

THE MEMORY AND EXPECTATION OF AESTHETICS:  
A STUDY OF ADORNO'S *AESTHETIC THEORY*

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# ABSTRACT

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**Title: The Memory and Expectation of Aesthetics: A Study of Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory***

This study aims to clarify the underlying conceptual structure of Adorno's theoretical position with regard to both philosophy and art and to examine the expectation of philosophical aesthetics. I introduce *Aesthetic Theory* from a morphological point of view and claim that the form and structure of this unfinished text reveals a great deal about the book, as it exemplifies Adorno's theory of meaning. I claim that for Adorno dialectic is better thought of not in its Hegelian form but as a Kantian antinomy. This is because the dialectical oppositions he identifies cannot be resolved under the capitalist conditions of the administered world. I claim that philosophy understood as the construction of a form of totality, the constellation, provides the key to understanding Adorno's theory of meaning. This theory consists of three linked concepts: midpoint, constellation and parataxis. I further claim that for Adorno art and philosophy are structured in the same way. Adorno has in effect developed a conception of art that depends for its ultimate justification on the concept of rank as explicated by the completion of the work of art by philosophy. Art and theory are thus entwined in a mimetic relationship. I claim there is a temporal dichotomy at the centre of Adorno's conception of the work of art, that it is both transient and absolute. This antinomy is what makes the work of art a paradoxically absolute commodity precisely because Adorno's concept of the work of art is modelled on the commodity form. I claim that Adorno's conception of the artwork as an instant is clearly closely related, in a structural and conceptual sense, to his conception of how philosophy works. Truth for Adorno is always located in the present instant. My textual analysis leads me to claim that for Adorno a utopian element is involved in writing a negative dialectical text. Finally, I claim that a theory of the art form in all its different typologies is best suited to carry out detailed critique and theoretical reflection on contemporary art. Philosophical aesthetics can only supply an historical perspective.

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## PREFACE

‘In order to lay hold of the fleeting phenomenon, he [the philosopher] must first bind it in fetters of rule, tear its fair body to pieces by reducing it to concepts, and preserve its living spirit in a sorry skeleton of words’.<sup>1</sup>

‘...the philosopher is always implicated in the problems he poses,’<sup>2</sup>

The second quotation above has a double significance for this study. First, Adorno always thought of himself as a musician. He was a skilled pianist but was also a composer. Early on in his life he was unsure whether he would become a composer or a philosopher. Second, for my own part as both a visual artist and student of philosophy I was attracted to *Aesthetic Theory* for two reasons. As a student of philosophy I have always been fascinated by texts that do not reveal their meaning on a first reading. As an artist I have always been engaged, as a reader, with aesthetics and art theory. I know from my own practice that there is an aspect to making art that is theoretical. This is because making is a form of thinking, just as writing is a form of thinking. The old saying that you only find out what you think by writing it down holds for painting too.

In his essay *Skoteinos, or How to Read Hegel* Adorno gives advice on reading Hegel. My methodology in what follows is to take Adorno’s advice on how to understand Hegel and apply it to reading Adorno’s *Aesthetic Theory*. The advice in question concerns the suggestion that reading for understanding, if done properly, if done immanently, will lead to a critique of what is to be understood. ‘Philosophy itself takes place within the permanent disjunction between the true and the false. Understanding takes place along with it and accordingly always becomes in effect, critique of what is to be understood when the process of understanding compels a different judgement than the one that is to be understood.’<sup>3</sup> Adorno has a second piece of advice about reading both Kant and Hegel that also applies to his own texts. It is generally accepted that almost any philosophical text if scrutinised minutely enough can be, in Heidegger’s usage subjected to de-structuration. There is a danger, especially with Adorno, of taking quotations out of context and so giving them a false reading. *Aesthetic Theory* is eminently quotable and easily misconstrued. In his fourth lecture on Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* Adorno stresses how important it is to keep in view the wider intentions of the writer of the text.

It is necessary for thinking about Kant - and to a far greater degree about Hegel - that the process of thought should carry a double movement. On the one hand, it should immerse itself in the text, and keep as closely to it as possible; on the other hand, it should retain a degree of self-control, remove itself from immediate contact and look at the ideas from a certain distance. This is because very many of the difficulties in Kant and Hegel, but also

in Fichte and Schelling, arise when you scrutinize the texts too closely and so fail to recognise their intentions, whereas these can be perceived much more clearly at a distance.<sup>4</sup>

The procedure for this investigation of *Aesthetic Theory* will be a close reading continually informed by a stepping back for a wider view.

*Aesthetic Theory* is a book of and about philosophical aesthetics, and of and about art. The book has twin openings. The 'Draft Introduction' asks whether aesthetics is still possible, whilst the opening section of the main text asks whether art is still possible. The two questions are connected because if there is no contemporary art then there will be no contemporary philosophical investigation of art, no aesthetics. It looks like a question about the end of art. However from Adorno's point of view it is equally a question about the end of philosophy. If philosophy is no longer possible then aesthetics is at an end. If art is understood as being inextricably bound up with philosophy, as it is for Adorno, then by implication art is at an end if the discipline that uncovers the truth of art is at an end. If modern art changes into anti-art then there might be nothing modern philosophy can do to explicate it other than turn into an anti-philosophy. It is the relationship of art and philosophy for Adorno that is the main subject of this examination of *Aesthetic Theory*.

Studying the history of philosophy is an essential part of contemporary philosophy, studying what Heideggerians call 'the memory of thought'<sup>5</sup>. Similarly, in order to study contemporary aesthetics it is essential to study the memory of aesthetic thought. This is the intended use of memory in the title of this thesis. Within the memory of aesthetics can be detected a conception that the philosophical discourse on aesthetics involves an element of expectation. This can be seen early on in the discourse, in Kant's theory of genius; 'the genius gives the rule to art'. It can also be found, far later, in the 'Draft Introduction' to *Aesthetic Theory*. 'The concrete historical situation of art registers concrete demands. Aesthetics begins with reflection on them; only through them does a perspective open on what art is. For art and artworks are exclusively what they are able to become.'<sup>6</sup> For Adorno, authentic contemporary artworks are the promise of future happiness as they point towards the possibility of a radically different, fully transformed, society in the future where art is no longer forced to be alienated in its opposition to the administered world of monopoly capitalism. Jean Marie Schaeffer also describes an aspect of expectation in modernist art, in his book, *Art of the Modern Age*, '... in "modernist" historicism the prospective dimension is essential: the past is not a completed model, it only represents the first steps of a future evolution.'<sup>7</sup> In his *Futures Past* Kosselleck argues that a significant change took place in the concept of history and the late eighteenth century so that it included a horizon of

expectation.<sup>8</sup> It is precisely these prospective elements in philosophical aesthetics that lie behind the use of ‘expectation’ in the title of this thesis.

The question ‘what is aesthetics?’ is as difficult as any other ‘what is...?’ question. For over two hundred years in philosophical circles the word aesthetics has generally been shorthand for philosophical aesthetics, a branch or sub-division of Western philosophy. To complicate conceptual matters Western philosophy itself divided into three whilst the nature of aesthetics was still evolving, continental, pragmatic and analytic. Nowadays these philosophical boundaries are increasingly fluid. As a collective singular in ordinary English usage the word aesthetics has two main historical meanings. The first is ‘The science of the conditions of sensuous perception – 1803.’ The second main historical meaning is itself divided in two: ‘The philosophy of taste or of the perception of the beautiful – 1833.’<sup>9</sup> Dr Johnson might well have kicked another stone and remarked grumpily that aesthetics ‘was something to do with art... whatever that is!’ These three meanings are a clear pointer to conceptual confusion in the future. All classifications have fuzzy edges. At one time early investigators of the life sciences decided to classify living creatures into plants and animals, which was an ‘either... or...’ classification. Eventually viruses were identified that fit neither classification fully, but both partially, thus showing up an incipient problem in the original division into plants and animals. But, in historical terms, the original division was eminently rational given the state of knowledge at the time. It was only at a later time that it became problematic and at that later time zoology and botany seemed to theoreticians of the subjects to make more sense combined into biological science. An analogous change has I believe occurred with aesthetics. At the time when modern philosophical aesthetics developed, in the late eighteenth century and into the early nineteenth century, it existed as a branch of philosophy. Philosophy as a discipline, had, at that time magnificent grandiloquent pretensions to systematise thought. Nothing would escape philosophy, but everything did, except the study of itself. This in a nutshell is what I claim in this study has happened to aesthetics, it has become the study of the history of itself. Art has escaped aesthetics just as the virus foxed botany and zoology. Indeed one could agree with Adorno’s tart observation in the ‘Draft Introduction’ to *Aesthetic Theory* that Kant and Hegel were the last philosophers who were able ‘to write major aesthetics without understanding anything about art.’<sup>10</sup> Adorno, on the other hand, insisted on the importance of critique being targeted at a particular artwork as opposed to a genre. For Adorno each artwork exemplified Goethe’s claim that ‘True works of art contain their own theory and give us the measurement according to which we should judge them.’<sup>11</sup> Whilst Goethe’s claim can be understood as a claim that works of art cannot be criticized, Adorno on the other hand believed, in line with the Jena Romantics, that works of art had to be completed in critique.



Adorno understood music so well that his writings on music are better described as musicology than as aesthetics. However, *Aesthetic Theory* is probably best described as an extended meditation on the possibility and simultaneous impossibility of philosophical aesthetics.

Art is an open concept that evades definition. However, conceptual expertise and theoretical reflection exist for all forms of art. This theory of art forms cannot in all conscience any longer be called aesthetics. To begin with most of the experts in the theory of art forms are not philosophers. A few are, and as with some of Adorno's texts where philosophy ends and musicology begins, depends entirely on whether the reader is a philosopher or a musicologist. Judgement on such a text can be made meaningfully in either court, philosophy or musicology, and it is a nonsense to call either or both aesthetics. Neither does this mean that all forms of art form theory can be brought under the rubric of aesthetics for that would be to fall back into the old hegemonic philosophical ways of thinking of the time of Kant and Hegel. Philosophy can no longer take over the various discourses on the arts, all it can do is intervene for the sake of clarity by tracing the philosophical heritage of a conceptual formulation. In short to use the brief history of philosophical aesthetics as a tool to help analyse the origins of conceptual confusions, if this is philosophical aesthetics then it is a form of historical study.

In the first, introductory, chapter of this research project I open the first section by exploring the brief history of modern aesthetics in order to be in a position to introduce the text that forms the centrepiece of this investigation *Aesthetic Theory*. The reception of *Aesthetic Theory* has been short and partial in Anglophone studies. I introduce the text from a morphological point of view as the form and structure of this unfinished text reveals a great deal about the book as it exemplifies what in chapter two I identify as Adorno's theory of meaning, revolving as it does around his concept of the constellation. *Aesthetic Theory* is also an interdisciplinary text and in the second section of chapter one I examine the question of interdisciplinarity. It is Adorno's Marxist approach that helps define the interdisciplinary nature of *Aesthetic Theory* in that he does not recognise disciplinary boundaries as anything more than illusory divisions. However, it is also the case that within the tradition of continental philosophy, the historical hermeneutical sciences, such as anthropology, sociology and psychology have close and in some respect shared conceptualities with philosophy. In the final part of the first chapter I explore Adorno's conception of culture that stands in sharp contrast to the more recent cultural studies movement.

The second chapter is divided into three sections and in it I explore Adorno's philosophical and artistic position by employing the concept of totality in three related senses. I take three objects that for Adorno are all linked, capitalism, philosophy and artworks. I argue that

each of these three objects can be best understood through three different methodological forms of totality: capitalism as negative totality, philosophy as constellation and artwork as monad. In the first section I argue that Adorno's conception of capitalism as a form of negative totality is fundamental to his world view. Whilst his concept of society is somewhat ambiguous and his ideas of the relationship between the individual and society seem to rule out meaningful collective action his philosophical position and his theory of the artwork are clearly fully informed and shaped by his Marxist position. I claim that for Adorno a dialectic is better thought of not as Hegelian in form, but as a Kantian antinomy. This is because the dialectical oppositions he identifies cannot be resolved under the capitalist conditions of the administered world. In the second section I claim that philosophy understood as a form of totality, the constellation, provides the key to understanding Adorno's theory of meaning.

This theory consists of three linked concepts: midpoint, constellation and parataxis. Allied to these three concepts are the three ideas of formation, presentation and interpretative understanding. Reading a philosophical constellation of concepts involves for Adorno reading more than appears to be there at first sight. This is a paratactical reading that implies that for Adorno art and philosophy are structured in the same way. In the third section of this chapter I explore the artwork as totality. Adorno uses Leibniz as a model and takes the monad as an exemplar of the artwork because the monad is both a universal and a particular, both a thing and a being. Monads reflect the external world and are dynamic in time. Artworks for Adorno reflect the administered world of capitalism and are dynamic in time in that their interpretations change over time. I claim that for Adorno artworks and philosophy share the same abstract structure both take the only forms they can against the negative totality of capitalism.

The third chapter is divided into three sections. In the first section I examine Adorno's conceptions of autonomous art and commodification and of success and coherence. For Adorno both artworks and commodities share the same abstract structure. The success and coherence of works of art are explored next. It becomes clear that for Adorno art has to reach a level of coherence if it is to be classified as art and the judgement that an artwork is successful does not come from outside the work but is internal, the artwork is itself the source of its own norms. In the second section, construction, I explore two important ideas for Adorno's theory of the modern artwork, montage and mimesis. Montage is a form of construction where elements are brought together so they can be read, sometimes in an instant. Construction underlies twentieth century art for Adorno. Mimesis and construction are dialectically opposed for Adorno. I explore the complex inter-linked conceptions of mimesis in *Aesthetic Theory*. These range from mimesis in language, in art and in the interpretations of artworks. There is also an Aristotelian aspect to

mimesis that is fundamental to artworks in that they mimic the other, the administered world. The last section of this chapter is concerned with judgement. Interpretation, commentary and critique are essential to the completion of an artwork by philosophy. It is the spirit and truth content of an artwork that is recognised by philosophy. This is a position that effectively excludes non-philosophers from the highest form of critical engagement with art. Adorno has in effect developed a form of definition of art that depends for its ultimate justification on the concept of rank as explicated by the completion of the work of art by philosophy. Art and theory and thus entwined in a mimetic relationship.

The fourth chapter is concerned with the temporalities in *Aesthetic Theory*. I argue that four forms of time inform *Aesthetic Theory*: chronological time, historical time, the time of the artwork and phenomenological time. Adorno's Marxist philosophy of history seeks to understand the past in the present in the hope of effecting change in the future. This is an interpretation of 'concrete history,' which he understands as a constellation. So for Adorno, history, like philosophy is modelled on structured forms. For Adorno there is a dialectical relationship between the new and the 'ever the same' that is based on Marx's commodity form. Indeed I claim that Adorno's abstract concept of the artwork is modelled on the commodity form. The autonomous work of art is, like the commodity form, an illusion, a semblance, both subject and object, both being and thing, both a commodity and work of free spirit, both within time as transient and an absolute, this is the relativity of artworks. This is the temporal dialectic at the centre of Adorno's conception of the work of art, that it is both transient and absolute. This antinomy is what makes the work of art an absolute commodity precisely because Adorno's concept of the work of art is modelled on the commodity form. The work of art is transient because the critique of it is always in a process of becoming and at any one historical moment this critique can in that historical moment reveal the truth, the absolute, about that work of art, a revelation of the truth in the metaphysical medium of philosophy: a truth that is always historically mediated. In the second section, musical time and phenomenological time are examined by means of a constructed historical narrative that seeks to trace Adorno's idea as to how musical time changed from the time of Bach to John Cage. Over this period of time Adorno argued that musical time became progressively spatialised. In addition Adorno believed that the works of the past were best interpreted by means of the works of the present. He thought Bach, for example, was best understood from the point of view of the music of Webern and Schoenberg. The less the music of the mid twentieth century seemed like earlier music, ceasing almost to be describable as music, the more it illuminated the past but the more it proved difficult to interpret. The constructed nature of *Aesthetic Theory* mirrors the constructed nature of contemporary music

of the 1960s and equally evades easy interpretation. Underlying his conception of history is Adorno's fundamental belief that truth is historical, that the truth, the absolute aspect, of any work of art is only identified by philosophical critique. The truth of a work of art, its participation in the absolute, is always now in the present time of interpretation, commentary and critique. The final section examines Adorno's conception of the instant. Like many of Adorno's concepts his theory of the instant is derived from ideas of Walter Benjamin. The instant is the moment of truth in a work of art. The experiential time of an artwork culminates for Adorno in this strange encapsulation of the totality of what a work means in a short space of time, the blink of an eye. This is not a temporal experience in terms of either musical time or phenomenological time. It is a form of understanding described as if it were a temporal moment. Adorno's conception of the artwork as an instant is clearly closely related, in a structural and conceptual sense, to his conception of how philosophy works: in metaphorical terms, as a form of instant pattern-recognition. This recognition of a moment also operates within his conception of history and in his theory that works of the past are best illuminated by the forms and structures of works in the present. The new reveals the old. The present moment then becomes the essential element in his conception of history, of art and of philosophy. Truth for Adorno is always located in the present instant.

In the final chapter, I analyse the topos of expectation in *Aesthetic Theory* from three viewpoints: his view on utopian expectation, his philosophical relationship with Heidegger and finally the relations between philosophical aesthetics and art theory. The main way Adorno thinks of utopia in *Aesthetic Theory* is as the negation of the administered world encapsulated within the freedom inherent in the making of an autonomous artwork. Further, the rationality of construction, derived from the administered world, may well, Adorno argues, point forward to perfected art forms in a future changed world. I claim that there is an epistemological utopia inherent in Adorno's style of writing. This can be identified in a paragraph at the end of the introduction to *Negative Dialectics* where the utopian nature of conceptual thought when expressed by rhetoric in an antinomical text is visible. My analysis of this passage leads me to claim that this utopian element involved in writing a negative dialectical text is clearly closely related to the utopian aspect involved in the construction of an artwork and is another Adornian parallel between art and philosophy. The one-sided relationship between Heidegger and Adorno is well known. The parallels between Adorno and Heidegger are striking despite their obvious artistic, political and philosophical differences. Fundamentally they differ over their respective views on truth. For both Adorno and Heidegger truth is non-propositional. For Heidegger truth is a foundational revealing as exemplified in a great work of art that serves to found an historical

epoch. Thus both the truth, the work and the epoch are only identifiable after the event. Whilst the work looks forward, it is only identified retrospectively. For Adorno by contrast the truth content of a work of art is a historically changing constellation of aesthetic elements as interpreted by philosophy. The truth content of a work of art is revealed, illusory as it is, by the external forms of interpretation, commentary and critique, but in an uncanny parallel to Heidegger this is always best done from the point of view of the present as retrospective understanding.

In the final section I explore the antinomical and mimetic relationship between philosophical aesthetics and art-form theory with regard to the expectation of philosophical aesthetics. In *Aesthetic Theory* Adorno is clearly concerned about the obsolescence of aesthetics. This he argues is because aesthetics continually fails to confront its object the work of art. If one examines what texts do confront the artwork then today they are all to be found within the wide variety of art form theory. The interdisciplinary nature of the crossover between philosophical aesthetics and art form theory does not make art form theory philosophical aesthetics. Essentially art form theory discourses are related to philosophical aesthetics historically and yet have to operate as separate discourses in their own right. This leads to the overall question of the meaningful survival of philosophical aesthetics as a discipline theorising about any art forms in the present day. I claim that the expectation of philosophical aesthetics is now limited to its memory, limited to looking back. A great deal of philosophical aesthetics as practised today in academic circles is precisely an examination of aspects of the memory of philosophical aesthetics, it is a looking back, an industry of re-evaluations of theories from the short history of philosophical aesthetics. This is an archaeology of philosophical aesthetics. As long as there is a memory of philosophical aesthetics that is found interesting enough to re-examine then the expectation of philosophical aesthetics is of a growing field of historical studies.

## CHAPTER ONE

# IDENTIFYING AESTHETICS

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section is an introduction to philosophical aesthetics and to *Aesthetic Theory*. The second section is concerned with interdisciplinarity and cultural studies.

### Section One: Aesthetics and *Aesthetic Theory*

#### **Brief historical background to Aesthetics.**

Modern aesthetics is a philosophical subject area that started in the mid to late eighteenth century with no less than five separate definitions as to what aesthetics was within fifty years. For Baumgarten aesthetics was a form of sense perception concerned with beauty. ‘Aesthetics (as the theory of the liberal arts, as inferior cognition, as the art of beautiful thinking and as the art of thinking analogous to reason) is the science of sensual cognition.’<sup>1</sup> For Kant aesthetics was initially a mode of conceptual understanding concerned with sensory perception. Kant distinguished his use of aesthetic in his *Critique of Pure Reason* from that of Baumgarten. It is worth quoting Kant’s footnote in the *Critique of Pure Reason* because it is an excellent indicator of the state of the use of the word and change of concept in 1787 and is a pointer to some of the problems that lie ahead.

The Germans are the only people who currently make use of the word ‘aesthetic’ in order to signify what others call the critique of taste. This usage originated in the abortive attempt made by Baumgarten, that admirable analytic thinker, to bring the treatment of the beautiful under rational principles, and so to raise its rules to the rank of a science. But such endeavours are fruitless. The said rules or criteria are, as regards their chief source, merely empirical, and consequently can never serve as determinate *a priori* laws by which our judgement of taste must be directed. On the contrary, our judgement is the proper test of the correctness of the rules. For this reason it is advisable either to give up using the name in this sense of critique of taste, and to reserve it for that doctrine of sensibility which is true science - thus approximating to the language and sense of the ancients, in their far-famed division of knowledge into *sensation and thought* - or else to share the name with speculative philosophy, employing it partly in the transcendental and partly in the psychological sense.<sup>2</sup>

Even in this first re-definition, Kant still leaves open the older sense so establishing a fundamental ambiguity of use. Kant’s second re-definition of the word aesthetic comes in the

*Critique of Judgement* where he restricts the word to its transcendental usage but changes that usage from the ‘doctrine of sensibility’ to ‘the aesthetic power of judgement’ on the grounds that the third critique is concerned with an ‘inquiry into our power of taste’.<sup>3</sup> This third change of use of the word aesthetics returns it closer to its use in Baumgarten as pertaining to the senses concerning the beautiful but further restricts it to its new transcendental use in the concept of aesthetic reflective judgement. Kant has in effect altered his definition of aesthetics to become a philosophical account of the nature of judging the beautiful in nature and art.

There is a fragment by Schlegel, ‘Critical Fragment no. 40’ which questions the use of the word aesthetic. ‘In the sense in which it has been defined and used in Germany, aesthetic is a word which notoriously reveals an equally perfect ignorance of the thing and the language. Why is it still used?’<sup>4</sup> This is very probably a reference to Kant’s redefinition of aesthetic, not once but twice. Hence in the space of less than 40 years we have three distinct uses for the same word. The next few years saw two further changes to the concept of aesthetics. For the Jena Romantics and Schelling, aesthetics, or the philosophy of art, was the highest form of philosophy. As Schelling stated: ‘The objective world is only the primitive, as yet unconscious, poetry of the spirit; the general organon of philosophy - and the keystone of the whole arch - is the *philosophy of art*.’<sup>5</sup> Art is therefore fully within the sphere of cognition and hence of truth. Indeed Schelling suggested, in line with the other Romantics, that philosophy can only be understood through art. ‘The appropriate sense by which this kind of philosophy must be comprehended is thus the *aesthetic* sense, and for this very reason the philosophy of art is the true organon of philosophy.’<sup>6</sup> The idea that the work of art is a process of becoming whereby successive interpretations can only be expected is at the heart of the theory. For the Romantics this endless interpretation was the absolute, a kind of infinite process. As Schelling also remarked in his *System of Transcendental Idealism*:

The artist seems to have presented in his work, as if instinctively, apart from what he has put into it with obvious intent, an infinity which no finite understanding can fully unfold. ... So it is with every true work of art: each is susceptible of infinite interpretation, as though there were an infinity within it, and yet we cannot at all tell whether this infinity lay in the artist himself or whether it resides solely in the art-work.<sup>7</sup>

The logical development of this idea of art as a form of absolute is the supposition that, for Schelling, there is in fact only one work of art, an absolute beauty, one of the highest rank in which and of which what we normally regard as separate works of art are merely participating.

