SOME OLD AND NEW THOUGHTS ON MARX AND ART!

'*The savage can only feel;civilised man feels and has ideas.*' (Balzac)

[Note to the reader: Use of the male pronoun applies to both genders and is used just for convenience.

Introduction

Art is a developing entity. If we were to draw an analogy to the living organism - a species, to be more precise - then either it is allowed to evolve naturally to achieve its full potential; or it undergoes some kind of decline, becomes extinct even, before it reaches maturity; due to a sudden or gradual change in its environment. (We could use the history of the dinosaurs as an example!) Art is a human construct, which exists under capitalism; itself undergoing its own decline and transition. Therefore it is capable of being reified as a mere commodity to be bought and sold, a rich man's asset (cf. real estate), or it could continue to be regarded as a thing-in-itself, as an aesthetic object, a new reality, which demands to be compared with prosaic reality from whence it came. The point is, art's continuation as an entity or its premature demise, is entirely in the hands of society and its mode of production.

Under late capitalism, the makers and shakers of art , aka as the art institution, play a key role, wherein the academic and the art critic, as well as the art dealer,

determine the fate of art. Will art's autonomy remain? Can art continue as a 'higher form' of labour, a free activity of the spirit, which results in the creation of a-practical aesthetic objects; admired for their unity of form and content (cf. other forms of labour, wherein this unity is broken, in the interests of objectivity, e.g. philosophy, science), or will art end up as just another form of alienated labour; not just a commodified object, equal in value to 'a certain quantity of manure'; but also a more direct means for the accumulation of capital?

Today the art entity is on the cusp of disappearing. A new generation of art theorists, the post-structuralists, have decreed that we are now living in a new post-modern epoch. The age of 'elitism' characterised by the production of artworks by a narrow spectrum of 'experts', has been superseded by a new 'democracy' of art. Henceforth the artists sees himself as a businessman/celebrity. Artistic value is determined more and more by the art market; therefore anything can be art (such as Hirst's animals preserved in formaldehyde or Emin's unmade bed). The idea is more important than the execution; form and therefore distance are abandoned altogether. On the other hand, not anyone can be an artist: That distinction remains the prerogative of the art institution (the art theorist and the art market working in tandem). Thus, despite the so-called 'democratisation' of art in the age of the new mass media (the personal computer and the internet), the masses are still excluded from the making and appreciation of art. At the same time, we see the dilution of what is meant by the term 'art - or should we say its 'dumbing down'?

1

‘There is no must in art, because art is free.’ (Kandinsky)

We have put the ‘midnight of the century’ behind us - the Nazi-Stalinist era. (N.B. The era of state controlled art, which saw the brutal suppression of all forms of artistic dissent.) But worryingly, it does look as though a new one is descending upon us, i.e. the Bush-Al Qaida era! Essentially the above injunction means to embrace the two great modern themes in art, usually counterpoised to one another: on the one side, functional/utilitarian art, which tries to change life and invariably fails; on the other, decorative/art-for-art’s-sake, which aims to please the senses and succeeds. Whilst the former may be more overtly critical and thought provoking (albeit at the risk of becoming low-grade art in the process), it does not necessarily ‘change life’, even at the individual level. Yet the latter is still valid, even if it lacks such a lofty aim; since the very best of this kind of art is freely produced and by means of ‘the play of poetical fancy’, opposes itself to the ‘prose of life’. To describe such art as decadent bourgeois art-for-art’s-sake is to miss the point. Rather this is art-for- man’s-sake. The fact that it is not appreciated by the masses is a tragedy. But it is not of the artist’s making. The cause (as we shall see) lies in the latter's’ spiritual impoverishment in general.This human lack among the many is not natural; for that would presuppose that the majority of humanity are condemned to a largely animal nature. Rather, as we shall see, it is historically determined. It a consequence of the capitalist division of labour and mechanisation of production (industrialisation), which began in late 18th century Europe. Such an inhuman condition for the majority of humanity was first acknowledged by the

German idealist phislosophers, e.g. Kant, Schiller; also Hegel and his pupil, Marx, in the early decades of the 19th century. Whereas it was largeley ignored by contemporary thinkers in Britain; e.g. the political economists, such as Adam Smith and Ricardo.

2

Elements of the Aesthetic - Art speaks its own language.

Art is a form of labour which combines both the theoretical and the practical senses. Hence the term, the 'plastic' is used to describe painting and sculpture; since plastic means to give form to a mass of matter, by means of a free play of the imagination. (As we shall see, this idea of imaginative play is closely related to the concept of form and extends across the whole range of the arts; e.g. from poetry, literature to drama and music; more recently to photography and music.) Theoretical means 'contemplation', both outwardly and inwardly; not practical; whereas the latter means 'relating to practice; opposed to speculative, ideal or theoretical; that may be turned to use; reducible to the conduct of life'). N.B. Clearly all of these definitions apply to non-artistic or material labour as well. But in present society practical labour is unfree, because it is bound by necessity or reason. (Necessity means 'the condition which demands something must be; the absolute determining of the will by motives'.) Human consciousness of means/ end necessity begins with primitive man and the rise of religion: Apart from the obvious need to make his own instruments of production, such as a stone adze, he also fashioned a religious fetish with his own hands, in order to appease or beseech

an ‘external’ power. Thus it is only when he began to make artistic objects for his own pleasure that art begins. Whereas modern man’s necessity is based on the fact that he cannot live without money.

Unlike art, other examples of high intellectual activity, such as philosophy and science, are necessity-bound. For the latter are driven by man’s need to need to understand and master Nature, not forgetting human society itself. There is perhaps one exception to necessity-bound reason, i.e. pure mathematics. However for Marx, artistic labour goes beyond reason even in this sense. It is associated with the concept of beauty and the free play of man’s imaginative powers. Therefore it is the antithesis of necessity-bound reason. This approach to art is revealed, for example in Marx’s student notebooks, in particular his comments about early Greek art: The earliest Greek statues, he says, were ‘models of mathematical construction of the human body’. But they were also devoid of any element of beauty; since nature was subordinated to reason rather than the imagination’. Therefore art begins at the subjective level, because it involves the free play of imagination and feeling. Thus Marx sees beauty as both a sensation and a concept. (See Mikhail Lifshitz’s book, The Philosophy of Art of Karl Marx, Pluto Press, London, 1973.) Beauty may be defined as any object which possesses qualities that gives delight to the eye, ear and of course, the mind. (A beautiful person and even specially prepared food, of course, gives delight to one’s hands and nose, as well; it therefore involves all of the human senses directly - C.F. a work of art, e.g. the Rokesby Venus, which can only evoke all of the human senses indirectly - Beauty is bound up with the form of the object in question, which is an indispensable

means for the expression of the work's content or meaning/purpose. (N.B. Form here, once again, refers back to the term 'plastic', above.)

The aesthetic element in art should be understood, initially, as the means by which man perceives the world through the senses (above). Today this is largely confined to a sphere of labour, which is an activity in its own right; usually for the making of apractical objects, which either give pleasure, because of their decorative quality or stimulate critical thought about the world. Ideally a work of art should achieve both these aims. The best art is a combination of the two. Therefore even decorative, apractical art objects have an indirect use value. They are made by and for man, for the cultivation of his senses. On the other hand, aesthetic sensibility has disappeared almost without trace from material labour - or labour for the making of practical objects; i.e. the creation of direct use values - as was the case in earlier epochs. Today we can still see evidence of artistic labour in material labour, but only in a very limited sense; notably in architecture for the construction of public buildings and bridges. Unlike the past, these structures are built by means of a strict hierarchical division of labour; i. e. between the theoretical and the practical ends of the spectrum of thought/action.(C.F. spiritual/intellectual and physical/ manual labour).

Unlike the poet or novelist (including those who feel compelled to address socio-political issues), who speak subjectively, possibly with more than one voice, which may contradict one another; the scientist and the philosopher is compelled to speak objectively; i.e. in a univocal voice, which brooks no ambiguity. Thge latter are

concerned with the objectivity of concepts. It is only on this basis that argument and counter-argument or the dialectics of knowledge can proceed.

Therefore art speaks its own language: The artist also achieves this by means of aesthetic craftsmanship. Since, increasingly he is not content merely to reproduce the structures of physical reality (especially man-made reality). He has to make the ordinary and everyday events (or things) seem 'strange', in order to draw our attention to them and thereby stimulate pleasure, as well as critical thought, on the part of his audience. (N.B. In terms of art theory, I am here alluding to the theory of estrangement. in art, as outlined by the Russian Formalists prior to the First World War.). The end result not only differs from, but also rivals the shapes of material reality. Thus the individual work of art is distinguished from the general social consciousness in the follow -ing ways: (a) desires and beliefs which may be in conflict, one with the other; since man is not fully rational; (b) 'a pervasive effect is established by the individual artist's vision, even granting its development in social context; (c) the external natural world, as well as the man-made world (society), as experienced by the artist, is therefore opposed to general social consciousness or prosaic reality.' (See Stefan Morawski's Introduction to Marx and Engulfs writings on Literature and Art, in Documents On Marxism and Art (DOMA), New York 1974)

To do this, the artist needs to have an understanding of the nature of the medium he chooses to work with, as well as a knowledge of the standard already set, which is socially determined. Therefore the objective basis of his art is both a question of

ideas as well as a given object or objects. (C.F. the theoretical and practical senses.) Standard here means in relation to an existing style, school of art or tradition. Therefore he would know how the various aesthetic attributes, such as symmetry (or asymmetry), repetition, proportion and harmony, etc. can constitute a coherent whole within his chosen medium. The great innovations in art can only come about in this way.

3 The concept of beauty.

Beauty according to Kant, Schiller, Hegel - and Marx.
Art/beauty are both subjective and objective in character.
The relationship between beauty, form and content in art - is also connected to realism and political tendency.
The pursuit of the beauty of form is what makes artistic labour a free activity.
The distinction between artistic and other forms of labour.
Beauty in all its forms is an aesthetic value, which is antithetical to capitalism and means/end necessity; e.g. the need for things, commodities, money.
'This attitude on the part of Marx towards aesthetic values is clearly related to his discovery of commodity fetishism, as well as the solution of the problem of the subjective and the objective in economic life.
The same goes for when 'he speaks of the sublime; ....in the sublime too, 'the qualitative becomes quantitative'.' (Lifshitz)

Beauty is a concept. Only man is able to see and appreciate beauty. He also creates it. Therefore the idea of beauty is not an absolute. Rather it varies in character, depending on the historical period and its cultural context. So although this paper is Eurocentric in standpoint, at the same time, its author would immediately recognise that non-European cultures have their own concepts of beauty, as well as art objects and artefacts worthy of display and appreciation.

There is also the difficult question of the artist's need to depict the antithesis of beauty, namely ugliness and monstrosities. But why is this the case? The European tradition has many examples of the latter. One only has to recall the medieval fascination with representations of devils and monsters, associated with illustrations of hell fire (of which Dante and Hieronymous Bausch are outstanding examples).

In more recent times we could remind ourselves of Victorian freak shows and, in the present day, a great effluence of horror which is recycled endlessly through the mass media, ranging from films, television and now the internet. Therefore, apart from the appreciation of the beautiful, at the same time, for centuries, large sections of the population have been fascinated by phenomena which fall into the category of the grotesque, the monstrous or downright disgusting. It has long been the position of aesthetic theory to present ugliness as the antithesis of beauty. Since the two opposites are associated with a broader cultural understanding of moral absolutes: Beauty is on the side of God, goodness or enlightenment; ugliness being assigned to evil, the devil himself and darkness or ignorance. In more recent and

enlightened times, these moral absolutes were given a greater complexity and rationalised in psychological terms. Thus the origins of evil become rooted in society itself; i.e. inequality, poverty and ignorance.

If we look at the history art, we find a recurring paradox: beauty can be found in images of ugliness, etc. This may be explained by the fact that beauty is not only found in objects alone. Since beauty is a concept, it is bound up with the 'creative imagination' and how this becomes objectified in more complex structures.
But now there is growing cause for concern. The creative imagination is suppressed or lacking altogether in great swathes of the population. We see regression in terms of any appreciation of knowledge, thought and reflection per se; Hence there is a general absence of any appreciation of ugliness, as part of a dialogue between the two opposites, essentially the conflict between beauty and ugliness. For this requires an ability to see things, the world, in an informed and more rounded form. Although we live in more enlightened or rational times, more people know more and more about less and less; they also have a practical view of the world; because they work for money. Even when they are not working, they feel the need to alleviate the stultifying effects of alienated labour. Since they lack a rounded education, including the education of the senses; this need for an outlet, increasingly takes the form of crude sensationalism. Therefore just about everything they do is a means-to- an-end. As Marx says, 'The quantity of money becomes man's sole essential trait.'

Thus paradoxically, when it comes to entertainment, we see a tendency towards ignorance and crudity, not enlightenment and a cultivated taste. Hence the rise of the irrational on a mass basis. Today the fascination with fabulous monsters is now divorced from all consideration of morality, religious awe or even curiosity; since the underlying aesthetic in mass entertainment is pure sensation.

In his book, Lifshitz is at pains to point out that the young Marx derives his own ideas about art from classical aesthetics, as developed by German idealist philosophy, especially the work of Kant, Schiller and Hegel. Of course, Marx achieved a 'Copernican revolution' in philosophy, by giving these ideas material form. In order to explain this important point, we need to start with some thoughts on epistemology. Since this is the starting point for Marx's critique of his idealist predecessors. In this regard, he does not annihilate their ideas; rather he supersedes them, by taking them in another direction, which allows him to build a whole new world outlook.

Let us begin, then, with Kant's notion of the antithesis between subjective thought and objective things. Since this is Kant's own starting point for his philosophy of the aesthetic. As Hegel observes in his Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics (Penguin Press, London, 1993), although Kant recognises 'the form of subjective ideas of the reason', there is 'no adequate reality [which] could be shown to correspond'. The essential nature of things, reality are 'not for him knowable by thought'. Whilst acknowledging the 'required unity' (to explain how philosophy makes sense of the world), this is established by means of 'intuitive knowledge'.

Knowledge springs inexplicably from within the depths of the individual's psyche, before being projected outwards into the world; thus establishing the 'required unity'; i.e. the objectivity of concepts, which enables a few privileged individuals to understand the world, including the concept of beauty, etc., and to share this knowledge with other men. The explanation for Kant's inconsistency is to be found in his inability to dispense with the idea of a power external to man. But at least, he recognises the necessity for an objective basis to knowledge, also the notion that there is such a thing as objective reality (even if it is not completely knowable). Thus Kant arrives at the notion of aesthetic judgement. But this is 'neither proceeding from the understanding as such...the faculty of ideas, nor from sensuous perception...but from the free play of the understanding and the imagination'. (Hegel, Ch. IV, Historical Deduction of the True Idea of Art in Modern philosophy, LXXVII) As it stands, we have no quarrel with this idea.

However Kant has a half-baked theory re the objectivity of concepts. As it happens, it was left to Marx to come up with the fully-baked version, or the materialist one; since his version acknowledges that the objectivity of concepts is entirely man-made and therefore accessible to other men; provided they share the privilege of being in possession of a cultivated mind; i.e they have reached the same level of thought. On this basis, he envisages a shared knowledge, which is based on the objectivity of concepts at the highest level of thought, i.e. philosophy (including the philosophy of art) and science. Thus man is able to come closer to an understanding of the truth. That is Marx's view of epistemology. (N.B. It is also Lenin's. See his Philosophical Notebooks, Vol. 38: Collected Works of G. W. F.

Hegel, The Science of Logic, Part One. Objective Logic, etc. Additional note: We shall leave aside the discipline of history; since the latter, more often than not, is written by the winning side, post festum. In other words, history is more closely tied to ideology; whereas philosophy and science are capable of being ideology-free.)

Otherwise we find that Marx is in agreement with much of what Kant and Hegel have to say about the concept of beauty. It begins necessarily at the subjective level; because it is associated with sensuousness, feelings of pleasure. and enjoyment, derived from a concrete-sensuous object (nature, man-made objects, the work of art). According to Hegel, Kant describes beauty as 'devoid of any interest'; it is freed from 'sensuous want, a desire of possession and use'; 'the objects are important to us for their own sake', 'not for the sake of our want'. Man sees beauty in nature and also in art objects of his own creation. 'The beautiful....is perceived as a universal delight.' Thus the creation of a beautiful object, as well as its appreciation, also operates at the objective level, i.e. the objectivity of concepts, whereby ideas are exchanged within a given community of individuals and between different communities. Therefore, argues Kant, 'to estimate the beautiful requires a cultivated mind; the natural man has no judgement about the beautiful' (my emphasis). For the 'natural' (uncultivated) man cannot explain the basis of his feelings and his judgement of the beautiful; yet he is able to share them with his fellow man. Feeling, pleasure, and enjoyment, sensuousness are also bound up within a particular art object, as well as having a universal value. According to Hegel - also Schiller - following on from Kant: 'the free totality of

beauty against the understanding's science of volition and thought. 'Beauty is thus pronounced to be the unification of the rational and the sensuous'.' (See [LXXXIV].)

