a graduation ceremony, or a political rally.

While liturgical music is heteronomous has no direct social function, what has to be understood about the direct social function of autonomous concert music is that it does not have one. We have seen that if a cultural outsider – an anthropologist from Mars – were to ask, during a church service, "What is the (social) function of this music?", the answer would be: religious, to uplift the spirits of the congregation and turn their thoughts to God, and so on. This heteronomous music subserves the function of the religious ceremony. A corresponding answer could be given for all music with direct social function. Music for dancing or military pageants is part of, or contributes to, the social occasion. These are all cases of art that is not for art's sake, but which is for the sake of any of the things that art can be contrasted with – religion, instruction, commerce, politics, entertainment, advertising. The modernist story is that prior to the separation of the value spheres in the 18th century, all art was for the sake of one of these other things.³⁷

In contrast, if the cultural outsider went to a concert and asked, "What is the (social) function of this music?", no comparable answer could be given. One could explain that a Bach cantata, performed in concert, was originally composed for church services; but in concert performances, it has no direct social function. To say that the music contributes to the social occasion of a concert is absurd; the music is the social occasion. This, I would argue, is the defining contrast between autonomous and heteronomous music, as Adorno conceives it. The development of autonomous music in the later 18th century mirrors another development at that time, the appearance of the musical work. Indeed, it could be argued that the work-concept – which according to some authorities appears in music only in the later 18th century – just is the concept of autonomous art.³⁸ To talk of the artwork is to talk of something that is normally without direct social function. The appearance of the artwork seems especially clear in the case of music, if one accepts that it is contemporary with the separation from performance; the appearance of the artwork in painting cannot be so much earlier. The possibility of autonomous music arises only with the distinction between the musical work, and music composed for a particular occasion, whether religious, courtly or military. There are religious or political works which remain heteronomous music, while jazz

improvisation, which may be autonomous, does not normally involve works; but these examples do not refute the claim that a distinction between work and performance is required to open up the possibility of autonomous music.

A direct function makes essential reference to participant understanding; it is an aim which is recognized, intended and fully conscious, and clearly pre-theoretical. Sociological or anthropological interpretation may unearth indirect functions some of which are latent in that they are not intended or recognized – though on one influential view, these also must make reference to participant understanding. Indirect function does not have to be latent in the sense of unconscious.³⁹ The direct function of supermarkets is to provide for the needs of the consumer, while their latent function, recognized by some if not all consumers, is to facilitate capital expansion. (A shop that is merely a front for money-laundering will not have either of these functions.)

The phenomenon of the concert has evolved so that not all music performed in public concerts is autonomous, if this was ever the case. Stadium rock is totally commodified entertainment without truth-content or social critique. This is functional music, among other reasons, because the audience are fans who gain their sense of identity from following it. Pre-18th century music perhaps had a more direct social function than commodified pop music and Hollywood films – “entertainment” is not a direct social function in the pre-18th century sense. The suggestion that there is a direct function of autonomous music and art, viz. an aesthetic function, is one I will return to on another occasion.⁴⁰

As we have seen, music originally written with a religious or military function can be performed in the concert hall and still fulfill contemporary secondary functions, for instance as backdrop to corporate hospitality events. Direct social function in the act of performance – music for church services or military pageants – should be contrasted with indirect social function found in political and religious art intended for concert performance or exhibition. Thus Socialist Realist art might achieve its social function both directly through integration in activities not primarily artistic, such as Moscow military rallies, and indirectly through exhibition in art galleries. In the latter case it trades on the credentials of art that does not possess direct social function.

5. Autonomous practice: qualifying Adorno’s standpoint

Adorno’s treatment of autonomous art can be criticized on both descriptive and normative levels. Concerning his descriptive claims, it may be argued that autonomy and heteronomy are ideal types present throughout the history of art and music. Karol Berger, for instance, claims that most European music since ancient times falls between these ideals; there is no point at which the era of autonomous

music began, rather there is partial autonomy in all music.⁴¹ Berger sensibly puts the Adornian thesis in terms of the development of an autonomous practice which has aims of its own not derived from other practices. However, he claims that the continuity of music's "internal aims" allows the inclusion of the works of Josquin, Monteverdi and Bach in the canon of art music despite subsequent changes in their "external functions".⁴²

By the "continuity of music's internal aims", Berger presumably means that there was always music that was created and appreciated for its own sake, and not just for its contribution to a larger social function – that this was not an 18th century development. This is just the point at issue, however – whether music does continuously have such "internal aims". Berger's case is supported by the existence of traditions of "learned music" that flourished in the Middle Ages, and in the Baroque era – Bach contributed to the latter through such works as *The Art of Fugue*, and *The Well-Tempered Clavier*.⁴³ During the later 18th century, music performed for its own sake in private, began to be performed in public as so-called chamber music. As noted earlier, subscription concerts helped composers to become independent, and fostered the development of a bourgeois audience. But private performance of chamber music, which exhibited aesthetic autonomy, pre-dates the public concert, whose appearance as an institution may therefore not be quite so central as is often assumed.