...for as aesthetic production proceeds from freedom, and if the opposition of conscious and unconscious activity is absolutely precisely for freedom, then there exists really only a single absolute work of art, which can to be sure exist in entirely different exemplars but which yet is only one, even though it should not yet exist in its most original form. To this view it cannot be objected that it would be inconsistent with the great freedom with which the predicate "work of art" is used. That which does not present an infinite immediately or at least in reflection is not a work of art.<sup>8</sup>

This absolute work is held to be 'not yet existing', a phrase that occurs many times in *Aesthetic Theory*, demonstrates a prospective element to the philosophy of art. It is a form of expectation. Schelling went on to state that 'Absolute objectivity is given to art alone. If art is deprived of objectivity, one may say, it ceases to be what it is and becomes philosophy; give objectivity to be philosophy, it ceases to be philosophy and becomes art.'<sup>9</sup> On Schelling's later, *Philosophy of Art*, when art has ceased to be the pinnacle of the system, Kai Hammermeister states: 'Art is a vital contribution to thought because it still fulfils functions that cannot be executed by conceptual thought, yet ultimately it depends on the philosopher to interpret its exploits.'<sup>10</sup>

Finally, after Schelling's total identification of art with philosophy, the fifth re-definition of aesthetics was given by Hegel. At the start of the *Lectures on Fine Art* we find: 'These lectures are devoted to Aesthetics. Their topic is the spacious *realm of the beautiful*; more precisely, their province is *art*, or, rather *fine art*.'<sup>11</sup> Hegel goes on to state that 'the word "Aesthetics", taken literally, is not wholly satisfactory' as it has its origins in Baumgarten's *Aesthetica* 'when works of art were treated with regard to the feelings they were supposed to produce'. Hegel explains that: 'attempts were made ...to frame others, e.g. "Callistics". But this too appears inadequate ... We will therefore let the word 'Aesthetics' stand; as a mere name it is a matter of indifference to us, and besides it has meanwhile passed over into common speech.'<sup>12</sup> For Hegel, aesthetics was largely an account of the history of the development of art, which understood in spiritual terms must culminate in philosophy. In his historical account Hegel claimed that art had once been highest form of absolute knowledge in ancient Greece. Art was then later replaced in this role by the Christian religion, which in turn had now been replaced by philosophy. Only in philosophy could knowledge of the absolute be attained, in the present, by Hegel.

To this muddled heritage were subsequently added sub-disciplines of other disciplines each dealing with art from a different perspective, art history, the sociology of art, the psychology of art and a more recent phenomenon of the twentieth century known as art theory that borrows from all the above. A fine beginning one might observe for a long history of misunderstandings and redefinitions as recently analysed by Peter Osborne who correctly points out the historical ambiguity still in use as regards the 'conflation of art and aesthetic' within contemporary



‘philosophical discourses about art.’<sup>13</sup> The basis of this confusion according to Osborne is ‘a longstanding confusion ...between the terms of the two main philosophical discourses about art that were established at the end of the eighteenth century: *art as “aesthetic”* and *“art as ontology”*’.<sup>14</sup> Part of the confusion in recent years, according to Osborne, has been the fact that after Duchamp much visual art simply was not presented as ‘aesthetic’ in the traditional sense of being a sensuously appealing object of contemplation. The same can be claimed for the advanced music and literature of the time. The confusion between art and aesthetic, according to Osborne, encouraged traditionally minded philosophical commentators on art to claim that art is at an end and to largely restrict their commentary on art to works that are unambiguously in the older defunct tradition, such as Francis Bacon, and to fail to engage with conceptual and post-conceptual art. If the memory of aesthetics is so muddled then Schegel’s question which has been hanging unanswered since the late eighteenth century as to why the word is still used is still a critical question concerning the expectation of aesthetics.

### **The reception of *Aesthetic Theory***

There is a real sense in which the reception of *Aesthetic Theory* is still in progress. Clearly the reception of Adorno’s work started in Germany as *Aesthetic Theory* was not published in English until 1984. There is then a further lag as it took quite some time for a few of the seminal texts on *Aesthetic Theory* written in German to be translated into English. Richard Wolin wrote that ‘*Aesthetische Theorie* constitutes a monumental effort to vindicate modernism, to authenticate its ‘right to exist’ from a historico-philosophical point of view, however precarious that right might appear to be in contrast with the grandeur of classical works of art.’<sup>15</sup> In 1984 Abrecht Wellmer considered that the ‘critical response’ to Adorno’s aesthetics has led to a situation where ‘only fragments and remnants of his work in this area live on in philosophical, literary and musical scholarship. It is not the esoteric nature of the *Aesthetic Theory* that has hampered its reception. The problem lies rather in its systematic aspects;’<sup>16</sup> Wellmer considers that different aspects of Adorno’s theory have been re-used by others but that even the detailed critiques of Adorno’s aesthetics that have been produced, which he in large measure agrees with, leave a sense that ‘the actual substance of Adorno’s aesthetics eluded them.’<sup>17</sup> At the end of his discussion of truth, semblance and reconciliation Wellmer admits that ‘Adorno’s writings on aesthetics themselves possess something of the qualities of a work of art. and thus may not be captured or surpassed by any process of interpretation.’<sup>18</sup> Rüdiger Bubner considers that Adorno’s *Aesthetic Theory* ‘has proven to be his true philosophical testament.’ His main criticism of Adorno’s theory of the artwork is that philosophy ‘adds what can never be contained in them: the interpretation of their

meaning as *the negation of existing reality*.<sup>19</sup> He further argues that ‘Adorno’s aesthetic theory tends toward dogmatic self-validation.’<sup>20</sup>

Simon Jarvis on the other hand thinks that the title *Aesthetic Theory* is ‘intended to distinguish Adorno’s work from formal aesthetics and from art history.’<sup>21</sup> Peter Osborne in his essay of 1989 presents ‘*Aesthetic Theory* as a *materialist metaphysic of modernism*.’<sup>22</sup> Writing in 1991, Lambert Zuidervaart describes Adorno as ‘one whose last major book and its central philosophical claims are, for the most part, ignored in the English-speaking world.’<sup>23</sup> He goes on to describe *Aesthetic Theory* ‘as a modernist reconceptualizing of philosophical aesthetics, especially the writings of Immanuel Kant and G. W. F. Hegel.’<sup>24</sup> Zuidervaart also claims *Aesthetic Theory* to be a book of meta-aesthetics, for ‘it presents philosophical reflections on philosophical aesthetics and it elaborates the categories and procedures employed in Adorno’s previous writings on the arts.’<sup>25</sup> Zuidervaart’s book is still, after eighteen years, the only entire book in English devoted to *Aesthetic Theory*. It came out at a time when arguments concerning the nature of the post-modern were fore-grounded in many texts published at the time in the tradition of continental philosophy. Consequently a great deal of the discussion centres around the topic of post-modernism. For Jay Bernstein the project of *Aesthetic Theory* is to reflect on the ‘terms of analysis’ of ‘aesthetic modernism.’ ‘Using the achievements of modernist art as its guiding thread, it seeks to trace the critical transformation that aesthetic discourse performs upon the language of reason (truth only cognition and categorical morality). Only through such a reflection can we comprehend how art’s apparent unreason reveals the irrationality of formal, enlightened reason.’<sup>26</sup> Hauke Brunkhorst on the other hand considers *Aesthetic Theory* to be ‘a critique of culture by art.’<sup>27</sup> Brunkhorst quotes Adorno: ‘In the *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*, he writes, “The common ether of aesthetics and sociology is critique.” And the *Aesthetic Theory* postulates a “critique of culture through art”.’<sup>28</sup> Kai Hammermeister writes of *Aesthetic Theory* that – ‘Adorno’s magnum opus on the theory of art is a collection of meditations on central concepts of classical aesthetics. These are intimately woven reflections, yet they are not clearly structured. Adorno’s basic manoeuvre is to take up the notion of paradigmatic aesthetics and unfold their negativity.’<sup>29</sup> In his excellent literature review John Roberts considers that following the publication in English of *Aesthetic Theory* in 1984 ‘Adorno’s writing has had an extensive influence on the rethinking of the question of autonomy in Anglophone art theory and philosophical aesthetics. ... generating by the late 1990s a minor academic industry in Europe and North America.’<sup>30</sup> Roberts identifies five different strands of critique of among Adorno’s commentators which in effect are five different political understanding of Adorno’s concept of autonomous art. In addition there is an enormous philosophical literature on Adorno that largely

ignores *Aesthetic Theory* except to make passing reference to the text. There are useful introductions to Adorno's thought, such as Max Paddison's work on Adorno's aesthetics of music where the references to *Aesthetic Theory* are sparse. There is no doubt *Aesthetic Theory* is a forbidding text, one that I believe holds the key to Adorno's philosophical position. It does not stand alone, *Aesthetic Theory* must be interpreted as the final stage of a massive corpus of texts that lead up to it.

### **Introduction to *Aesthetic Theory*.**

If Schiller's 'fleeting phenomenon' is the work of art, and the 'sorry skeleton of words' philosophical aesthetics, then Adorno's late *magnum opus*, *Aesthetic Theory*, published posthumously in an unfinished form in 1970 may be 'sorry' but it is no 'skeleton'. It is a massive text that few commentators have come to terms with as a whole. For any reader in any language to open the book at any page is to see part of the problem. The reader is presented with a continuous text with no chapter divisions, no sub-headings, nothing but paragraph divisions. In addition there are single blank line divisions between the twelve sections of the main text. For a reader of *Aesthetic Theory* in English there are two separate translations. The first translation by Christian Lenhardt was published in 1984. This translation did not follow the layout of the original German text but was divided into twelve chapters with numbered sub-headings and paragraphs that do not follow the layout of the original. To add to the misleading layout 'transitional phrases were interpolated such as: "as we saw" or "as we said" or "let us remember".'<sup>31</sup> This all gives the impression that the text is discursive. In addition, many words that were in a foreign language in the original were translated into English so their effect was rendered invisible. However, this first translation does have two merits. The first, is a comprehensive index of both names and concepts. The later translation in English only has a name index. The second merit is that, unreliable as aspects of the translation are thought to be, it is far easier to read than the second translation and is therefore still a useful introduction to the book.

The consequence of having two translations in English is that early articles on *Aesthetic Theory*, and some books, published in English refer to, and quote, the first translation. After the second translation by Robert Hullot-Kentor was published in 1997 references in the literature on Adorno in English were increasingly referenced to the Athlone Edition. Unfortunately, in 2004, the publishers Continuum took over the Athlone edition and republished it with a different pagination. The secondary literature on *Aesthetic Theory* in English from 2004 on can now be referenced to either of two editions of the second superior translation, each with a different

pagination. This of course makes looking up such references an unnecessarily complex task. The decision to 're-package' the book in a re-designed uniform series must have been a marketing as opposed to a scholarly decision. The result is to make a difficult book even less accessible. Commodification of the product *Aesthetic Theory* thus continues, Adorno would have been appalled, if unsurprised.

There is no simple key to *Aesthetic Theory*. No summary can be made without distortion. This is true of most important philosophical texts, their innate complexity evades paraphrase and frequently understanding. In his *Philosophy of Existence* Karl Jaspers raises precisely this possibility of misunderstanding a text. '...one experienced the truth of Schelling's remark that philosophy is an "open secret". One may *know* texts, and be able to trace their thought constructions with precision – and yet not *understand* them.'<sup>32</sup> One approach to *Aesthetic Theory* is through its structure. Clearly it is impossible to look solely at the structure without paying attention to the content. In a sense only familiarity with the content allows one to look at the structure. But such a morphological approach to *Aesthetic Theory* reveals something fundamental. The book as it stands presents a forbidding wall of text. It is also unfinished. The unfinished nature of the book is seen clearly in the 'Paralipomena' where sets of paragraphs are grouped together awaiting either rejection or incorporation into the unnamed sections that roughly form the whole. These sections would have been revised. Whilst this unfinished state matters a great deal to any approach to the content of the book, it does not matter to the morphological approach. The structure of *Aesthetic Theory* is as clear in the unfinished text as it would have been in the final version. How can this structure be described? The text is a totality consisting of a set of fragments. The basic unit is the sentence, a fragment in itself for it is only a part of a larger whole, the paragraph. In English many of these paragraphs are less than a page long, most are one to two pages in length. Some paragraphs are 3 pages long and only three run to four pages with one at over just over 5 pages. The paragraphs are in themselves mini-totalities and they in turn are grouped together in sections. The twelve sections in turn form the group that is the whole. In addition to these twelve main sections there are 154 paragraphs in the Paralipomena, some no more than fragments, and a short section on 'Theories on the Orgins of Art'. Finally come the 'Draft Introduction' and 'Editor's Afterword.' The 'theory', the content, is presented, or more accurately painstakingly discovered by the reader, within this structure, within this form, which could itself be called 'aesthetic' but it could equally well be called 'philosophic'. It is quite possible Adorno hoped that *Aesthetic Theory*, in its final state, would be an elegant constellatory set of statement about theories of art and aesthetics and hence aesthetic in a double sense. So the

morphology of the text reveals it to be an aesthetic/philosophic structure about theory concerned with aesthetics. The aesthetic structure mirrors the philosophical structure.

In 'The Essay as Form' Adorno contrasts the 'positivist tendency' with its 'rigid separation of form and content' and his essayistic approach. In this essay, Adorno claims – '...it is scarcely possible to speak of the aesthetic unaesthetically, stripped of any similarity with its object, without becoming narrow-minded and *a priori* losing touch with the aesthetic object.'<sup>33</sup> Adorno clearly thinks that the very act of writing about art cannot but be aesthetic, that writing about art cannot be undertaken in flat un-expressive matter of fact prose. He is not claiming that writing about art should itself be a form of art. His claim is closer to the Jena Romantic's notion that criticism of a work of art is itself an integral part of that work in the sense that criticism completes the work. I will return to this aspect of Adorno's Romantic understanding of artworks in the next chapter concerned with his ideas about art works as monads. As Fredric Jameson wrote about *Aesthetic Theory* - '...the method might be Marx's, but the philosophical form something closer to *Finnegans Wake*.'<sup>34</sup> It is worth quoting what Walter Benjamin had to say about the style of Friedrich Schlegel's fragmentary style of writing for it parallels Adorno's style.

...the epistemological presuppositions are bound up in the most intimate way with the extralogical, aesthetic determinations and can be divorced from these and presented separately only with great difficulty. At least at this particular period, Schlegel cannot take up any idea without setting his entire thinking and all his ideas into unruly motion. This compression and close connection of the epistemological insights within the whole mass of Schlegel's thinking appear to have heightened their bold paradoxical character, and vice versa.<sup>35</sup>

Adorno's writings have been called 'atonal philosophy' by Susan Buck-Morris<sup>36</sup> this points to the suggestion that *Aesthetic Theory* was consciously conceived of as *if* it were a modernist composition. However, the motive for the style is not artistic but philosophical, although as will be seen the two are linked. Adorno often cites 'Rimbaud's dictum' concerning the necessity to be absolutely modern in *Aesthetic Theory* with reference to art. In his article 'Why Philosophy?' he applies it to philosophical texts. 'Rimbaud's phrase: "it faut être absolument moderne" is not a programme of an aesthetic nature, nor one likely to appeal to lovers of neat and tidy schemes. It is a categorical imperative of philosophy.'<sup>37</sup> *Aesthetic Theory* is not structured in a traditional sense. Consequently reading this text becomes a different form of activity from traditional reading of a linear text. It becomes necessary to first read the text before you can read it again for understanding. This is nothing new in philosophy, the same demand was made by Schopenhauer in the Preface to *The World as Will and Representation* on the grounds that 'the beginning

presupposes the end almost as much as the end the beginning, and that every earlier part presupposes the later almost as much as the later the earlier.’<sup>38</sup> Anyone who reads *Aesthetic Theory* expecting a linear narrative to unfold will quickly find themselves disorientated. Not until several subsequent readings are the constellations of concepts revealed to the reader. In *Negative Dialectics* Adorno compares writing philosophy to composing music, ‘Its course must be a ceaseless self renewal,’ and that ‘philosophy is not expoundable.’<sup>39</sup> This last ominous phrase should give any interpreter of Adorno’s philosophical texts a clear warning. Adorno’s philosophical texts, and in particular *Aesthetic Theory* are written, or composed, in order to resist easy interpretation just as Samuel Beckett’s plays resist interpretation.

*Aesthetic Theory* was to have been dedicated to Samuel Beckett and the motto for the book was intended to be Friedrich Schlegel’s *Critical Fragment* 12 – ‘What is called the philosophy of art usually lacks one of two things: either the philosophy or the art.’<sup>40</sup> At the time Schlegel published this fragment (1798-1800) there were very few texts it could have applied to. The two main ones would have been Kant’s Third Critique, *The Critique of Judgement* (1790) and Schiller’s *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1795). Kant was justifiably accused by Adorno (along with Hegel) of being among the last ‘able to write major aesthetics without understanding anything about art.’<sup>41</sup> In contrast Schiller can be accused of writing so elegantly and poetically that the philosophical content is rendered opaque. This motto by Schlegel would have announced at the very start of *Aesthetic Theory* what might be called the Romantic heritage of *Aesthetic Theory*. The extent to which Adorno was influenced by the Jena Romantics directly is hard to judge, he was however thoroughly familiar with Walter Benjamin’s text *The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism*. The further ramifications of this Romantic heritage will be examined in the next chapter.

One aspect of the verbal style of *Aesthetic Theory* is Adorno’s use of foreign words. As Robert Hullot-Kentor, the second translator of *Aesthetic Theory*, puts it in one of his essays on Adorno, ‘foreign, classical, and archaic terms recur regularly; ...all these techniques break the normal rhythm of the sentence and not only demand persistently reconstructive labour on the reader’s part, but bring concepts into otherwise unavailable association.’<sup>42</sup> As Adorno commented in *Minima Moralia* ‘German words of foreign derivation are the Jews of language.’<sup>43</sup> Berthold Hoeckner suggests that Adorno’s use of foreign words, particularly in *Aesthetic Theory*, was aesthetic. ‘The appearance of these words in his own writings, I suggest, does precisely and paradoxically what he claimed only the German language could offer to philosophy namely, an authentic form of expression and presentation. The *Fremdwort* becomes Adorno’s performance of the aesthetic.’<sup>44</sup> The example Hoeckner gives for *Aesthetic Theory* is the use of the English word

*apparition*, which keeps on *appearing* throughout the text. As Hoeckner comments: ‘The foreign word is like a fleeting poetic moment in philosophical prose. It is an enigma in need of exegesis, even though its meaning is impossible to grasp. Adorno fulfils that interpretative need by suggesting that an apparition, like fireworks is ephemeral, sudden, explosive.’<sup>45</sup> This use of a foreign word is precisely the effect of montage. The addition is exactly calculated to contrast with its context. In his essay ‘On the Use of Foreign Words’ Adorno claims he wants ‘to release their explosive force: not to deny what is foreign in them but to use it.’<sup>46</sup> In this essay Adorno argues that a purist organic view of language would try to exclude the use of foreign words as inappropriate. He sees in them ‘the incursion of freedom.’<sup>47</sup> He quotes Walter Benjamin in *One-Way Street* who compared a writer with a surgeon who inserts ‘the silver rib of a foreign word’ into a text in order to cure it and describes this as ‘the dialectic of the foreign word’<sup>48</sup>. In his essay ‘Words from Abroad’ Adorno claims that an author ‘can, however, take advantage of the tension between the foreign word and the language by incorporating that tension into his own reflections and his own technique.’<sup>49</sup> The foreign word provides an ‘interruption of the conformist moment of language’ and can serve ‘the expression of truth.’<sup>50</sup> Further on in a passage where he is criticising Heidegger’s ‘jargon of authenticity’ for largely excluding foreign words Adorno claims that – ‘Every foreign word contains the explosive material of enlightenment, contains in its controlled use the knowledge that what is immediate cannot be said in unmediated form but only expressed in and through reflection and mediation.’<sup>51</sup> Later he states - ‘Only the foreign word that renders the meaning better, more faithfully, more uncompromisingly than the available German synonyms will allow a spark to flow in the constellation into which it is introduced.’<sup>52</sup> Adorno writes of ‘the social process undergone by foreign words, and in fact by language itself, a process in which the writer can intervene to make changes only by recognising it as an objective one.’<sup>53</sup>

*Aesthetic Theory* is undoubtedly difficult to read. The stylistic characteristics of the text described by the second translator in a striking way. ‘No one from the land of edutainment would compose these starkly unbeckoning sheer sides of type, uninterrupted by chapter titles or typographic markers, that have severed and jettisoned every approach and patched over most every apparent handhold.’<sup>54</sup> The unapproachability of the text is not just in the form but in the structure as well. This aspect of reading Adorno’s prose is well described by Terry Eagleton in the following way.

Every sentence of his texts is thus forced to work overtime; each phrase must become a little masterpiece or miracle of dialectics, fixing a thought in the second before it disappears into its own contradictions. Like Benjamin’s, this style is a constellatory one,

each sentence a kind of crystallized conundrum from which the next is strictly non-deducible, a tight-meshed economy of epigrammatic *aperçus* in which every part is somehow autonomous yet intricately related to its fellows.<sup>55</sup>

*Aesthetic Theory* is in twelve sections. It is entirely possible that the number of sections would have altered during the final revision that Adorno planned to make and so it is fanciful to read anything into the number twelve. But if one allows fancy to take its course then the musical parallel with twelve tones inevitably comes to mind. The twelve tones determine the structure, they are the material, the *stoff*. In what sense are they the most up to date materials? It is the technique with which they are manipulated, the construction that is up to date, the spatial arrangement, the enigmaticalness of the text, the difficulty of reading. The twelve tones stand together, they do not lead on one from another. To list them is easy, to summarise them is very difficult except in such general terms as are encapsulated in the titles. (These section titles refer to the second translation into English, they do not appear in the original.)

1: Art, Society, Aesthetics

2: Situation

3: On the categories of the Ugly, the Beautiful, and Technique.

4: Natural Beauty

5: Art Beauty: Apparition, Spiritualization, Intuitability

6: Semblance and Expression

7: Enigmaticalness, Truth Content, Metaphysics

8: Coherence and Meaning

9: Subject-Object

10: Toward a Theory of the Artwork

11: Universal and Particular

12: Society

Twelve sections whose titles yield 25 topics. In addition are the Paralipomena, consisting of twelve groups of paragraphs ordered by the editors into twelve groups in the same order as the twelve sections and a short section on theories concerning the origin of art. Finally, there is the 'Draft Introduction', the topic of which is aesthetics. This is in effect a constellation of constellations as each of the sections is itself a constellation. Adorno's conception of the constellation will be examined in the next chapter.

So who is it for? What audience of readers is it written for? Not for the general reader but for a set of audiences. For an academic philosophical audience, and for audiences of artists, critics and art theorists. As John Roberts reported, 'In conversation with two artist friends recently, both



declared Adorno was a far more serious and productive guide to their practices than any other philosopher or aesthete.<sup>56</sup> It would be entirely in keeping with Adorno's position as a public intellectual that he would hope for a wide audience but without for a moment relaxing his rigorous dialectical style of writing. Any audience needs to be familiar with Bach, Baudelaire, Beckett, Benjamin, Beethoven, Berg, Brecht, Croce, Freud, George, Goethe, Hegel, Hölderlin, Kant, Klee, Lukács, Marx, Mozart, Nietzsche, Plato, Proust, Rimbaud, Schelling, Schiller, Schoenberg, Schopenhauer, Schubert, Shakespeare, Valéry, Wagner, and Webern as well as a wide range of other theorists and artists, including the rarely cited Heidegger. This list gives an indication of the scope of the text and the breadth of intellectual, cultural and artistic experience any reader is assumed to have. But by far the highest number of references are to the sextet of Beckett, Benjamin, Beethoven, Hegel, Kant and Schoenberg. This sextet defines the book. One artist and two theorists from the age of the bourgeois revolution, 'without understanding anything about art'<sup>57</sup> and one theorist and two artists from 'the short twentieth century.'<sup>58</sup> Then there is Adorno himself. His earlier texts are essential reading for an understanding of many key ideas that cannot be fully appreciated by studying *Aesthetic Theory* in isolation.

Adorno normally dictated his texts and once he received the typed manuscript he became a critic. 'This process of revision which may end up with every sentence having been changed, was a process Adorno called "carrion-eating" (Lämmergeiern).'<sup>59</sup> Lämmergeiern are a type of vulture that drop bones 'from a height onto rocks to break them: the marrow can then be devoured.'<sup>60</sup> Adorno enjoyed watching them in Frankfurt zoo and adopted the name for his own critical editorial process of text revision. This process of revision of *Aesthetic Theory* was still in progress at the time of his death. Many changes still remained to be made. A characteristic of the writing style of *Aesthetic Theory* is that within a section on a particular topic many of the paragraphs, each of which deals with a different aspect of the subject of the section, have both conceptual and verbal echoes. These echoes are found in the first sentence of the paragraph. I use the word echo to describe this aspect of his writing style because the echoes are reminiscent of the structure of some music. Many of the paragraphs of *Aesthetic Theory* start with a sentence that makes a transition from the subject matter of the previous paragraph by referring to it in the process of introducing the next topic, an echo. An example of the echo would be the sentence at the start of a paragraph on 'The Progress of Art' in the section 'Universal and Particular'. This paragraph follows one on the topic of 'Style'. 'Naïve faith in style goes hand in hand with rancour against the concept of progress in art.'<sup>61</sup> Such echoes give the misleading impression that the whole text is to be read as if it were a discursive text, as if one topic leads on from another. However, as Adorno did not believe that a traditional discursive text was still possible, this echo

has to be regarded as demonstrating his belief that everything is related and that categorisation into particular topics is an illusory quality of academic texts. In this sense echoes can be seen as ironic. As related precisely to the irony of a Jena Romantic fragment. It could well be that the echoes can be taken as evidence that paragraphs starting with them are virtually complete and in the correct order. The final sentence of some paragraphs also act like Jena Romantic fragments, as they both sum up the paragraph and stand alone as quotable statements.