In this regard, in [V11], Hegel makes his own pertinent observations about beauty. He begins by emphasising the notion of art as a free activity. 'The beauty of art presents itself to sense, to feeling, to perception and imagination'. Initially therefore, the apprehension of beauty does not require thought, certainly the kind of thought associated with scientific intelligence. '...what we enjoy in the beauty of art is precisely the freedom of its production and plastic energy. In its origination, as in the contemplation, of its creations we appear to escape wholly from the fetters of rule and regularity....the source of artistic creations is the free activity of fancy, which in her imagination is more free than nature's herself...the creative imagination has the power [to create] products of its own.' [Author's emphasis.] But further on, in [L1 a], he introduces the notion of reflection or thought: Looking at fine art's ability to arouse feeling, men have 'asked what [sort of] feelings [are they] that art ought to evoke - fear, for example, and compassion; and then, how could these be pleasant - how, for example, the contemplation of misfortune could produce satisfaction.' Hegel answers this question by distinguishing between 'feeling, as...a thoroughly empty form of subjective affection'. Whereas this form of feeling, 'hope, grief, joy, or pleasure...may in such diversity comprehend varied contents, as there is a feeling of justice, a moral feeling, a sublime religious feeling, and so forth.' To 'comprehend varied contents' (i.e. sensuousness which is not divorced from a given moral universe),

abstract reflection or thought is required. Thus misfortune, for example, can produce satisfaction so long as it comprehends a particular content; e.g. a sense of justice. Goya's paintings and etchings of 'terror and splendour', which he produced during the Peninsular War in the first decade of the 19th century, spring to mind.

Thus Hegel establishes the dialectical notion of art, within which there is an interaction between subjective/objective criteria, via the brains of the artist and his audience. (N.B. On the one hand, sensuousness, feelings of pleasure, desire, fear, anger, etc.; on the other, the art object is capable of interpretation and evaluation, in which a consensus can be reached within a given social group and between various groups; e.g. philosophers, historians, students, members of the public.) He demonstrates the importance of this dialectic when he acknowledges the work of the art historian, Winckelmann (1717-68). In so doing Hegel stresses the role of art history as the basis for an objective standard of beauty, taste, etc. Such knowledge is important, not just for the critic or even the art-loving public; but also to the the artist himself. Winckelmann, he says, was 'inspired by his obversation of the ideals of the ancients in a way that led him to develop a new sense for the contemplation of art, to rescue it from the notions of the commonplace aims and a mere mimicry of nature, and to exert an immense influence in searching out the idea of artworks and in its history.'

Marx, as we have noted, embraces the idealist aesthetics of his intellectual forbears. Since there is an element of materialism in the latter's thinking; just as

there is an element of idealism in that of Marx (i.e. a human awareness of what art or society should be like). But where Marx differs from Kant, et al, is in his materialist understanding of the relationship between art and the rest of society - to what extent does art have the material force to act as an agency of human emancipation? Since all of these thinkers, from Kant to Marx, essentially share the same view of art as a free activity of the spirit, which is bound up with form rather than the content of art. (Although, of course, the two elements are inextricably related.) But it is only on this basis that art is able to oppose itself to the existing order and what Schiller describes as the mechanical 'pressure of wants'. Artistic labour therefore, as the critic Theodor Adorno has pointed out, is (or should be) centred on the dynamic between the artist's material and his intention; what he wants to do and say, etc.. In other words form plays a central role in the mediation of the content of art or the artist's chosen subject.To do this the artist needs to exercise a unity of the senses, i.e. engage both his psychical and his physical faculties at the same time.

Whereas, in society at large, as a result of the capitalist division of labour and mechanisation of production, we see a schism between the two. Furthermore, the capitalist does not require the worker to engage his intellectual and creative powers in the process of production; since these require cultivation and reflection. In terms of practical reason or means/end rationality, an rounded education for all, would be an unnecessarye cost, as well as a burden for the capitalist. (N.B. To teach the workers how to think and reflect like philosophers might even be perceived to be a dangerous investment in some quarters!)

But hereafter Marx comes into conflict with his intellectual forbears. Like them, and for all of the above reasons, he acknowledges the relegation of art as a separate sphere of activity - under the capitalist division of labour and mechanisation of production - from which the masses are excluded. Therefore, unlike Schiller, according to Marx's materialist based dialectics, the masses lack an aesthetic sensibility, because this element is no longer a part of material production. Therefore workers are deprived of the skills and attitudes associated with artistic labour. By the same token they associate art as an activity which is carried out by a remote spectrum of experts, which is largely alien to them. This is what Marx means when he says, that the capitalist mode of production makes the worker 'more one-sided and dependent introduces competition from machines as well as from men. Since the worker is reduced to a machine, the machine can confront as a competitor.' (See his EPM, Wages and Labour.) Thus Marx concludes, and from a very early stage, art lacks the material force to act as a suitable agency of human emancipation or, as Schiller would put it, make resolve this 'fatal division of the spirit', in order to make man 'whole' again. In other words, because art is a separate sphere of activity, it is therefore unable to function as both the model and the means to effect such a fundamental change in human consciousness at the objective level.

The young Marx dismissed Schiller's attitude as romantic idealism. Indeed is an attitude from which he had only recently broken with himself. Since he had made, as Lifshitz puts it, 'a transition from a nebulous opposition to the existing order towards an even more radical criticism of social relations.... '[Henceforth]The anti-

aesthetic spirit of reality could readily assume a revolutionary character.' (See Lifshitz, Ch. 1.) This anti-aesthetic spirit of reality is ,of course, practical reason and sensuousness, which the workers have in abundance. But some how this will have to be united with an extant tradition of intellectual labour and its concomitant, the cultivatition of the senses.

That not withstanding, let us proceed with the dialectic of subject/object in art, and how this applies to the concept of beauty, or is given material form. Since this constitutes a conceptual consensus and a starting point, which is shared by Marx and Kant, et al. 'Beauty', says, Marx, 'is simultaneously an object, and a subjective state. It is at once form, when we judge it, and also life, when we feel it. It is at once our state of being and our creation.'(Vischer - after Schiller, quoted by Marx.) We should note that here there are two points of agreement: (1) Marx agrees with Kant, et al, on the need for an objective standard of taste. (2) Elsewhere he asserts that, "If you want to appreciate art, you have to be an artistically cultivated person.' (EPM.) N.B. Once again, beauty may be appreciated by ordinary or uncultivated man; but it can only be understood in conceptual terms by the cultivated mind. The basis of the latter, of course, is that the individual in question requires a level of education; also wealth and leisure time, to fully appreciate beauty, both in terms of his own feelings and understanding. Thus beauty needs to be understood conceptually, if only to safeguard aesthetic value, despite the fact that the capitalist structure if society is inimical to art.

Since art comes under increasing attack from two angles. On the one side, we have

the levelling effect of generalised commodity production - or market forces - leading to the degradationof the artist and his work. On the other side, we have the impact of mechanisation on the art, which results in the deskilling of the artist.) In this regard, the art institution must and does play a key role; on the one hand, as a repository of the history and theory of art; on the other, it also not immune to nihilist tendencies within the intelligentsia itself or to the levelling effects of capitalism. Thus the need to defend art's objective side, ie. a conceptual understanding of beauty is an insufficient guarantee in itself. (N.B. In the 1930s, the cultural critic, Walter Benjamin, argued that in the age of mechanical reproduction, e.g. of modern reprographics, photography and film, beauty was an 'outmoded concept'. Henceforth what is needed a productivist art which, once it is placwed at the disposal of the workers, is able to play a direct role in the political struggle against fascism, etc. See section on the Historical Avant Garde.) Yet even Benjamin acknowledges that mechanisation is a two edged sword. Therefore, in today's so-called 'postmodern' world, as for the art student himself, if he is not careful, he will find himself in the same camp as the worker; whereby he is required to rely more and more on his own practical reason and his appetite for consumption; Hence we see an increasing emphasis on crude sensationalism; since now the artist wants only to reflect what is going in a society, now geared to mass consumerism, as well as to make money, etc. (See later sections.)

So we can see that the concept of beauty is a complex question. It is not universally understood; even if it is widely felt and appreciated. Then there are immediate and mediated forms of beauty. Therefore how do we judge it? Beauty is to be found in

the form of things, not only nature's own forms, but also form within the work of art; which allows the artist to express his attitude to its content. (N.B. This applies equally to both the functional and the decorative arts.) For Marx, artistic labour involves the reproduction of the structures of reality (both natural and social) and the reconstitution of their various attributes within a coherent whole, which rivals the shapes of the object depicted. (N.B. This is also referred to as the artist's 'subject'.) By the end of the 19th century such a conception of beauty was widely accepted within the art institution and even the commercial sector.

The artist James McNeill Whistler (1864-1903) once illustrates this very well: 'The artist does not confine himself to purposeless copying, without thought, but in a blade of grass or a butterfly's wing, he said in the 'Ten O'Clock' [lecture] finds hints for his own combinations, and thus is Nature ever his resource, and ever at his service.' (See Robin Spencer's book, James McNeill Whistler, Tate Books, London, 2003.)

According to Morawski, form in art is at he heart of Marx's idea of fundamental human values; because it constitutes a vital aspect of his 'all-out search for the means of social disalienation. Morawski cites this as one of the important reasons behind Marx's repeated praise for Greek art and its enduring power for humanity. (C.F. Lifshitz.) He offers three explanations. (1) Marx acknowledges the 'the formal harmonious attributes achieved by ancient art. (2) The best art finds a specific means to express the values of the society that produces it.('Greek art was sustained by a system of living myth, based in the specific mode and level of

economic activity.') (3) 'This art expressed the highest human values and thereby offered a tremendous affirmation of humanity. Marx believed that latter two points were particularly suited to the art of a 'young' or naive civilisation.'

Therefore, contrary to the views of some Marxist aestheticians, artistic form is a very important question for Marx; although at no stage in any of his comments about art, does he sanction form for its own sake. Rather he makes allusions to the importance of form in his consideration of artistic 'expression', particularly in his appreciation of the art of the ancient Greeks. It is the form of a work of art which allows the artist to indulge in the free play of his imaginative powers. Therefore the latter is not to be found in the artist's subject/content, necessarily. This is because, if he is a committed artist; i.e. desirous of expressing a political tendency, he is working under a compulsion. He sees art in instrumental terms, as serving a higher end or didactic function; e.g. a critique of the existing order or a clear class position, aimed at getting he general public on the side of the workers, etc. .

Form involves a particular style and array of techniques, which the artist chooses to depict the the work's content/subject. (Of course, in reality, we can't separate form and content, as well as other closely related elements in art.) But it is form, primarily, which enables the artist to stamp or express his personality and point of view on his subject; albeit in the context of a given genre and tradition or style, which he deems appropriate to his purpose. At one level, form involves the experience of beauty at its purest level, i.e. when it is associated with sensuousness or feelings of pleasure (e.g. a one of natures own forms). But for Marx, like Hegel,

beauty and form in art has more to do with the way in which the artwork is constructed. It is this which determines the artwork's quality. It also provides a suitable basis for socially critical art, e.g. a painting, a play or a novel, which confronts the social reality, injustice, etc.. Therefore the qualitative value of a work of art is not simply a question of whether the artist is a committed one.(N.B. But, for Marx, it is preferable if he is socially critical.) The secret of a good work of art is to be found in how successful the artist is in his quest to achieve a unity of form and content within the work. Hence we can say this is a beautiful novel, play or film, as well as speak about a beautiful painting or photograph. (C.F. the tendency in 20th century art towards anti-art, which makes a virtue out of the sacrifice of all form and, therefore, a sense of distance in art; thus reducing the work to mere content; e.g. the fashion for ready-mades, minimalism, the substitution of text for art, music based on the repetition or even random sounds, etc. See later section.)

As for music, it is a revelation to consider the fact that, on the one hand, we can have the most complex musical compositions ; also a well-written popular song for that matter. On the other, any music which is based on melody, harmony, etc. can be appreciated spontaneously as a thing of beauty, over and pover again, whenever it is performed. A beautiful, sublime movement in a Beethoven string quartet, for example, may last only a few minutes. Yet the musical score which gives rise to it, covers many pages. By the time he had finished his labour of creation, Beethoven had sweated over it, for a period of time which is considerably longer than the time it takes to listen to the movement in question.

But, as I intimated earlier, we need to go beyond this relationship between form/ content in art and consider other important elements, such as a committed art. The latter also raises the whole question of realism in art. Since this is a key consideration with regard to the committed artist's need to communicate with his audience. As we shall see, the latter became the subject of passionate debate about the role of art in the 20th century. Realism in art refers to the way in which the artist depicts reality, i.e. his subject/content). Again this idea relates back to the form of the work. It also raises the question of popular art. That is to say, to what extent does the form and content of a work of art make it accessible to the masses In this regard, the simplest form in art is mimetics, or the attempt to make a work of art mirror the surface of reality. (N.B. Mimetics extends across the whole spectrum of art, from the written word, to images and sounds.) Hence it constitutes the most basic and popular form in art. But often the simplest forms of art, which have the capacity to appeal to a wide audience, sacrifices not only complexity or the many-sided character of reality - but also quality, in terms of its construction. As we have already noted the form or structure of the artwork is intimately bound up with the question of beauty. Conversely, to what extent does the form/content of a work of art, because of its innovation and complexity, i.e. the beauty of its construction, actually restrict its appreciation at the popular level. (C.F. the techniques of estrangement, an invention of Russian Formalism; whereby the artist seeks to distance his work from his subject, by means of 'making strange' familiar words and images, because they have been arranged in unfamiliar ways, etc. Such a form or style is inevitably less accessible to the masses.)

It was precisely for this reason that Stalin was deeply suspicious of the Russian avant garde in the newly established Soviet Union. Since the latter were intent on experimentation within the arts. They wanted to create a new aesthetic form based on the new technologies of print, photography and film. Before long Stalin's commissars of art were poised to take control. Their first priority was to suppress all freedom to experiment in art and to impose their own artistic forms, based on conservative and practical considerations. This involved the imposition by bureaucratic means of a more traditional form of realism, e.g. mimetics and the narrative form. For these were forms which both a backward-looking bureaucracy and the masses could relate to. It was against this background, that is the brief flowering, followed by the brutal suppression of the Russian avant garde, that the important debates about realism and committed art arose between Bertolt Brecht and Geog Lukacs in the 1930s. The former took up the struggle in the west on behalf of the left avant garde; whereas the latter found himself, against his better judgement, as the ignominious defender of official Soviet art, warts and all; i.e. Socialist Realism (which is no such thing), as well as the bourgeois canon. See later section on the Historical Avant Garde.)

In the light of the above, we must now consider what might appear to be a contradictory attitude in Marx: his alleged ability to face in two directions at the same time: on the one side, he is the champion of artistic form; on the other, he is the champion of art's content. (N.B.The former is usually associated with decorative art, ideas of beauty, etc.; whilst the latter is associated with functionalism or committed art.) Either he prioritises artistic form as central to the

articulation of ‘fundamental human values’ (such as freedom and dis-alienation); or he prioritises content. The latter, of course, is of the utmost importance to socially critical or committed art, etc. Indeed it is true that on other occasions, Marx placed a higher emphasis on the content of art. For both he and Engels had a high regard for art as a means to an end; namely to critique existing society or the real world. Hence their preference for drama and literature; such as the works of Shakespeare, Cervantes, Schiller, Goethe, Walter Scott, Pushkin, Balzac and Dickens. But at no time did they justify the substitution of content for form in the work of art. Such art was lacking in ‘artistic skills and sacrificed the whole idea of the beauty of form in art.