Other arts may have achieved significant autonomy, in Adorno's sense, before the 18th century. In China, for instance, a commodified art market existed as early as the Song Dynasty (960-1368), and faking and copying with dishonest intent, corollaries of an art market, became prevalent during the 15th-16th century Ming Dynasty.⁴⁴ Painters had an artisanal tradition and began to exploit market mechanisms from the 16th century onwards – witness the careers of Michelangelo and Raphael, and especially the studios of Titian and Rembrandt.⁴⁵ Early in the 18th century, Hogarth created art that was both autonomous and socially engaged, and advertised and sold engravings from his paintings in an attempt to break free of patronage.⁴⁶

These considerations qualify rather than falsify Adorno's view, however. Berger's claim that autonomous and functional music are merely "ideal types" is too strong. The developments just cited are relatively marginal compared to the revolutionary developments in the world of the arts at the end of the 18th century. Music was slower than other arts in gaining social autonomy, hence its lower artistic status before the later 18th century. Only then did composers begin to market their products, and it is striking how few composers of art music since Mozart's time, compared to painters or novelists, have managed to make a living as composers; the story of Mozart's death in poverty is not entirely Romanticised.

If the descriptive dimension of Adorno's account requires qualification, so also does the normative dimension. As we have seen, for him, autonomy is a precon-

dition for truth in art, which is the ultimate criterion of its social significance. Adorno has an excessively narrow attitude to non-autonomous art – whether Western political art, or non-Western music and art – and his low valuation of it is a defect of his treatment. Two senses of “heteronomous” should be distinguished: contingently heteronomous art consists of artforms capable of autonomy, but which because of their social function happen to be non-autonomous, such as 18th century music for banquets or military pageants, or their 20th century equivalents, political art and mass entertainment. Intrinsically heteronomous art is decorative art with a practical function – ceramics, ceremonial swords, furniture – whose genre is therefore incapable of becoming autonomous. Whether an artform is capable of autonomy cannot be entirely predicted; but humans would have somehow to lose the need for furniture, before items of furniture could become autonomous art. Even when exhibited in a museum, furniture’s functional origins are inescapable.

Despite the fact that autonomy is not a precondition for truth in art, which can apply also to heteronomous art; nor is truth an ultimate criterion for art’s social significance.⁴⁷ A work with a practical or social function might still challenge the status quo, or disclose human aspirations. Ruskin argued that Gothic art allowed for the craftsman’s autonomy, within a context of heteronomous art. A more contemporary example would be Matsuda Gonroku’s lacquerware cabinet with swan design, produced by a master of *maki-e* at the nadir of Japanese fortunes in 1944, is a powerful testament to traditional values, and their loss or corruption.⁴⁸ The post-Romantic concept of art supports Adorno’s critique of political art, in that the greatest artists do not lecture, prescribe and proscribe, but rather provoke and encourage thought. However, that is an aim which a humane political art can achieve. The work of Orozco and the Mexican muralists, such as “Dive Bomber and Tank 1940”, is political art of high aesthetic quality.⁴⁹ The problem with Michael Moore’s films is not that they are political art, but that they are bad political art.

I have been dwelling on one dimension of artistic autonomy, the social dimension which so preoccupied Adorno. This dimension illustrates a general truth about art’s autonomy, however – that it stands in a reciprocal relation with its functionality or instrumentality. Adorno captures the truth that the negation of functionality is itself a kind of function. To talk of something as an artwork is to separate it from other things, and yet those other things do remain connected with it. This is a paradox, that is, an apparent contradiction that is not a genuine one – just as the liberation of the artist through commodification of the artwork is paradoxical but, since capitalism liberates as well as constructs, not a genuine contradiction. Adorno’s account is one of the most brilliant attempts to explain this disconnection and connection, an account which overcomes the dichotomy between aestheticism and social functionalism.

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1 See for example Geuss (2005), p. 161.

2 Bernstein (2004), p. 142.

3 Adorno (1997), p. 227. Here, it is understood that "work of art" = "autonomous work of art".

4 As Zuidervaart puts it, for Adorno, "the autonomy of the work has a social character and the social character of the work is itself autonomous" (Zuidervaart (1990), p. 64).

5 Bernstein (2004), p. 146.

6 Bernstein (2004), p. 146.

7 Geuss, in his otherwise persuasive (2005), seems to be led into this misinterpretation through neglect of non-formalist features of Kant's aesthetics; for instance, "autonomy and formalism are not a priori properties of all art and of all artistic experience, as Kant thought" (p. 178). Haskins (1989) rightly comments that Kant "never speaks of art...as autonomous in the third Critique" (p. 43).