In *Aesthetic Theory* there is a dialectic between totality and fragments, between totalities and singularities, between the book and the sentence. This makes sense of claims that this is a paratactical text where any sentence can stand in for the whole. The editors of *Aesthetic Theory*, attribute this fragmentariness to the factor that left the text in an unfinished state, namely Adorno's death.

Adorno employs the concept of the fragment in a double sense. He means on the one hand, something productive: that theories that bear a systematic intention must collapse into fragments in order to release their truth content. Nothing of the sort holds for *Aesthetic Theory*. Its fragmentariness is the intrusion of death into a work before it had entirely realized its law of form.<sup>62</sup>

The law of form the editors refer to is the constellation, the arrangement of a set of concepts in such a way that they produce an insight, a meaning. This constellation of course operates in the realm of content, of meaning. The same 'Editors' Afterword' contains quotations from Adorno's correspondence about *Aesthetic Theory* that shows the editor misunderstood the nature of the book by claiming its 'fragmentariness' to be 'the intrusion of death'. In contrast it is clear that Adorno did think of the book as a totality composed of fragments, but as seen from the point of view of meaning. '...one must assemble the whole out of a series of partial complexes, that are so to speak of equal weight and concentrically arranged all on the same level; their constellation, not their succession must yield the idea.'<sup>63</sup> It is clear that the philosophical content of *Aesthetic Theory* is going to take the form of a constellation of philosophical and aesthetic ideas ideas concerning works of art set against the totality that is capitalist society.

It is worth considering the title *Aesthetic Theory*. This title has an ambiguity about it created by the juxtaposition of aesthetic and theory. Rüdiger Bubner argued that the title 'is equivocal. "Aesthetic theory" does not only mean that theoretical aesthetics is one subdivision of an extensive theoretical edifice. More important, it means that the text's main concern is the process by which theory itself becomes aesthetic the convergence of knowledge and art.'<sup>64</sup> Hans-Martin Lohmann also sees the title *Aesthetic Theory* as deeply ambiguous. Is it concerned with the 'theory of the aesthetic' or with 'a theory that is aesthetic'? 'The one remains as unclear as the

other and we probably have to resign ourselves to the thought that *Aesthetic Theory* in its entirety has something of a rebus riddle about it that nobody has yet been able to decipher.’<sup>65</sup> He recommends Freud as a key to understanding *Aesthetic Theory*. Andrew Bowie comments that “the suggestion has rightly been made that *Aesthetic Theory*’s title, which has no article, plays with the idea that the theory itself is in one sense aesthetic.’<sup>66</sup> Adorno’s constant use of antinomies is a clue to this ambiguity. If *Ästhetische Theorie* is read as an antinomical paratactical title, a mini constellation in its own right, then the two concepts oscillate between unresolvable opposites of aesthetic(s) and theory. Theory is reflective philosophy, it is reflection upon theory past and present. In terms of expectation theory operates in a realm of concepts that do not fully capture the aesthetic experience of a singular artwork. On the other hand, the realm of the aesthetic is the non-conceptual experience of a singular artwork. The whole of *Aesthetic Theory* revolves around this antinomy. For Adorno the aesthetic concepts of the history of philosophical aesthetics always fail to capture the ‘non-identical’ particularity of any artwork, and yet they inevitably have to be used. One of the clearest expositions of this position is in paragraph 137 of the ‘Paralipomena’.

None of the categories of theoretical aesthetics can be employed rigidly, as unshakeable criteria. Whereas aesthetic objectivity can only be grasped in the immanent critique of individual works, the necessary abstractness of categories becomes a source of error. It is up to aesthetic theory, [ästhetischer Theorie] which is unable to progress to immanent critique, at least to delineate models of its self-correction through the second reflection of its categories.<sup>67</sup>

*Aesthetic Theory* is thus an exercise in ‘second reflection’ where the experience of an artwork is mediated by ‘interpretation, commentary and critique’ which must of necessity operate in the realm of theory. So the title of the book stages the philosophical antinomy that exists between the aesthetic and reflective theory, between the experience of art and philosophy. Between two separate but, for Adorno, inescapably connected realms.

## Section Two: Interdisciplinarity

### Interdisciplinarity: art, aesthetics, philosophy

When Kant wrote *The Conflict of the Faculties* he argued that the state should have control over the three higher faculties concerned with the well being of mankind. First: the protection of private property. – the law. Second: the well being of the body – medicine. Third: spiritual well being – religion. Kant further insisted that the lower faculty, philosophy, should have the freedom to examine the theoretical positions of the other three, independent of state control.

...a university must have a faculty of philosophy. Its function in relation to the three higher faculties is to control them, and in this way, to be useful to them, since *truth* (the essential and first condition of learning in general) is the main thing, whereas the *utility* of the higher faculties promise the government is of secondary importance. ... The philosophy faculty can, therefore, lay claim to any teaching, in order to test its truth.<sup>68</sup>

The idea that other disciplines have developed within philosophy and subsequently split off is related and also puts philosophy as prime. In this sense philosophy is understood to have intellectual progeniture, to be an origin for the evolution of all other disciplines. This is an historical evolutionary position, it is Hegelian, although Hegel was scathing about ‘conglomerates’ of knowledge, disciplines that he considered to have been cobbled together. ‘What is true in any science is so through and by virtue of philosophy, whose encyclopedia comprises all true sciences. ... The encyclopedia of philosophy thus excludes ... mere assemblages of information.’<sup>69</sup> Nietzsche took a similar view to Kant and Hegel concerning the primary position of philosophy. In ‘We Scholars’, the sixth part of *Beyond Good and Evil*, he inveighs against ‘a harmful and improper displacement of the order of rank between science and philosophy which is today ... threatening to become established.’<sup>70</sup> A later variant of this position by Heidegger ends up wondering whether after the progressive splitting away of other disciplines there is any thing left for philosophy understood as metaphysics to do.<sup>71</sup>

By contrast philosophy has a long history of incorporating ideas, theories, beliefs and sets of values that have originated outside philosophy. Other disciplines have similarly absorbed ideas and theories that developed within philosophy. This widening approach recognises the main thrust of interdisciplinary studies requires a wider frame of reference. Roland Barthes identifies an ‘unease in classification’ as an important factor:

Interdisciplinarity is not the calm of an easy security; it begins *effectively* (as opposed to the mere expression of a pious wish) when the solidarity of the old disciplines breaks

down ...in the interests of a new object and a new language neither of which has a place in the field of the sciences that were to be brought peacefully together, this unease in classification being precisely the point from which it is possible to diagnose a certain mutation.<sup>72</sup>

One of the widest frames of reference, developed by Foucault, is the idea of discourse. The idea that disciplines as traditionally conceived can be discovered to be part of deeper structures, such as discourses and domains, comes from a structuralist analysis of knowledge. However, widening the frame of reference from discipline to discourse merely widens the whole within which the various compartments are understood to be contained. It is a form of super-interdisciplinarity.

*Aesthetic Theory* can be regarded as both a genealogy of art and philosophical aesthetics on the one hand, and as a 'world scale narrative' on the other – a genealogical narrative. It is a form of critical history of art and philosophy of art written from the standpoint of the 1960s. As a 'world scale narrative' its precedent in aesthetics is Lukács' *Theory of the Novel*, which Adorno claimed 'set a standard for philosophical aesthetics which has been retained ever since.'<sup>73</sup> *Aesthetic Theory* also has another relationship to Lukács' *Theory of the Novel* – the mood in which it was written. Lukács writing during the First World War found himself writing 'in a mood of permanent despair over the state of the world.'<sup>74</sup> Adorno in the 1960s had a similar mood of despair over the state of the world and the state of art but he was also concerned about the survival of autonomous works of art and by implication the survival of the philosophy of art.

When one comes to consider the relationship of philosophy to the wider contemporary theoretical discourse about art one finds several approaches that relate to philosophy in a number of different ways. In *The Return of the Real* Hal Foster, who writes from the perspective of an art critic, identifies three areas of investigation that 'advanced art' has shared with critical theory, 'the structure of the sign, the constitution of the subject, and the siting of the institution'. His claim is that the relationship between critical theory and advanced art is so close 'that critical theory is immanent in innovative art.'<sup>75</sup> Foster goes even further by suggesting that critical theory is 'not only a conceptual tool but a symbolic, even symptomatic form.' He has an interesting, if not wholly, convincing theory why this is so. 'Since the middle 1970s critical theory has served as a secret continuation of modernism by other means: ... after the climax of the 1968 revolts, it also occupied the position of cultural politics, ... This double secret service - as a high art surrogate and an avant-garde substitute - has attracted many different followers.'<sup>76</sup> Foster draws on the work of philosophers and theorists such as Benjamin, Deleuze, Derrida, Foucault, Kristeva, and Lacan. His suggestion, that there is a symbiotic relationship between philosophical and non-philosophical thought and the production of art, that theory and art feed off

each other would suggest that a philosophical dimension is not only ineliminable to the discourse on art but to the production of art as well.

In *Farewell to An Idea*, a work of art history, T.J. Clark draws on ideas from Hegel, Bakhtin, Adorno and Freud in order to illuminate his thesis that both modernism and socialism as projects, have come to a melancholic end. Clark borrows the structure of his book from Hegel. Each chapter consists of a detailed investigation of a ‘moment’ in the history of modernism. Each selected ‘moment’ illuminates its period very effectively, but, this borrowed Hegelian structure amounts to no more than a striking literary device as opposed to a philosophically informed conceptual investigation.

*Kant after Duchamp* by Thierry de Duve is an interdisciplinary book of art theory that uses philosophy instrumentally with little understanding of the original context. The book is centrally concerned with the reception of Duchamp’s Readymades in the 1960s and is particularly concerned to establish Duchamp’s ‘Fountain’ as a paradigmatic example of twentieth century art. One of de Duve’s borrowed philosophical theses is derived from Saul Kripke. De Duve claims that by naming the urinal by the proper name ‘art’ Duchamp has in fact nominated it as art and that therefore it is art. In chapter 5 de Duve attempts a re-reading of Kant’s ‘aesthetic judgement’ that illegitimately conflates the ‘sensus communis’ with the ‘supersensible’ and is more a homage to Greenberg’s (acknowledged) misreading of Kant than a useful contribution to Kantian studies. As well as relying on Kripke and Kant he attempts to use the ‘archaeological’ methodology of Foucault. These particular ‘borrowings’ from philosophy are a form of misappropriation of sources that exemplify the dangers of such interdisciplinarity for De Duve’s use of these philosophical theories is not undertaken at a level that is fully responsible to the philosophical traditions he attempts to borrow from.

By contrast Peter Osborne’s definitive study *Conceptual Art* is a work of theoretical scholarship that sets the works within the wider philosophically derived theoretical setting in which they were created. It can be described as art history, or art theory, or visual culture, but it is simply self-described as a ‘typology’ of six forms of conceptual art, accompanied by edited texts that give the intellectual background to the forms in question.<sup>77</sup> This all raises the question as to what extent a philosophical dimension to discourse on contemporary art is ineliminable?

All interdisciplinary studies have one thing in common, they implicitly recognise the existence of disciplines, for even to ignore them is to recognise them as something to ignore. In the one position, philosophy is prime and other disciplines are under its ultimate jurisdiction, whether they can be traced as having split off from philosophy as either analytic sciences or as historical hermeneutic sciences. In this view any theorisations undertaken within these disciplines

can be claimed as ‘a philosophy of’. In another position, philosophy proceeds by borrowing and lending, as the different strands of philosophy have certainly done, and in widening the frame of reference. Finally there is the totalising frame of reference as provided by a Western Marxist analysis whose perspective demands an approach that effectively ignores disciplinary boundaries to thought.

Interdisciplinarity has been critically described as a form of intellectual desire that seeks a lost world called ‘*einheitswissenschaft*’ the ‘supra-disciplinary science of culture’.<sup>78</sup> Although, as one might expect, most practitioners of interdisciplinarity would deny this analysis, they would deny they have a repressed desire for a totalising perspective. Most practitioners would claim to be operating at a lower level, that their investigations fall between disciplines, or across disciplines, or involve more than one discipline. There are various prefixes to the word discipline that carry these senses, ‘inter’, ‘trans’, ‘multi’, ‘cross’.

Disciplines have their habitus in the institution of the university where the ‘empirical-analytic sciences’ are in constant disciplinary flux. What were once interdisciplinary projects harden into disciplines in their own right, Biochemistry being the prime historical example. More recently, largely through the desire to investigate ecological systems, the older disciplines of Botany, Zoology and Biochemistry have joined up into Biological Science. The continued investigation of ecological systems has drawn in more specialists from Geology, Soil science, Geography, Paleobotany, Oceanography, and even Land use historians. In short as many specialists as the investigation seems to require. Ecology itself has subsequently been mined for ideas, concepts and models by other disciplines. Similar re-groupings have taken place within the ‘historical-hermeneutical sciences’. For example, in some universities in the United Kingdom, art history has been transformed into a wider discipline called visual culture. One description of visual culture draws on 34 different specialisms.<sup>79</sup> Most of these are ‘borrowings’ from other disciplines surrounding the core components of traditional art history. The rationale behind this re-grouping reflects not merely changes of intellectual fashion within academia, but a reaction to perceived related changes that have occurred within the visual arts and the wider culture since the breakdown of traditional visual art genres in the mid twentieth century.

The concept of borrowing is well established in the new discipline of interdisciplinary studies, which is itself partly a sociology of interdisciplinarity and partly a ‘philosophy of’ a meta-discourse on interdisciplinarity. There are two main problems with borrowing ideas, concepts and models from other disciplines. The first is that their precise use and value within the original discipline may not have been fully understood by the borrower and so doubt may be cast on the validity of their re-use. The second problem is related, the borrowing becomes

commodified in an intellectual sense, becomes an intellectual fashion icon that is then applied across a whole range of disciplines simply because it is fashionable. An example would be the recently fashionable tag ‘postmodern’. An analysis of its actual usage reveals that it meant diametrically opposed things in different disciplines and in different art forms.<sup>80</sup> Other intellectual fashion icons in current use can be identified, ‘discourse,’ ‘text’ and ‘theory’ are possible candidates.

Disciplines and university departments are not necessarily coterminous. Some university departments may only cover part of a discipline. For every discipline, sub-discipline, and emerging discipline, for every inter, trans, and multi discipline there will be a meta-theoretical ‘philosophy of’. It is partly for this reason that some theorists have claimed that philosophy is not a discipline, but an activity common to all disciplines. ‘Philosophy of’ can be identified in each discipline (in the loosest sense) as that activity undertaken when the disciplinarians reflect critically upon their own theoretical structures. How they reflect on their own theories will vary, but sometimes some of it is borrowed theory in the sense that the theories originally belonged to philosophy, linguistics, psychology, sociology, or anthropology, or to any one of what Habermas, in *Knowledge and Human Interests*,<sup>81</sup> has called the ‘historical-hermeneutical sciences’. These disciplines, just like the ‘empirical-analytic sciences’, are much closer theoretically in both their shared intellectual heritage and in their borrowings from each other, than might seem apparent at first sight. This is surely one reason why inter/multi/trans/disciplinarity is both possible and common. Philosophy is itself a divided discipline, historically divided post-Kant into three traditions in Western universities, continental philosophy, pragmatism and analytic philosophy. Of the three, it is the continental tradition that has been most borrowed from and has itself borrowed from, the closely related disciplines of psychology, anthropology, linguistics, and sociology. Philosophy does not exist outside the university, there are no financially independent commercially driven institutes of philosophy.

Another reason sometimes advanced for considering that philosophy is not a discipline is largely historical. As Bourdieu has pointed out, philosophy was the first of the disciplines to institute itself in a sociological sense as a body of scholars within, and yet separate from, the community in fifth century Greece.<sup>82</sup> So from the founding position of origin an historical account can be attempted of how all the other disciplines periodically split off from the mother discipline, and then themselves continued to split in a form of creative evolution of knowledge. So any proposal that philosophy is not a discipline partly relies on this historical perspective and partly on the assumption that philosophy and all the variations on the theme of ‘philosophy as ...’ should be regarded as one body of knowledge, a kind of un-masterable, unknowable totality, an



einheitswissenschaft, a chimera. There clearly cannot be a meaningful sense to the idea of such a broad and incoherent category as ‘philosophy in general’. Although it is no doubt possible to trace the origins within philosophy of critical concepts used with the various ‘philosophies of’.

There is a further reason why inter/multi/trans/disciplinarity is common. The continental ‘historical-hermeneutical sciences’ have also, in various forms and in various areas, taken Marxism seriously as a form of totalising perspective. There is a sense in which any Marxist account of almost anything is bound to cross disciplines. Similarly other ‘wide-studies’ were developed in the mid twentieth century that also inevitably cross disciplines. Gender Studies and Ethnic Studies are examples. These in turn, have in parts, also been conducted from a Marxist perspective. What all these ‘wide studies’ have in common is that they are fundamentally driven by value, by a moral position.

Adorno is firmly located in the tradition of the movement commonly known as critical theory. The ideas of the group, the Frankfurt Circle, developed when he was a member. Critical theory has been well described by Helmut Dubiel as ‘the name for the Circle’s theoretical-political orientation, a mark of belonging to the tradition of Marxist theory, and – significantly – the expression of the claim of representing the real substance of the authentic tradition.’<sup>83</sup> There is no doubt that *Aesthetic Theory* must be classified as a late example of critical theory at work precisely because it is a work that makes use of the multi-disciplinary approach pioneered by the Institute of Social Research in Frankfurt in the late 1920s and early 1930s. This can be seen in a short selection of the many formulations of societal totality in *Aesthetic Theory*. This totality is variously described as ‘the subordinating authority of the whole,’<sup>84</sup> ‘the system of total functional rationality’<sup>85</sup>, ‘the irrational administration of the world’<sup>86</sup>, and ‘the guilt of the monstrous monadological character of society.’<sup>87</sup> There are four intertwined disciplines at work here, Western Marxist theory, sociology, Freudian psychology and philosophical theory.

One theme that runs throughout Adorno’s thought is the dialectical relationship between universal and particular. One of Adorno’s intellectual objections to any systematic philosophy lies in his distrust of the rationality that subsumes particulars under universals, and yet this is the dominant rationality of the Enlightenment. For Adorno, any general universal concept like ‘totality’, ‘capitalism’ or ‘society’ under which sets of particulars can be subsumed must be treated with suspicion. As Max Weber wrote in a letter: ‘If I am now a sociologist ... I am so essentially in order to put an end to the use of collective concepts, a use which still haunts us. In other words: even sociology can only start from the action of one or a few, or many individuals, i.e. pursue a strictly “individualistic” method.’<sup>88</sup> Weber’s thought was of considerable importance for Adorno in another respect concerning the rationalization of society. Adorno agreed with

Weber that any account of wide concepts such as ‘totality’, ‘capitalism’ or ‘society’ was bound to be problematic. Each of these three comes originally from a separate discipline, totality from philosophy, capitalism from political economy, society from sociology. Each of these separate disciplines is, for Adorno, another example of a form of false rationality in that the real nature of the administered world has created such false divisions within knowledge. Adorno believed, for example, that the ‘separation of sociology and psychology’ had to be understood in his characteristic dialectical fashion as ‘both correct and false:’ – ‘False because it encourages the specialists to relinquish the attempt to know the totality which even the separation of the two demands; and correct insofar as it registers more intransigently the split that has actually taken place in reality than does the premature unification at the level of theory.’<sup>89</sup> Adorno thought that such intellectual divisions between disciplines were largely a matter of institutional convenience within an institution, the university, that claimed to be the repository of the whole truth even if its structure made that goal impossible. ‘In all their necessity these divisions simply attest institutionally to the renunciation of the whole truth.’<sup>90</sup>

This belief, that the real nature of the world is effectively masked by knowledge being divided into disciplines raises the question of the perspective from which this can be asserted. Any disciplinary division is a perspectival division, each discipline provides a different perspective. This leads to the kind of relativism put forward by Adorno’s one-time colleague at the Institute of Social Research in Frankfurt, Karl Mannheim. The sociology of knowledge that Mannheim advocated employed a ‘concept of the social totality’ that Adorno found: ‘...serves not so much to emphasise the intricate dependence of men within the totality as to glorify the social process itself as an evening-out of the contradictions in the whole.’<sup>91</sup> Only at the level of an individual, Adorno believed, along with Weber, can these sets of false disciplinary divisions be revealed as such. Consequently any use of such universals is bound to involve distortion and ambiguity. One could therefore expect that Adorno’s use of totality, capitalism and society to involve some ambiguities and contradictions. Despite this it is necessary for Adorno to rely upon such false universals precisely because there can be no grasp of the real nature of reality underlying false rationality without such reliance being in place. It is impossible to declare something to be unreal without relying on a notion of the real, without covertly employing a perspective that underlies all others. This does not imply that such a perspective is an external viewpoint it is just that an immanent analysis of the contradictions involved in any set of perspectives can reveal a fundamental insight. Such a fundamental insight into the reality of the social and economic power of capital was made by Marx.

In the 'Paralipomena' of *Aesthetic Theory* Adorno addresses the problems of attempts to separate aesthetics from the rest of philosophy and turn it into a form of science.

Aesthetics presents philosophy with the bill for the fact that the academic system degraded it to a mere specialisation. It demands of philosophy precisely what philosophy has neglected to do: that it extract phenomena from their existence and bring them to self-reflection; this would be the reflection of what is petrified in the sciences, not a specialised science located beyond them. Aesthetics thereby yields to what its object, like any object, immediately seeks. Every artwork, if it is to be fully experienced, requires thought and therefore stands in need of philosophy, which is nothing but the thought that refuses all restrictions.<sup>92</sup>

It is clear that for Adorno philosophy must resist being restricted to being a narrow specialist discipline. He seems to take very much the same view as Kant that philosophy must be free to criticise texts of other disciplines. In the 'Draft Introduction' to *Aesthetic Theory* Adorno addresses the very possibility of the continuation of philosophical aesthetics. 'The concept of a philosophical aesthetics has an antiquated quality' and 'what needs to be carried through is what in the theories of Kant and Hegel awaits redemption through second reflection. Terminating the tradition of philosophical aesthetics must amount to giving it its due.'<sup>93</sup> Adorno is above all concerned with a particular conception of truth as embedded in particular artworks and available only through philosophical analysis. Whilst his analysis is in the main based on theoretical positions derived from the European philosophical history of aesthetics, he draws on other disciplines. These include Freudian theory, theories from sociology and politics, hermeneutics, semiotics, and from writings on artworks by both critics and artists. This approach exemplifies his fundamental belief that philosophy is 'nothing but the thought that refuses all restrictions.' As Peter Osborne argues philosophers work in abstractions. 'Capitalist modernity is a social world constituted through abstraction to a hitherto unthinkable extent. It is in this conjunction that the "absolute modernity" of an ant-disciplinary, and hence speculative and cross-disciplinary, philosophical practice resides.'<sup>94</sup>

### **Art and culture**

In *Aesthetic Theory* it is clear that Adorno is concerned with art in a narrow sense as 'great art'. This is anomalous for his time. By the 1960s when *Aesthetic Theory* was written most left-wing writers on art would have been wary of drawing any clear demarcation between high art and the rest of culture. This was partly because employing the (at times) vague concept of culture obviated the need to refer to art as separate from culture in the first place. Most commentators of the time would have been closer to Raymond Williams in his development of a form of cultural

studies concerned with a broad spectrum that included both high art and industrial entertainments of many forms, particularly those derived from a working class folk culture.

In addition to this broad movement of cultural studies, most overtly Marxist cultural critics of the 1960s and 1970s would still have asked the traditional Marxist question of a work of art, ‘who is it for?’ in order to lay bare the class nature of art. In his talks at the *Yenan Forum on Literature and Art* in 1942 Mao Tse-Tung had asked the same question, ‘The first Problem is: literature and art for whom?’<sup>95</sup> The answer for Mao was the broad mass of the people, any art that was not for the people was class dominated bourgeois art. Adorno did not think about society in class terms and so stands apart from many Marxists of the mid-twentieth century for this reason. However, he was not in favour of creating art for overtly politically driven reasons. The breakdown of the categories of high and low art had, as Adorno knew, been championed by the Dadaists and Surrealists. So, in very general terms, Adorno was out of step with his contemporaries in two main ways: by rejecting a class-based approach and by rejecting the category breakdown within the arts promoted by a wide range of creators. He was further out of step with the nascent cultural studies movement. This movement had grown out of the studies of works by writers such as Mathew Arnold with his *Culture and Anarchy* in the nineteenth century as well as by works such as *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* by T.S. Eliot in the 1940s and the later work of, Leavis, Hoggart, and Raymond Williams.<sup>96</sup> Adorno, by contrast, had a particular usage for the word ‘culture’ which he had developed with Horkheimer during their exile in America. This was the concept of the culture industry. The discussion of ‘culture’ within the Frankfurt School had opened in the 1930s when Horkheimer coined the phrase ‘affirmative culture.’ This was explored by Marcuse in an important early essay.