Therefore any artist who fell into that trap was criticised by Marx and Engels from the standpoint of art itself, i.e. as poor art; since it showed a careless disregard for form. Thus they dismissed the dramatic efforts of Ferdinand Lasalle, a one time friend and socialist. As Morawski writes in his Introduction: ‘they directed more attention to problems of [content] than to developing a formal interpretation. [But] they did regard form - which I take to be the primary constituent of any work of art - in any instrumental fashion...they often wrote as though it were a transparent and necessary value, which if competently disposed, would permit the content...to shine brightly through....[Despite their preoccupation with matters of content, they also showed] a recurrent concern for [form] the fundamentally human value. [They regarded] aesthetic realisation [as the] ultimate source of harmonious formal value. [Form in a work of art is the key to an understanding of man’s slippage between] the alienation and disalienation of the human species, in its basic characteristics

and its astonishing, irrepressible desire for freedom and fulfilment.' (Morawski, pp 35-9.)

Arguably, for Marx, what art makes art distinctive, is not just the unity of form and content; but the fact that artistic labour is a 'free activity of fancy', based on 'the creative imagination, which has the power to create products of its own'. It centres precisely on why the artist creates a certain form in order to express the content of his art (including a political tendency). This is both a subjective and subjective process. He must dig deep within himself, involve his own personal feelings, as well as think about his subject, not forgetting existing forms, styles and techniques.

Once again these considerations do not apply to other forms of labour; i.e. labour to achieve a practical end. We could call this non-artistic labour. This is because it is labour governed solely by crude necessity (a means/end rationality). Let us consider non-artistic labour. In present society, based on the capitalist division of labour, it falls into three broad areas: (1) It follows that there is a separation between the theoretical and the practical attitude (as Marx puts it) in the production process. For instance the architect designs a fabulous new building, which combines his own unique aesthetic sensibility, a visualised form or shape, with function (e.g. the new 'Sage' Theatre complex in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, which was opened at the end of 2004.) In this regard, architecture, or the design of buildings and bridges, constitutes the last remaining example of an aesthetic dimension within practical, material labour; which was much more widespread during earlier epochs; e.g. the Medieval period, characterised by the building of the great cathedrals across Europe. (2) But the actual construction of the building, etc.

is carried out by engineers and building workers, whose labour is unfree and is guided by purely practical considerations; of which the need for money is the greatest. (3) Unlike art, which is a 'free activity of the fancy', and to a lesser extent, architecture, we also have a form of theoretical labour, which is determined, nevertheless, by necessity or a means/end rationality; such as the work of the philosopher or scientist, who applies his reason to solve a particular question or problem.

Therefore, along with Kant and Hegel, within the capitalist division of labour, Marx acknowledges and values the role of art as a unique and higher form of labour, compared to non-artistic labour. However Marx goes further; because he acknowledges aesthetic value; but he now sees this as the antithesis of value as it is defined by bourgeois political economy. N.B. This antithesis, of course, is linked to his need to give idealist aesthetics material form: On the one hand, the capitalist division of labour destroys, (1) aesthetic sensibility within the psyche of the worker; (2) as well as the last traces of aesthetic labour within material labour (which we can now recognise as non-artistic labour). Such are the effects of capitalist industrialisation, which reduces the worker to the level of a machine, etc. On the other hand, as a result, art becomes a specialised form of culture within the capitalist division of labour. Thus artistic labour is now established as an activity of a privileged few. (See later sections.) We can illustrate this point by citing Marx's own quotation from Shakespeare on the subject of money. (See Capital, Vol. I.) Marx uses Shakespeare's lines, because the latter 'knew better than our theorising bourgeois that money, as the most general form of property, has little in common

with personality, that they are utterly contradictory' Its levelling effect has the capacity to turn everything into its opposite (of which more later) :

'Gold! yellow, glittering, precious gold!...
Thus much of this will make black, white; foul fair;
Wrong, right; base, noble; old, young; coward, valiant...'
(Shakespeare, Timon of Athens, quoted in Capital.)

What better way to describe contemporary society! This antithesis between art and capitalism also plays an important role in Marx's consideration of the concept of the sublime; which dates back to his student days, especially his preparatory notes for his Dissertation of 1841. But by this stage, he has abandoned use his own futile attempts to write poetry in protest against the ruling order. Now he is wearing his hat as a critical critic of existing society. By so doing he is also echoing German philosophers of the day, who were also preoccupied with considerations of the sublime; as well as many German artists, e.g. the landscape paintings of Caspar David Friedrich, dating from the early 19th century.

Whilst working on Capital, once again Marx his youthful interest in the categories and forms associated with the aesthetic; this time, because they were comparable to the vicissitudes and categories of capitalist economy. He noticed that the capitalist transforms all quality into into quantity. This is analogous to the consideration of the sublime: Man observes in nature 'the tendency toward endless movement; he is attracted to the pursuits of the grandiose, the transcends of all boundary and all

measure'. It is precisely these aspirations which characterises the romantic movement in Germany at the time. Earlier, in his preparatory notes for his Dissertation in 1841-2, Marx speaks about the 'dialectics of measure', which is followed by a reign of 'measurelessness', contradiction and 'discord'.Here he is applying the concept of the sublime to historical epochs, especially in order to compare antiquity with the capitalist epoch. Even in his earlier EPM, Marx opposes the idea of the measurelessness of things to the laws of political economy, which are contradictory: 'The need for money is the only genuine need created by political economy. The quantity of money becomes more and more man's sole essential trait; just as it has reduced everything to an abstraction, so now in its own development it is reduced to a quantitative thing. Like the sublime, 'Measurelessness and immeasurability become its real measure.'

To understand exactly what Marx means here, we need to refer back to his statement on Capital (quoted above); N.B. Gold, hitherto regarded as a priceless object, because of its aesthetic value, is reconstituted as money. He then goes on to describe money as 'the radical leveller', whereby 'all qualitative differences are extinguished. Quality, form, individuality - all these are subordinated to an impersonal quantitative force.' As a consequence, everything has a habit of being turned into its opposite: e.g. 'much of this will make.... 'base, noble', etc. (Arguably, here we have the material force behind today's postmodernists, who assert that now everything is equal in the cultural realm. Thus we can abolish the old distinction between high and low culture, etc. See later section.)

Again, ‘in The Poverty of Philosophy (1847) and Capital, the dialectics of measure is given more developed and scientific form. The relative harmony of simple commodity economy, the birthplace of capitalism, is ‘measure’; while capitalism, with its disproportions and contradictions between the ancient methods of appropriation and the higher forms of production, is the violation of measure.’ (CF. Hegel’s view of capitalist society which is dominated by ‘the measureless as measure.’; ie. the commodity of money.) ‘Measureless is the tendency to amass capital - [...] as opposed to ancient ‘oeconomy’ [Aristotle]. Measureless and disproportional is capitalistic progress in its very essence: ‘production for production’s sake’. The contradictory nature of the development of its productive forces is clearly inimical to some fields of spiritual activity - art for instance Marx speaks of this [again] in his Theories of Surplus Value with a clearness, barring all misunderstanding. Spiritual production wrote Marx, calls for a different kind of labour than that used in material production.’ (See Lifshitz, Ch. 13.) (But the postmodernists are blind or too cynical to entertain such lofty ideas about ‘production for production’s sake’; also the idea that the development of the productive forces is increasingly ‘inimical’ to art, etc.)

4 Marx’s materialist critique of Schiller’s notion of the ‘fatal’ division of the spirit. (With hindsight who will be proved the more correct?)

Both Marx and Schiller admired antiquity, despite the fact that Marx started writing 30 or 40 years after Schiller’s death. (Of course, as we have noted, Marx owed a considerable debt to German idealism; not only Schiller, but also Ant and

Hegel.) Both Marx and Schiller held similar views about the importance of antiquity. Therefore Schiller would have understood Marx's comment (in the Critique of Political Economy, 1859): '...The difficulty is not in grasping the idea of Greek art and epochs bound up with certain forms of social development. It rather lies in understanding why they still constitute...a source of aesthetic enjoyment and in certain respects prevail as the standard and model beyond attainment....The Greeks were normal children. The charm of their art for us does not conflict with the primitive character of the social order from which it had sprung. It is rather a product of the latter, and is...due to the fact that the unripe social conditions under which art arose...can never return.' These observations led Marx to the notion of the increasing disproportion between a society's artistic achievements, compared to the development of the productive forces. This gives rise to increasing antagonism between the spiritual (idealistic) and the sensuous (materialistic) aspects of man's nature. Here Schiller would also have agreed with him. Long before the end of the 18th century he had observed such an antagonism within capitalism; which, he concluded, amounted to a 'fatal division of the human spirit'.

Schiller's argument is as follows: Firstly, he is an important member of the school of German idealist philosophy. They were well aware of the capitalist division of labour and its effects. They acknowledged that in classical times the psyche or mind of man was whole rather than fragmented, unlike the present age. N.B. But when they speak about the whole man, clearly they meant free citizens, not the slaves who made them so. Even by the end of the 18th century, an enlightened

thinker, such as Schiller, was able to acknowledge the 'pauperising' effect of the capitalist division of labour. He contrasted this with the division of labour associated with earlier modes of production. Since the latter 'actually promoted inclinations and talents, thus functioning quite differently from the man-crippling division of labour. In contemporary England, this led Adam Ferguson to say, 'We make a nation of helots and have no free citizens.' Marx also picks up on this theme a few decades later. As Lifshitz writes: 'Throughout history, a certain degree of specialisation was necessary for individual development. But the contemporary bourgeois is interested in division of labour only as a means of producing more commodities, and consequently of cheapening [them] with a given quantity of labour, and hurrying on the accumulation of capital.....In most striking contrast with accentuation of quantity and exchange value, is the attitude of the writers of classical antiquity, who hold exclusively by quality and use value. [So] commodities are better made. Men adapt their talents to a suitable field. Hence both the product and the producer are improved by the [classical]division of labour.' Thus, as Homer says in the Odyssey, 'Divers men take delight in divers deeds.'

'In ancient society the personality had already begun to emancipate itself from personal ties, but this is not yet a mature commodity economy. Whereas in bourgeois society, social relations assume the form, from the standpoint of the individual, as 'mere means to his private ends, an outward necessity...It is true that Greek society depended on slavery. But would the free citizen of the ancient Republic be able to understand how, the most powerful instrument for shortening

labour time, becomes the means for placing every moment of the labourer's time and that of his family at the disposal of the capitalist, for the purpose of expanding the value of his capital.' (Capital, Vol. I) Although these are Marx's observations, both he and Schiller were in accord about the growing disproportion between the achievements of art and the productive forces.

Secondly, we need to understand in more detail why Schiller placed so much faith in art; N.B. as the agency of freedom and dis-alienation. Basically, it is because he assigns to the aesthetic a special position between sensuousness and reason. Ant is his starting point. So he agrees with the latter about how artistic activity is now to be understood as one that differs from all others. The various arts had been removed from everyday life and therefore could be treated as a whole. As the realm of a-practical creation and disinterested pleasure, the whole was contrasted with the practice of life. With the constitution of aesthetics as a branch of philosophy, the concept of art comes into being. 'Artistic production is divorced from [all other social activity] and comes to confront them abstractly.' The ancient role of poetics, as a unique example of form in the enjoyment of art and its unity with art's content, including its critical function, was now extended. 'Criticism censures as inartistic works with a didactic tendency.' In his Critique of Aesthetic Judgement (1790), Ant theorises and therefore objectifies the artist's subjective need to distance himself from life through the work of art. So for Ant, 'It is not the work of art but the aesthetic judgement (judgement of taste) that [he] investigates. It is situated between the realm of the senses and that of reason....Kant's axiom also defines the freedom of art from the constraints of the developing bourgeois society.' The

aesthetic is conceived as a sphere that does not fall under the rule of means/end rationality (the need to make a profit) which prevails in all other spheres of life. It is also independent of the sensuous and the moral (the beautiful is neither agreeable or morally good); as well as the theoretical sphere. Finally, Ant wants aesthetic judgement to have universal validity. Thus, as Peter Burger observes, he 'closes his eyes to the particular interests of his class'. It is this aspect of his argument which is 'bourgeois' and 'pathetic'.
See Peter Burger, Theory of the Avant Garde, Minneapolis, 1989, Ch. 3, ii. The Autonomy of Art in the Aesthetics of Kant and Schiller.)

But for Schiller, the error in Kant's aesthetics is to be found in his insistence that the making and appreciation of art is entirely subjective. (N.B. the latter stresses the functionlessness of art.) It is here that he parts company with Ant, so that he can move closer to the idea of a social function for the aesthetic. he turns Kant's idea of the functionlessness of art on its head.

This condition of art is the basis of its autonomy, the fact that it is not tied to immediate ends. It is for this very reason that art can fulfil a task for humanity which cannot be fulfilled in any other way: It is to remind its audience of their humanity.

Thus schiller sees this as 'the furtherance of humanity'. This takes us takes us back to his idea of attainment of the aesthetic state.; In other words, he implies that the unity of the senses and reason, which prevailed in ancient times, can be re-taught.

(Thus he believes that classical culture can be re-established within bourgeois society.) The task of art is to once again 'put back together the torn 'halves' of man that have been torn asunder.' (C.F. Adorno, See later section.) Clearly this must have been the rationale behind Schiller's brilliant dramatic works.

For Schiller, the division of labour has class society as its unavoidable consequence. Therefore he sees man who suffers because, 'he never develops the harmony of his being, and instead of imprinting humanity upon his nature he becomes merely the imprint of his occupation, of his science.' However class society cannot be abolished by a political revolution (C.F. Marx), because the revolution has to be carried out by those men (the working class), whose sensuous state of merely wanting and having, is stamped upon them by the capitalist division of labour. Thus they are unable to develop their humanity. As Peter Burger says, Schiller's analysis ends in an 'irresolvable contradiction of sensuousness and reason'. Rather it is the daunting task of art to put back together the torn halves of man, within a society already characterised by the division of labour, and therefore make possible the human development of the whole man; since the individual is unable to develop within his own sphere of activity. Ever the optimist about the validity of his aesthetic state; also the enemy of determinism, Schiller asks, so eloquently, '...can man be destined to neglect himself for [a means/ends rationality]. Should Nature be able, by her designs, to rob us of a completeness which Reason [seems to reveal to us as hers]? It must be false that the cultivation of individual powers necessitates the sacrifice of [all of man's other attributes; e.g. the appreciation of beauty, etc.]; or however much the law of Nature [does display

this tendency of mindless means/end rationality], we must be at liberty to restore by means of a higher Art this wholeness in our nature which [present] Art has destroyed.' (Schiller, On the Aesthetic Education of Man, quoted by Burger, in section Ch. 3, section 2 The Autonomy of Art in the Aesthetics of Ant and Schiller.)

Schiller argues that, precisely because bourgeois art 'renounces all direct intervention in reality, art is suited to restore man's wholeness. [Although he] sees no chance in his own time for the building of a society that permits the development of the [wholeness] of everyone's powers, he does not surrender this goal...[For] it is true,...that the creation of a rational society is made dependent on a humanity that has first been realised through art.' Schiller emphasises the play impulse, which he identifies with artistic activity, as the synthesis of the sense impulse and the form impulse. According to Burger, he seeks liberation for humanity 'from the spell of sensuousness through the experience of the beautiful'. That is to be the central function of art, precisely because it has been removed from the practice of life.

The immediate problem for Schiller's theory of the need for an 'aesthetic education', of course, is the fact that his own brilliant drama is unable to reach out and inspire a wider audience. This is because they are performed within a society already rent by the division of labour. His plays seek the reconstitution of the whole man, which the individual himself is unable to develop in the practice of life. So here (as Marx was later to observe), Schiller gets himself into a bind. On

the one hand, he sees that ‘the lower and more numerous classes’ are slaves to the immediate satisfaction of their drives. On the other, ‘the enlightenment of reason’ has done nothing to teach the civilised classes to act morally either. So Schiller has nothing to fall back on. One cannot trust man’s good nature or rely on the educability of his reason.