8 Dependent (as opposed to free) beauty makes essential reference to artworks' perfection in terms of some concept or function. Thus aesthetic judgment of a painting must consider its function of creating life-like representations. Kant places purely instrumental music, together with designs à la grecque and foliage on the borders of wallpaper, under the contrasting heading of free beauty. Free beauty – with its insistence on the possibility of autonomous aesthetic judgment – was the novel idea, dependent beauty the traditional concept.

9 Constant makes the first recorded use of "art for art's sake" in 1804 – see Haskins (1989), p. 52 n2, and Hamilton (2007), Ch. 3, concluding sections.

10 The contrasting senses of autonomy are the autonomy of one art (for instance music) from other arts, and the autonomy of art in general from non-art. Music's 19th century rise in status involved both. The ideal of absolute music equates primarily with the first – though the two kinds of autonomy interact, since if one art is subordinate to another, it cannot be high art. When Romanticism liberated music from a literary or linguistic model, the result was "music for music's sake" – the autonomy of one art from others – though at the same time the arts in general were becoming autonomous in the sense of "art for art's sake". The issue is pursued in Hamilton (2007), Ch.3.

11 Hobsbawm (1962), p. 325.

12 Hobsbawm (1962), p. 325.

13 Discussed further in Hamilton (2007), and (in preparation).

14 Wilde (1909), p. 54.

15 Hamilton (2007) and (in preparation).

16 Adorno (1997), p. 194.

17 Adorno (1997), p. 5.

18 Adorno (1997), p. 146.

19 As Berger (1997) notes, p. 6.

20 Attali (1985), p. 47.

21 Zuidervaart (1990), p. 68. Geuss distinguishes a "sociological" thesis about whether art is established in a certain society as a distinct form of human endeavour, from a thesis about the evaluative criteria for art ((2005), p. 161n).

22 Identity Thinking is discussed further in Hamilton (2007), Ch. 6.

23 As Fubini puts it, "For Adorno, aesthetic value is not an optional extra which can be added to the social

import of the musical idiom...social criticism and aesthetic criticism involve one another reciprocally in a subtle dialectic relation...which is [not] an ordinary relation of cause and effect: music exists within society, and is thus an essential component of society" (Fubini (1991), pp. 445-6).

24 Adorno (1976), p. 209.

25 Adorno (1997), p. 227; (1976), p. 209. As Bernstein puts it, "nothing truly artistically formed is immediately social" (Bernstein (2004), p. 148). By social derivation of thematic material, Adorno is referring to the way, for instance, that trumpet flourishes in a classical symphony are derived from music for military bands, and movements such as minuet and scherzo originated in dance forms.

26 Adorno (1976), p. 209.

27 Later he comments on the way that music can function as "the decoration of empty time" (Adorno (1976), pp. 41-43, 47). He continues: "If something simply exists, without a *raison d'être*, and that is enough to console us for the fact that everything else exists for something else...[then this] anonymous solace to the congregation of the lonely, ranks surely not lowest among the functions of music today".

28 Adorno (1997), pp. 229, 226-7.

29 Bernstein (2004), p. 149.

30 Zuidervaart (1990), p. 61.

31 For Adorno, the artwork has an unstable identity across different socio-historical conditions.

32 Bernstein (2004), p. 150; Adorno (1997), p. 237.

33 "The shadow of art's autarchic radicalism is its harmlessness: Absolute colour compositions verge on wallpaper patterns" (Adorno (1997), p. 29).

34 "Buying up art and culture", *The Economist*, 10.2.07., p. 61; "Designer Dreams", *The Economist*, 27.1.07., p. 33. Banham (2001), p. 183, describes the Los Angeles project ironically and scathingly as the "Acropolis".

35 Bourdieu (1987).

36 Elitism is discussed further in Hamilton (forthcoming 2008).

37 This separation is discussed in Hamilton (2007), Ch. 1.

38 The claim that the work-concept appears at this time is defended by Goehr (1992).

39 See Helm (1971), who discusses Veblen's account of conspicuous consumption. Functionalism came to dominate American sociology through the influence of Robert Merton's (1949), "Latent and Manifest Functions", and through the work of Talcott Parsons – see Turner and Maryanski (1988). Functionalism draws on the biological concept of organism, with the harmonious interdependence of parts, and the Hegelian concept of dialectical and spiritual organic interdependence and unity (Lavine (1965)). The concept of latent function draws on Hegel's concept of the cunning of reason – human beliefs are tools of real rational development.

40 This is the view of Zangwill (2001).

41 See also Wolff (2000), pp. 225-30.

42 Berger (1997), pp. 115-6, 153.

43 See Ledbetter (2002), p. 34.

44 Clunas (1997), Ch. 5, especially pp. 173, 176, 190, 194.

45 See for instance Goffen (2004), pp. 19, 44.

46 The issue is discussed in Uglow (2002).

47 As Zuidervaart (1990) argues.

48 Tokyo Museum exhibition of lacquerware, October 2006 .

49 Orozco, however, adhered to art for art's sake by insisting, totally implausibly, that his work had no political significance - see Folgarait (1998).