By affirmative culture is meant that culture of the bourgeois epoch which led in the course of its own development to the segregation from civilisation of the mental and spiritual world as an independent realm of value that is also considered superior to civilization. Its decisive characteristic is the assertion of a universally obligatory, eternally better and more valuable world that must be continually affirmed: a world essentially different from the factual world of daily struggle for existence, yet realizable by every individual for himself “from within,” without any transformation of the state of fact. It is only in this culture that cultural activities and objects gain value which elevates them above the everyday sphere. Their reception becomes an act of celebration and exaltation.<sup>97</sup>

Here Marcuse identifies a spiritual split, a form of alienation between everyday life and the world of art. Furthermore in this essay he implies that the enjoyment of, and participation in, all aspects of the high culture of the bourgeois era is in itself to affirm the non-artistic repressive values of that culture. He identifies affirmative culture as idealist and goes on to claim that it is only

through some form of revolution, through materialist philosophy that the end of affirmative culture will come about, and a 'new life' emerge. As one culture ends, another begins - this theme runs on through a whole succession of later essays and books by Marcuse, as does the paradox that now becomes apparent in the next quotation.

There is an image of earthly delight in the works of great bourgeois art, even when they portray heaven. The individual enjoys beauty, goodness, splendour, peace, and victorious joy. He even enjoys pain and suffering, cruelty and crime. He experiences liberation... In art one does not have to be "realistic", for man is at stake, not his occupation or status. Suffering is suffering and joy is joy. The world appears as what it is behind the commodity form: a landscape is really a landscape, a man really a man, a thing really a thing.<sup>98</sup>

The paradoxical contradiction here is that we have already understood that the affirmative character of bourgeois culture gives merely the illusion of freedom, yet in this passage Marcuse states clearly that some aspects of bourgeois culture are valuable and do transcend the affirmation of the repressive controls of bourgeois society and indeed can be truly liberating in a progressive sense. One might term this the aesthetic dialectic of Marcuse. This strand to his thought runs right through his subsequent texts. 'The Affirmative Character of Culture' is an important essay in regard to Adorno because he did endorse many of the points Marcuse made in it: the commodity status of art, the idea of the end of art in a time of revolution, the liberating possibility of art and the extent to which art affirms the values of a total society. At the same time Adorno rejected the use of such a general concept as affirmative culture in any discussion that does not involve detailed analysis of individual works of art. 'As legitimate as Herbert Marcuse's critique of the affirmative character of culture was, its thesis requires the investigation of the individual artwork: Otherwise it would become an anticulture league, itself no better than any cultural asset.'<sup>99</sup> Here Adorno is putting forward one of his central beliefs about art that any generalised discussion of culture needs to be informed by detailed discussion of individual artworks. For Adorno it is only by making a detailed study of an individual work of art that any insights into art can be made. Marcuse, in his books and essays up to the time of the publication of *Aesthetic Theory* does not do this. In later books, Marcuse does look at individual works so he clearly took in Adorno's criticisms. Adorno continues:

Rabid criticism of culture is not radical. If affirmation is indeed an aspect of art, this affirmation is no more totally false than culture - because it failed - is totally false. Culture checks barbarism, which is worse; it not only represses nature but conserves it through its repression; this resonates in the concept of culture, which originates in

agriculture. Life has been permeated through culture, along with the idea of a decent life; its echo resounds in authentic artworks.<sup>100</sup>

There are far worse things Adorno points out than a failed culture, barbarism for example, and that even in a failed culture authentic artworks carry a message of hope and truth. 'Affirmation does not bestow a halo on the status quo; in sympathy with what exists, it defends itself against death, the telos of all domination. Doubting this comes only at the price of believing that death itself is hope.'<sup>101</sup> This is Adorno's sharpest critical comment on affirmation. He is arguing that if you believe affirmation bestows a halo on the status quo, then your only hope is death, the death of humanity, art and culture. As early as the 1940s Adorno and Horkheimer had been critical of the use of the word 'culture.'

To speak of culture was always contrary to culture. Culture as a common dominator already contains in embryo that schematization and process of cataloguing and classification which brings culture within the sphere of administration. And it is precisely the industrialized, the consequent, subsumption which entirely accords with this notion of culture.<sup>102</sup>

In the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* Adorno and Horkheimer developed the critical concept of 'the culture industry' in order to propose that most culture, both high and low, was fully integrated into late capitalism as a form of social control as forms of entertainment. This concept of 'the culture industry' is also a fundamental part of the theoretical structure of *Aesthetic Theory*. In the section known as 'Situation' Adorno clarifies his antinomic conception of art, that it is both art and a commodity, both autonomous and liable to submersion in the culture industry. 'Compared with authentic art, degraded, dishonoured, and administered art is by no means without aura: The opposition between these antagonistic spheres must always be conceived as the mediation of one through the other.'<sup>103</sup> The antinomy lies in the fact that Adorno wishes to maintain a dichotomy between authentic (or autonomous art) and the wares of the culture industry. These two concepts are both in dialectical tension as opposites and yet in antinomic complicity as each has to be understood through the other within a society created and dominated by late capitalism. As Adorno writes in *Aesthetic Theory*, there is a sense in which the culture industry includes art because both art and entertainment are products of the same society. Autonomous art is opposed to that society whilst entertainment accepts and affirms the values of that society. 'Art develops by way of the social whole; that is to say, it is mediated by society's ruling structure.'<sup>104</sup> What were formerly free 'lower arts' have, during the course of the growth of capitalist society, become integrated by being submerged in the culture industry. '...the lower arts and entertainment, which are today, administered, integrated, and qualitatively reshaped by the culture industry.'<sup>105</sup>

Autonomous art, on the other hand, has a long history, dating from the end of the eighteenth century, of growing independence from traditional patronage. Art established itself during the nineteenth century as an independent sphere having its own economic power within the larger capitalist economy and its own internally generated artistic values. Adorno called this historical phase of art, autonomous art and it is very difficult to understand *Aesthetic Theory* without a clear grasp of what he meant by the autonomy of art. Precisely what Adorno meant by autonomous art will be examined in the third chapter. In the next chapter the structure of Adorno's conception of the administered world, critique and the artwork three inter-linked aspects will be examined in more detail as three forms of totality, capitalism, philosophy as constellation and the artwork as monad.

## CHAPTER TWO

## TOTALITIES

If there is a central topic to *Aesthetic Theory* then it is encapsulated in phrases such as ‘...the irrational administration of the world...’ and ‘...the untruth of the whole...’<sup>1</sup> These two phrases are both references by Adorno to the reality of the situation of the historical time of autonomous art. This reality is the negative form of totality that represents, for Adorno, capitalism at work. Capitalism denies freedom and happiness, this position of Adorno is probably best described in traditional philosophical language as ethical. This ethical position underlies everything for Adorno, it underlies his three main areas of interest, society, philosophy and art. It is a major presupposition to *Aesthetic Theory*. Against the background of an increasingly powerful late capitalism Adorno identifies a crisis for both philosophy and art. Given this background he is concerned whether philosophy and art are still possible in the twentieth century. How can philosophy and art continue to exist in such a world? In his analysis of this crisis Adorno makes use of two further forms of totality.

One of these further totalities is concerned with philosophy, the other with art. In Adorno’s philosophical methodology he makes use of categories and concepts from the history of philosophy combined with insights from other disciplines to create constellations of ideas which are intended to be interpreted by the reader. These constellations can be understood to be totalities, to be wholes. However, they are not to be understood as permanent wholes, as achieved totalities that will continue through time but as temporary arrangements of concepts that yield an insight at the historical moment in which they are formed. Such constellations are the polar opposite of traditional philosophical theories that form part of a system such as those of Kant or Hegel. These thought-constellations, if developed rigorously, so Adorno claims in ‘The Actuality of Philosophy,’ form part of an emancipatory praxis for an interpretative materialist philosophy. This modern version of philosophy stands in contrast to traditional philosophical systems which are understood by Adorno to be not only internally incoherent but to have intellectually impossible goals.

The third form of totality in *Aesthetic Theory* is the work of art itself. Just as a philosopher can no longer write a system, so no contemporary composer can write music in the same style and form as Beethoven, without it being any more than a dull essay in academicism. When we think back to the time of Hegel and Beethoven, to the time of the bourgeois revolution, according to Adorno, we find both philosophy and art expressed in totalities. An early autonomous artwork of modernity, such as a Beethoven symphony, can best be understood



as a form of dynamic totality paralleling Hegel's systematic philosophy. As autonomous art has progressed in the twentieth century this integral totality of the artwork has altered, has fragmented. This can be seen in works by Schoenberg, Kafka and Beckett for example, and this fragmentation of art runs parallel to Adorno's fragmentation of philosophical methodology which reconstitutes it as an interpretation of a constellation of concepts. The artwork can still be thought of as a totality, albeit fragmented. The metaphor Adorno uses is the monad. So there are three objects, capitalism, philosophy and art, each of which can be understood through three different methodological forms of totality: negative totality, constellation, and monad. This chapter is divided into three sections. Each section will consist of an examination of one of these three forms.

## Section One: Capitalism as negative totality

There is a historical relationship between the concepts of ‘totality,’ ‘negation’ and ‘capitalism.’ The first two are philosophical terms, the third derives from political economy yet its conceptualisation depends on the other two terms. *Aesthetic Theory* demands to be understood as a Marxist text as this first section will make clear, but, before proceeding to an examination of Adorno’s understanding of ‘the administered world’ I will briefly sketch the historical development of the concepts of ‘totality’ and ‘negative’ from Kant and the Jena Romantics through Hegel to Marx and the arrival of the third term ‘capitalism.’

### Background to negative totality

For Kant, both totality and negation are two of the twelve *a priori* concepts that go to make up his table of categories. The conception that there could be ‘*an idea of the totality of the a priori knowledge*’ can be found in Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*. This totality of ‘*a priori knowledge*’ would be conceived as ‘an exact classification of the concepts which compose that totality, exhibiting their *interconnection in a system*.’<sup>2</sup> This system is a positive totality. However the system is not knowable as a systematic totality of ideas but only in parts, as described in the three Critiques, but only, knowable as fragments. Not that Kant understood this as fragmentation. For Kant ‘Totality’ and ‘system’ are intimately related, at times synonyms. However, the Jena Romantics employed the concept of fragment as a further synonym for totality and system.

Can a negative totality be found in Kant? A possible candidate would be everything assumed to be lying beyond the bounds of sense, the ‘things in themselves.’ These are strictly unknowable in their reality except as produced by the operation of sense perception in the only form it can take as filtered through our *a priori* concepts of understanding. However, the ‘things in themselves’ are not actually a form of negative totality. They merely form a background of unknowable reality and as such are vacuous, they do not negate anything. They are just unknowable in contrast to the world of appearance and not in opposition to it.

However, there are other forms of negation in Kant. One form is that of non-being in time which is conceived of as the opposite of being in time or reality. ‘There therefore exists a relation and connection between reality and negation, or rather a transition from one to another...’<sup>3</sup> Negation is a sub-set of the ‘Table of Categories’ under the second division, *Of Quality*, negation here being understood as that which does not exist, nothing. The distinction is between something and nothing, i.e. ‘*none*’ which opposes ‘all, many and one.’<sup>4</sup> ‘All negations...are merely limitations of a greater, and ultimately of the highest, reality; and they therefore presuppose this reality, and are, as regards their content, derived from it.’<sup>5</sup> Negation is

also understood by Kant in terms of ‘conflict,’ as in the opposition of forces in nature, where one aspect of reality is in conflict with another, ‘*realitates phenomena*.’<sup>6</sup> Thirdly, Kant also makes use of antinomies, or contradictory positions. It is these last two forms of negation, conflict and the antinomical, that Hegel will develop.

As Herbert Marcuse states in the opening sentence of his *Reason and Revolution*, ‘German idealism has been called the theory of the French Revolution.’<sup>7</sup> It is well known that both Kant and Hegel were excited and to some extent inspired by the events of 1789. As one of Kant’s acquaintances reported, ‘He lived and moved in it; and in spite of the terror, he held onto his hopes so much that when he heard of the declaration of the republic he called out in excitement; “Now let your servant go in peace to his grave, for I have seen the glory of the world”.’<sup>8</sup> Hegel, along with his student friends at Tübingen, Hölderlin and Schelling ‘welcomed the French Revolution by planting a liberty tree on the outskirts of town.’<sup>9</sup> Adorno also saw the French Revolution as a pivotal moment in history: ‘...the French Revolution, for all the abrupt concurrence of some of its acts, fitted into the overall course of bourgeois emancipation.’<sup>10</sup> In the Preface to his *Phenomenology of Spirit* Hegel makes clear he is aware of living in a time of great change, ‘...ours is a birth-time and a period of transition to a new era.’<sup>11</sup> Hegel’s philosophy was a progressive dynamic seeking for a unified theory of reality (Reason) that proceeded by negation. Full comprehension of the whole, is the whole comprehended. So, for Hegel, totality is both the totality of knowledge and the knowledge of totality. For Hegel what is given is in essence negative, there is a real sense in which his was a *negative philosophy*, which is how it was referred to by his contemporaries and successors.<sup>12</sup> What is given is negative because its truth will be achieved by ‘overcoming this negativity, so that the birth of the truth requires the death of the given state of being.’<sup>13</sup> Hegel’s progression to the absolute notion of his system took place through negation, through dialectical moments. Out of each negative moment came a further positive stage of becoming, creating in the end, a system of total knowledge and comprehension. This project enabled Hegel to claim that ‘Philosophy is its own time apprehended in thoughts.’<sup>14</sup> As Adorno remarked, the very thought ‘...of world history being perfected in the Prussian state...’ was of itself enough to render the entire project an ‘absurdity.’<sup>15</sup>

Hegel’s systematic philosophy was employed by Marx as part of his science of capital. The science of capital was conceived by Marx as a whole systematic totality dynamically unfolding through historical time. This is as much an idea of the Enlightenment as the encyclopedia, or systematic philosophy or science. Marx’s analytical science of capital described an economic mode of organising society, which later came to be popularly known as capitalism. As Marcuse states:

There is no more adequate example of the formation of the dialectical notion than Marx’s concept of capitalism. ... The concept of capitalism is no less than the totality of the capitalist process, comprehended in the ‘principle’ by which it progresses. The

notion of capitalism starts with the separation of the actual producers from the means of production, resulting in the establishment of free labour and the appropriation of surplus value, which, with the development of technology, brings about the accumulation and centralization of capital, the progressive decline of the rate of profit, and the breakdown of the entire system. The notion of capitalism is no less than the three volumes of *Capital*, just as Hegel's notion of the notion comprises all three books of his *Science of Logic*.<sup>16</sup>

Hegel's 'notion constitutes a 'negative totality', which evolves only by virtue of contradictory forces.'<sup>17</sup> As Marcuse points out in *Reason and Revolution* the substantive difference between the dialectics of Hegel and Marx was between Hegel's ontology of the system and Marx's grounding of dialectics in 'a historical condition...a social condition associated with a particular form of historical society...The totality that the Marxian dialectic gets to is the totality of class society, and the negativity that underlies its contradictions and shapes its every content is the negativity of class relations.'<sup>18</sup> So capitalism as modelled on Hegel's 'notion' can be understood to be a negative totality, moreover a negative totality that is still in the process of becoming, not yet finished. It is in this sense in which Adorno seems to understand it, however, he does not always seem to distinguish clearly between capitalism and society. As Marx wrote in the first volume of *Capital*, 'capitalist production' would lead to 'the negation of negation' in other words to its own disintegration.

The capitalist mode of appropriation, the result of the capitalist mode of production, produces capitalist private property. This is the first negation of individual private property, as founded on the labour of the proprietor. But capitalist production begets, with the inexorability of a law of Nature, its own negation. It is the negation of negation. This does not re-establish private property for the producer, but gives him individual property based on the acquisitions of the capitalist era: i.e., on co-operation and the possession in common of the land and of the means of production.<sup>19</sup>

The logic of disintegration, 'the negation of the negation,' when projected into the future depends on a smooth concept of temporal progression, a projected history, what might be called a Marxist imaginary of inevitability. As Marx remarked in a speech, progress and decay seem to go hand in hand in some ghastly dialectic of his contemporary civilization:

On the one hand, there have started into life industrial and scientific forces, which no epoch of the former human history had ever suspected. On the other hand, there exist symptoms of decay, far surpassing the horrors of the Roman Empire. In our days everything seems pregnant with its contrary. Machinery, gifted with the wonderful power of shortening and fructifying human labour, we behold starving and overworking it. The new-fangled sources of wealth, by some strange weird spell, are turned into sources of want. The victories of art seem bought by the loss of character. ... This antagonism between modern industry and science on the one hand, modern misery and dissolution on the other hand; this antagonism between the productive powers, and the social relations of our epoch, is a fact, palpable, overwhelming.<sup>20</sup>

Disintegration was also a central concept for Adorno. Disintegration not only in capitalist society, but in philosophy and art as well. Adorno's conception of dialectics takes up Hegel's idea that 'the very being of finite things' contains 'the seeds of their perishing as their own Being-in-Self.'<sup>21</sup> The logic of dialectics' remarks Adorno in *Negative Dialectics* 'is one of disintegration: of a disintegration of the prepared and objectified form of the concepts which the cognitive subject faces, primarily and directly.'<sup>22</sup>

### **Adorno's conception of capitalism and society**

When Adorno remarked in *Minima Moralia* 'The whole is the false'<sup>23</sup> he was reversing a famous phrase of Hegel's 'The True is the whole'<sup>24</sup> [*das Ganze*]. By this Adorno meant that the actual whole, capitalism, the 'administered world' was false, was untrue. It was a totality that negated truth. In this sense 'the administered world' is a negative totality. It not only negates truth in all fields, it negates freedom and happiness as well. It is also a negative totality in the Hegelian sense of being not yet completed. The negative totality that is late capitalism at work provides a background to all of Adorno's thought. It provides the moral authority for the variations on the declaration that nothing is right about the world and that the world should be other than it is. The implicit claims are not only that should the world be other than it is, but philosophy should also be other than it is and art should be other than it is. Most of *Aesthetic Theory* is taken up with a set of accounts as to why philosophy and art have developed but little space is given to theorising 'the total exchange society'<sup>25</sup> against which philosophy and art are understood. Even less space is allotted to theorising about how, if society were other than it is, what, in such changed circumstances, art might be like. All we are offered is the expectation that best practice in autonomous art, of whatever historical moment within modernism, somehow points to a utopian future, to a spark of freedom the truth of which can only be revealed by philosophy. It is therefore necessary to step outside the late text *Aesthetic Theory* and to examine earlier texts in order to gain an insight into Adorno's concept of 'the administered world.' There is an important sense in which *Aesthetic Theory* does not stand alone, even when it comes to art, for many of Adorno's extended comments on artworks are contained in earlier texts. The same is true of philosophy. *Aesthetic Theory* is a text centred on the possibility of there being such a study as aesthetics, in that it stands alone in Adorno's oeuvre and yet its interpretation does require reference to earlier texts.

A clear reference to the negativity of 'the whole' can be found in Adorno's *Negative Dialectics*: 'If the whole is the spell, if it is the negative, a negation of particularities – epitomized in that whole – remains negative.'<sup>26</sup> The phrase of Adorno's, 'the administered world', can be seen as ambiguous, in that it seems to refer to both society and capitalism. The phrase becomes shorthand for a capitalist society, a society in which capitalism is the economic system for that society. Capitalism as an economic system may historically have started within one particular society, within one particular nation but by its very nature it is trans-national and

ultimately a global economic system because of capital's inherent tendency to universalise itself. The territory of capitalism is defined not by any state or nation, nor by boundaries of economic unions or any other spatially defined entities but by the mode of production. A society on the other hand is spatially defined. Within sociology the concept of society originated in attempts at definitions for the relations and operations of the populations of nation states.

It was George Lukács who in *History and Class Consciousness* re-introduced, or revealed, the centrality of the concept of totality for Marxist thought, as he stated:

It is not the primacy of economic motives in historical explanation that constitutes the decisive difference between Marxism and bourgeois thought, but the point of view of totality. The category of totality, the all-pervasive supremacy of the whole over the parts is the essence of the method which Marx took over from Hegel and brilliantly transformed into the foundations of a new science. ...Proletarian science is revolutionary not just by virtue of revolutionary ideas which it opposes to bourgeois society, but above all because of its method. *The primacy of the category of totality is the bearer of the principle of revolution in science.*<sup>27</sup>

Adorno did not share Lukács' faith in the revolutionary potential, let alone the reality, of the proletariat. The moment that Marx had hoped for in 1848 was long gone along with the potentially revolutionary class on which the faith was based. However, Adorno did still use the language of class in his discussions of the nature of society. 'Society remains class society, today just as in the period when the concept originated; the repression current in the eastern countries shows that things are no different there either.'<sup>28</sup> The phrase 'class society' in the above sentence, from Adorno's article 'Society,' was originally translated by Fredric Jameson as 'class struggle'. Martin Jay corrected this translation of *Klassengesellschaft* in his *Marxism and Totality*.<sup>29</sup> It is clear that Adorno did still believe in the class structure of society: '...the difference between the classes grows objectively with the increasing concentration of capital.'<sup>30</sup>

As Martin Jay has pointed out there have been almost as many versions of what is meant by totality as there have been prominent Western Marxists.<sup>31</sup> Adorno's totality is almost the negation of Lukács'. As Adorno explained in his lectures on sociology, where he directly addresses the question as to whether society can be considered to be a totality in any sense: 'The emphasis I place on the concept of society, and my insistent use of it, may, of course, be readily misunderstood in the 'organicist' or – to use the language of the German cultural reaction – the 'holistic' sense, to mean that society is a sum or an agglomeration of elements which is simply more than its parts.'<sup>32</sup> What Adorno has in mind by contrast is a concept of society that is more abstract, and dialectical: on the one hand, individuals and on the other the various relationships individuals have to each other. On this view society has to be understood '...as a relational category which is not exhausted by the individuals composing it.'<sup>33</sup> The real relations between individuals are masked by the ideology of capitalism:

... the totality within which we live, and which we can feel in each of our social actions, is conditioned not by a direct 'togetherness' encompassing us all, but by the fact that we are essentially divided from each other through the abstract relationship of exchange... If one wanted to characterize the concept of society itself, then the notion of the system, of an order imposed in a somewhat abstract way, would be far more adequate than the notion of organic wholeness.<sup>34</sup>

This analysis of society in terms of 'exchange relations' makes use of a basic concept of Marx's theory of capitalism, the relationship of exchange. Adorno makes clear in 'Society' that exchange is a form of control over the individual. 'The form of the total system requires everyone to respect the law of exchange if he does not want to be destroyed, irrespective of whether profit is his subjective motivation or not.'<sup>35</sup> It is clear that Adorno believes individuals to be trapped by capitalism, that individuals are at the mercy of an 'economic process' that '...reduces individual interests to the common denominator of a totality which remains negative because its constitutive abstraction removes it from those interests, for all its being composed of them at the same time.'<sup>36</sup> This is another clear reference that Adorno does consider the totality of capitalism to be negative. Capitalism appears as the fundamental conceptual structure for Adorno. It must underlie any attempt to make sense of society: 'Without making use of capitalism as a key concept, they [the facts] could only be interpreted at the cost of violent and arbitrary distortions.'<sup>37</sup> As Adorno stated in 'Some Ideas on the Sociology of Music' the concept of society operates in two ways, it is a dual aspect concept: '...society is both an umbrella concept that subsumes every more specialized subsystem within itself and something that manifests itself as a totality in each of its branches...it is a process; it produces both itself and its subordinate parts, welding them together into a totality, in Hegel's sense of the term.'<sup>38</sup> As is already clear, for Adorno society cannot be understood without reference to capitalism. In his essay, 'Late Capitalism and Industrial Society' Adorno draws upon Marx's important distinction between the forces of production and relations of production. These two concepts are the key to making clear that for Adorno late capitalism has given rise to industrial society:

... contemporary society undoubtedly is an industrial society according to the state of its *forces* of production. Industrial labor has everywhere become the model of society as such, regardless of the frontiers separating differing political systems. It has developed into a totality because methods modelled on those of industry are necessarily extended by the laws of economics to other realms of material production, administration, the sphere of distribution, and those that call themselves culture. In contrast, however, society is capitalist in its relations of production.<sup>39</sup>

This essay contrasts late capitalism with industrial society in a way that makes clear these two concepts are related by the one being folded into, contained within the other. However, for Adorno, this hiding within by late capitalism is not at all obvious:

However, simply to regard the forces of production and the relations of production as polar opposites would be unworthy of dialectical theory. They are interlocking

phenomena: the one contains the other within it. It is this that seduces us into focussing simply on the forces of production, even though it is the relations of production that have the upper hand. The forces of production are mediated more than ever by the relations of production, so completely, perhaps, that the latter appear to be the essence; they have become second nature.<sup>40</sup>