We can now turn to Marx’s critique of Schiller’s idealist account. Firstly, he rejects the latter’s idea that the sensuous-material world of wants is caused by an ‘alienation of the spirit’. For Marx, this is not a fatal division, because educated, cultivated men - such as Schiller and himself - do not suffer from it. They are able to demonstrate the unity of sensuousness, reason and the spiritual or an aesthetic sensibility. Since ‘the ‘objectification’ of reality, the modification of its crude natural form, is itself a material process, a process of ‘projecting’ man’s subjective forces and abilities. ‘The history of industry and the concrete existence of industry are the open book of fundamental human forces, human psychology in sensuous [material, objective] form.’ (See Marx’s EPM, quoted by Lifshitz, Ch. 11.) ‘The senses have their own history. Neither the object of art nor the subject capable of aesthetic experience comes of itself. ‘only music awakens the musical sensibility of man...for the unmusical ear the most beautiful music means nothing...and so the sensibilities of the social man are different from those of non-social man. Only through the objective development of the richness of human nature is the richness of human sensibility - the ear for music, the eye for beauty of form, in short sensibilities capable of human enjoyment, sensibilities which manifest themselves as human powers - in part evolved, in part created....The objectification of human

nature both in theory and in practice was necessary, therefore, both in order to humanise man's sensibility and to create for all the richness of human natural existence a corresponding human sensibility.' (EPM, Private property and Communism.) So for Marx, the aesthetic impulse - or its absence - is not biologically inherent, something preceding social development - or which has evolved out of existence, because of a particular social development. 'It is', says Lifshitz, 'a historical product, the result of a long series of material and intellectual productions. 'The object of art', wrote Marx, 'as well as any other product, creates an artistic and beauty-enjoying public. Production thus produces not only an object for the individual, but also an individual for the object. (Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, 1859.)

Contrary to Schiller's objection, the problem of man's alienation is located within class society itself, as it is presently constituted; nevertheless it is here that it must somehow be resolved. Therefore Marx acknowledges the fact that in bourgeois society, art is only able to achieve its object in a very distorted fashion; given the capitalist division of labour, as well as the mechanism of the market. The capitalist market, as Morawski reminds us, transformed art into a commodity, which it had never before been. Henceforth the artist is alienated, because he is forced to create products for an anonymous buyer. (C.F. the wage labourer.) So now the price of his product becomes all important. Whereas previously there had been a community of interests, values tastes and knowledge, artistic labour now becomes more depersonalised. More important, many artists (though not all) began to limit their creative freedom to suit the tastes of the market and its buyers. Finally, the majority

of society, the workers themselves; those who are the producers of every other commodity, are excluded from the artist and his work;. ‘Labouring men and women had originated and long pursued aesthetic activity and art in a past grown irretrievable: the most direct descendants now lacked the time off and surplus income to relate to art, which had, due to specialisation and alienation, now to be produced by a remote spectrum of experts.’ (See Morawski’s Introduction.)

Clearly, Marx is right about the objective/subjective dialectic, as it applies to the history of industry and art. Despite being excluded from aesthetic activity, etc., the workers must first come to terms with their own material impoverishment, relative to the affluence and excess of their rulers; i.e. by reason alone, within the sensuous material realm, or Marx’s ‘anti-aesthetic spirit of reality’ Therefore he sees the solution in the progressiveness of the bourgeoisie itself: As Marx and Engels wrote in the Communist Manifesto in 1848: ‘though the bourgeoisie destroys all ‘patriarchal, idyllic relations’; although it prostitutes everything, having resolved personal worth into mere exchange value; though it ‘has stripped of its halo every occupation honoured and looked up to with reverent awe’, including the work of the poet - nevertheless, and for this very reason, the ‘nihilism’ of the bourgeois mode of production is at the same time its greatest historical merit. ‘All that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life and his relations with his kind.’ For it is necessary and progressive, to first tear up existing illusions or those ‘motley ties’ that enslave man to the old social forms.

On this basis, therefore, a successful social revolution is the only guarantee of the

renaissance not just of art, but of man himself as a whole man (C.F. Marx's 'social man'), in the objective sense, not just subjectively, e.g. in the singular form of a Schiller or a Marx. Since both of these individuals can only conjure up what might be in their own minds themselves; as a conscious act of will and reason; and neither has the ability to objectify himself as such, without an objective change in society. Thus Marx envisages a future communist society, based on the complete abolition of private property. Only then can he envisage a new division of labour, whose aim is production for man's sake, not production for production's sake. It is only when all this has been accomplished, does he envisage the disappearance of the contradictions between the reason/spirit and the sensual/material (egotistical realm), allowing for the all-sided development of the individual. Since communist society regulates man's relationship with nature on a rational basis; because it brings this under common control, instead of being ruled by it. Neither is it characterised by fetishism of money and commodities, which likewise rule over man. Communist society establishes the material basis for the 'development of human power which is its own end, the true realm of freedom.' (German Ideology) '...The shortening of the working day is its fundamental premise.' (Capital, Vol. III)

To conclude, the point of departure for Marx stems from Schiller's idealist solution to the problem. For the latter, this lay in his notion of attainment of the 'aesthetic state': Only art, as a special sphere of culture, marked by formal attributes, can offer a solution to the fragmentation of the soul (mind). Art can make man whole again; because it offers the possibility of reuniting the spiritual and sensuous aspects of man's nature. But there are two problems with Schiller's

aesthetic state: (1) It means that only a select few might find 'redemption', given the 'man-crippling effects' of industrialisation, etc. (2) So it leaves the door open to a deterministic explanation ; i.e. the aesthetic impulse is biologically inherent. Therefore what about the mass of suffering humanity? Therefore, according to Marx, Schiller's idealist thought is fundamentally flawed; because he wants to restore ancient relations and values under bourgeois economy. But this can only be achieved at the level of thought, not in reality. Marx described this as 'pseudo-classicism'. (C.F. The revolutionary Jacobins, who tried to restore the ideals of the Roman Republic in France by adopting the symbols and fashions of antiquity.) This is what Marx tackles in his EPM (and again in his Eighteenth Brumaire of 1852).

On the other hand, Marx is not quite so pessimistic. The capitalist division of labour does not mean that all is lost. Whilst, of course, he acknowledges the spiritual impoverishment of the masses, paradoxically, for Marx, the key to making man whole again, and therefore to human freedom, is to be found in this very 'anti-aesthetic sphere of the spirit' (i.e. the sensuous mind, which sooner or later must apply itself to the problems of 'corporeal existence'). Its locus was to be the working class, the very class which had been excluded from the making and appreciation of art under capitalism. Whereas Schiller appears to see art surviving within its ivory tower, Marx is more pessimistic about the fate of art from this point on. Along with Hegel, he predicts that art too is degraded by the capitalistic structure of society. The ancient 'proportionment' of the flourishing of art under the classical mode of production, leads to dis-proportionment or the antagonisms of

bourgeois society. As long as the capitalist mode of production persists, then 'the degradation of art as a special form of culture' is inevitable. But he anticipated 'the communist revolution of the working class lays the necessary basis for a new renaissance of the arts on a much broader and higher basis.' (Lifshitz, Ch 13.)

Today, however, we would be hard-pressed to share Marx's optimism.

What he could not foresee, from his standpoint in the middle of the 19th century, was the rise of mass consumerism and mass entertainment in the 20th century. The credit-card economy and relatively low cost of a plethora of consumable commodities, means that the physical impoverishment of the workers is at an end; except for a small minority. (N.B. Of course, this only holds true in developed capitalist society. The opposite - misery of wants, as well as the soul - is still very much the case for the majority of humanity.) But Marx's observation that the worker is intellectually impoverished by the capitalist division of labour, which reduces him to the level of a 'machine', an 'abstraction' and a 'stomach', arguably still holds true, especially in developed capitalist society! This is further reinforced by the rise of mass entertainment, based on crude sensationalism. Thus the gulf between sensuousness, reason on the one side and the aesthetic impulse (the poetical play of fancy,etc.) on the other; between corporeal existence and spiritual life, grows even wider.

What then, is man's condition and his fate, let alone that of art, if 'the inner-logic of capitalism', fails to bring about the breakdown of the system; because the 'new-

fangled men', the workers, fail to develop the necessary collective consciousness and strategy to seize the historical opportunity to usher in the new epoch of human freedom (socialism-communism)? The possibility of man who, by dint of his reason, is ' at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life and his relations with his kind', today seems to be even more remote. The reasons for this are, of course, another story, which are largely outside the remit of this paper. This author can only touch on these. (See section on Adorno's 'culture industry, etc.) Suffice to say, that the Ant and Schiller's opposition between work and play; this inimical relationship between the senses and reason; between the poetical play of fantasy and the prose of life, continues to hold sway. Thus for the moment, at least, the German idealist philosophers would appear to have the last word who emphasise the 'fatal division of the human spirit'.

5

The Autonomy Art - a Definition.

This is a 'historical development'.

Two approaches: firstly, the socio-historical; secondly, the theoretical.

Why it comes under attack:

Firstly, from the rise of the historical avant garde;

Secondly, from the impact of mass consumerism, advertising and the 'culture industry'.

The autonomy of art is defined simply as art's attempt to become independent of the rest of society. But this is only a relative independence, which is precariously

balanced. Therefore art's autonomy can easily be overturned; in fact under the pressure of the levelling effects of of the capitalist mode of production; in terms of both the economic base of society (the struggle between capital and labour) as well as ideology and consciousness, such an overturning is inevitable. Rather this apartness of art is a product of social and historical development. It provides a framework for the producer's perspective , as well as his means of production. He lives in a world constituted by the art school, the teacher of theory and practice, the art critic, the dealer, the gallery, also the broadsheet press. His audience is focused on this world, from which the masses are largely excluded. Burger describes this social phenomenon as 'the institution of art'.

Art's autonomy arises out of the historical phase of capitalism, known as generalised commodity production.This involved the separation of the producer from his means of production on a universal basis, as a consequence of the capitalist division of labour. The mechanism of exchange is the market. On the other hand, the artist-producer was able to exclude himself from this process. he still had the opportunity to continue with the old mode of production, based on the unity of intellectual, practical and physical labour; even after this new historical division of labour had set in. But the artist was not able to remain in glorious isolation, as we shall see.

The rise of modern capitalism also freed the artist from the control of the court or a wealthy patron. Henceforth he was free to dwell on the sensuous appeal of his ideas and the materials with which he worked, as well as questions of style and

technique. In the history of western music, the transition is achieved by Beethoven's time, whereas Haydn, his predecessor and early tutor, was bound to his aristocratic patron for most of his life. But the artist did not achieve freedom to create immediately. Initially the newly 'emancipated' artist was tied to a specific class, 'that the courts and the great bourgeoisie promoted art as a witness to their rule'. They were quick to seize on the artist's new predilection for aesthetic awareness or a preoccupation with the form of the artwork. This enables him to create decorative works, based on imagination and craftsmanship.) Likewise the artist recognised a ready market for his work.

The artist's new and abiding interest in the production of objects of pleasure, was inextricably connected, either directly or indirectly, to the aura of those who rule. But this does not alter the fact that, over time, bourgeois art advanced the possibility of pleasure through art (now properly called the 'aesthetic'), which contributed immensely to the creation of the sphere we call art.' In other words', argues Burger, '[critical theory, eg. structuralism and now postmodernism , i.e. aka the theoreticians of postmodernism] must not deny an aspect of social reality (and the autonomy of art is such an aspect) and retreat to the formulation of a few dichotomies (aura of the rulers versus the receptivity of the masses, aesthetic appeal versus didactic-political clarity). It must open itself to the dialectic of art that Walter Benjamin summarised in the phrase: 'There is no document of civilisation which is not at the same time a document of barbarism'.' Here Benjamin is echoing Marx and Engel's idea about the price of progress being measured in terms of the suffering or 'stupid' masses. 'Culture has always been

paid for by the suffering of those who are excluded from it. [C.F. Greek culture which based itself on slavery.] True, the beauty of works does not justify the suffering to which they owe their existence; but neither may one negate the work that alone testifies to that suffering.'

To dismiss outright the aesthetic appeal of artworks (because of their decorativeness and beauty) in favour of a more functional approach (which has a didactic purpose, e.g. to promote the cause of the struggling masses), misses the point, according to Burger: It overlooks the following contradictory aspects: (1) The liberating power of the aesthetic for its bourgeois or middle class audience (N.B. which is currently lost on the masses, who have long been excluded from aesthetic experience in their life practice.). (2) The regressive features of didactic or 'moralising' art. One could add, that to deny the autonomy of art - which is bound up with the rise of aestheticism (the notion of the art object as a thing in itself, i.e. not just a representation of something), is to deny objective reality. But such a view is the product of an incorrect methodology, i.e. subjective idealism. Thus even an intelligent critic, such as Benjamin, can descend to the level of the sectarian. The latter, of course, have more in common with those who seek to prescribe what art should be and thereby crush creative freedom. The barbarism of the commissars of art in Stalin's Soviet Union; also the gauleiters of the Nazi regime, are the two most infamous examples from recent history. In this regard, the two regimes mirrored each other, as instruments of artistic repression.

So the achievement of art's autonomy is closely linked to the rise of the aesthetic appeal of artworks. This in turn is linked to a new emphasis on form, which allows the artist to express his own attitude to his subject (or content). Form therefore takes centre stage in the artist's unique ability to engage in the 'free play of fancy', in opposition to the means/end necessity of the prose of life: Firstly, it led to the emancipation of art from any direct tie to the sacred; although this required centuries for its completion. 'But even within what still had the external appearance of sacral art, the emancipation of the aesthetic proceeds.' Consider the foregrounding of a humanist approach to religious subjects in Renaissance art. Raphael's 'Madonna of the Pinks' is modelled on a real woman, etc. Burger also cites the example of Baroque art, which is still irrefutably connected to a religious subject; but the latter has become relatively loose. He also reminds us of the fact that the artist has 'developed a heightened sense for the effects of colours and forms'. Thus, although the emancipation of the aesthetic is a contradictory process, what occurs here is the emergence of 'a new way of seeing that is immune to the coercion of means-ends rationality', as well as new a sphere that opens up, which is concerned with the 'ideologised' notion of genius, etc. For now, the artist is increasingly working on his own, in terms of handcraft; although he is, of course, a social participant in art as a special sphere of culture, he can play a significent or innovative part in this process, eg. the invention of a new style or art movement. (See Burger, Ch. 3, The Problem of the Autonomy of Art in Bourgeois Society, section 1.)

So much for the history of art's autonomy, which is distinguished by its precariousness and loss of itself. But we also need to have a theoretical account With the help of Burger, this may be summarised as follows: (1) 'It is Schiller's idea that precisely because it renounces all direct intervention in reality, art is suited to restore man's wholeness....[Therefore] the creation of a [truly] rational [just] society is made dependent on a humanity that has first been realised through art.' (2) This is achieved by means of the play impulse within artistic activity and the form impulse (otherwise to be seen as 'the experience of the beautiful'); somehow through this experience, man is able to liberate himself from the 'spell of sensuousness' (egoistic desires); . (3) Schiller assigns this 'central social function' to art, 'precisely because it has been removed from all the contexts of practical life'. (4) But the reality is that art can make man whole again, or remind him of what it means to be human, only vicariously, through the experience of art, and only at a subjective level. (5) This autonomy or detachment of art from practical contexts is a historical process. (6) But it is only a relative autonomy; since art is not free of bourgeois ideology or indeed of counter-ideology. (7) Nevertheless the relative detachment of art from the practice of life (e.g.. by means of craftsmanship and the emphasis on form in art as well as content, the aesthetic impulse, etc.) has given rise to the erroneous idea that the work of art is independent of society and has no useful, i.e. social function. (8) Such a conclusion gave birth to a new movement in art, whose aim was to undermine bourgeois art from within, namely the rise the historical avant garde. Initially this occurs in the western Europe in the first decades of the 20th century. The very aesthetic appeal of 'useless' artworks would become the target of a radical protest, initially in western Europe. This took

the form of a demand for anti-aesthetic artworks, allegedly of a socially useful nature, which by the same token, could also be reintegrated into the practice of life. (See later sections.)

The high point of art's autonomy is marked by the rise of a movement called Aestheticism, which emerged in the late 19th century. What aestheticism achieved, for good or ill, marked the extreme limit of art's detachment from practical life. It was during this period in the history of western art that the notion of 'art-for-art's-sake' comes into being. Aestheticism is also associated with the of Modernism; e.g. Impressionism, Post-impressionism, Symbolism, Expressionism. leading to the birth of Cubism and Futurism at the turn of the century. Aestheticism is exemplified in the work of fine artists such as Manet, James McNeill Whistler, and Monet; also the poet Mallarme. It may be defined as a movement wherein art becomes more self-reflexive; i.e. the work of art is to be seen as a thing-in-itself first and foremost. This is because: (1) The artist wishes to convey an impression of reality, for example, rather than feel obliged to accurately depict this. (2) At the same time, he seeks to deploy new techniques and to set a new style. (3) Aestheticism marks the triumph of form over content. The form of the work becomes an important means of personal expression, of sensations, momentary states, as well as mood. Abstraction represents its extreme end or art-for-art's-sake in its purest form. It arises within fine art when the form which the artist has created, abolishes any direct link with external reality. Abstractionism reduces art to mere feelings and emotions. It is the last resort of a humanist desire to escape from an unjust world, etc. Therefore, it would be wrong to say that aestheticism is

entirely disinterested in the practice of life. But it exists primarily for the artist and his consumer's private contemplation.
Aestheticism coincides with that period in the history of the bourgeois 'art institution', when not only the production of artworks, but also their reception become individual, private acts. Nevertheless it is an important development within the tradition of dis-alienated art, because it allows both the artist and the individual to affirm his humanity through art; which is otherwise truncated in his real life practice by means/end activity. Yet this can only be the case as long as the artwork in question, by mans of form, remains firmly within the sphere of art, which thereby, has already separated itself from the practice of life.

The downside of aestheticism, however, is that it is not merely the highpoint of art's autonomy. It also facilitates further a growing tendency within the art institution towards the submission of art to capitalism's commodification process. Art-for-art's-sake (as Benjamin was quick to point out) is easily transformed into art-for-money's-sake! As Matisse said of his own work, he wanted his paintings to soothe the feelings of the businessman, after a hard day's work at the office. The businessman might very well be an arms manufacturer. But how to combat this amoral status which art has bestowed upon itself? That is the challenge which the rise of the historical avant garde tried to resolve.

Finally, mention should be made of a famous libel case in England in 1877. This marked an important turning point for art and the art institution, which is after all, a bourgeois creation. It was brought by the artist, James McNeill Whistler against the

art critic, John Ruskin. At the centre of the argument was the important question of what constitutes aesthetic value? Is this still to based on the traditional idea of craftsmanship and individual skill, with its emphasis on form, as well as the content of the artwork? (N.B. Such an approach is also associated with the traditional idea of beauty, in particular the beauty of form, the importance of structure and the artist's mediation of his material, in order to render more effectively the subject or content of his work.) Or, if individual skill is no longer an essential aspect of artistic labour, is the value of the artwork now to be based on the price which the artist is able to fetch in the market place? If the latter is to become the basis of the value of artworks, then the door is opened, not just to mechanisation of art, but ultimately to the degradation of art by means of the dispensing of form altogether; i.e.. the rise of the anti-aesthetic or anti-art. Enter the historical avant garde. But first, we shall look at the Whistler-Ruskin Libel case in more detail. Then in the following section we shall look at the rise and fall of the historical avant garde.

6

The transformation of the art institution.

An existing tendency becomes the dominant tendency.

Not just 'art-for-art's-sake' - but 'art-for-money's-sake'!

A new art for new times - new pressures for the aesthetic tradition;

both from within and without the art institution.

The famous libel case of 1877, brought by the artist, James McNeill Whistler against the art critic, John Ruskin.

How Victorian Britain set a precedent for all future art under capitalism, based on industrialisation (mechanisation) and the free market; i.e. modernist and postmodern art.
The rise of the 'professional' artist, whose main interest was to control the price of his work; not its intrinsic value.
New issues are raised and ultimately legitimised: although the work of art could appear to be unfinished, could it still be considered art and realise a decent price; or was it not indistinguishable from the manufactured article? (C.F. the work of the 'craftsman', such as the Upholsterer, compared to that of the 'speedy plasterer'.)
Ultimately the quality of the art work is no longer the issue; it is a 'fair' price for the artist.
Henceforth it is not artistic labour which matters, but how much time the artist spends in assembling the work in question. (Consider the ready-made, the installation, etc.)
The irony of it all!

The following section is based on Robin Spencer's book, James McNeill Whistler (Tate Books, London, 2003). Although it focuses on Whistler, its purpose is to use him as an example, in order to highlight the growing conflict between new old and new approaches to aesthetic value in western Europe at the end of the 19th century. N.B. By aesthetic tradition, we mean the sensuous appeal of the artwork, which becomes something in its own right. Hence its aesthetic appeal. This marked the highpoint of art's autonomy or detachment from the practice of life in bourgeois

culture.The backdrop to this debate was, of course, the rise of that mechanical medium for the representation of reality, photography, whose origins can be traced back to the 1830s: Once artists became convinced of this new rival, they had to rethink existing conceptions about some important questions, such as, what is reality? How can the artist portray reality in these new-fangled times? What techniques should he use? What does aeshetic value mean now? Could this question be based on individual craftsmanship alone, such as a highly-wrought painterly technique, associated with the great painting of the past; or could paintings be done in a hurry, using 'less' skillful techniques (such as Whistler's nocturnes, etc.)? What would the public make of this? Could there be a successful marriage between art and technology? In this regard, are artworks based on etching' drypoint, lithography; also those based on inking and paper, not forgetting the watercolour, equal in value to traditional painting? Finally how does one evaluate craftsmanship anyway? Could this be decided by such a crude form of measure as the amount of labour time expended by the artist; or should the market set the price?

In 1877 the artist, James McNeill Whistler, exhibited a painting, Nocturne in Black Gold: The Falling Rocket, a painting of fireworks against the night sky. In actual fact, the artist took great pains with it and continued to work on the painting for many years afterwards,. Despite all this, when the art critic, John Ruskin saw it, he described it in a pamphlet addressed to the 'workmen and labourers of Great Britain', as 'an ill-educated conceit of the artist'; almost a 'wilful imposture'; and added that he 'never expected to hear a 'coxcomb' [the artist] ask £200 guineas for

flinging a pot of paint in the public's face.' After some syndication of the aforesaid review, Whistler sued Ruskin for libel, claiming £1,000 damages. Ruskin welcomed the challenge, because he saw this as his opportunity to ram home to the public his views about art. From his standpoint, Whistler was confident of winning the case, because he believed that the jury and the public would side with the artist who merely wanted to sell his pictures, free from this sort of criticism which 'interfered with the sale of a marketable commodity'.

The central question which the jury had to decide was whether Whistler's painting was worth the money he had asked for it. Therefore it raised some related questions of the level of artistic skill involved in its production; whether Whistler was right to assert, that it is only artists themselves who are qualified to criticise painting, etc. For their part the defence team raised the question at every opportunity of whether Whistler's art was technically competent . No less than the Attorney General of the day presided over the case. It was he who asked Whistler a question about the amount of labour time he expended in order to 'knock off' the painting. Was it a mere two days for which he was asking £200 guineas? Whistler came back with his famous reply, 'No! - I ask it for the knowledge of a lifetime.'

Ruskin already knew that, by this time, it would be impossible to bring the labour theory of value to bear on establishing a price (N.B. the amount of time spent on a work by the artist). This was because he knew that the price could not be crudely quantified by the cost of labour which goes into making the art object. (Indeed this was no longer the case even within the realm of industrial production). Rather he

was aware that now the price of a painting had to be based on the margin which the manufacture, or dealer, calculated would make him a profit. For even by the last quarter of the 19th century, in Britain at least, everything was determined by the free market; despite the fact that Ruskin believed this was disastrous for society, the 'principle of death'. Such was the nature of 'modernism' (his word for everything he detested about the modern world). Thus he fell back more and more on affirming the labour theory of value as a means of determining the intrinsic, or what he called the 'vital', value of art.

Ruskin's problem was that, whilst he championed the minutely observed time-consuming painting of the Pre-Raphaelites, i.e. a time-based economy of art, he was no doubt horrified by the price which the artist William Holman Hunt received for his painting, The Shadow of Death. In 1873, it was sold with engraving rights, for £11,000 guineas. Therefore Ruskin struggled to arrive at a 'just' price for any painting. As the curator of the great J.M.W. Turner's archive, he tried to address the question of genius, once described by turner himself as 'the genius of hard work'. But once again, for Ruskin, the commodity of 'hard work' as a prerequisite for 'genius', was to be measured in terms of labour time. But then he had to admit that many of Turner's wonderful watercolours were actually the fruit of 'hasty execution', even if they were indeed 'quite faultless'. Once again Ruskin's admission as to exactly how Turner produced many of his greatest works, illustrated the difference between the intrinsic value of his watercolours (what they were worth) and their exchange or market value. Logically, on the basis of the amount of labour time deployed or the skill involved, a Turner watercolour should

be worth less than one of his paintings; yet they still sold for a large amount of money. Thus he would have to concede that the price of genius could not be measured in strictly economic terms.

The next line of argument pursued by the Ruskin defence was that the Whistler painting was unfinished, because there was no evidence of a drawing technique. In this regard, it was criticised in terms that would be regarded by today's standards, as sexist; because attention was drawn to the fact that Whistler's nocturnes were so-called, because of their 'delicate [feminine] values of colour'. But what they really lacked were the 'masculine' attributes of drawing, form and composition'! Ruskin took this line of arguing further by making the comparison between Whistler's painting and material labour. With regard to the latter, Ruskin was bound to 'rank an attentitive draughtsman's work above a speedy plasterer's, and distinguish an 'Artist's work from the Upholsterer's. Therefore ipso facto, because the work was unfinished, Whistler was no artist.

One of Ruskin's witnesses, no less than the artist, Edward Burnes-Jones, made an interesting point, not just for his own time, but also for posterity: 'that if unfinished pictures became common we shall arrive at a stage of mere manufacture, and the art of the country will be degraded.' Ruskin's witnesses argued that Whistler's nocturnes were not only unfinished; they lacked even the amount of labour and finish required to make an upholstered sofa or a plaster wall. Therefore his paintings could hardly aspire to be products of mere manufacture.Whistler had, in fact, reduced himself to the level of a machine. By so arguing, the Ruskin team

were upholding the superiority of the home-made artifact, coordinated by eye and brain, over the soulless product manufactured by the machine. At the same time, along with the presiding judge, they were attacking ' a romantic notion of spontaneous creation, which is worthless in a society [such as capitalism's attitude to the skilled worker, e.g. the engineer over the road sweeper] that valorizes the amount of work.'

In his conclusion, Spencer warns that, since all of these questions still apply to the whole question of what is art, both yesterday and today, then we should not jump to hasty conclusions, along the lines: that Ruskin represents 'a force of reaction and repression'; whilst Whistler stands for 'the revolutionary free spirit and advocate of artistic freedom'. But there is no doubt as to where the jury stands, considering its verdict: On the one hand it ruled in favour of the plaintiff, Whistler. Ultimately the verdict was to turn on the question of 'marginal utility', meaning that the jury recognised now it is price alone which dictates the cost of goods, which is the principle upon which the free-market economy is based. It was a principle to which Ruskin was totally opposed in 1870s Britain; although he knew even then that it was impossible to reverse. On the other hand, the jury awarded Whistler only a farthing's damages. Therefore he had to pay for all of his court costs himself, which nearly ruined him financially. The reason why the jury's verdict proved almost financially ruinous for this particular artist, might be explained as follows: they did not really like the fact that art per se had to be reduced to the law of value and market forces. Although', writes, Spencer, 'we have found this an acceptable way to price and buy goods for more than a century,

some of us still have difficulty valuing art on this basis, perhaps because of a residual instinct which tells us that art should be about something more than money.' No doubt Marx would have appreciated this last point, if he were alive today!

Spencer continues his argument by turning it on its head, 'Since Whistler sued Ruskin, how often has the time taken to produce a work of art not been relevant to an assessment of [its asking price]?' He reminds us that 'dealers still value 19th century art in these terms.' But in the modern age of ready-mades, conceptial art, installation art, etc., the definition of how the artist uses his time has changed drastically, from questions of craftsmanship and genius inherent in the work, to a question of literally how much time did it take the artist to produce it. Spencer cites the case of Duchamp's infamous Fountain of 1917; that since he did not make the urinal himself; he merely appended the initials 'R. Mutt' to it and turned it face down; then 'his greatest achievement was his use of time'. He finishes up by saying, 'Today the subject of an artist's video, and other forms of performance and conceptual art, is very often time itself.' (See Ch. IV, Morality.) We could say the same about Damien Hirst's pickled animals. (Whereas at least Tracy Emin had to put several hours work (?) into her Unmade Bed. But, once again, whither art?

Irony is everywhere in Art! It is within the individual artwork; within art criticism and certainly within the history of art: Ruskin's attack on Whistler is ironic; because it was he who asserted that the latter's paintings were even less artistic than a plasterer's wall; inferring that they were no better in quality than a

machine-made image (such as newfangled photography). Whereas Whistler's work was actually quite painterly; except Ruskin hated his style and technique. It was another example of the modern, which he detested. Whistler was, in fact, a pioneer of aestheticism in art. He himself explains what this means, when he said, 'his ambition [was] to paint something that would be admired for its own sake, rather than for its subject'; though his subjects are always recognisable, if enigmatic (e.g. The Woman in White, 1864). He also made the frame a part of the painting. Aestheticism also laid the foundations for the Modernist movement. In this regard, Whistler was a great admirer of the modernist poet, Baudelaire. It was the latter who said, 'The true connoiseur has never confused art from industry'. The early Modernists also advanced the idea of connecting decorativeness in art with its sales potential for wealthy buyers. As Spencer says, 'for Whistler, modern art was synonomous with modernity, not least because it was an investable commodity which would eventually show a profit like everything else.' Therefore he is a precursor of today's postmodernists; since the pursuit of profit has become one of their main goals. (N.B. The other, of course, is the desire to be a celebrity!) But here we find another irony; conversely their work, more often than not, eschews the whole idea of crafsmanship and skill. As we have seen, they devote their labour time to other priorities, such as organising the assemblage of their so-called artworks. Thus their work is the antithesis of Whistler's decorative Modernism.

7

The attempt to negate art's autonomy.

The rise of historical avant garde movements within the art institution: Firstly in the west, the radical avant garde; secondly, in Russia, in response to the 1917 Revolution, a radical avant garde movement gives rise to the left avant garde.

Both avant gardes are given the appellation 'historical', because, these movements mark the first attempt by artists to overthrow the art institution as an instrumentality of the bourgeoisie.

The role of this institution, historically, is to maintain the art entity, now it has achieved autonomous status, by means of colleges and museums; but increasingly it falls under the sway of market forces.

The aim of the western avant garde is to subvert the art institution from within, by means of provocations which challenge traditional aesthetic concepts; these take the form of elements of practical life which substitute themselves for the art object.

Apart from this, its aims are somewhat vague.

The aim of the left avant garde in Russia is to overthrow the art institution from without, by means of a new functional aesthetic which seeks to reunite art with practical life directly.

For them, art is to play an important part in the revolutionary transformation of society.

Both movements fail, but for different reasons.

The rise of the European ‘wing’ of the historical avant garde in the early years of the 20th century, was a reaction to aestheticism, which was, they alleged, ‘socially useless’.This tendency was later reinforced by the barbarism of the First World War. It was one thing for the ‘art institution’ itself to be a material expression of bourgeois privilege (even if this was now extended further to include the middle classes). But the class which now possessed the disposable income and the leisure time to become consumers of art, was the very same class which had unleashed a world war, in which millions of workers were butchered as cannon fodder. Burger defines these European avant garde movements as an attack on the status of art in bourgeois society, not just a movement or style.

These movements attempted to negate art as an institution which is detached from the everyday life of men. But, unlike their counterparts in Russia - the left avant garde (who emerged under the impact of the 1917 Revolution) - the western avant gardistes did not necessarily want their art to become practical again; that is they did not try to reintegrate their art with practical life. They wanted merely to stress the link between the two. In this regard the individual artworks which they produced were neither more nor less socially useful than those produced under aestheticism. Rather the radical element in these avant garde artworks, stemmed from the fact that the artists who made them, began to insert everyday objects, into their work, such as bus tickets and wallpaper (e.g. the cubist works of Picasso and Braque, etc.). But later, under the impact of the First World War, other avant gardistes wanted to do something that would shock the bourgeois movers and

shakers within the art institution even more. Since they were outraged by the bourgeois class in general, whom they correctly identified as being both responsible for the slaughter of millions of men, and who also profited by it. So they appropriated complete objects from this anti-aesthetic sphere; i.e. mass produced commodities. Hence the advent of the 'ready-made' artwork was regarded as even more shocking than Cubism. Thus they tried 'to organise a new life [practice] from a basis in art.'

Therefore the primary intention of the western avant gardistes was to draw attention to the way in which art functions in society, as an objectification of the bourgeois life-style. What they actually achieved was a damaging assault on the aesthetic (form, beauty, distance, etc.), smashing through it; whilst they stopped short of smashing up the art institution itself. Herbert Marcuse explains why this is so. He observed that in bourgeois society, art can play a contradictory role: (1) It projects an image of a better world which is objectified in the art object. Therefore art is able to protest against the bad order that exists in reality. (2) By realising a better order in fiction, it relieves existing society of the pressure of those forces that press for change. Where art accomplishes this, it is 'affirmative', in Marcuse's sense of the term. (3) The fact that bourgeois art distances itself from the relations of production 'contains an element of freedom', an 'element of the non-committal and an absence of consequences'. It is this impotent freedom, based on art which distances itself from life, as well as the art institution, that stimulated the western avant garde to attempt the reintegration of art in the life process. Burger describes this project as 'a profoundly contradictory endeavour'.