These statements make it clear that Adorno did think that capitalism was a more fundamental category than society. There is a sense in which capitalism and society are, for a Marxist, dual concepts. Capitalism and society are related, both are necessary for any description of how life is organised, but the first is prior in that it explains why the organisation is as it is. So for Adorno, the individual is the antithesis of society, the antithesis of totality. This is why Adorno claims that totality is a dialectical concept that belongs to a critical theory as opposed to an empirical positivist theory:

The crucial difference between the dialectical and the positivistic view of totality is that the dialectical concept of totality is intended 'objectively', namely, for the understanding of every social individual observation, whilst positivistic systems theories wish, in an uncontradictory manner, to incorporate observations in a logical continuum, simply through the selection of categories as general as possible. In so doing they do not recognize the highest structural concepts as the precondition for the states of affairs subsumed under them.<sup>41</sup>

This statement again makes it clear that capitalism has to be assumed as a 'highest structural concept', a precondition for any attempt to understand totality. The individual is the antithesis of society as opposed to any collectivity of individuals. Society for Adorno, is a system in which each individual has a place. It is in this sense that society can be thought of as a structured system. The very idea of society is itself not value free for '... in its very structure this idea follows the model of middle-class society.'<sup>42</sup>

### **Adorno's rational – irrational dialectic of society**

A further aspect of Adorno's views about society is encapsulated in his antinomial dialectic between rational and irrational. This dialectic brings together ideas from Freud and Weber and sets them in dialectical tension. Any idea of society, according to Adorno, involves notions of 'hierarchical ordering' and so society itself is a 'classificatory concept' of sociology which is incoherent because 'The object meant by the concept society is not in itself rationally continuous.'<sup>43</sup> For Adorno, society is both rational and irrational. Society believes itself to be rational but in truth is irrational. Society can include remnants of 'pre-capitalistic' societies within them, an irrationality within a rationality that is itself irrational. 'Within the exchange society, the pre-capitalistic remnants and enclaves are by no means something alien, mere relics of the past: they are vital necessities for the market system. Irrational institutions are useful to the stubborn irrationality of a society which is rational in its means but not in its ends.'<sup>44</sup> The progressive rationalisation and bureaucratisation of society were key concepts in the sociology



of Weber. In Adorno's view the progressive rationalisation as described by Weber is irrational. This means that the various meanings of rational and irrational used by Adorno with regard to society are complex and characteristically set up as contradictions and have to be disentangled. To begin with, how can Adorno's claim be understood? The claim is that to describe society as rational is itself irrational. This idea was developed in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* where Adorno and Horkheimer set out to show how Enlightenment reason developed out of myth (irrationality) and in the twentieth century can be seen regressing into mythic irrationality in totalitarian states such as Nazi Germany and the USSR, as well as in Western liberal democracies dominated by capitalism. In his essay, 'Late Capitalism or Industrial Society?' Adorno states that a rational theoretical description of an irrational society is impossible: 'The irrational nature of contemporary society inhibits a rational account of it in the realm of theory.'<sup>45</sup> The second strand that is bound up in this rational/irrational idea is derived from Freud. No more can society be regarded as a curable whole than can a person be thought of as a psychically sound subjectivity, this is the myth of the whole personality. 'The stress on totality as against the unique, fragmentary impulses, always implies the harmonistic belief in what might be called the unity of the personality, [a unity that] is never realised in our society. It is one of the great merits of Freud that he has debunked the myth of this unity.'<sup>46</sup> So it is a critical sociological/psychological conceit for Adorno to refer to society as irrational. It brings together Max Weber and Freud as opposite poles. For Adorno rational and irrational are in a dialectical relationship. To think of society as a whole would be to think of it by means of a false rationality. This false totality of society 'binds people together only by virtue of their alienation from each other.'<sup>47</sup> Each individual may have an identifiable place, and identifiable role but their binding together is not rational in the Weberian sense, but irrational in the Freudian sense as a society based on the mutual antagonisms of individuals is irrational because: 'the whole or the totality of society maintains itself ... only through the antagonistic interests of human beings, this society of rational exchange is infected in its constitution and at its very root by a moment of irrationality which threatens to disintegrate it at any moment.'<sup>48</sup> Furthermore this antagonistic relationship is also at the same time a form of 'rational' domination which is theorised by 'Freud's theory': 'namely, that the overwhelming majority of human beings tolerate relations of domination, identify themselves with them and are motivated towards irrational attitudes by them...'<sup>49</sup> There is a sense in which this rational/irrational conceit is a typical Adornian antinomial dialectic in that it at first sight looks ultimately self-defeating. It looks to be as much a stylistic, defiant, and rhetorical trope as a useful analytical description. However, it is probably best understood as an example of Adorno's 'shock' tactics in presenting text that is designed to take readers by surprise so they are forced to stand back and think about the meaning.

### **Antinomies and/or dialectics**

I have called this rational-irrational dialectic an antinomical dialectic simply because it is not a pure example of a Hegelian dialectic. There is indeed an opposition involved but it is not resolved, Hegel's dialectics are resolved through the negation of the opposition whereas Adorno's are negative in that they are unresolvable. Adorno's negative dialectics are far more like Kant's antinomies, upon which Hegel's dialectics are based, than Hegel's dialectics in themselves. Many commentators who write about Adorno refer to him as a Hegelian. This judgement should in my opinion be revised. Adorno is far more of a Kantian in his negative dialectics than a Hegelian for his negative dialectics are identical to Kantian antinomies in being unresolvable in the terms in which they are conceived. Lukács uses the concept of unresolvable antinomies in the essay 'The Antinomies of Bourgeois Thought' in *History and Class Consciousness*. For Lukács these antinomies can only be resolved by the proletarian revolution. Similarly for Adorno the antinomies revealed by his negative dialectic cannot be solved under the negative totality of late capitalism, but the horizon of revolution has receded.

One commentator who takes the standard view that Adorno is more of a Hegelian than a Kantian is Mauro Bozzetti. 'Kant is often employed by Adorno for the purposes of criticizing Hegel, but Adorno's perspective remains fundamentally dialectical, and this crucially distances him from Kant's method.'<sup>50</sup> Bozzetti admits that Adorno resists Hegelian 'reconciliation, synthesis, the positive and totality' which is precisely the difference I am alluding to but still claims that resistance 'is always carried out in such a way that his procedure remains in dialectical contradiction.'<sup>51</sup> Remaining in 'dialectical contradiction' without any form of synthesis means that the contradictions remain open, remain in short antinomic. Later in his essay Bozzetti lists three points on which Adorno and Hegel 'find no agreement' in their respective interpretations of history, in their respective evaluations of unreason and irrationality and in their ideas about religious categories. Despite this Bozzetti still sees 'the elements of kinship between Hegel and Adorno are greater, indeed thematically and methodologically inseparable from one another.'<sup>52</sup> Bernstein whilst he claims Adorno is a Hegelian remarks that 'he cannot be an orthodox Hegelian'. 'Adorno's philosophy is the articulation of what it is to be a Hegelian *after* Hegel, after Marx, after Nietzsche, and above all after two centuries of brutal history in which the moment to realize philosophy, the hope of left Hegelians like Marx, was missed.'<sup>53</sup> As Bernstein points out it is Adorno's central belief in the domination of capitalist society that lies at the heart of his negative dialectics. 'Since contradiction is the moving force of negative dialectics, negative dialectics will continue only so long as domination continues.'<sup>54</sup> This position is made clear by Adorno in the Introduction to *Negative Dialectics*. 'Regarding the concrete utopian possibility, dialectics is the ontology of the wrong state of things. The right state of things would be free of it: neither a system nor a contradiction.'<sup>55</sup> Towards the end of the book Adorno returns to the idea of utopian hope. 'It lies in the definition of negative dialectics that it will not come to rest in itself, as if it were total. This is its form of hope.'

For Bubner, by contrast, one of the main questions Adorno and Horkheimer faced in conceiving their *Dialectic of Enlightenment* was, 'How is it possible to make use of Hegel's dialectic and, at the same time, be dead set against its logical and historical consequences?'<sup>56</sup> Giving a privileged status to 'irrational beliefs' is he thinks the key, so that their conception of myth is at basis rational is the heart of the dialectic which is hidden by 'illusion'. Bubner sees the use of 'illusion' in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* as a 'means to obscure the line of division that separates art from philosophy.'<sup>57</sup>

A commentator who does think Adorno's use of dialectic is more Kantian than Hegelian is Hauke Brunkhorst who identifies the time Adorno spent reading Kant with Kracauer as a teenager as a key his use of antinomies. 'The idea of a negative dialectics, which is Adorno's most unique philosophical contribution, owes much to it. This influence is particularly evident in Kant's antinomies, since they do not nullify contradiction, but maintain it and allow thought to move back and forth between its opposing extremes.'<sup>58</sup> This resemblance to Kant is the most striking thing about Adorno's use of dialectics as negative dialectics, Adorno does not move to as Hegel does to an ultimate totality of absolute knowledge, but moves away from the negative totality of the administered world. 'Adorno takes only the negative side of Hegel's dialectics as a method of processing through contradictions ... Adorno's step away from Hegel's *speculative* understanding of dialectics is a step back to Kant, just a step, not a return to some sort of Neo-Kantianism.'<sup>59</sup> As Duttmann remarks: this is a 'transformed conception of what dialectic is. Adorno calls the dialectical approach that has renounced the claim to totality a negative dialectics.'<sup>60</sup> As Brunkhorst points out 'Contradictions and antinomies for Adorno are not only something to avoid. On the contrary, they have a productive function of finding new solutions to problems and innovative conceptions in theory as well as in practical life, as in Kant's transcendental dialectics. They can also be applied to modern art, and to the process of socialization and in therapeutic communication.'<sup>61</sup> In his lectures on Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* Adorno describes what he understands as the essence of Kantian philosophy that at its heart is a fundamental antinomy.

The dialectical or antonimic structure of Kantian philosophy means that it aspires to create a system, to provide a central point, which is that of the idea that can construct reality - but at the same time, it refuses to regard the world as identical with that idea. This implies a vast effort to square the circle and it is very easy to criticize him for the errors that spring from it. I believe that this is the deepest thing to be found in Kant. On the one hand, he holds fast to the intention of philosophy to understand reality as a whole, to decode the totality. At the same time, he declares that philosophy is *incapable* of this, and that the only form in which the totality can be grasped is the expression of the fact that it cannot be comprehended.<sup>62</sup>

This antinomy lies at the centre of Kant's whole philosophical approach for Adorno. In *Negative Dialectics* Adorno points to a fundamental difference with Hegel. 'What is negated is negative until it has passed. This is the decisive break with Hegel.'<sup>63</sup> In other words under the

conditions of late capitalism a negative dialectic must remain unresolved, remain in short an antinomy. In this, paradoxically, Adorno sees a form of utopian hope. 'It lies in the definition of negative dialectics that it will not come to rest in itself, as if it were total. This is its form of hope.'<sup>64</sup>

### **The individual and society**

Adorno and Raymond Williams had significantly different conceptions of the relationship between an individual and society. In the final section of *The Long Revolution*, 'Britain in the 1960s' Raymond Williams analyses a series of 'confusions' in general thinking about modern society. These confusions concern the uncertainties about how to organise and plan the various services and developments within a society that appears to be complacently expanding under the sort of banner encapsulated in the phrase, derived from a 1957 speech by the Conservative Prime Minister Macmillan, 'You've never had it so good.' This misquotation of Macmillan is how the essence of the speech is remembered. Macmillan was referring to the optimism and prosperity that opened the decade of the 1960s. Raymond Williams is in no doubt as to the source of the confusions in thinking about society. 'For my own part I am certain, as I review the evidence, that it is capitalism – a particular and temporary system of organizing the industrial process – which is in fact confusing us.'<sup>65</sup> Williams sees the older socialist values of the labour movement being compromised and rendered powerless by the increasing power of capitalism to infiltrate deeper into society so 'that hardly any principled opposition remains.'<sup>66</sup> He is concerned with the absence of democracy from many aspects of life at both a national and a local level. 'The pressure now, in a wide area of our social life, should be towards a participating democracy, in which the ways and means of involving people much more closely in the process of self-government can be learned and extended.'<sup>67</sup> Class is another issue that Williams thinks is confused, between the social origins of classes and the economic aspects that were subsequently overlaid on the original social classification and he believes society would be better off without such a classification. When he turns his attention to culture Williams is concerned that whilst there has been an increase in the enjoyment of 'real art and argument' the 'distribution of bad art and bad argument is increasing even more rapidly.'<sup>68</sup> Williams sees the way forward as, on the one hand, the encouragement of artists to experiment in all forms and on the other by encouraging 'real criticism.' He admits that increasingly so much of culture is 'left to the market'. 'We should be much clearer about these cultural questions if we saw them as a consequence of a basically capitalist organization, and I at least know no better reason for capitalism to be ended'<sup>69</sup> Williams goes on to suggest structural changes to various cultural institutions to make them publicly owned and financed with democratic accountability to counter the rise of powerful financial interests and a consequent restricted marketplace in culture in general. What were once 'seemingly impossible expectations'<sup>70</sup> of the long revolution such as the right to vote, the eradication of poverty and education for all children,

had by the 1960s been achieved. William's main worry is that 'massification' of society and its culture is already well underway. He sees the 'central problem is that of expectations.'<sup>71</sup> It is the task of the present generation to 'frame new expectations, in terms of a continuing version of what life could be.'<sup>72</sup> These Williams believes must revolve around the eradication of 'social poverty', 'cultural poverty' and 'inadequate democracy.' 'These ways of thinking require not only new kinds of analysis of the society, but also a new version of the relationship and new feelings in human expectation.'<sup>73</sup>

As is clear from the above explication of Williams' position there is a great contrast between Adorno and Williams. In this contrast lie deep similarities. Both are orientated to the expectation that the world would be a better place without capitalism. For Williams there are difficult adjustments to make so the 'long revolution' can continue on a path that may well end with the control and eventual elimination of capitalism. William's 'long revolution' started in the 1780s with the industrial revolution. This is the same historical epoch which for Adorno sees the emergence of autonomous art. Adorno by contrast, whilst he has a utopian expectation that capitalism might one day come to an end never lays out what he might well have called a well meaning liberal minded set of recipes for change. Adorno identifies utopian expectations encapsulated within the work of art. He would never have attempted to do what Williams does in his laying out of a set of proposals for how ordinary life and cultural life might be changed and made more equitable and democratic. The 'dialectic of enlightenment' is the direct opposite of the 'long revolution'. The first is utterly pessimistic the other infused with some degree of hope.

By contrast to Williams, Adorno always stresses the significance of the singular individual whether understood as philosopher, artist or receiver of artworks or all three. This has led some theorists to question his apparent lack of interest in collectivity:

Adorno ... falls into a social-theoretic reductionism that simply passes over the level of the cultural accomplishments of social groups, the sphere of social action in general, and thus is confined to the two poles of "individual and organisation". ... This analysis has selected and designed concepts in such a way that the fundamental category of social action, the dimension of the social, can no longer be discerned...<sup>74</sup>

This is a serious criticism of Adorno, by Axel Honneth, and partly explains why some of Adorno's students in the 1960s were disappointed to find his Marxist theory apparently lacked any element of praxis. This was unfair of such critics in that Adorno had, since the publication of 'The Actuality of Philosophy', maintained that the act of engaging in critical theory was itself a political praxis. In his mind his activity as a philosopher and critic was itself a revolutionary praxis. What Adorno thought could be done in terms of practical action to combat such a powerful and pervasive negative totality as capitalism was less clear. He seems to believe that no amount of well-meaning political action within a liberal democracy can make any real improvement. Adorno claimed: 'Politics aimed at the formation of a reasonable and mature

mankind remain under an evil spell, as long as they lack a theory that takes account of the totality that is false...'<sup>75</sup> A liberal politics, in other words, that failed to correctly analyse the total situation would be bound to fail. In his late essay 'Resignation' he spells out the danger that praxis in the form of 1960s radical action was always in danger of being just another example of a 'pseudo activity.'<sup>76</sup>

In contrast, the uncompromisingly critical thinker, who neither superscribes his conscience nor permits himself to be terrorized into action, is in truth the one who does not give up. ...Open thinking points beyond itself. For its part, such thinking takes a position as a figuration of praxis which is more closely related to a praxis truly involved in change than in a position of mere obedience for the sake of praxis.<sup>77</sup>

Although Adorno does acknowledge the existence of collectivity he still lays most stress on the singular experience, whether social, metaphysical or artistic, of individuals:

Collective modes of production by small groups are already conceivable, and in some media even requisite; monads are the locus of experience in all existing societies. Because individuation, along with the suffering that it involves, is a social law, society can only be experienced individually. The subduction of an immediately collective subject would be duplicitous and would condemn the artwork to untruth because it would withdraw the single possibility of experience that is open to it today.<sup>78</sup>

Presumably the 'collective mode of production' Adorno has in mind is the film, or a theatre ensemble, although at another point in *Aesthetic Theory* he refers to 'collective forms of production such as the composers' workshop that Schoenberg envisaged.'<sup>79</sup>

If the value of collectivity is in doubt, so also is the value of a scientific approach to analysing the ills and structure of society: 'In a determinably false society that contradicts the interests both of its members and of the whole, all knowledge which readily subordinates itself to the rules of this society that are congealed in science, participates in falsehood.'<sup>80</sup> In other words, a positivist empirical sociology which operates on a scientific basis inevitably 'participates in falsehood'. The results of empirical research, as he showed in his own practice in texts such as *The Authoritarian Personality*, need to be assessed critically using the deeper interpretation that only comes from a critical theory point of view. Adorno clearly believed that the industrialisation of all forms of leisure activities had taken over from, or become another version of, ideology:

Men have come to be – triumph of integration! – identified in their innermost behaviour patterns with their fate in modern society. ...The affective re-arrangement of industry, the mass appeal of sports, the fetishization of consumer's goods, are all symptoms of this trend. The cement which once ideologies supplied is now furnished by these phenomena, which hold the massive social institutions together on the one hand, the psychological constitution of human beings on the other.<sup>81</sup>

However by contrast, in the essay 'Free Time' Adorno contrasts hobbies, boredom and DIY with genuine free time. Hobbies, boredom and DIY can be understood as an extension of the 'unfreedom' of work as such.<sup>82</sup> He admits that, much to his surprise, an empirical sociological investigation into attitudes towards a royal wedding had revealed that, whilst TV watchers were entranced by the spectacle, they nevertheless retained a sense of objectivity and disbelief in the importance of the hyped event they had witnessed. 'It is obvious that the integration of consciousness and free time has not yet completely succeeded. The real interests of individuals are still strong enough to resist, within certain limits, total inclusion.'<sup>83</sup> More typical of Adorno's attitude to the consciousness of individuals in general is his view expressed in the essay 'Lyric Poetry and Society' where a privileged individual is in a position to gain a wider perspective:

The lyric subject (the more adequately it presents *itself*, the more compellingly) does not merely embody the whole. Rather it is set apart from the whole in that it owes its existence to special privilege: not only the fewest individuals, given the pressures of the necessities of life, are ever allowed to grasp the general truth or shape of things in self-immersion – few, indeed, have been allowed simply to develop themselves as independent individuals, in control of the free expression of their own subjectivities.<sup>84</sup>

This could be interpreted as mandarin cultural conservatism, and in a sense it is, for it is an astute acknowledgement that the forms of art, and philosophy Adorno believed in most passionately were the preserve of a privileged few in an irrational and unequal society.

### **Summary**

This close reading of portions of Adorno's writings on capitalism as totality has revealed a number of aspects of his understanding that require critique. It is clear that Adorno does think of capitalism as a form of totality, a negative one, against which and in opposition to which critical theory must work. Society, whether understood in general sociological terms or as industrial society, is itself permeated by capitalist forces of production. Capitalism is the most fundamental concept. Despite this there are comments by Adorno where three different aspects of his critique are muddled together. It is not always clear whether Adorno is distinguishing between society and the power of capital. Often the sociological understanding of a society, is run together with an economic understanding and political understanding of capitalism as if they are identical. To this confusion is added the mixed metaphors of Weberian rationality and Freudian irrationality as forms of total ideological control from which there is no escape except for the few lone individuals who can identify this. Adorno and Horkheimer's analysis in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* that the rationality of the Enlightenment has subverted itself and turned into its opposite, myth is a source of this view. Whilst this has the advantage of making clear that philosophy is only possible as a critique of the current situation in economics, politics, philosophy and art, however, does seem to be used as a signifier for a deeply pessimistic negative outlook. That rational/irrational conceit is a good example of Adorno's methodological

approach as negative dialectics. I argue that his negative dialectics should be understood as Kantian antinomies which are un-resolvable as opposed to Hegelian dialectics.

In addition there are a fundamental set of problems involved in setting up the power of capital, whether understood as such or in the form of a modern society, in opposition to the lone individual. First, the power of capital as manifested in the 'irrational administration of the world' does seem to be so overwhelming in Adorno's view that few can escape it. There are places where his analysis implies that individuals are totally controlled and submerged in the ideology of the power of capital. This leaves Adorno no space to construct, or identify, oppositional social groups through whose shared understanding and shared collaborative action the critique of the power of capital can be undertaken. Second, emphasis on the lone individual whether as creator, audience member or analyst underplays a more realistic sociology of art such as that proposed by Pierre Bourdieu.<sup>85</sup> In *The Rules of Art* Bourdieu develops his sociological conception of a 'field' to make clear how complex and social is the creation and reception of art. This is an entire realm of sociological understanding that is missing in Adorno's account.

Disintegration was meant to be the telos of capitalism according to Marx. That capitalism has transformed itself through several phases from monopoly capitalism through to global capitalism without disintegrating is undeniable. What have disintegrated, according to Adorno, are philosophy and art. The impossibility of grasping the world via traditional systematic philosophy in a world so structured by capitalism means that for Adorno the only way philosophy can survive is in micrological conceptual forms, in constellations, and it is philosophy understood as constellation, that forms the next section of this chapter.



## Section Two: Constellation

In the previous chapter I introduced *Aesthetic Theory* from a structural point of view and suggested that the text could partly be understood as a structure of sections or parts. Adorno clearly thought about the book in this way because in a letter, quoted in the ‘Editors’ Afterword’ to *Aesthetic Theory* he states: ‘The book must, so to speak, be written in equally weighted, paratactical parts that are arranged around a midpoint that they express through their constellation.’<sup>86</sup> This idea of a constellation runs through *Aesthetic Theory*, indeed it structures the book, and it is to be found in many other texts by Adorno. The basic conceptual idea is of a set of ideas being both equal and equidistant from a midpoint [*Mittelpunkt*] or centre [*Zentrum*] and presented [*darstellen*] in the form of a constellation. I will discuss each of these concepts in turn starting with ‘midpoint.’

### Midpoint

Midpoint (or centre) and constellation are two intimately related concepts for Adorno and they are related to a third, which is a textual conception, parataxis. These three concepts, themselves form an implied constellation. They form the core of what, to put it in analytic philosophical terms, can be described as Adorno’s theory of meaning. The relationship between the three concepts is complex. I will first examine midpoint which is an idea that can be found in a variety of texts by Adorno where interestingly it is used in reference to three different objects. Midpoint is used in reference to (i) the text itself (in two forms, as the essay and as philosophy) (ii) to art and artworks (especially to music), and (iii) to society. The fact that the idea of midpoint links these three different areas demonstrates its important conceptual role for Adorno. It is a fundamental aspect of his concept of meaning. I will introduce each in turn starting with texts.

In ‘The Essay as Form’ Adorno explains why the essay is the textual mode of communication that he thinks is best suited to his understanding of the reality of communicating in a society that at every turn expresses the totality that is late capitalism at work. He does this by examining the form of the essay. According to Adorno, one of the benefits of the essay over a longer discursive text is, the freedom available for the writer to experiment and try ideas out:

But for the essay, culture is not some epiphenomenon superimposed on being that must be eliminated, but rather what lies underneath is itself artificial (thesei), false society... The essay owes its freedom in its choice of objects, its sovereignty vis-à-vis all priorities of fact or theory to the circumstance that for it all objects are equally near the centre, to the principle that casts a spell over everything.<sup>87</sup>

It must be assumed that ‘the principle that casts a spell over everything’ is a reference to the totality of late capitalism. This is one fundamental meaning to the concept of the midpoint, that

in such a society the experimental cross-disciplinary freedom provided by the form of the essay enables the writer to unmask the reality of capitalism. This suggestion is reinforced by another passage from the same text: ‘The essay must let the totality light up in one of its chosen or haphazard features but without asserting that the whole is present.’<sup>88</sup> However, there is a second important meaning to midpoint within a text. In *Minima Moralia* Adorno claims that the essence of dialectical thinking – in other words, philosophy – can be described as follows:

All bridging concepts, all links and logical auxiliary operations that are not part of the matter itself, all secondary developments not saturated with the experience of the object, should be discarded. In a philosophical text all the propositions ought to be equally close to the centre. Without Hegel’s ever having said so explicitly, his whole procedure bears witness to such an intention.<sup>89</sup>

In this section, (44) of *Minima Moralia*, Adorno also advocates losing philosophical arguments with other philosophers ‘in such a way as to convict their opponent of untruth.’ Whilst this recommendation on the conduct of arguments may represent a momentary stepping into the world of Jonathan Swift in order to make a point ironically, the main point demonstrates the significance of this idea of the midpoint. The reference to Hegel’s dialectical anti-foundationalism allows Adorno to explain that philosophy must always start in the middle, that there is ‘no first principle.’ Nothing in philosophy can be built up from an initial point, unless it is acknowledged that this initial point is in reality already in the middle. This second meaning to midpoint within a text is the more important as far as the structure of the text is concerned. So in philosophical terms, along with Heidegger, Adorno believes in philosophy as being already in the middle. In Heidegger’s terms that middle is the meaning of the existence of Dasein which can only be fully understood by the philosophical recovery of the truth of Being. By contrast, for Adorno, that middle is a historical materialism the truth of which is revealed by philosophy and art against the negative totality of late capitalism. The idea that philosophy should start in the middle was also held by Friedrich Schlegel as this extract from his lectures shows:

Philosophy must have at its basis not only a reciprocal proof but also a reciprocal concept. In the case of every concept, as in the case of every proof, one can in turn ask for a concept and a proof of the same. For this reason philosophy, like an epic poem, must start in the middle, and it is impossible to lecture on philosophy and to pay it out piece by piece in such a way that the first piece would be completely grounded for itself and explained. It is a whole, and thus the path to recognising it is no straight line but a circle.<sup>90</sup>

This is another reminder of Adorno’s Romantic heritage. As one of the revelations of truth for Adorno, as for Heidegger, is art, and as the truth of art for both philosophers is only recoverable by philosophy, art is extremely important for Adorno’s theory of meaning. As well as the literary form of the essay, Adorno also used the term model to describe the sections of the long text *Negative Dialectics*. Models, like essays, are the antithesis of a system:

The call for binding statements without a system is a call for thought models, and these are not merely monadological in kind. A model covers the specific, and more than the specific, without letting it evaporate in its more general super-concept. Philosophical thinking is the same as thinking in models; negative dialectics is an ensemble of analyses of models.<sup>91</sup>

The same structure for an extended text used for *Negative Dialectics* was clearly planned for *Aesthetic Theory*. The twelve sections of *Aesthetic Theory* each deal with a constellation of concepts on a subject area of art and aesthetics set up in opposed conceptual pairs. Each section is clearly intended to be an 'essay' or 'thought model' and the entire book a paratactical 'ensemble'.

We have seen that there are two types of meaning to midpoint within a text – first that it points to the underlying unfreedom of the whole and second, that the text itself takes the form of an essay, model or fragment. This makes the text into a structural form that cannot start with first principles but must already be in the middle. The structure, the juxtaposition of ideas and concepts

in antinomic tension presents the reader with a text that they are forced to read carefully and interpret. Nothing is offered in the way of a discursive argument.

The second main use of midpoint by Adorno comes with his analysis of artworks, particularly musical works. Art is seen as having a midpoint, particularly traditional forms of music such as Beethoven's, where the articulation of the form is understood as a dynamic totality where the parts go to make up the meaning, and hence the truth of the whole. It is not in any one part that truth resides but in the relations between the parts, in the 'nexus' of meaning hidden in the processes of art: 'Art tends towards processes in which everything that occurs is equidistant to the midpoint [*Mittelpunkt*]; where everything accidental arouses the suspicion of being superfluously ornamental.'<sup>92</sup> With the breakdown of traditional forms, the experimental artworks of the twentieth century become more diffuse in their internal organisation, in particular music. However the same problems of how to begin – the example Adorno uses is Proust – are faced by an author as well as by a composer:

The contemporary problem faced by all artworks, how to begin and how to close, indicates the possibility of a comprehensive and material theory of aesthetic form that would also need to treat the categories of continuity, contrast, transition, development, and the "knot", as well as finally whether today everything must be equally near the midpoint or can have different densities.<sup>93</sup>

Later in this section of *Aesthetic Theory* Adorno criticizes contemporary artworks such as happenings for getting so close to reality as to be indistinguishable from it and for becoming in effect, anti-art. The problem revolves around the structure of the artwork. If a modern work does not have a midpoint as the above passage indicates is possible, but has parts of 'different densities' can these be understood as parts? Can they be explained by a 'material theory of

aesthetic form?’ Clearly they could not be so described. An understanding of an artwork as if it were a structure cannot deal with unstructured works of art, unless it is assumed, as Adorno seems to, that the structureless is predicated on the structured.

It is generally clear that when it comes to modern music the idea of the ‘midpoint’ is extremely important, in fact as the next quotation demonstrates, it becomes a formal concept of what Adorno calls ‘static form’. Whereas a ‘midpoint’ was essential to a traditional dynamic work, it still is important for modern works that do not appear to progress in the same way:

If it is at all possible to point to something like a [basic] ‘idea’ underlying the shaping of form in the new music, then one would have to put forward the idea of static form in which each single event is equidistant from the centre, in which concepts like development [*Entwicklung*] and progression [*Fortgang*] – even if for different reasons in the different schools [of composition] – increasingly lose their meaning and in which in a certain sense the music relates indifferently to time.<sup>94</sup>

Modern music has a new type of structure that as Adorno suggests involves a new relationship to time. A highly structured work such as a classical symphony, from say Beethoven’s mid period, depends on using the audience’s memory and expectation tied into their experience of time whilst they listen to the work. Recapitulations, echoes, the sonata form; all these formal elements depend on a dynamic temporal progression being an integral part of both the intention of the composer and the experience of the audience. By contrast some modern music seems to float and does not contain easily identifiable structures, let alone tunes and themes. Whilst modern music is necessarily *in time* it is also in terms of its structure in a sense *out of time*. This new music is still understood by Adorno as having a ‘midpoint’ precisely because of its new structure:

Until the most recent developments in art, differentiation between the intensive and the secondary within a whole was an accepted artistic means; the negation of the whole through partial wholes is itself demanded by the whole. If today this possibility is disappearing, this is not only the triumph of structuration that at every instant wants to be equally near the midpoint [*Zentrum*] without falling slack; it is also the result of the lethal potential inherent in the contraction of the means of articulation.<sup>95</sup>

The danger for music that becomes no more than a sound experience is that it runs the risk of being a form of anti-art, runs the risk of ceasing to be describable as music. This again is a question of fragmentation and disintegration. The structure of the artworks of modern music has fragmented and is in danger of becoming so unstructured that it finally disintegrates all aesthetic form. As long as there is some form of relational as opposed to literal ‘midpoint’ there is a form of structure. A relational form, akin to Adorno’s concept of the philosophical constellation.

The third form of midpoint in *Aesthetic Theory* is concerned with society. There is a sense in which Adorno’s view of society parallels his view of modern art. As was seen above,

for Adorno modern society cannot be grasped as a whole, it is like modern music, no more than sets of abstract relations. Modern society takes the fragmented form it presents to an observer because of the negative totality of late capitalism that lies behind it. If modern art is fragmented and disintegrating it is because, in Adorno's view, art is in revolt against precisely the same negative totality expressed as 'affirmative' art and taste. When it comes to society a 'midpoint' can also be seen to exist for ideology: 'Today, ideology means society as appearance. Although mediated by the totality behind which stands the rule of partiality, ideology is not simply reducible to partial interest. It is, as it were, equally near the centre in all its pieces.'<sup>96</sup> In effect, Adorno is arguing, the negative totality that is late capitalism at work 'touches' everything, art and society alike. To call his view of society, 'aesthetic' or to call his view of art 'societal' in the end comes to the same thing: 'Causality has withdrawn to totality... Every state of things is horizontally and vertically tied to all others, touches all others, is touched by all others. ...In a total society all things are equidistant from the center; that society is as transparent, and its apologia as threadbare, as those who see through it are certain to die out.'<sup>97</sup> This form of midpoint is the same as the first one for texts, namely that the midpoint indicates the underlying reality of the negative totality of late capitalism. So midpoint or centre is clearly an extremely important concept for Adorno whether he is concerned with a text, philosophy, artwork or society. I will now move on to examine the related concept of constellation.

### **The constellation as a formation**

The notion of a constellation is thought to have been derived by Adorno from Walter Benjamin's 'Epistemo-Critical Prologue' to his *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* where Benjamin illustrates his discussion of ideas, concepts and objects with 'an analogy' - 'Ideas are to objects as constellations are to stars.'<sup>98</sup> The meaning comes from the form, the form of the constellation of ideas gives rise to an insight. It is a methodology for doing philosophy that avoids writing systematically. The system is impossible, the time of the system is past. However a constellation is a mini-system. In another text, the exact date of which is hard to judge as it was also left unfinished with the death of the author, Walter Benjamin put forward the idea that knowledge is often achieved in flashes of insight: 'In the fields with which we are concerned, knowledge comes only in lightning flashes. The text is the long roll of thunder that follows.'<sup>99</sup>

It is interesting to note that an earlier source of the notion of a constellation, which may have been known to both Adorno and Benjamin, can be found in the writings of George Simmel, who also used the concept of *Verdictung*. This can be variously translated as condensation, coalescence and crystallization.<sup>100</sup> *Verdictung* is clearly very close the idea of the constellation. A constellation is a synchronic spatial form, whereas *Verdictung* is formation, the process of creating the formed. A liquid that has the form only of its container can in the process of crystallization form crystals in an analogous way to vague and random thoughts forming into the presentation, the *Darstellung*, of a concept. In his essay 'The Adventure' Simmel refers to

the similarity between a work of art and an adventure. An adventure is 'A fragmentary incident, it is yet, like a work of art, enclosed by a beginning and an end.'<sup>101</sup> Later in the same essay Simmel refers to all the elements that go to make up an adventure as 'a constellation'.<sup>102</sup>

The idea of a constellation or conceptual construction can also be found in Max Weber's theory of ideal types. In his essay 'Objectivity' Weber writes of 'synthetic constructs which have been designated as *'ideas'* of historical phenomena.'<sup>103</sup> Weber describes this in the following way: 'This conceptual pattern brings together certain relationships and events of historical life into a complex, which is conceived as an internally consistent system.'<sup>104</sup> At another point in the essay Weber refers to this 'complex' as a constellation.

Constellation is a key idea that Adorno uses as the methodology of his philosophy. Once concepts are arranged in a constellation they form a pattern, a relationship, a kind of 'gestalt' in which recognition of meaning can occur in a moment and in that moment the question that lay behind the formation of the constellation fragments, disintegrates, 'disappears'. For Benjamin constellations were composed of objects or images, whereas for Adorno constellations are of concepts. Both the ideas from Benjamin quoted above, of formation and recognition in an instant, can be found being made use of in Adorno's inaugural lecture at the University of Frankfurt in 1931:

...the function of riddle-solving is to light up the riddle-*Gestalt* like lightning and to negate it (*aufzuheben*), not to persist behind the riddle and imitate it. Authentic philosophic interpretation does not meet up with a fixed meaning which already lies behind the question, but lights it up suddenly and momentarily, and consumes it at the same time. ...so philosophy has to bring its elements, which it receives from the sciences, into changing constellations, ...into changing and trial combinations, until they fall into a figure which can be read as an answer, while at the same time the question disappears.<sup>105</sup>

The multi-disciplinary nature of philosophy/theory as understood by Adorno, is clear in this extract. Philosophy is free to make use of 'elements' that come from the entire totality of thought. Adorno goes on to claim that he thinks this approach is a materialist praxis. This is because he believes, perhaps naïvely even for the early 1930s, that the interpretation of an 'untrue' reality in whatever aspect implicitly calls for its abolition:

The interpretation of a given reality and its abolition are connected to each other ...out of the construction of a configuration of reality the demand for its [reality's] real change always follows promptly. ...Materialism has named this relationship ...dialectic. Only dialectically, it seems to me, is philosophic interpretation possible. When Marx reproached the philosophers, saying they had only variously interpreted the world, and contraposed to them that the point was to change it, then the sentence receives its legitimacy not only from out of political praxis but also out of philosophic theory...the annihilation of the question compels praxis.<sup>106</sup>

This use of the concept of dialectics is certainly Hegelian for the expectation is that the recognition of the meaning of the opposed concepts will result in a positive result in political

praxis. The fact of making the analysis makes a change. Whilst Adorno clearly optimistically believed this in the early 1930s he also still held a similar view over 30 years later: ‘Where thought transcends the bonds it tied in resistance - there is its freedom. Freedom follows the subject’s urge to express itself. The need to lend a voice to suffering is a condition of all truth.’<sup>107</sup> Lending ‘a voice’ is a weaker form of praxis. So a text is not to be systematic, in the traditional sense of being built around a comprehensive narrative argumentative structure, but is to be more informal, as close perhaps to reflective musings as to structured theorisation. One way of doing this is to make the text a set of fragments such as Adorno chose to do with *Minima Moralia*. His rationale for this was his belief that by attending to the thoughts of an individual, himself, he could thereby say more about society and the world in general in a fragmented text than by directly addressing the issues in a discursive theoretical text: ‘...in an individualistic society, the general not only realises itself through the interplay of particulars, but society is essentially the substance of the individual.’<sup>108</sup> As was noted above, another manifesto for Adorno’s preferred manner of writing philosophy is contained in ‘The Essay as Form.’ For Adorno the essay has great unmasking power precisely because it stands outside standard philosophical forms: ‘By transgressing the orthodoxy of thought, something becomes visible in the object which it is orthodoxy’s secret purpose to keep invisible.’<sup>109</sup> Earlier in ‘The Essay as Form’ Adorno sets out an account of the essay as a constellation:

The essay becomes true in its progress, which drives it beyond itself, and not in a hoarding obsession with fundamentals. Its concepts receive their light from a *terminus ad quem* hidden to the essay itself, and not from an obvious *terminus ad quo*. In this the very method of the essay expresses the utopian intention. All of its concepts are presentable in such a way that they support one another, that each one articulates itself according to the configuration that it forms with the others. In the essay discreetly separated elements enter into a readable context; it erects no scaffolding, no edifice. Through their own movement the elements crystallize into a configuration. It is a force field, just as under the essay’s glance every intellectual artefact must transform itself into a force field.<sup>110</sup>

There are a number of points to note in this extract. First Adorno still holds onto his belief, first expressed in 1931, that the correct materialist interpretation of ‘a given reality,’ through an open experimental form such as the essay holds out an expectation for change in the sense of it being utopian. He is no longer making the unrealistic claim that the formation of such a set of ideas on its own ‘compels praxis.’ The second point to note is that, in line with Simmel, a constellation is formed by a process akin to crystallization. The third point is that a further related concept ‘force field’ is being used. Once formed, the constellation acts like ‘a force field’ analogous to the way a magnetic field attracts objects of the right kind around it. Fourth, as was seen above in ‘The Actuality of Philosophy,’ a constellation disintegrates once the force field is, so to speak, switched off. It is switched off by being understood, Benjamin’s ‘lightning’ flash, the momentary gestalt of understanding. The formation, the crystallization of the constellation

shows, like a gestalt, the relations of the concepts out of which it is formed as being related equally around a relational 'midpoint' or centre. This formation is the presentation, the *Darstellung*, of the constellation. Reading the constellation is analogous to reading a gestalt.

The gestalt psychology of perception was developed in the 1920s by Köhler and others, the basic idea being that wholes are perceived as opposed to particular parts, the parts are perceived as already in sets. Previous theories assumed perception was of discrete bits of the blooming buzzing confusion. To put it in Benjaminian terms, constellations are perceived. There are two aspects to this theory, the first is that the basic structure of visual perception is perception by means of wholes, the second aspect is that such wholes are actively sought in the visual field. If the structural form of gestalt theory is moved from the sphere of visual perception to the sphere of philosophical understanding then it is constellations of concepts that provide insight and understanding. Within philosophy, in parallel to visual perception, there is a desire to find and construct conceptual wholes. Within gestalt psychology the suggestion was that this is account of how visual perception worked, and was a new discovery. Within philosophy the claim is not so much that this approach is a new discovery as just the best way to do philosophy in the twentieth century. This would be Adorno's claim in *The Actuality of Philosophy*.

Gestalt psychology is an account of visual experience. The visual has long been a model for philosophical thought, Descartes 'clear and distinct ideas' and Kant's 'intuitions without concepts are blind' being prime examples. Perception as 'seeing through or 'seeing clearly' in discursive knowledge was most probably originally borrowed from philosophy for psychology. Adorno uses the concept clarity and blindness throughout his writings, mostly derived from Leibniz's blind monads but very possibly also a reference to Kant's blind intuitions. 'Experience' of philosophy for Adorno becomes metaphysical experience and is closely linked to the experience of artworks. Once a set of dialectically related concepts are arranged in a particular pattern, in a constellation, they can be seen and understood, an insight is revealed. This is all visual language at work. This model depends on a moment in time when understanding is achieved. It depends on a moment, a shudder, shock, recognition, explosion, a singular moment. Such a moment can only be experienced against a background. A firework depends on a dark sky for its effect. Watchers see the momentary flashes sparks and explosions and movements of coloured particles taking place against a dark background that is integral to their effect. Fireworks in bright sunlight against a blue sky are of no interest. The dark background for Adorno in both both philosophy and art is a form of totality, a presupposition, an assumed presence, a dark partially hidden reality; the administered world of late capitalism. This reality can be broken down in various ways as sets of interrelated descriptions and analyses, political, economic, sociological, and psychological. There is an antomic relationship between the moment and the totality against which the moment is experienced. Autonomous artworks and philosophical insights are privileged moments, privileged



experiences against and out of the totality. At this point it is time to bring in the third part of my suggested complex, parataxis.

### **Parataxis**

As noted above, ‘midpoint’ can refer both to the structure of a text and to the negative totality of capitalism pointed to by that text. *Aesthetic Theory* is a text that Adorno claimed to be paratactical. In other words, each sentence sits alongside every other sentence, each sentence is calculated to have the same relation to each other sentence. Each sentence, in a sense, reflects all the others. As well as the level of the sentence, in the context of *Aesthetic Theory*, ‘paractical’ is also meant to describe the sections or chapters as being in a relationship without constructed connections. Parataxis literally means the placing of words, phrases or statements next to each other without the use of conjunctions. The effect of parataxis is that the reader is in a sense forced to interpret the text for themselves. In this sense a paratactical text is open and can mean ‘more’ than it appears to. Samuel Beckett was a master of parataxis as this extract from Lucky’s speech in *Waiting for Godot* demonstrates:

hockey of all sorts penicilline and succedanea in a  
word I resume and concurrently simultaneously for  
reasons unknown to shrink and dwindle in  
spite of the tennis I resume flying gliding golf over  
nine and eighteen holes tennis of all sorts in a  
word for reasons unknown in Feckham Peckham  
Fulham Clapham namely concurrently  
simultaneously what is more for reasons unknown  
but time will tell to shrink and dwindle I resume<sup>111</sup>

It is well known, that for Adorno, Samuel Beckett’s work served as a paradigm for contemporary art. Adorno also shared with Heidegger a fascination for the late poetry of Hölderlin. In his essay ‘Parataxis,’ on the poetry of Hölderlin, Adorno makes clear that there is an ideal sense in which a poetic text, and by implication a philosophical text, can mean more than it appears to:

The path followed by the determinate negation of meaning is the path to the truth content. If the truth content is to be true in the emphatic sense, if it is to be more than merely what is intended, then it leaves immanence behind as it constitutes itself. The truth of a poem does not exist without the structure [*Gefüge*] of the poem, the totality of its moments; but at the same time, it is something that transcends this structure, as a structure of aesthetic semblance: not from the outside through a stated philosophical content, but by virtue of the configuration of the moments taken together signify more than the structure intends.<sup>112</sup>

This aspect of the configuration, meaning ‘more than the structure intends’ could at first sight be taken to be a species of Heideggerian mysticism. Adorno is very careful in this essay to distance himself from what he regarded Heidegger’s misinterpretation, or misappropriation, of Hölderlin’s poetry. Adorno makes it clear that philosophy is necessary in order to do justice to the parataxis of the poetry: ‘While Hölderlin’s poetry, like everything that is poetry in the emphatic sense, needs philosophy as the medium that brings its truth content to light, this need is not fulfilled through recourse to philosophy that in any way seizes possession of the poetry.’<sup>113</sup>

Later in this essay Adorno describes great music as ‘aconceptual synthesis’ and sees this as prototypical for Hölderlin’s late poetry. ‘In poetry, unlike music, aconceptual synthesis turns against its medium; it becomes constitutive dissociation.’<sup>114</sup> If a poem by employing parataxis can so move against the structural logic of ordinary language then it can conjure up, or create, a new meaning, a ‘more’ where one does not apparently exist then this means there is an escape route from the conceptuality of traditional philosophic texts. If a philosophical text can be so arranged that its parts conjure up ‘more’ than is apparently there, ‘more than the structure intends’ then this exactly fits in with Adorno’s approach to philosophical writing. A traditional Jena Romantic fragment points to ‘more’, points to a form of fragmented totality through the impossibility of completion of the fragment. Yet, paradoxically, by its constitutive incompleteness such a fragment itself becomes a system. As Schlegel put it in *Atheneum* Fragment 206: ‘A fragment, like a miniature work of art, has to be entirely isolated from the surrounding world and be complete in itself like a porcupine.’<sup>115</sup> For Adorno the essay is a form of fragment – it is a whole and yet as with *Negative Dialectics* and *Aesthetic Theory* a set of essays, or models, could be arranged to make a greater whole at the level of the book. These two books operate without a traditional discursive structure, their textual juxtaposition of elements is intended to mean ‘more.’ It does not take very much reflection to realise that meaning ‘more’ than the structure intends is precisely what happens in many works of art, both in the tradition of western art and in the twentieth century. A work of art is a thing, an artifact, a construction that also at the same time has meaning and value over and above the bare bones of its thinghood. It is characteristic of both collage in painting and montage in film that they are forms that point to ‘more’ than is at first sight apparent in the elements that are juxtaposed. In music dissonance has the same effect, something ‘more’ can be heard, this is also true of the twelve tone row. These constructions conjure up a ‘more’. There is a sense in which *Aesthetic Theory* is a hermeneutics of ‘more’. Meaning ‘more’ is a characteristic of language, and it no accident that Adorno refers to the reading of a constellation as if it were a ‘script’, ‘a figure which can be read as an answer’ as he put it in ‘The Actuality of Philosophy.’ This ‘more’ however can only be identified by means of an interpretation, a reading, it is a hermeneutic practice.

So we have the three elements of what I am suggesting might be called Adorno’s theory of meaning: midpoint, constellation and parataxis. Allied to these three concepts are the three

ideas of formation (*Verdictung*), presentation (*Darstellung*) and reading or interpretative understanding (*Verstehen*). Formation takes place in an experimental and experiential freedom. The kind of freedom Adorno attributes to metaphysics: ‘Philosophy has the curious characteristic that, although itself entrapped, locked inside the glasshouse of our constitution and our language, it is nevertheless able constantly to think beyond itself and its limits, to think itself through the walls of its glasshouse. And this thinking beyond itself, into openness - that, precisely, is metaphysics.’<sup>116</sup> Presentation as constellation allows a number of concepts that might not normally be brought together, perhaps because of the divisions between disciplines, to be shown together as a kind of gestalt. ‘Reading’ [*Verstehen*] is a form of interpretative understanding derived from the philosophical hermeneutics of the Romantics such as Schleiermacher. ‘Reading’ allows more to be read in the script of the constellation than might be expected to be there, this more being achieved by conceptual parataxis of the force field. Reading a constellation may on occasion operate instantaneously like Benjamin’s ‘lightning’ or a process of reflection – akin for Adorno to Jena Romanticism’s concept of reflection. As Benjamin stated, ‘...the infinity of reflection for Schlegel and Novalis, is not an infinity of continuous advance but an infinity of connectedness.’<sup>117</sup> This in turn is remarkably similar to Hölderlin’s ‘They hang together infinitely (exactly).’ As Benjamin remarks this is very much the same as Schlegel and Novalis’ understanding of ‘the infinitude of reflection as a full infinitude of interconnection... systematically...’<sup>118</sup> In this Romantic sense a constellation can be thought of as a non-hierarchical open system of interconnectedness. In this sense it differs from a closed traditional philosophical system.

It is in this sense as a system of interconnectedness that *Aesthetic Theory* is like a work of art, not in its style, but in its structure in which the aesthetic and the philosophical are entwined. Indeed this analysis is beginning to lead to the thought that perhaps the reason why *Aesthetic Theory* can be regarded as if it were a work of art is because for Adorno a constellation of ideas, philosophy, is structured in exactly the same way as a modern artwork. Both are a form of configuration that say ‘more’ than they appear to. This ‘more’ requires philosophy, ‘theory’ to reveal it, to reveal the truth content of the artwork, and to reveal the truth content of the set of philosophical models. If an artwork has the same abstract structure as a philosophical constellation, then this means it has a structure such that it requires philosophy to complete it. This is a thoroughly Romantic idea. The final section of this chapter examines the third form of totality in *Aesthetic Theory*, the artwork understood as monad.