The Dadaist artwork (exemplified by Duchamp's 'Fountain') is best described as a provocation or manifestation. Once it is removed from practical life it loses its work character. At the same time it is a functional object from practical life. Therefore, argues Burger, 'the intended purpose or function of the avant gardiste manifestation is most difficult to define'. When art and the praxis of life are fused, i.e. when the practice is 'aesthetic', the art is 'practical', art's purpose becomes confused, because the two distinct spheres (art and practical life) have ceased to exist.

However these provocations shattered the notion of individual creativity and the related, 'romantic' notion of genius; because mass-produced commodities or 'ready-mades' are substituted for the work of art. By so doing, the avant gardiste destroys the individual character of the artwork, which is essential to art in bourgeois society. When he signed his urinal ('Fountain'), an arbitrarily chosen mass produced commodity, Duchamp was able to mock the whole idea of individual creativity. But more importantly , as Burger reminds us, the protest of the western avant garde against the art institution, was soon accepted as art by the art institution. Therefore any continuation of this protest loses its credibility. Burger then turns to the relationship between the producer of artworks and the consumer. Traditionally there was an antithesis between the two. But this is undermined by the Dadaist Tzara's, who left 'instructions' for 'making a Dadaist poem' and Breton's writing of 'automatic texts'. Since both pieces invite the consumer to participate in the production of the poem, etc. Therefore once the

distinction between art producers and consumers ceases to exist, the concept of individual creativity loses its meaning. This laid the foundation for today's laissez faire attitude; i.e. the idea that anything can be art and anyone can be art. At the same time we see a degradation in the quality of the artwork.

To conclude, this attempt to abolish art's autonomy and all that this entails, whereby art is supposedly reintegrated with the life, failed. In bourgeois society this can only amount to a false overcoming. Proof of this conclusion can be found in today's effluence of pulp fiction and commodity art. The primary function of this kind of 'art' is to impose a particular kind of behaviour on the mass of consumers, which is 'in fact practical, though not in the sense the avant gardistes intended. Here literature ceases to be an instrument of emancipation and becomes one of subjection.' Artistic labour subordinated to the advertising industry is intended to prompt the masses into buying things they don't really need. When it is subordinated to the entertainment industry, once again it acquires a practial function; but one which enthrall the masses and sweetens the burden of a coercive means/end rationality. (C.F.Marx's 'callous cash payment'.)

Finally Burger asks whether the aim of overcoming art's autonomous status is desirable at all, either now or in the future. On the other hand, he suggests that the idea of defending the distance between art and the practice of life is a necessary one, because it establishes a 'free space within which alternatives to what exists become conceivable.' (See Burger, The Negation of the Autonomy of Art by the Avant Garde, Ch. 3, Section 3.)

8

The left historical avant garde (1916 - 36).

On the one hand, this was a marriage between art and the industrial machine age. (Ruskin and Morris lose the battle for individual craftsmanship to 'technological utopianism'.) On the other, the left avant garde was a positive response to the Russian revolution of 1917.

It is characterised, not just by mechanisation, but also extremism, nihilism and an over-emphasis on Functionalism!

'Change life!' was their motto.

But the masses were left behind the debate and the avant garde fell prey to bigger political forces.

This was not the answer, either for art or the masses.

The period 1916-23, a time of war and revolution, which gave rise to the historical avant garde of the left, was one of the most turbulent and sectarian periods in the history of art. But in less than a decade the movement had burnt itself out. The failure of the left-avant garde echoed the failure of the proletarian revolution. There followed the long postwar boom, which began in 1945. Reconstruction unleashed the era of modern mass consumerism and the industrialisation of culture. The collapse of the Soviet empire in the second half of the 20th century removed the last impediment to global capitalism. The seeds for today's cynical postmodernists were sown. The latter have embraced the new modernity, i.e. the mass consumerist/mass media society, as though it were humanity's true destiny.Today's 'avant garde' are, of course, a parody of the real thing! So history

turned out quite differently from that envisaged by the ‘real’ or historical avant garde.

But let us begin with the First World War, from which it ensued. In its birth pangs, the avant garde could be characterised as a scrum of contending art movements. A constant stream of art manifestos, which were pejorative in tone, were were hurled, like grenades, by one group at another. This was both a good and bad period for art. On the one hand, it was one of the most innovative and exciting periods for art, comparable with the Renaissance in its impact on art and society. (Indeed there is a common thread to both periods: Each was accompanied by a technological revolution as well as enormous social upheaval; in the first instance, we have the invention of printing and the transition from feudalism to capitalism; in the latter we have the rise of modern industry, including the revolutionary transformation of the reproductive process, i.e. the rise of film, reprographics, advertising, etc., and the Russian Revolution.) On the other, along with the fashion for the art manifesto, as the intellectual equivalent of a bomb, we have the rise of a nihilist current (within both the left and the right), which was destructive for art in the long run. In particular, the nihilist tendencies which would later crystalise into the Proletcult movement in the new Soviet Union.

The driving force of this tendency was an idealist and utopian view of the new, revolutionary possibilities for art - and the working class - which had been thrown up by the new technologies, such as reprographics, under the impact of (what then appeared to be) the first successful proletarian revolution in history. Hence the rise

of the erroneous idea that the proletariat could move directly towards the creation of a new revolutionary culture, which could be accomplished along with the abolition of the old culture, including all of the great artistic achievements of the past. Central to this idea was a call for the return of art into life (only now this was to be based on an industrialised working class, whose location was to be the factory and the streets.). But this came at a price: the call for the abolition of aesthetic value in art, which was derided as both reactionary and redundant.

To be fair, some theorists of the avant garde (e.g. Walter Benjamin in the 1930s), argued that the literary quality of a functional work of art is important. But the main criterion was that it be 'politically correct'. Therefore, it follows that '...the politically tendency includes a literary tendency.' With hindsight, this is a rather simplistic and mechanical view. Indeed the Soviet journalist, Tretiakov, whom he chose as his model of a functional artist, was a servant of the Stalinist regime (at least in the objective sense), and was therefore in no way representative of the 'correct political tendency'; despite his valiant efforts to transform his literary means of production in the interests of the proletariat.

Despite its many genuine artistic achievements, overall, as far as the avant garde is concerned, it was a case of the intelligentsia telling the working class that it could run before it could walk; since the latter had yet to benefit from the riches of a cultural education, including some idea of the theory and history of art. It also ran contrary to Marx and Engels comments about art. Consider these two prevailing marxian themes: Firstly, their insistence on the unity of form and content, as the

basis of all art and aesthetic value (including political art). Secondly, their observation about the effects of industrialisation on the masses; namely the increasing accumulation of capital and the division of labour has two contradictory outcomes: on the one side, alienated material labour means the increasing spiritual impoverishment of the masses; on the other, we see the rise of artistic labour as a unique and higher form of labour; but only because the artist is able to produce a concret-sensuous object, which he recognises as his own creation. This is potentially dis-alienated labour, achieved at the subjective level. Therefore both Marx and Engels looked upon the artist as a 'wealthy man', etc.

Indeed it should be noted that, within the realm of culture, such a state of affairs would prevail for generations in a future communist epoch. This would still be the case, ven if all went well (C.F. the abortive social revolution of the 20th century, which started at the wrong time in the wrong place, etc.). (See next section.)

But for some strands of Futurism, early Dada and Constructivism; and certainly for the Proletcult movement, nihilism and functionalism - a.k.a. as utilitarianism - was the way forward. In its extreme form, this meant the annihilation of all consideration of form. Thus the traditional boundary between art and life, which had prevailed since the Renaissance, was abolished at a stroke; namely the production of autonomous/semi-autonomous works or primarily a-practical works of art; that is concrete-sensuous objects of contemplation; ranging from a Renaissance fresco to a painting by Picasso or Matisse (not forgetting, of course, poetry, music and drama). Thereby art is able to distance itself from life in order to

critique it more effectively; i.e. by opposing the 'poetical play of fantasy to the prose of life'. And all of this is achieved by means of the artist's own imagination; which allows him to create a suitable form and technique. Thus he enhances the content of the work itself, including an artistic tendency; or art which engages, consciously or unconsciously, in the class struggle.

By contrast, in Italy in 1915, the Futurists led by Marinetti, organised pro-war demonstrations, in honour of war and its machinery of destruction. In Holland in 1917, a group of architects organised a revolt against the tradition of Ruskin and Morris in England; precisely because the latter were highly critical of industrialism and its depersonalising effects (etc.) Taking the opposite stance, this Dutch group proclaimed the new aesthetic based on industrial technology.Thus were laid the foundations of the Bauhaus movement in Weimar Germany. (N.B. But the best of Bauhaus would go on to demonstrate that utilitarianism could also inspire genuinely new aesthetic forms; whilst the artist Moholy-Nagy also produced a-practical artworks, inspired by constructivism.) Earlier in1920, the first Berlin Dada art fair was mounted. Whilst it included an anti-war painting by the German Expressionist, Otto Dix, it also included the 'Prussian Archangel', a pig-faced figure in an army uniform (which revealed the influence of Surrealism on Dada); as well as a placard by George Grosz, saying: 'Art is dead. Long live the new machine art of TATLIN!'

But in Russia, the revolution of 1917 threw the various artistic movements into turmoil. On the credit side, we have the fusion of Cubism and Futurism with Constructivism. In the first decade of the 20th century Cubism began to use

organic elements (mass produced objects such as bus tickets) to create decorative, a-practical objets d'art. At the same time Cubism's radical forms reflected the impact of film montage techniques. (N.B.The first films were being made by the end of the 19th century.) Film montage or the juxtaposition of different angles of view, as well as moments in time, in any particular order, gave the world a new way of seeing reality. In 1920s Russia, this new way of seeing was enhanced further by a new revolutionary outlook, with the proletariat occupying centre stage. (Consider Eisenstein's early films for example, such as Strike and Battleship Potemkin.) Cubism, Futurism, even dreamy Suprematism also inspired brilliant utilitarian art, e.g. revolutionary posters (such as El Lissitsky's famous 'Defeat the Whites with the Red Wedge'); as well as street art; hereby proving that decorative art could also have a useful purpose.

On the debit side, we have the emergence of Proletcult, which was inspired by utilitarianism and a technocratic utopianism. Although it based itself on the trade union movement; initially it allowed itself to be diverted by bourgeois-influenced artists who were au fait with German Expressionism and formal experiments up to a point; e.g. Eisenstein and Tretiakov. When the latter arrived in Moscow, their first act was to involve themselves with the workers theatre. Mayakovsky and his middle class group of friends began Lef Magazine, which was oriented towards the workers. In these early years, prior to the Revolution's degeneration and the rise of Stalin, the Proletcult movement stirred up controversy with the Bolshevik government, not because they wanted to incorporate utilitarian graphics and industrial design into furniture, clothing, stage design, photography and montage;

but because Proletcult demanded total independence from the revolutionary regime; i.e the Party and Soviet power. This was because they saw themselves as an emerging 'third force in the revolutionary state, balancing the political element (the Party) and the industrial element (the trade unions) and ultimately serving to create a new working-class culture to replace that of the bourgeoisie.' At the time,Trotsky (co-leader of the Revolution) and Lunacharsky (Commissar of Culture) strongly opposed Proletcult on the grounds of their destructive approach to existing works of art. 'For Lenin, who anyway saw the worker's first task in a time of shortage as basic organisation rather than the practice of art, the idea of any large movement parallel to the party was intolerable.' (See John Willett's account in The New Sobriety 1917-33, Thames and Hudson, London, 1987, CH. 5.) Nevertheless the Bolsheviks did not suppress Proletcult itself (although Bogdanov, its leading advocate in the Party, was for a time). By 1922-3 it had grown to a membership of over 300,000.

The subsequent rapid degeneration of Proletcult mirrored that of the Soviet state. It coincided with Stalin's iron grip on the Party and the state, which led to the imposition of the first Five-Year Plan in the late 1920s. By then Proletcult was led by a new organisation called RAPP. Paradoxically its leaders now began to arrogate 'the right to stand for Communist Party policy. The new 'proletarian' associations were a very different proposition from the old Proletcult from whose ashes they had originated, since their ambition was not to operate parallel to the party but to be its executive arm in cultural matters.' It now began to purge from its ranks all those bourgeois-influenced artists and any semblance of formal

experimentation, 'in favour of a more utilitarian comittment to the politician's aims, above all to the Five-Year plan.' RAPP was now emboldened to attack foreign groups and well wishers, above all the germans. In the name of the new 'revolutionary' culture and full of dogmatism, they attacked LEF and New LEF, the Formalist critics, the Constructivists, Meyerhold [creator of the new theatre], the satirical school..., and the theoreticians of the cinema.' Not only did they attack them on artistic-cultural grounds, '...the political campaign against Trotskyism and other forms of opposition provided fresh weapons of denunciation which they did not hesitate to use.' The Association of Proletarian Musicians used its first issue to fight 'the influence of decadent bourgeois music among young musicians', a phrase aimed at Shostakovitch as well as at the Leningrad cult of contemporary Western music.'

The outcome was that the remaining avant gardistes sought temporary exile in Germany, eg. the photomontagist, Lissitsky, the film-maker, Vertov, Meyerhold's theatre, the writer, Tretyakov and the poet, Mayakovsky. The inescapable choice for most of them was, either surrender to RAPP and the Stalinist regime or death. Whilst Lissitsky, for example, ended his career producing grotesque agitprop which glorified Stalin and the Five-Year Plan, Mayakovsky committed suicide in 1930. Tretyakov disappeared for ever into the Gulag. Willett provides us with a photograph of Mayakovsky's funeral accompanied by this caption: 'End of an era. Moscow turns out for Myakovsky's funeral after his suicide...' (Willett, Ch. 19.)

During the 1930s, the avant garde in the West struggled on bravely, but in vain; as

a divided house; only to be defeated by the 'midnight of the century', crushed between the hammer and the anvil of Fascism and Stalinism; and finally extinguished altogether by the rise of the culture industry. Its leading exponants were Bertolt Brecht and Benjamin on the one side and Theodor Adorno on the other. Whilst they disagreed among themselves about the way forward for art, they were forced to do battle with Lukacs, who had appointed himself as cultural commissar for Stalinist culture in the Soviet Union.

Benjamin's wrote two famous essays between 1934 and 1936: Firstly, The Author as Producer called upon the cultural intelligentsia to transform their own means of production in the interests of the proletariat and its struggle against Fascism. (Quite how this was to be achieved he never spelt out!) Nevertheless Benjamin was one of the last defenders of the avant garde as a self-proclaimed cultural vanguard, alongside (perhaps in lieu of?) the vanguard party, which was no longer revolutionary. Indeed it had degenerated into an instrument of repression against both artists and the masses. Secondly, The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction, pitched the idea that the new technologies of mass reproducibility (in particular, photography and film), established a new way of seeing the world. Thus the old art is stripped of its aura and, via the new art of industrial technology, the masses are able to come to revolutionary consciousness. However, Benjamin contradicts this sunny optimism - a replay of an earlier technological utopianism - in a pessimistic 'Epilogue'. In this last section he anticipates the 'horrible features of imperialistic warfare', which he correctly attributes to overproduction. 'Imperialistic war is a rebellion of technology....Fascism...expects war to supply

the artistic gratification of a sense perception that has been changed by technology.' Once again, he blames this simplistically on bourgeois art-for-art's-sake: 'This is the situation of politics which Fascism is rendering aesthetic.' His only answer is rather weak: 'Communism responds by politicising art.'

Earlier Adorno had been engaged in a debate with Benjamin over modern cultural practice; which centred on the relations between avant garde and commercialised art under the dominion of capital. 'The contradiction between 'high' and 'low' genres - the one subjectively progressive and objectively elitist, the other objectively popular and subjectively regressive - has never been durably overcome.' Brecht proved to be the most innovative theorist of the avant garde, as well as its practitioner. 'For his theatre represents perhaps the only major body of art after the Russian Revolution to be uncompromisingly advanced in form, yet intransigently popular in intention.'