### Section Three: Monad

In the section of *Aesthetic Theory* entitled 'Towards a Theory of the Artwork' There is a paragraph concerning the artwork as monad. This is how it opens: 'The artwork is both the result of the process and the process itself at a standstill. It is what at its apogee rationalist metaphysics proclaimed as the principle of the universe, a monad; at once both a force field and a thing. Artworks are closed to one another, blind, and yet in their hermeticism they represent what is external.'<sup>119</sup> This sentence contains a number of ideas concerning artworks used by Adorno throughout *Aesthetic Theory*; force field, blindness, hermeticism and representation of the external, often described as mirroring. The above sentence does not include two other related ideas often found in *Aesthetic Theory*, that an artwork, as a monad, is the ultimate particular individual work and at the same time a universal exemplar of art. All of these metaphorical ideas about artworks being understood as if they are monads are taken from Leibniz.

#### The background to Adorno's monads

Leibniz's monads are individual spiritual essences that make up the structure of the universe. Each monad is blind and yet reflects the entire universe. The main text by Leibniz for this metaphysics of substance is *The Monadology* (1714). This text is a brief summary, in 90 numbered paragraphs, of his philosophical position. A monad is 'a simple substance'. It is *one* simple substance, a unit, so simple it cannot be made out of smaller parts or broken up for it has no parts. 'These Monads are the real atoms of nature and, in a word, the elements of things.'<sup>120</sup> Monads can only be created or annihilated. As a numerical unit, 'one', monad has a long philosophical history originating with Pythagorus. 'Monad' is the Greek word for the number 'one.' According to Leibniz monads have no windows, nothing can come in or out, they are blind. In order to have an identity they must be distinguishable one from another, 'each Monad must be different from every other.' Monads are dynamic in their existence in time, they must be both subject to change and have perceptions of this change. It is the quality of these perceptions, or 'apperceptions' that distinguish between three levels of monads. The lowest level are bare monads, 'in a state of stupor'. The next level are conscious monads with memory. The third level consists of a single monad, God. The 'final reason of things must be in a necessary substance.'<sup>121</sup> 'Thus God alone is the primary unity or original simple substance, of which all created or derivative Monads are products...'<sup>122</sup> Each monad 'has relations which express all the others, and, consequently, that it is a perpetual living mirror of the universe.'<sup>123</sup> Only one monad, God, has a clear view of the universe, of reality, for lesser monads the appearance of the universe can be chaotic and confused. A living body, such as a plant or animal consists of a collection of monads each with one dominant monad or soul. In higher beings, such as humans, the soul is described as a mind. There is a 'pre-established harmony between all substances, since they are all representations of one and the same universe.'<sup>124</sup> This

leads Leibniz to the thought that out of all the possible worlds God could create, the world he has created must be the best of all possible worlds: ‘Whence it is easy to conclude that the totality of all spirits must compose the City of God, that is to say, the most perfect State that is possible, under the most perfect of Monarchs.’<sup>125</sup> Since Adorno clearly thought this was possibly the worst of all possible worlds the selection of monad as a symbol for art was probably not without ironic intent. This metaphysics of substance, based on monads, allows Leibniz to claim that he has solved several philosophical problems of his day. The distinction between mind and body is erased and the existence of god proved. Furthermore, a rational order of nature has been established that is integral with science and morality.<sup>126</sup> In philosophical terms monads are both universals and particulars. The *Monadology* is like a Bach fugue, a perfect logical metaphysical system, it is at the same time also an exact fantasia.

As has been noted before, Adorno often takes over an idea from Walter Benjamin and develops it. In his *Theses on the Philosophy of History* Benjamin describes ‘materialist historiography’ as being based on ‘a constructive principle:’

Thinking involves not only the flow of thoughts, but their arrest as well. Where thinking suddenly stops in a configuration pregnant with tensions, it gives that configuration a shock, by which it crystallizes into a monad. A historical materialist approaches a historical subject only where he encounters it as a monad. In this structure he recognises the sign of a Messianic cessation of happening, or, to put it differently a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past.<sup>127</sup>

Here Benjamin’s monad is virtually the same idea as Adorno’s constellation, a crystallized ‘configuration’ at a standstill. The standstill being the ‘cessation of thinking’ at the recognition of the configuration, it is the shock of recognition that creates the monad for Benjamin.

In *Minima Moralia* Adorno uses the monad as a symbol for an individual who is in opposition to society. The individual as monad reflects the ills of society, it is ‘the precise opposite of the collective.’<sup>128</sup> Society here is understood as the whole ‘system’ of individual monads. This use of the word monad to represent an individual person can also be found in *Aesthetic Theory*: ‘...monads are the locus of experience in all existing societies. Because individuation, along with the suffering that it involves, is a social law, society can only be experienced individually.’<sup>129</sup> The individual, as monad, both represents, mirrors, the bad totality of society and is the only ‘locus’ for any experience of society. This again emphasises Adorno’s conception of society being composed of lone individuals as opposed to groups. Part of this emphasis on the lone individual for both art and experience comes down to Adorno’s idea of experience. Whilst it is true that only an individual can experience society, or an artwork, it is undeniable that there are collective modes of experience that Adorno appears to ignore entirely. For example members of a particular audience for art, or as a member of a particular group within society, can have shared experiences as a group.

There are several references to monads understood in philosophical terms in Adorno's *Negative Dialectics* such as: 'Only a philosophy in fragment form would give their proper place to the monads, those illusory idealistic drafts. They would be conceptions, in the particular, of the totality that is inconceivable as such.'<sup>130</sup> For Leibniz monads mirror the totality of the universe, each one is itself an idea of the whole even though each one has no conception of the whole. In parallel to this, philosophy for Adorno has itself to be composed of fragments which do not add up to a whole system. A philosophical book consisting of fragments such as *Minima Moralia* is a good example of this at work. Here Adorno selects many of the subject areas for the fragments from apparently insignificant aspects of his life in mid-twentieth century America. These aspects have been selected by Adorno in accordance with Benjamin's insistence on the importance of minutiae. The larger later texts such as *Negative Dialectics* and *Aesthetic Theory* are structured in the same way as *Minima Moralia* in that they consist of fragments, models in the case of the first and constellations in the case of the second. A fragmented philosophy points towards an impossible whole consisting of the fragments. This is another example of Adorno's Romantic heritage.

There are three aspects of monads that Adorno selected for use in *Aesthetic Theory* to refer to artworks - spiritual beings, mirrors and dynamism.

*Spiritual beings*: artworks, like monads, are in some respects spiritual beings, they can only be experienced as individual works. They also participate in the universal, art.

*Mirrors*: artworks reflect the exterior 'administered' world in their own constitution, history is 'sedimented' into them.

*Dynamism*: Artworks, like monads, are dynamic totalities in time.

I will examine each of these in turn.

### **Monads as spiritual beings**

There are many places in *Aesthetic Theory* where Adorno writes about works of art *as if* they were selves or beings of some kind. Examples of this are: 'art itself thinks,'<sup>131</sup> and, 'Any artwork that supposes it is in possession of its content is plainly naive in its rationalism.'<sup>132</sup> That this is not merely a stylistic device is proved by the fact that artworks possess 'spirit.' As Benjamin also pointed out, for the Romantics, 'everything is a self,'<sup>133</sup> not just the 'I' as in Fichte. So this is yet another example of the Romantic heritage to *Aesthetic Theory*. The 'thingly structure' of artworks 'makes them into what is not a thing'<sup>134</sup> and 'The spirit of artworks is constituted in their reity.'<sup>135</sup> There are several senses in which an artwork is a thing whether it be a text, a score, an object or an idea. The thing can be traded, can be bought and sold. The creator owns the copyright, the legal owner has property rights. As a thing the artwork is a commodity where the thing-like character suppresses the real social relations that lay behind its production. However, Adorno means more than this as his insistence that all artworks have history 'sedimented' into them bears out. For Adorno all artworks are products of a particular

person at a particular time and place working with the latest datable materials. In this sense what is also reified in to the artwork, in a kind of reversal of Lukács's theory of reification, is a mirroring of the social reality of its production which becomes a part, however illusory, of the spirit of the work. Spirit 'makes artworks, things among things, something other than thing.'<sup>136</sup> At a later point in *Aesthetic Theory* Adorno states: 'Indeed, because art is essentially spiritual, it cannot be purely intuitive. It must also be thought: art itself thinks.'<sup>137</sup> The 'thingly structure' is also perhaps a reference to what is perhaps the best section of Heidegger's 'On the Origin of the Work of Art' where Heidegger analyses the work of art as a thing. 'The artwork is, to be sure, a thing that is made, but it says something other than what the mere thing itself is...'<sup>138</sup> Heidegger's analysis leads him to identify 'three modes of defining thingness' – 'as a bearer of traits, as the unity of a manifold of sensations, as formed matter.'<sup>139</sup> Heidegger then proceeds to the position that, 'The essence of art would then be this: the truth of being setting itself to work.'<sup>140</sup> The analysis of the thingly character of artworks led Heidegger to the position where he could begin his analysis of the truth of the work of art, which is characteristically both crudely political and mystical. In one of his few references to Heidegger in *Aesthetic Theory* Adorno acknowledges the value of this analysis in the 'Art Beauty' section:

Not only do artworks, as Heidegger pointed out in opposition to idealism, have things that function as their bearers—their own objectification makes them into things of a second order. What they have become in themselves—their inner structure, which follows the works immanent logic—cannot be reached by pure intuition; in the work what is available to intuition is mediated by the structure of the work, in contrast to which the intuitable is a matter of indifference.<sup>141</sup>

There are classes of artworks where there is a clear division between the thing that embodies the artwork and the production of the work. Two examples are musical scores and dramatic scripts.<sup>142</sup> Whilst there can be no doubt that traditional artworks, as opposed to many examples of happenings and conceptual works in the twentieth century, do have the reality of being a thing, the reality of an artwork having some kind of being is only an illusion for Adorno. If, for Adorno, art 'thinks' then it is part of the illusion of art that it is a form of thinking being in dynamic time: 'By virtue of their nexus of meaning, the organon of their semblance, artworks set themselves up as things that exist in themselves. By integrating them, meaning itself – that which creates unity – is asserted as being present in the work, even though it is not actual.'<sup>143</sup>

In contrast to Heidegger, the spiritual being of an artwork for Adorno is not merely an illusion constitutive of artworks per se but an illusion constitutive of artworks created under capital: 'The semblance character of artworks, the illusion of their being-in-itself, refers back to the fact that in the totality of their subjective mediatedness they take part in the universal delusional context of reification, and, that, in Marxian terms, they need to reflect a relation of living labor as if it were a thing.'<sup>144</sup> Adorno's conception of an artwork as 'both a force field and

a thing' goes to the heart of his theory of artworks as monads. For Adorno artworks are both things and beings, their ontological status is binary and is probably best expressed as a dialectic of thing and being. As was noted above, for Adorno, a dialectic is closer to the structure of a Kantian antinomy, than to a Hegelian dialectic. The antinomy of thing and being keeps both poles open. The poles are not resolvable under the conditions of late capitalism. If they are resolvable at all for Adorno it will be in the future, it is a matter of utopian expectation.

The final aspect of the monad artwork as a being consists in its individuality as a particular work of art: '...the monads, which artworks are, lead by way of their own principle of particularization to the universal.'<sup>145</sup> An artwork for Adorno can never be experienced except as a particular individual work and yet artworks are always examples of art, the universal. At the same time each new artwork changes the idea of art, in a sense it redefines the indefinable universal of art. 'Not only does the dialectic of the universal and the particular descend into the depths of the universal in the midst of the particular. At the same time it destroys the invariance of the universal categories.'<sup>146</sup> So in parallel with his conception of society being composed of individuals, art is composed of individual works of art. Adorno is not interested in movements or –isms or the whole idea of style. As will be explored in more detail in the next chapter his insistence on the importance of individual works leads him to restrict what counts as art to singular 'great works.'

### **Monads as mirrors**

Adorno's analysis of the ontology of the artwork as the antinomy of thing and being leads him to one of his most positive and utopian comments: 'Only as things do artworks become the antithesis of the reified monstrosity. Correspondingly, and this is the key to art, even out of so-called individual works it is a We that speaks and not an I.'<sup>147</sup> As Adorno explains in this section of *Aesthetic Theory*, even though every artwork is the product of an individual 'I' this does not mean that it is an 'I' that speaks, 'the private I is externalized in the work ' as ' the I's collective essence.' It is this 'linguistic quality' of an artwork that makes it social. This relation of the 'We', as society to the artwork monad is a characteristically antinomic relationship. On the one hand, artworks are entirely separate from the administered world and yet at the same time they mirror that world in their construction. 'The relation of works of art to society is comparable to Leibniz's monad. Windowless – that is to say, without being conscious of society, and in any event without being constantly and necessarily accompanied by this consciousness – the works of art, and notably music which is far removed from concepts, represent society. Music, one might think, does this the more deeply the less it blinks in the direction of society.'<sup>148</sup> Artwork monads have a particular relation to society, that of opposition. The autonomous art of modernism has for Adorno a definite and important oppositional relationship to the 'social whole.' Indeed it is the oppositional nature of autonomous art to bourgeois taste and belief systems that serves to partly identify it as art at all. 'Art, however, is



social not only because of its mode of production, in which the dialectic of the forces and relations of production is concentrated, nor simply because of the social derivation of its thematic material. Much more importantly, art becomes social by its opposition to society, and it occupies this position only as autonomous art.<sup>149</sup> A danger that oppositional art has to face is the danger of polarising ‘... into ideology and protest... Absolute protest constrains it and carries over to its own *raison d’être*’;<sup>150</sup> Part of Adorno’s disagreements with Brecht centred on this very issue, the danger that an art of protest would amount to no more than protest, that it would not achieve the status of art. The development of art for Adorno was not solely internal to art. This development was partly internal but even for autonomous art it also reflected the society in which it was made, and the very development of that society was itself a driving force. ‘The more total society becomes, the more completely it contracts to a unanimous system, and all the more do the artworks in which this experience is sedimented become the other of this society.’<sup>151</sup> The more total society became over historical time the greater was the mimesis of society by art. Not in direct mirroring of society, by socialist realism as advocated by Lukács, but in more indirect ways. The antinomy of this mimesis is that it looks like an apparent flight from reality but it is a different order of realism as authentic contemporary art in its sheer abstraction. ‘New art is as abstract as social relations have in truth become.’<sup>152</sup> It is in this sense that Adorno thinks Samuel Beckett’s works are more realistic and political than some of Brecht’s. Art can show the truth about society, ‘...art is nevertheless the truth of society in so far as in its most authentic products the irrationality of the rational world order is expressed.’<sup>153</sup> For Adorno art has this ‘...double character as being socially determined in its autonomy and at the same time social.’<sup>154</sup>

One of the themes that runs through all, what might be termed, Hegelian histories of art is the idea of progress. There are two main reasons why Adorno does not believe in the progressive development of art. For one thing, to be examined in the next chapter, Adorno thinks each successful artwork stands alone as a prime example of ‘Art.’ Whilst there is a necessity for art, in Adorno’s view, to make use of the most up to date materials, the most modern constructions, this is only an illusion of progress. The continual negation of the previous style in art is not for Adorno a progression but simply another way of showing how under capital an ‘ever the same’ rules. ‘To its very core, art is enmeshed in the historical movement of growing antagonisms. In art there is as much and as little progress as in society.’<sup>155</sup> Progress in society, as we have seen, consists in the ever-increasing power of the negative totality that is late capitalism at work. As well as this general aspect of reflecting society Adorno believes art partakes in the capitalist structure of society for it is inevitably social through its ‘mode of production’. It is clear from the following comment that the construction, ‘the configuration’ of an artwork mirrors ‘social forces’ in society:

The elements of an artwork acquire their configuration as a whole in obedience to immanent laws that are related to those of the society external to it. Social forces of

production, as well as relations of production, return in artworks as mere forms divested of their facticity because artistic labour is social labour; moreover, they are always the product of this labor.<sup>156</sup>

In this sense Adorno's history of art is Darwinian, art evolves in the situation it finds itself in. Adorno clearly believed art also reflected capitalist society in these subtle ways. The very forms of art could, by analysis, be tied to forms of production, such as commodity production, 'nominalistic artworks were unwitting *tableaux économique*.'<sup>157</sup> Another example is drama: 'To the extent to which a drama – itself a sonatalike product of the bourgeois era – is in musical terms "worked," that is, dissected into the smallest motifs and objectified in their dynamic synthesis, to this extent, and right into the most sublime moments, the echo of commodity production can be heard.'<sup>158</sup>

A further relationship between monadic art and capitalist society is concerned with utopia, a world of future happiness. This, for Adorno, lies in the expectation that in this very opposition to totality, art somehow expresses or encodes a spark of freedom that points to the possibility of a changed world in the future. 'In our totally organized bourgeois society, which has been forcibly made over into a totality, the spiritual potential of another society could lie only in that which bears no resemblance to the prevailing society.'<sup>159</sup> The 'spiritual potential' is to be found in oppositional autonomous art, even though it is also deeply entwined in capitalist society. In the autonomous work of art lies the utopian hope for a changed world in the future:

...art today is scarcely conceivable except as a form of reaction that anticipates the apocalypse. Closely observed, even tranquil works discharge not so much the pent-up emotions of their makers as the work's own inwardly antagonistic forces. The result of these forces is bound up with the impossibility of bringing these forces to any equilibrium; their antinomies, like those of knowledge, are unsolvable in the unreconciled world.<sup>160</sup>

Art and knowledge share the same antinomic structure. The idea that it might just be in art working through the principles of construction derived from the 'administered world' that hope for a different outcome might lie is clearly present in Adorno's thought: 'The many interrelations with technocracy give reason to suspect that the principle of construction remains aesthetically obedient to the administered world; but it may terminate in a yet unknown aesthetic form, whose rational organization might point to the abolition of all categories of administration along with their reflexes in art.'<sup>161</sup> This is an expectation of utopia, embodied in this case in the art of the future, as opposed to the art of the present. The negative totality might yet, through art, achieve the 'negation of the negation,' precisely because artworks became autonomous monads in response to the form of society. There is one further aspect of monads to consider, the dynamic.

### **Monads as dynamism**

The third aspect of the artwork as monad concerns the artwork being thought of as an organic totality dynamic through time. As Benjamin remarked, the idea that artworks should be thought of as works is 'a basic concept' of Romanticism.<sup>162</sup> The 'concept of the work'<sup>163</sup> is a modern (18<sup>th</sup> century) conception. As Annie Becq points out: 'The fundamental notions of modern aesthetics crystallize around the idea of creation: in the work of art, understood as an organic totality, are expressed the autonomy of the beautiful and the irreducible originality of the genius whose unique gesture has engendered it. Consequently, this concept of the *work*, fruit of human activity, has taken the place of beauty...'<sup>164</sup> In the 'First Introduction' to the *Critique of Judgement* Kant states that when the 'products' of nature are 'systems' such as 'crystal formations ... shapes of flowers, or the inner structure of plants and animals,' then 'nature proceeds *technically*, i.e., it proceeds also as *art*.'<sup>165</sup> In *Aesthetic Theory* Adorno comments on Kant's idea of an artwork. 'For Kant artworks are purposive as dynamic totalities in which all particular elements exist for the sake of their purpose - the whole - just as the whole exists for the sake of its purpose, the fulfilment or redemption through the negation of its elements. At the same time artworks were purposeless because they had stepped out of the means-ends relation of empirical reality...'<sup>166</sup> This idea that artworks can be understood to be dynamic totalities is mainly used by Adorno in an historical sense to refer to the work of Beethoven, although he does want to maintain the idea of the artwork as a totality right through into the twentieth century. When he states that, 'beauty is shifted to the dynamic totality of the work'<sup>167</sup> this comment is located in a section where Adorno is discussing disintegration and integration in artworks. The coherence of an artwork, its truth content, depends on the integration of all of its elements in the whole. A whole that in an important sense falls apart if you look at it too closely. As so often he is thinking about music. As Adorno describes listening to music such as Beethoven's and as he analyses it in detail it somehow disintegrates for him. The particular details seem incoherent at the level of the micro-structure. As Adorno says the beauty of the work has somehow migrated to the level of the whole. Adorno goes so far as to identify the structure of Beethoven's music with that of Hegel's philosophy in two senses in terms of structure as here: '...Cognitive character of Beethoven's music ... the relationship of part to whole revealed at every instant as a process of musical self-reflection. ... in this his music is no mere analogy for, but is in fact directly identical to, the structure of Hegelian logic.'<sup>168</sup> It is also related in terms of coherence at the level of detail: 'The tour de force of each of his great works is literally Hegelian, in that the totality of nothing determines itself as the totality of being, though it does so only as a semblance and not with the claim of absolute truth.'<sup>169</sup> A text by Hegel such as the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is extremely difficult to follow at the level of the individual sentence. As Adorno recommends in his *Hegel: Three Studies* the reader of Hegel needs to learn to be able to stand back from any individual sentence with a consciousness of the larger context. For Adorno, Beethoven's music is the ultimate model for his conception of the artwork monad for it reflects the 'dynamically unfolding totality' of the bourgeois revolution:

The kinship with that bourgeois libertarianism which rings through all Beethoven's music is a kinship of the dynamically unfolding totality. It is in fitting together under their own law, as becoming, negating, confirming themselves and the whole without looking outward that his themes come to resemble the world where forces move them; they do not do it by imitating that world.<sup>170</sup>

Beethoven's work 'echoes' the values of the French Revolution and yet 'Aesthetic totality is the antithesis of the untrue whole.'<sup>171</sup> Beethoven's music is also seen to be a clear precursor of the music of Schoenberg in terms of organisation:

The total rationality of music is its total organisation. By means of organisation, liberated music seeks to reconstitute the lost totality - the lost power and responsibly binding force of Beethoven. Music succeeds in doing so only at the price of its freedom, and thereby it fails. Beethoven reproduced the meaning of tonality out of subjective freedom. The new ordering of twelve-tone technique virtually extinguishes the subject.<sup>172</sup>

The construction of a music artwork monad is 'currently the only possible form that the rational element in the artwork can take.'

This last section on the artwork monad as totality has demonstrated how important the idea of construction in art is for Adorno. One final comment needs to be made on the artwork monad as a dynamic totality and that relates to history. Adorno never thought that artworks were static, as will be seen in the next two chapters. Artworks are dynamic not only in themselves but over time in that the interpretation of them is never fixed but is always developing. In this sense artwork monads are dynamic in historical time by virtue of an hermeneutic process of becoming. This same process can of course proceed by a work becoming less and less interpretable so some artworks end up as mute alien relics of a bygone time. However, as will be discussed in the next chapter there is, for Adorno, something of the alien about all artworks.

This three-part investigation of Adorno's use of monad in *Aesthetic Theory* has revealed the importance of the artwork monad as an antinomy between thing and being. As a being an artwork is a singular entity which can only be experienced by another singular entity, an individual. As a mirror an artwork monad reflects and embodies the time in which it was created. As a dynamic totality artworks are both structured totalities and works with a history and an hermeneutical becoming over time.

## Summary

This investigation of three forms of totality used in *Aesthetic Theory*, capitalism as negative totality, philosophy as constellation and artwork as monad has shown that all three are intimately and inescapably related. It is the first of these forms, capitalism as negative totality that gives rise to the other two forms. Constellations of negative dialectics are the only form that

philosophy can take for Adorno. Every work of art, for Adorno, is in opposition to the negative totality of capitalism. Every true work of art encapsulates this utopian moment, however illusory this may be, so in a sense the utopian moment is a moment of now – even though paradoxically this is a moment of capitalism. Does this hold for philosophy? Does every Adornian philosophical statement also encapsulate a utopian moment by virtue of its also being oppositional to society? His belief, already described above, in ‘The Actuality of Philosophy’ that philosophical practice was itself a form of revolutionary praxis supports this idea. However, it must be the actual form the philosophy takes, the non-discursive antinomic negative form of *Negative Dialectics* and *Aesthetic Theory* that embodies the idea of a philosophy with a utopian moment. The form that is expressed in constellations of concepts in temporary relationships. Just as Kant’s antinomies required a higher realm ‘the supersensible’ for their possible reconciliation so Adorno’s antinomies of both art and philosophy by their very form hold out the, perhaps illusory, expectation of a better world. ‘The monadological character of artworks would not have been formed without the guilt of the monstrous monadological character of society, but only by its means do artworks achieve that objectivity that transcends solipsism.’<sup>173</sup> It is the history of society that has made artworks monads. The development of capitalism and modern autonomous art are therefore the same development. ‘The artwork is mediated to real history by its monadological nucleus. History is the content of artworks. To analyse artworks means no less than to become conscious of the history immanently sedimented in them.’<sup>174</sup> So, it is the history of a modernist autonomous art that is identical to the history of the social development of capital. To this must be added the history of philosophy. The history of the development of capitalism is then simultaneously three histories, of society, of art and of philosophy. As Adorno wrote in the section of *Aesthetic Theory*, ‘Universal and Particular:’ ‘...the history of the whole of bourgeoisie art was not possible except as the effort if not to solve the antinomy of nominalism then at least to give it shape, to win form from its negation. In this the history of modern art is not merely analogous to the history of philosophy: It is the same history.’<sup>175</sup> This is an extremely close structural relationship between art, philosophy and capitalist society wrapped up in the metaphor of the artwork as monads.