As for Lukacs, he continued his attacks on avant garde 'formalism', now defined as anything which was innovative, which can only alienate the workers, whose aesthetic experience is based on established conventions, e.g. a notion of realism, which seeks to simulate reality, etc. Thus he dismissed Brecht's Epic theatre, as bourgeois formalism; because it established a new form of realism, based on the notion of keeping the audience aware that they are merely watching a play, so that they might concentrate on its political content. Anything which over-emphasised the importance of style, form or technique, was derided as formalist and reactionary; '...even though Lukacs must [have been] perfectly well aware that these are the features that distinguish art as knowledge from science, and that

works of art which ignored their own form, would destroy themselves as art.' (See Aesthetics and Politics, Verso, London, 1986, p 66.)]

Therefore, Brecht not withstanding, I would argue, not by nihilism alone, despite the best efforts of the avant garde (both past and present)! The best and most enduring avant gardistes, historically speaking, were not infantile nihilists, but those who already knew something about the history of art in their chosen field, and who had the imagination and vision to adapt this knowledge to the challenge of the new: the new world of mass reproducibility. Thus bourgeois cubism and futurism gave rise to the revolutionary avant garde in Russia. The Russian Revolution transformed the new art; the best of Dada was political and led to the political montages of Rodchenko and John Heartfield. Although definitely in the camp of agitprop, Heartfield's work is still a fine example of the plastic arts. (N.B. The term 'plastic' means giving form to a mass of matter, substantially modifying it. Any work of art which ignores its own form, destroys itself as art, etc.) Whereas the best that Duchamp in the west could come up with was his (in)famous ready-made, a men's urinal called Fountain (1917). His only gesture towards the modification of an existing mass, was that he turned the thing upside down and added the signature, 'R. Mutt.'

9

The defeat of the historical avant garde, combined with the impact of new technology on social consciousness, imposes new challenges for the artist and his audience.

Adorno's theory of the 'total system' of the post-industrial society:

In its place we have the 'societe de consommation' enclosed within a seamless web of media technology.

The class struggle in its traditional form, organised along collective lines, appears to be over.

The erosion of high culture increasingly engulfed by low culture or the culture industry.

Not even oppositional art can escape commodification.

The rise of the 'new aesthetic' or anti-art.

The artist has become a direct producer of surplus value.

These tendencies are reinforced intellectually by a new reactionary ideology, i.e. Postmodernism.

Critique of Adorno.

The fate of the historical avant garde has also played its part in the degradation of the artist and his art. (N.B. By historical avant agarde, we are referring to all of those artists and their intellectual allies, who believed that art could change things directly; e.g. its western 'wing' used 'provocations' - anti-art objects - to attack bourgeois-art-for-art's-sake; while its leftwing offshoot in the new Soviet Union used 'constructivism' or functional artworks, such as photomontage posters in the

hopes that this kind of art could play a vanguard role, alongside the proletariat and the Party, in socialist construction.) More importantly, the degradation of art in the latter part of the 20th century could be attributed to the defeat of the international revolution which erupted at the end of the Second World War in 1945, at the hands of the Stalinist bureaucracy and the Red Army.

As a consequence, in the postwar period, the so-called 'Third Industrial Revolution' in the developed western democracies, characterised by mass production of consumer goods and the rise of new forms of mass media, especially television and its offshoots, resulted in the rise of the 'societe d'consummation' and the entertainments industry. Bourgeois culture becomes a universal culture, obliterating local cultures. Just as it is for European man, reeling under the onslaught of industrialisation in the 19th century, so it is for world man in the 21st century: 'The concentration of property in the hands of the few and the 'fearful and painful expropriation of the masses.... under the stimulus of passions the most infamous, the most sordid, the pettiest, the most meanly odious'. In consequence, all patriarchal relations, and all personal family and communal ties disintegrate, and in their place appears one strong bond - that of the 'callous 'cash payment''. (Capital, Vol. I) In a word, sensuous reality is dominated by money, which becomes capitalism's one essential trait.

Despite having written these words in the middle of the 19th century, Marx could not have painted a truer picture of present bourgeois society. It finds its reflection in so-called 'reality' television, wherein the ratings are determined by base, self-

seeking human behaviour. At the same time, we see the defeat and occupation of Iraq by state sponsored American terror. Across the Arab world, the secular nationalist struggle against imperialism, has demonstrably failed; not just against against overwhelming force; but because their leaders have no answer to the seductive promise of jobs and mass consumerism. Meanwhile the nationalist movement itself has become corrupt and no longer defends the people. The price that the Arab masses must pay is the transfer to transnational control of their natural resources, such as oil. Thus an important (indeed vital) new market is opened up for global capital. Democracy for these people, who have already suffered for a generation under the jackboot of tyrants, is a sham. It means in reality, the achievement of a bogus new sovereignty and submission of a comprador bourgeoisie to global capitalism in general and the American empire in particular. No wonder we see within Arabic culture, a reactionary islamist response, in the form of Al Qaida, etc. The latter, of course, seek to turn the clock back, to return their people to the darkest days of moslem rule. But they go about their bloody business of terror with the aid of the latest developments in western technology. Whilst the bemused masss in the west watch horrified and helplessly, as the spectacle of terror unfolds on their television screens. In the face of over-hyped warnings of a terrorist attack, they yield to the politics of fear. Thus the bourgeoisie and its state have the opportunity to curtail civil liberties even further.. What a pretty pass we have come too!

But why all this passivity in the face of state terror and its mirror image, the shadowy Al Qaida, etc.? Adorno has part of the answer. In his Dialectic of

Enlightenment and Negative Dialectics, he explains that the Nazi era of propaganda represented a relatively primitive stage in the emergence of the mass media. Whereas today we live under a 'total system' of control or 'administered capitalism'. Therefore Benjamin's strategy for attacking it in the 1930s, in particular his conception of vanguard or technological art, which he defined as revolutionary in accordance with the degree to which it is technically (technologically) 'advanced', is naive, certainly by today's standards. It was and still is, only more so, a form of 'technological utopianism'. It is an approach to art, which the neo-avant garde is unwilling to take seriously. They have better things to do with technology, e.g. explore identity issues.

Frederic Jameson takes up the argument:'The fundamental difference between our own situation and that of the thirties is the emergence in full-blown...form of that ultimate transformation of [post- war] monopoly capitalism variously known as the societe de consommation or as post-industrial society.' (See Frederic Jameson's Conclusion in Aesthetics & Politics.)

In the 1980s, Adorno's notion of a 'total system' was identified with the Frankfurt School of critical theory. It came to mean ' a sense of an increasingly closed organisation of the world into a seamless web of media technology, multinational corporations, and international bureaucratic control.' Then it was debunked by the Marxist left on the grounds of idealism, in the form of reductive or deterministic methodology. But that withstanding, today Adorno's ideas do not seem to be so wide of the mark.

Adorno's Theory of the Culture Industry as a 'total system' of control.

This has three main aspects:

(1) The Dialectic of Enlightenment. In the 'Dialectic' Adorno posits a pessimistic assessment of the course of Western historical development. Essentially he sees humanity subordinated to necessity in its struggle against Nature. In this regard he places little emphasis on the role of different modes of production and the possibility of an eventual harmonious relationship between man and Nature, as well as between man and man. Adorno had little faith in the proletariat as an agency of emancipation, on its own behalf or for the whole of humanity. He sees only the increasing misuse of means/end rationality by the ruling class, culminating in technological warfare and mass destruction of human life; as well the decay of art as a free activity of the spirit. (N.B. The D. of E. is also the title of a book co-written by Adorno and Max Horkheimer in 1944-45. The latter was the founder of the original Institute for Social Research in the 1930s, precursor of the postwar Frankfurt School. It was forced to relocate to the USA during the Nazi period. Adorno joined the F.S. in 1938.)

(2) Negative Dialectics. The principle behind this idea is that every cultural achievement is threatened with its own negation. In the case of art, it comes under increasing attack in the 20th century from capitalism's technological innovations, particularly within the sphere of mass production of commodities; but also including the mass reproducibility of text, image and sound; i.e. the mass media. Both Adorno and Horkheimer saw the rapid development of mass culture in terms of the 'culture industry'; they dismissed as 'illusory' the idea that mass culture may

be characterised as a spontaneous form of popularity. Rather they argue that this is manufactured by the capitalist in the interests of profit. The latter is able to manipulate the masses' appetite for crude sensationalism; since they lack or have been denied a cultivated taste, eg. for aesthetically pleasing designs. Adorno sees only psychological regression in mass culture. With 'nothing left for the consciousness but to capitulate before the superior power of the advertised stuff'. The audience seeks to 'purchase spiritual peace by making the imposed goods literally its own thing'. (C.F. Marx's notion of commodity fetishism.) This is then called individual 'taste'. The same argument applies equally to the masses' experience of art and entertainment. They prefer the latter; since it does not require them to have a discriminating taste or to think too much. Adorno hated what he experienced in the USA, which he called 'a completely commercial order'. As an intellectual exile from Germany, he concluded that the American 'culture industry' closely resembled the organisation of a peoples' culture in Nazi Germany. Finally he calls this new social phenomenon the era of 'administered capitalism'. (N.B. This term 'Negative Dialectics' is also the title of a book by Adorno, published in 1973.)

As for art *propre*, as an admirer of Kant, Adorno sticks to the line of classical German idealism. He therefore defines the aesthetic in terms of the individual's mediation of reality, by means of the unity of form and content: The artwork is a dynamic between the artist's material and his intention. 'Without intention there would be no form [ ] intention is the identifying principle in its immanent shape.' Intention should seek to objectify itself in the work of art and is the purpose of

critical understanding of Nature, the world. Form is the distinguishing concept of art. It is a qualitative and antagonistic (oppositional) dividing line between art and the prose of life. Thus art acquires its distance and autonomous status. The centrality of form is the mediation of the content of the artwork. It is the very essence of artistic labour. But form is not merely the harmonious arrangement of given elements within the work. Since the artist seeks to annihilate past forms, without annihilating form itself. This is the basis of Modernism which emerged in the late 19th century. However form is an 'amoral essence'; since the more art emphasises form (e.g through the rise of aestheticism), the greater the injustice in the real world. Art has a 'twofold culpability': It creates distance and thus allows culpable real life to go unchecked. This puts enormous strain on the artist.

Thus the traditional aesthetic is negated in the 20th century through the rise of the anti-aesthetic. Adorno sees this as a manifestation of the artist's 'destructive discontent with modern culture'. The rise of a 'matter-of-factness' type of art is the inevitable outcome of the 'regressive side' of the Dialectic of Enlightenment. (C.F. the 'culture industry'.) Literal art or completely objectified art (such as the 'ready-made') becomes mere fact and ceases to be art. This negation occurs, because of the artist's realisation that 'absolute freedom of art' contradicts the 'abiding unfreedom of the social whole'. The artist chooses to give up this burden and to capitulate to capitalism's one true bond, the 'callous cash payment'. Adorno also cites the increasing inhumanity of society as another factor. Art begins to lose its autonomy in both theory and practice. The constituent elements of art that were synonymous with human self-affirmation, i.e. the use of form as the means by

which the artist seeks to express his attitude to his subject, allegedly have lost their force; therefore they are wantonly abandoned. Adorno was no great supporter of functional art in any shape or form!

Finally Adorno sees humanity, as a whole, suffering from its divided self or the 'two torn halves' of the Dialectic of Enlightenment, which 'do not add up'; i.e. the dichotomy between, on the one side, high art/intellect and reason in the service of beauty and freedom; on the other, mass culture, the 'culture industry' and sensuousness dedicated to crude sensationalism. We could up date this thesis by citing the emergence of a grey area in between, in the form of anti-art, increasingly in the service of direct production, aided and abetted by the mass media, which presents the artist to society as a cause celebre.

(3) Nevertheless the only possibility for humanity to be reconstituted in its wholeness, is through a defence of the traditional aesthetic. Here we find a solution to humanity's suffering, which is consistent with German idealism, e.g. Kant's theory of beauty, as disinterested; but in its purposelessness we can find purposiveness; also Schiller's notion of the achievement of the aesthetic state. The catalyst for this transformation of society is to be none other than critical theory, in the hands of theorists such as the members of the Frankfurt School, Through their agency, abandoned aesthetic concepts, long since sedimented in the art of the past, are to be resuscitated. In this regard, no doubt Adorno believed that his last great work, 'Aesthetic Theory', first published in 1967, just two years before his death, is a testament or written history of unconscious human suffering

at the hands of a failed Enlightenment project, which had merely plunged humanity deeper into the rule of means/end rationality. Adorno had a blind humanist faith in the idea of the 'self-constituting' human subject; regardless of the contradiction which reality confronted him with; namely the capitalist division of labour; since this is the very basis of the 'two torn halves' of his dialectic of humanity, which he himself says, 'do not add up'. In 1968 his revolting students walked out of his lectures. They complained that since he was so preoccupied with art, the word 'practice' had disappeared from his writing!
With hindsight, we also need to consider what Adorno was up against.

Therefore we need to elaborate further on the anti-art which Adorno begins to address in his final work. More than 30 years after his death, we can now identify the disparate movement which is behind it; as the neo-avant garde. However this is not to be confused with its more illustrious predecessors. The original avant garde was essentially humanist in outlook, certainly in Russia. After all, these artists tried to reunite art with practical life; so that art too could play a direct role in human liberation. Arguably the defeat of the historical avant garde has had a negative effect on future generations of artists and critics: - The continuous rise of successive neo-avant garde movements since the Second World War, are collectively speaking, a negation, of the left avant garde. The two avant garde movements are only superficially alike: Each has a strong preference for anti-art. Both appear to share a utopian view of the future. Except the old avant garde's view of the future envisaged a new and higher epoch of socialism and communism. Whereas the neo-avant garde's view of the future actually means more of the same,

i.e. a continuation of the existing epoch of capitalism. Somehow, capitalism and its 'callous cash payment', continues to be a progressive force for humanity. But given the enormous increase in human suffering, certainly in global terms, this optimism could be described as myopic and narcissistic, as well as cynical in attitude. Objectively this is a dystopian view of the future.

These neo-avant garde movements are , of course, a reflection of the so-called 'third industrial revolution'; i.e. the eventual submission of the masses to the ongoing levelling effects of fully-developed capitalism; aka. the rise of mass consumerism and the modern mass media society in the second half of the 20th century. These changes are further refracted by the art institution, of which they are a part; in particular, the rise of a new intellectual current commonly referred to as Postmodernism. Since the latter offers the neo avant garde intellectual reinforcement for its activities. Depending on one's ideological perspective, postmodernism may be described as: (1) merely a new form of theorising about culture; (2) or it stands for both a new theory and a social period; i.e which has replaced the period of Modernism. Then again we would be justified in describing every new period as 'modern'; since this is the moment when people, who think, are able to reflect on recent events, including artistic and cultural movements, and to question all of what has gone before; hence the need to negate the past,etc. In this sense the term 'postmodern' has very little meaning. Therefore it would perhaps be more useful to define the term 'postmodernism' as merely a new theory . It is characterised by an ambiguous attitude to both the present and the future.

Postmodern theory (N.B. which is deeply implanted within the art institution itself), helps to reinforce the bourgeois economic and cultural order. A key element of postmodernism is the notion of relativism. In response to the swamping of high art by the culture industry, we have a new idea - that all cultural products, regardless of their quality, are of equal value. In effect, this is an acknowledgement of capitalism's levelling effects, or the engulfing of all quality by quantity. Thus the postmodernists offer an intellectual fig leaf to the neo avant-garde, as the advocates of anti-art objects. As we have already seen, these are ambiguous; since they are bring practical life into the art institution, whilst preserving the art institution itself; albeit now under the domination of market forces. At the same time this involves the overthrow of the traditional aesthetics (N.B. the concept of beauty, the unity of form and content within art, individual creativity and craftsmanship). Finally, along with a penchant for the superficial and the trivial, we see a rejection of functional art and the humanist aim of changing life directly. In addition the postmodernists have an uncritical attitude to the commodification of art. Now this includes the rise of the artist as businessman or the direct producer of surplus value, which he accumulates on his own behalf. In this respect, he is assisted by the mass media, which turns him into a celebrity.

To sum up, the neo avant garde and their intellectual supporters, the postmodernists, do not wish to bite the hand that feeds them. They do not seek to overthrow the art institution or to change the life. According to them this has already been achieved by advanced capitalism, i.e. mass consumerism and its

conduit, the mass media, as well as the culture industry. This is their reconciliation with bourgeois reality.

Critique of Adorno.

Adorno uses abstract theory to explain the meaning of the aesthetic, as well as the relationship between art and society. As a result he comes up with an analysis of how this relationship evolved in the 20th century, which is divorced from the historical process. Thus his characterisation of 'late' capitalist society is only accurate as a snapshot of history; since he ignores the contradictory process that proceeded it; i.e. the struggle between capital and labour, which originates in the economic base and is carried on in the superstructure of society (i.e. production, institutions of labour and the state, ideology).

Therefore, on the one hand, we have to agree with his description of the USA as the source and model of a 'completely commercial order'. On the basis of this model he correctly identifies mass consumerism or the 'post-industrial society' as a 'total system' or 'an increasingly closed organisation of the world into a seamless web of media technology, multi-national corporations and international bureaucratic control'. Given his description of the the twin poles of modern culture as the 'torn halves of an integral freedom, to which however they do not add up; no doubt he would agree with both Schiller and Marx's analysis that, fundamentally, this is due to the capitalist division of labour: So that, as Schiller observed (when industrial capitalism was just getting under way), 'enlightenment and reason' has

not taught the 'civilised classes' to act morally. Rather they have used their monopoly of creativity and reason in accordance with a means/end rationality, which is ultimately destructive of the productive forces (of which humanity is the most important) and of humanity's relationship with the rest of Nature; whilst the 'lower and more numerous classes' remain the slaves to the 'more immediate satisfaction of their drives' (sensuousness, practical reason, cut off from the cultivation of the intellect).

Later Marx would say something very similar: 'Labour produces marvels for the rich, but it produces privation for the worker....It produces beauty, but deformity for the worker. It replaces labour by machines, but it casts some of the workers back into barbarous forms of labour and turns others into machines. It produces intelligence, but it produces idiocy and cretinism for the worker.' (EPM. See section on Private Property.)

On the other hand, Adorno fails to acknowledge the struggle between base and superstructure, or as Marx puts it, within 'anti-aesthetic spirit of reality'; concretely the revolutionary upsurge, both in Europe and the colonial world, which errupted immediately after the end of the Second World War. This upsurge began in Italy and Eastern Europe in 1945 and spread to China and Vietnam; culminating with the May Events in France in 1968. All of these struggles were to end in a historical defeat for the international working class. But, with the possible exception of 1968, each of these defeats was not engineered by a 'total system' of control or 'administered capitalism'. They were the direct result of the crisis of revolutionary

leadership of the working class; i.e. the betrayals of Stalinism and reformism. Since the latter were acting in their own self interest, they chose to defend the bourgeois order in its hour of need. Firstly, the revolution movement in Italy and Eastern Europe in the late 1940s, was not due to the existence of a 'completely commercial order' and its powers of seduction. Since mass consumerism and the 'culture industry' had yet to be introduced into Europe. Rather these mass movements for freedom were defeated by the irresistible material force of the Red Army.

The defeat of the international revolution came at enormous cost for the workers. It marked the gradual decline of its ability to organise itself independently of the state. The collective struggle would eventually give way to disillusionment and the atomisation of the class. (In Britain, for example, the Miners struggle began with a limited victory over wages in the 1970s; but ended with their total defeat at the hands of the state in the 1990s. As a result whole communities have been devastated.) Out of this defeat, today we see only the passivity of the masses, despite the fact that, right across the developed world, the majority of ordinary people are now facing new and more serious attacks on their living standards, in the form of a pensions crisis and social security cuts .

Nevertheless, we cannot deny the fact that this historic defeat was subsequently reinforced by the 'third industrial revolution', i.e. the onset of mass consumerism and the rise of the new mass media society, as well as an explosion of the 'culture industry'.These developments were also accompanied by an increase in living

standards for the workers. Therefore it can no longer be said that the workers in the developed areas of ther capitalist world are depressed physically - as are their counterparts in the less developed areas - although it could still be said that they are depressed intellectually. Arguably subordination of the new technologies to a means/end rationality, represents a gross misuse; since this takes the form of advertising, the manufacture of unnecessary wants (pursuit of personal status, conspicuous consumption, via the mania for designer logos, etc. N.B. As Adorno says, there is 'nothing left for the consciousness but to capitulate before the superior power of adverised stuff'.) Public service broadcasting has been swept aside by ubiquitous commercial interests. Hence the rise of wall-to-wall television soap operas, game shows, and now 'reality TV'; as opposed to a balance of entertainment, drama and documentary TV, etc. Now we must also include the rise of the personal computer, the internet, the camcorder, the digital camera and the mobile phone. This new wave of technological advance exacerbates further the tendency towards atomisation and bourgeois egotism within society, especially among the young. Once again we find a gross imbalance between the trivial and the edifying.

Thus today the relatively affluent masses in the developed capitalist world can only gaze with passive bemusement at the mass media's portrayal of the continuing class struggle in the third world; since the latter is becoming increasingly desperate and barbaric, e.g. in Africa and parts of the Middle East.

Finally we cannot agree with Adorno's solution to the human tragedy of loss and unfulfilled potential, which essentially is the same as Schiller's notion of the 'aesthetic state'. Once again this resides in humanist art, which springs from the individual's irrational response to means/ends rationality of practical life; i.e a desire for freedom. According to Adorno, he is somehow able to push back 'oppressive, overstuffed furnishings of an age' which rejects 'absolutes' and 'beauty'. It may once have been true that art represented

the unconscious history of human suffering against an Enlightenment gone wrong; but not any more, in so far as the neo-avant garde has anything to do with it. Whilst the masses are too engrossed with the 'culture industry'. We may agree with Adorno about the importance of aesthetic concepts wih regard to the defence of the aesthetic and the idea of artistic labour, freed from compulsion and domination. But we cannot agree with his view that these by themselves can bring reason's struggle to its senses and direct its power towards human self-realisation. This is despite his own valiant efforts to revive the aesthetic by means of his own lifelong commitment to critical theory.

Conclusion

Contrary to the idealist view of the history of 20th century art, art's democratic golden age has not yet happened. For such an age to exist, we will need the revolutionary transformation of society by means of the emergence of mass

communist consciousness; since the revolution must be the conscious achievement of the masses themselves. But there's the rub; since the masses have been impoverished in the spiritual sense (i.e. they lack an aesthetic sensibility), precisely how will this mass communist consciousness come about. There is no magic blueprint, since previous experiments have given birth to monsters? (Of course, the latter is another can of worms, which we cannot open here!)

Bear in mind Gramsci's 'optimism of the will and pessimism of the intellect'. A communist future, wherein man can exist in a human relationship with the world, seems less and less likely. But of this I am certain: It will only be possible for each and every individual to achieve his/her full artistic potential, when the labour process is, once again reunited with an aesthetic sensibility. But this will also include the production of aesthetically endowed objects which are a means to an end (direct use values), as well as the production of aesthetic objects which are ends in themselves (indirect use values); i.e. they are not functional in the conventional sense, save their ability to stimulate thought or reflection, as well as give pleasure to the consumer. Such objects d'art are the highest expression of free or dis-alienated labour; since they are the fruits of the human imagination; they exist solely for man's contemplation and delight. In this regard, they have only an indirect use value. Therefore both decorative art, as well as functional art, are equally valid. As for the latter, at its very best, it is also an example, first and foremost, of a work of art in and for itself; it functions as both an object for contemplation and delight; as well as striving to be critical of society at the same time; in the hope that it might have the effect of not only making people think; but

it might lead them to take the apropriate action Thus both forms of art should still bear some kind of relationship with the world; whilst constituting a new reality, which is able further enrich the world at one level or another. Such art, of course, will become increasingly important with the spread of human knowledge, the liberation of a multiplicity of latent talents and increased leisure time for everyone. It will stand alongside aesthetically enhanced material labour, which is the product of freely associated labour, i.e. direct use values, which spring from a society based on production for man, not production for production's sake.

But what we need today, if we are to rescue art's autonomy, in either its decorative or functional role, which is one of the bourgoisie's greatest achievements, is a strategy and practice for art, that works against the stream; one that works in opposition to the capitalist division of labour, as well as the levelling effects of commodity production, whose outcomes are the fragmentation of human consciousness, combined with the depersonalisation of the individual on a mass scale. If art is to aspire once again to the status of dis-alienated labour, as a precursor of humanist (communist) man, an objectively determined set of criteria is required; which is firmly grounded in tradition; itself the seedbed of new insights and innovation in art. How else are we to understand and appreciate, let alone supersede humanity's highest cultural achievements? This understanding may be arrived at both informally and formally (e.g.. from one's own reading, by immersing oneself in an artistic milieu) or by means of a more formal education. The latter, of course, would require a reversal of the current government policy, which sees art only in the narrow utilitarian sense, as a means to an end. Hence the

teaching of art is subordinated to design and technology in schools at secondary level. Rather the teaching of art for its own sake, as a part a humanist based curriculum needs to be reinstated. Likewise the same applies to higher education.

At the same time mechanisation must be seen as the handmaiden of art, instead of a substitute for feeling and thinking, which involves mediation at both the subconscious and conscious level. Only on this basis could we envisage the fulfilment of a multitude of untapped creative potential within society. But it would be hard to envisage the implementation of such a strategy for art without a revolution in general social consciousness. Once again, when and on what basis will the latter arise?

Arguably all of the above, is germane to what Marx means when he says, 'If you want to enjoy art, you have to be an artistically cultivated person.' (EPM) He wants as many individuals as possible need to have a basic knowledge of the history and theory of art. On a broader front, if only the technologies of mass reproducibility could be turned away from the culture industry and aimed in this direction! In this regard, a massive expansion of public service television, without any extra cost to the consumer, would be important. It would certainly signal a greater belief in the capacity of the masses to accept a higher standard of entertainment than at present, eg. in the tradition of Dennis Potter's Singing Detective, etc.

Thus a defence of the objective basis of art, is in no way opposed, in Luddite fashion, to new developments in style and technique or format. Neither does it exclude the rise of new art media, based on new industrial technology; historically the rise of the mass reproducibility of image and sound, as well as text; the possibility of combining all of these (as in film and advertising). It should be clear from previous comments that I have a largely positive attitude to the achievements of Modernist art, much of it based on the new technology, especially film and television.

But all of this can only be achieved through the simultaneous and conscious effort of collective humanity to overthrow private property, as a truly outmoded concept. Although such an overthrow marks the beginning not the end of the revolution; because the task of this collective movement also entails, necessarily, the total elimination the rule of capital (commodity relations and its alienating effects), combined with the simultaneous deconstruction of the capitalist division of labour and its concomitant, the fragmentation of the human psyche. Communism is, of course, as Marx says, "the positive abolition of private property, as the appropriation of human life, is thus the the positive abolition of all alienation, and thus the return of man from religion, the family, the State, etc., to his human, i.e. social life.' (EPM)

Only a Communist society can establish the conditions for the dis-alienation of all. Morawski summarises three elements from the writings of Marx and Engels in support of this: (1) The creative abilities of each person will be developed to the full; everyone capable of becoming a Shakespeare might do so. (2) The character

of work will become more aesthetic; because it will involve the free play of the physical and the intellectual senses. (3) Every person will develop an aesthetic sensibility to some degree. he will be able to realise this in every domain of the arts. No longer would we have a society dominated by professional painters, etc.; but only painting as one pursuit in which everyone might participate.

This last point is mentioned as early as the German Ideology and as late as Engel's Anti-Duhring. Morawski warns against privileging any one of these points, at the expense of the others. This can only lead to a one-sided interpretation of Marx's aesthetics; e.g as set out in Marx Penseur de la Technique (Paris, 1962). Its author, Kostas Axelos. not only emphasises the aesthetic suffusion of labour; but he suggests that Marx anticipated the disappearance of the art object. If thus is so, then paradoxically, 'Marxian dis-alienation would provide a retrograde utopia, an atavistic lapse into the time when aesthetic structure had still to be consciously developed. In other respects, Axelos' vision is a dimmming of the Marxian original into a mere reverie on the idea of technical benefits.'

Morawski argues that it would be rash to conclude that artistic specialisation will disappear or that artistic abilities would be distributed equally throughout society. He stresses Marx and Engel's great prescience with regard to point (2) When one considers the potential for today's industrial art (rather than what has actually been achieved), then the integration of art with technology would also be accompanied by increased leisure time, which would be a stimulus to study and creativity. (C.F. the current situation, wherein we see very little in the way of the shortening of the

working day, compared even to Marx's time.) The prime dynamic factor of the future epoch of humanity, will be the release of the latent capacities of the oppressed under capitalism; once the subordination of the 'stupid masses' to the 'burdended geniuses' - who presently control their destinies - has been overthrown. The time would then be ripe for the emergence of homo aestheticus. (See Morawski's Introduction.)

For Marx, all 'seemingly fatal contradictions' men can solve themselves by a critical and revolutionary reconstruction of the world. Once again, this requires those 'newfangled men' (and women). But only the future struggle can show whether humanity will overcome the contradiction between its artistic and its economic development. This is, of course, bound up with the future of humanity itself. Meanwhile, as Bob Dylan says in one of his more profound songs: 'It ain't dark yet; but it's gettin' there!'

Postscript: A Modest Proposal

In the Short Term:

Both Hegel and Marx predicted the inevitable decadence of art in modern times, as a result of capitalism's levelling effects (the engulfing of quality by quantity), combined with the continuous rise of mechanisation. Nevertheless we can venture some short-term solutions to this decline. But these are contingent upon the

unlikely revival of the class struggle, involving both the working class and the middle class; but along with the political struggle, is also mindful of the need to defend art and culture:

(1) At the theoretical level, a thorough critique of postmodernism should be undertaken from the standpoint of materialist dialectics.

(2) At the political level, we need an organised campaign, starting with the schools, to restore the teaching of art for its own sake, freed from the constraint of means/end rationality; i.e the freeing of art and design from commercial interests.

(3) Restore the teaching of art history and theory to its rightful place at university and college level.

(4) Revive the tradition of craftsmanship in mainstream education, as advocated by William Morris at the end of the 19th century. Since the 'Arts and Crafts' movement was against ruthless commercial expansion, the cynical proliferation of the useless, the squalor and pollution carelessly created by industrial production, against monotony and deadening of the human spirit. At a time of increasing anxiety about the social effects of globalisation, echoes of the Arts and Crafts molvement are still with us.' (Fiona MacCarthy.) The beauty of craftsmanship is that it establishes the possibility for the middle-class person to rediscover the sensory joys of creating things by hand (or with the aid of technology, whilst not allowing the latter to do everything for you); whilst the worker is allowed the new luxury of thinking, including a consideration of aesthetic ideas.

(5) Restore public service broadcasting, but on a broader and higher plane, with adequate investment, based on progressive taxation. We need more quality dramas, documentaries, film classics, etc. (such as are presently broadcast by the BBC4

digital TV channel); i.e many more programmes of a high artistic and cultural content should be made for free-for-view TV, not at an extra cost for the consumer, as at present.

In the Long-term:

As Marx says, only a communist revolution can bring about a true renaissance of the arts on a broader and higher basis. Since, only a Communist society can establish the conditions for the dis-alienation of all, commensurate with the rise of 'homo aestheticus' as the fulfilment of man's telos as a species being. (See Section 9.)

April 2005

Sources:

Aesthetics and Politics: Key Texts of the Classic Debates Within German Marxism (Afterword by Frederic Jameson), Verso Press, London, 1986.
Walter Benjamin, The Author as Producer, 1934 (Reprinted in Reflections, Schocken Books, New York, 1986.)
The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,

(Reprinted in Illuminations, Schocken Books, New York, 1985.)

Peter Burger, Theory of the Avant Garde, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1989.

Terry Eagleton, Anti-Humanism, London Review of Books, 5th February, 2004.

Georg Friedrich Hegel, Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics, Penguin Books, London, 1993.

Vladimar Illich Lenin, Collected Works, Vol. 38, Progress Press, Moscow, 1972.

Mikhail Lifshitz, The Philosophy of Art of Karl Marx, Pluto Press, London,1973.

Eugene Lunn, Marxism and Modernism, University of California press, 1984

Karl Marx, Capital, Vol. I., 1859.

The Communist Manifesto, 1848.

Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts, 1844.

The German Ideology, 1846.

Documents on Marxist Aesthetics, Eds. Lee Baxandall and Stefan Morawaski, New York, 1974.

Isaak Illich Rubins, Essays on Marx's Theory of Value, Black Rose Books, Montreal, 1982.

Madan Sarup, Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism, Harvester Wheatsheaf, London, 1988.

Robin Spencer, James McNeill Whistler, British Artists, Tate Publishing, London, 2003.

Adolfo Sanchex Vazquez, Art and Society, Merlin Press, London, 1979.

John Willett, The New Sobriety: Art and Politics in the Weimar Period, Thames and Hudson, London, 1987.