The examination of the concept of the artwork as monad has revealed some significant aspects of Adorno’s understanding of the relationship between art and philosophy. The extent to which Adorno believes artworks have ‘history’ ‘sedimented’ into them is of great importance. It ties in with his view that precisely in line with the development of the totality of capitalist society both art and philosophy have developed as oppositional forms. If art is autonomous for Adorno then so must philosophy also be autonomous. Philosophy can no longer be a system but it can be systematic, it can be constructed in the form of a constellation which exactly mirrors the constructed nature of an artwork monad. So, artworks and philosophy share the same abstract structure. For both artworks and philosophy the paratactical ‘more’ of their construction is a key feature. As will be seen in the next chapter to fully interpret an artwork, for Adorno,

requires a form of philosophy. The philosophical interpretation in a sense completes the artwork. The next chapter will look more closely at the structure of the artwork understood as Adorno's seeming insistence that there are only great works of art. The question 'whether there are only great works of philosophy?' will have to wait.

## CHAPTER THREE

# ADORNO'S THEORY OF THE ARTWORK

The investigation of Adorno's theory of the artwork will form the subject matter of this chapter. In the previous chapter Adorno's concept of the artwork was examined from the narrow point of view of his conception of an artwork as a monad. This chapter enlarges the viewpoint and is organised into six sections. The first examines autonomous art and commodification; the second success and coherence; the third, montage, construction and mimesis; the fourth, interpretation, commentary and critique; the fifth section examines Adorno's related concepts of spirit and truth content. The final section returns to the relationship between art and philosophy in *Aesthetic Theory*.

### Section One: The status of the artwork

#### Autonomous art and commodification

For Adorno autonomous art is both independent and social. He has two main reasons for this position. The first is that Adorno believes art not just mirrors the society in which it was created as a monad mirrors the universe in which it exists, but that it is inevitably opposed to that society. The second reason is that the concept of autonomous art for Adorno involves a belief in total artistic freedom that relates to the possibility of actual political freedom. 'Art is related to its other as a magnet to a field of iron filings. Not only art's elements, but their constellation as well, that which is specifically aesthetic and to which its spirit is usually chalked up, refers back to its other.'<sup>1</sup> For Adorno art is fundamentally engaged with the administered world in its utter opposition to society and yet it is still autonomous art. He calls this the 'double character' of art: 'Art's double character as both autonomous and *fait social* is incessantly reproduced on the level of its autonomy.'<sup>2</sup> This 'double character' is inherently contradictory. 'The double character of art—something that severs itself from empirical reality and thereby from society's functional context and yet is at the same time part of empirical reality and society's functional context—is directly apparent in the aesthetic phenomena, which are both aesthetic and *faits sociaux*.'<sup>3</sup> This is an antinomy between the internal freedom of the autonomous works of art and its simultaneous immersion in the totally un-free society of late capitalism. This is one of the most important antinomies in *Aesthetic Theory* and is a key to understanding Adorno's conception of the work of art. It is an antinomy that is not resolvable under the conditions of late capitalism. It is all too easy to assume that autonomy means the work of art is entirely separate

from society and some commentators on Adorno have made this mistake as John Roberts pointed out.<sup>4</sup>

The ability of art to be internally free is in origin the result of societal domination according to Adorno because the idea of freedom is conceptually dependent on the idea of domination, freedom and domination are opposed linked concepts.

The idea of freedom, akin to aesthetic autonomy, was shaped by domination, which it universalized. This holds true as well for artworks. The more they freed themselves from external goals, the more completely they determined themselves as their own masters. Because, however, artworks always turn one side toward society, the domination they internalized also radiated externally. Once conscious of this nexus, it is impossible to insist on a critique of the culture industry that draws the line at art.<sup>5</sup>

This quotation makes it clear that Adorno does not believe in two separate realms, art and the culture industry. In some circumstances a work of autonomous art must be seen as a part of the culture industry. Every work of art is created by an artist who is inevitably a part of the society in which they live and create. The works are usually traded in some form of organised market if the artist is to make a living from their art. For Adorno the best way for an artist to oppose society is to be completely free in the making of their work. ‘By its difference from empirical reality the artwork necessarily constitutes itself in relation to what is not, and to what makes it an artwork in the first place.’<sup>6</sup> It is the work itself that will then be opposed to society, not through its overt content but partly through the encoding of freedom in its very making. ‘Autonomous works provoke the verdict of social indifference and ultimately of being criminally reactionary; conversely, works that make socially univocal discursive judgements thereby negate art as well as themselves. Immanent critique can possibly break through this rigid alternative.’<sup>7</sup> George Lukács, for example, accused Kafka of being an example of ‘an aesthetically appealing, but decadent modernism.’<sup>8</sup> By contrast Adorno was convinced that Brecht’s political dramas were driven more by ideological beliefs than by purely aesthetic considerations. ‘Art, however, is social not only because of its mode of production, in which the dialectic of the forces and relations of production is concentrated, nor simply because of the social derivation of its thematic material... Art’s asociality is the determinate negation of a determinate society.’<sup>9</sup> Adorno believed that the relation art has to society is formed at the time of the creation of the work. ‘...the relation of art to society is not to be sought primarily in the sphere of reception. This relation is anterior to reception, in production.’<sup>10</sup> Many commentators and creators think of art’s relation to society as being primarily seen in the reception of the work, in the effect the work has on an audience. Plays by Brecht, which Adorno criticised for being didactic and overtly political, were written specifically to have a cathartic affect on their audience, to draw the audience in and to bring them to re-assess their own attitudes to the action taking place on stage. Agit-prop theatre seeks to change hearts and minds in a positive manner. Adorno believed that the inclusion of an openly political message in the structure of a play will damage that work from an artistic point of view. Adorno’s view is that the autonomous work of



art can only be successful if it is purely true to its own structure. It is in this sense that he understands Samuel Beckett's plays to be more political than Brecht's because they are utterly uncompromising in their almost abstract language and structure. Adorno's pessimism concerning the survival of autonomous art in the 1960s is clear in the following passage, where he introduces the criterion of expression.

...socially the situation of art is today aporetic. If art cedes its autonomy, it delivers itself over to the machinations of the status quo; if art remains strictly for-itself, it nonetheless submits to integration as one harmless domain among others... The central criterion is the force of expression, through the tension of which artworks become eloquent with wordless gesture. In expression they reveal themselves as the wounds of society.<sup>11</sup>

He continues by citing Picasso's *Guernica* as an example of an autonomous work that through its uncompromising internal abstraction nevertheless operated as a successful protest to an atrocity, the bombing of a civilian population. This endorsement of *Guernica* by Adorno is inconsistent when set in relation to his criticism of Brecht. There is no doubt that *Guernica* is a supreme example of agit-prop, it is a political protest as much as it is an expression of horror. It clearly makes 'A univocal discursive judgement' which in Adorno's view should 'negate' it as art. But Adorno treats it as if it were a pure expression when it is as calculatingly structured as any of Brecht's plays precisely in order to express horror. In a sense Adorno's valorisation of *Guernica* contradicts his position. 'Whereas art opposed society, it is nevertheless unable to take up a position beyond it; it achieves opposition only through identification with that with which it remonstrates.'<sup>12</sup> This is why the opposition to society is integral to the concept of art.

In the section of *Aesthetic Theory* known as 'Art, Society, Aesthetics' Adorno makes it clear that works of art are subject to exactly the same forces of production as any other goods. 'The aesthetic force of production is the same as that of productive labour and has the same teleology; and what may be called aesthetic relations of production – all that in which the productive force is embedded and in which it is active – are sedimentations or imprints of social relations of production.'<sup>13</sup> It is clear that Adorno considers any work of autonomous art to be an actual commodity. The relationship to commodities goes deeper than this for Adorno thinks the work of art shares the same abstract structure as a commodity. He describes it in this way: 'the commodity character itself: a parody of aesthetic semblance'.<sup>14</sup> Just as an artwork appears to be more than a mere thing so a commodity as a desirable fetish appears to be more than a thing.

The absolute artwork converges with the absolute commodity. The modern pays tribute to this in the vestige of the abstract in its concept. If in monopoly capitalism it is primarily exchange value, not use value, that is consumed, in the modern artwork it is its abstractness, that irritating indeterminateness of what it is and to what purpose it is, that becomes a cipher of what the work is.<sup>15</sup>

Another way in which an artwork resembles a commodity is in the way that it is made. This is especially true of artworks from the era of the bourgeois revolution. The putting together of a dynamic whole out of many ‘details’ involving ‘a dynamic synthesis’ parallels factory production of the time.

...right into the most sublime moments, the echo of commodity production can be heard. The common nexus of these art-technical procedures and material processes, which has developed in the course of industrialization, has yet to be clarified but is nevertheless strikingly evident. With the emergence of intrigue and development, however, commodity production not only migrates into artworks in the form of the heterogeneous life but indeed also as their own law: nominalistic artworks were unwitting *tableaux économiques*.<sup>16</sup>

So autonomous art and commodities are structurally alike in that they share a similar form. An artwork is at the same time a pure tradable commodity. For Adorno to examine an artwork solely from a traditional aesthetic point of view is a mistake.

Art perceived aesthetically is art aesthetically misperceived. Only when art’s other is sensed as a primary layer in the experience of art does it become possible to sublimate this layer, to dissolve the thematic bonds, without the autonomy of the artwork becoming a matter of indifference. Art is autonomous and it is not; without what is heterogeneous to it, its autonomy eludes it.<sup>17</sup>

Any analysis of modern works of art for Adorno must take into account the other of society, not in the sense of a wider context such as is exemplified by the topos of the history of ideas, but in the sense of understanding that modern works of art are a product of the development of capitalism. Only an aesthetic theory that takes the double character of the artwork into account is acceptable for Adorno.

### **Success and coherence**

‘The concept of an artwork implies that of its success. Failed artworks are not art’.<sup>18</sup> This astonishing statement by Adorno can be found in the section of *Aesthetic Theory* called ‘Toward a Theory of the Artwork’. As Fredric Jameson noted in *Late Marxism*, ‘This, the working premise of *Aesthetic Theory*, must at first be laid out as scandalously and as baldly as possible: all art is “great art”’.<sup>19</sup> How is this to be understood? It is fundamentally an ontological claim involving a judgement, the basis of which at this moment is not clear. This adjudication classifies a work as either art or non-art. It is very close to the military use of the word rank in that fundamental status is addressed. A suggestion that Adorno thinks in this binary way about works of art can be found in *Quasi Una Fantasia* where he writes: ‘Music resembles language in the sense that it is a temporal succession of articulated sounds which are more than just sounds. They say something, often something human. The better the music, the more forcefully they say it. The succession of sounds is like logic: it can be right or wrong.’<sup>20</sup> This is a form of logic of art, of binary status, either ‘right or wrong,’ either art or not art. If one assumes that it is

inherent to Adorno's concept of art that it be of high rank, that it be successful, one should also assume that as his thinking is inherently antinomical that there must be an opposed concept to success which would be failure. There is art and there is failed art, in a sense for Adorno both concepts are needed, one to understand the other and *vice versa*.

In *Aesthetic Theory* Adorno states: 'No continuum leads from bad by way of middling to the good; what does not succeed is a priori bad because the idea of success and coherence is inherent to the idea of art.'<sup>21</sup> This suggests that, for Adorno, the very idea of art involves the judgement that a work must reach a stage of success before it can be conceived of as art, not merely classified as art, but regarded conceptually as autonomous art. It also introduces a related concept, coherence, which is involved in this recognition of a work as an artwork. I use the word recognition here because, as will become apparent later, there is a similarity to Hegel's account of one person recognising another in Adorno's account of someone recognising an artwork as a distinct form of being as opposed to being a mere thing. '...art tolerates neither normal works nor middling ones that correspond to a norm or establish their means in terms of their distance from it. There is no scale for the ranking of artworks...' <sup>22</sup> Rank [*Rang*] is here being used as a kind of absolute status. Adorno does not mean to imply that there is some form of external standard or norm of which artworks must partake as with a Platonic ideal of the beautiful, although he is very close to doing so. The very 'idea of art' according to Adorno demands that an artwork reach a certain state of coherence, and therefore a level of success, before it can be understood to be a work of art. The beauty of an artwork must also be derived from this successful coherence. Coherence is closely related to another concept, articulation. Just as all the parts of a skeleton are articulated and held together within one body by means of sinews and muscle fibre so the parts of an artwork comprise the whole. 'It is not possible to conceive the rank or quality of an artwork apart from its degree of articulation.'<sup>23</sup>

For Adorno there is something suspect about the concept of greatness.

The idea of greatness as a rule is bound up with the element of unity, sometimes at the cost of its relation to the nonidentical; for this reason the concept of greatness itself is dubious in art. ...Greatness is the guilt that works bear, but without this guilt they would remain insufficient. This is perhaps the reason for the superiority of major fragments, and the fragmentary character of others that are more finished, over fully complete works.<sup>24</sup>

The concept of greatness here must mean an appreciation of an artwork that is akin to the organic type of explanation encountered above. Such an understanding fails to account for the contradictory or dissonant elements in a work, the elements that point to the future hope of art. For Adorno this future hope seems to be twofold. First, the artwork itself holds open the possibility of future works, it is constitutive of art that it holds open the possibility of its own development in its own freedom. Second, by analogy this internal freedom of the artwork holds open the utopian possibility of political freedom. The other aspect of this concern about

greatness is the suggestion by Adorno that the unfinished, the fragmentary can in some cases be superior to more finished great works. This is another aspect of Adorno's Romantic heritage, the valorisation of the fragment over the completed whole was an important element of the aesthetics of the Jena Romantics. Robert Hullot-Kentor argues that in *Aesthetic Theory* 'an aesthetics that is devoted to the primacy of the object claims that one art work can be and absolutely must seek to be, better than any other art work... Thus Adorno's dissatisfaction with each and every artwork was his alliance with each one as it seeks to be the only artwork.'<sup>25</sup> Hullot-Kentor is, I think, exaggerating Adorno's position and trying to make it too like Schelling's. It is not that art works compete with each other to be great, but that they have to achieve a certain internal quality to be art at all. Adorno admits in the 'Draft Introduction' that there was a time, the time of Kant and Hegel, when artworks did conform to general aesthetic norms, and indeed aesthetics itself saw its task as identifying and to some extent helping create these norms. However, despite that, as he claims below, important works inevitably altered such norms. 'True, there has probably scarcely ever been a work that as important in any regard that did not, by virtue of its own form, mediate these norms and thus virtually transform them.'<sup>26</sup>

So far the discussion of external norms has been related to the relationship to earlier works. One of the defining characteristics of art in the last 200 years has been the pace of change and the extent and frequency with which norms and styles have been transformed many times. The concept of style is conservative. In other cultures, such as the Japanese and Chinese, particular styles in art can last for hundreds of years. The whole idea of a style imposed on a group of works is for Adorno a form of shorthand, a kind of identity thinking, a form of categorisation that falls short and is unconvincing. 'The concept of style never fully did justice to the quality of works; those works that seem most exactly to represent their style have always fought through the conflict with it.'<sup>27</sup> Even the best work that seems to exemplify its own style will have elements in it that are in conflict with the style. If a work fully exemplified its style it would be truly organic, an academic exercise, with no dissonant elements pointing forward. It might even be thought of as perfect. However, as he also states, just as there can be no failed artworks so there can be no perfect ones either. 'The ideological, affirmative aspect of the concept of the successful artwork has its corrective in the fact that there are no perfect works.'<sup>28</sup> Clearly within cultured bourgeois society certain works of art are considered to be, and valued as, more successful than others. Such a societal valuation of an artwork creates what for Adorno is only an apparent ranking and should be understood to be an affirmative aspect of culture in that it only serves to reinforce the ruling ideology and values of bourgeois society. As he states: 'The truce between the domains of entertainment and serious art bears witness to the neutralisation of culture: Because no spirit is binding for culture's spirit, culture offers its wares in a selection for *highbrows*, *middlebrows*, and *lowbrows*.'<sup>29</sup> Culture is being used here, with its three 'brows', not as art historical comment but as a form of sociological commentary. However, there is one statement that makes it clear that rank ultimately depends on the work's

relationship to the administered world. In short the work's opposition to it. 'The rank of an artwork is defined essentially by whether it exposes itself to, or withdraws from, the irreconcilable.'<sup>30</sup> So ultimately the rank of a work of art for Adorno depends on its opposition to the administered world of late capitalism. 'The deepest antinomy of artworks, the most threatening and fruitful, is that they are irreconcilable by way of reconciliation, whereas actually their constitutive irreconcilability at the same time deprives them too of reconciliation. Yet they converge with knowledge through their synthetic function, the joining of the disjoint.'<sup>31</sup>

For Adorno artists who have produced work of the first rank are always liable to a falling off in quality. 'Even artists such as Richard Strauss, perhaps even Monet, diminished in quality when, seemingly happy with themselves and with what they had achieved, they forfeited the power for historical innervation and the appropriation of the most progressive materials.'<sup>32</sup> So for an artwork to be successful it must not only be internally coherent and fully articulated, it must also, and this 'must' has the force of an aesthetic imperative for Adorno, employ the most advanced materials. But what are the most advanced materials, and who decides what they are? As we have already seen, for Adorno, the work decides. The artist who takes up new materials to make a work can fail to make the work coherent. Twentieth century art is full of failed experiments. An example would be the computer generated artworks of the late sixties and early seventies. Avant-garde audiences sat in small auditoria and watched with utter seriousness what we would now think of as no more than screen savers. There may be screen saver art out there but it is really a form of modern craft such as the decorated plates or carpets of the past. It often takes a long time for a new medium to be available for making successful art. Inventions such as photography, coal tar pigments, film, aluminium, acrylic paint, the saxophone, have been new technologies in the last hundred and fifty years that have been used by artists, but not usually successfully, soon after their invention. The electric motor had to wait a very long time for artists to use it in mobiles or machine art such as Tinguely's in the 1960s. Whereas other innovations such as the electric guitar, video recorder, and digital imaging have come into successful use almost immediately. Advanced materials can also mean require advanced techniques. After all there was not any advance in the design and construction of orchestral instruments needed for the transitions from tonal to atonal, and then to twelve tone row music, to take place. These changes took place in the conception of the music, in the innovations made by the composers using the latest methods of composition.

It is already apparent that Adorno considers that any work of art that is considered successful by the administered world of culture will inevitably be damaged. Commodification of the experience of art as taking pleasure can also lead to consumers of such art who are accustomed to such works being easy to understand and enjoy consequently finding themselves unable to appreciate more complex and less immediately appealing works of the first rank. Someone who enjoys Mozart may well find a later modernist work difficult to follow. 'What popular consciousness and a complaisant aesthetics regard as the taking pleasure in art,

modelled on real enjoyment, probably does not exist. The empirical subject has only a limited and modified part in artistic experience *tel quel*, and this part may well be diminished the higher the work's rank.'<sup>33</sup> This is a very strange statement by Adorno. What is an empirical subject? Is it short hand for an ordinary person with little knowledge and appreciation of art? Is it short hand for an oppressed and totally controlled subject at the mercy of the administered world? And to what is the empirical subject opposed? To a transcendental subject!? To a subject, such as Adorno who inhabits a different realm of being? The context in which this statement is made is a paragraph largely concerned with 'The Pleasure of Art'. The quotation continues:

Whoever concretely enjoys artworks is a philistine; he is convicted by expressions like "a feast for the ears." Yet if the last traces of pleasure were extirpated, the question of what artworks are for would be an embarrassment. Actually, the more they are understood, the less they are enjoyed... For him who has a genuine relation to art, in which he himself vanishes, art is not an object;... The bourgeois want art voluptuous and life ascetic; the reverse would be better. Reified consciousness provides an ersatz for the sensual immediacy of which it deprives people in a sphere that is not its abode.<sup>34</sup>

'Reified consciousness' is the key phrase. An 'empirical subject' would be a 'philistine' subject whose consciousness has been turned into a form of thing by the power of the administered world. Such a subject is not capable of fully appreciating a true work of art, they cannot enter the 'sphere' of art, all they can do is enjoy art, they cannot have 'aesthetic experience.'  
'Aesthetic experience does indeed benefit from an intensified sensual differentiation as a medium of giving form, yet the pleasure in this is always indirect.'<sup>35</sup> In short, no more pleasure in art than in philosophy!

The inverse of this situation is that of the opposite of the pleasure taker, the fashionably hip member of a counter-culture where the works on offer achieve little more than an anti-bourgeois stance. 'As Boulez points out, many works, of which the question as to their value no longer makes sense, are beholden solely to their abstract opposition to the culture industry, not to their content or the capacity to realise it.'<sup>36</sup> This is similar to the criticism Adorno makes of Brecht. That if a work sets out to be politically oppositional to its core then it will fail as art. 'However once artworks are entombed in the pantheon of cultural commodities, they themselves - their truth content - are also damaged.'<sup>37</sup> The work itself does not change, it's internal coherence is the same, but for Adorno there has been some form of erosion in the reception of the work once it has become a popular classic masterpiece, a gem of late capitalist taste. Adorno's insistence on quality and rank opens him to the criticism that he is a high bourgeois elitist only concerned with high art. Is his complaint that the shallow interpretation that an affirmative audience of 'empirical subjects' with 'reified consciousness' enthusiastically puts on the work in question is too easy and undemanding, too much in the mode of 'How beautiful!?' If this is so, then is he claiming that an erosion of understanding has taken place? There is no doubt that a commodification effect occurs with art that becomes popular. Is it that the work itself fails as it is no longer challenging, no longer advanced, no longer progressive

due to the ‘decay wrought by time’ and by popularity? If this is so how does the work fail? One way in which the work could fail is that the bourgeois audience is incapable of appreciating the intricacies of the form of the work, of the construction, that this form simply becomes an easily recognisable style. The failure is also partly historical. The work achieved its status as ‘great art’ at a particular time when it was genuinely advanced, genuinely oppositional. Perhaps, as Adorno suggests early on in *Aesthetic Theory*, ‘great art’ was only possible at a certain time in history. ‘Rather, art’s substance could be its transitoriness. It is thinkable, and not merely an abstract possibility, that great music—a late development—was possible only during a limited phase of humanity.’<sup>38</sup> This would almost certainly be the time of the bourgeois revolution and the music in question would be that of Beethoven. By becoming fully accepted by a wide bourgeois audience a work such as Beethoven’s seventh symphony, can no longer point to an utopian future, even if it did once in the past, and still does now to the perceptive historically minded beholder such as Adorno. The work has now lost its power to disturb, has become a pure source of pleasure, a kind of cultural golf. In this situation the perishing has begun. ‘The question, however, of what and what is not an artwork cannot in anyway be separated from the faculty of judging, that is, from the question of quality, of good and bad. The idea of a bad artwork has something nonsensical about it: If it miscarries, if it fails to achieve its immanent constitution, it fails its own concept and sinks beneath the apriori of art.’<sup>39</sup> The message is clear, there is no such thing as a bad artwork, there are only artworks and works that fail to make the grade that cannot conceptually be categorised as art.

If the concept of art is narrowed down to include only works of the highest rank and quality, then, this also opens the question as to whether a philosophical account of lesser art is possible? For Adorno, lesser art, in its most commodified form, includes the products of the culture industry. The implication is that aesthetics can only be concerned with successful art.

What is true in positivism is the platitude that without the experience of art nothing can be known about it and there can be no discussion of it. But precisely this experience contains the distinction positivism ignores: To put it drastically, this is whether one uses a hit song, in which there is nothing to understand, as a backdrop for all kinds of psychological projections, or whether one understands a work by submitting to the work’s own discipline.<sup>40</sup>

This is the kind of comment that encourages critics to label Adorno as an elitist. He has often been criticised for his restricted view of jazz. By jazz he did not mean the serious exploration and development of the blues by ensembles operating in a culture of experimentation and free improvisation. He meant extremely popular, lightweight big bands. In *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* there is a reference to jazz that makes it clear that he did realise that there were two types of jazz; ‘...how to master technical problems at both ends of the scale of music experience—real jazz or a cheap imitation;’<sup>41</sup> This comment may of course be by Horkheimer rather than by Adorno. A member of the Glenn Miller Orchestra remarked that playing in that band was like going to work in a factory. The factory work consisted in the repetition of the

familiar with strict rigour. No free form playing was allowed. Understanding ‘a work by submitting to the work’s own discipline’ is a central idea of Adorno’s theory of the artwork.

It is worth asking whether Adorno was alone among his contemporaries in giving such importance to the concept of great art? Herbert Marcuse expressed his views on great art in the preface to his book, *The Permanence of Art* (in English *The Aesthetic Dimension*) of 1978.

...the objection that I operate with a self-validating hypothesis seems justified. I term those works “authentic” or “great” which fulfil aesthetic criteria previously defined as constitutive of “authentic” or “great” art. In defense, I would say that throughout the long history of art, and in spite of changes of taste, there is a standard which remains constant. This standard not only allows us to distinguish between “high” and “trivial” literature, opera, and operetta, comedy and slapstick, but also between good and bad art within these genres.<sup>42</sup>

Marcuse clearly operates with a concept of rank, the constant standard, that he admits is largely ‘a self-validating hypothesis’. What Marcuse calls the constant standard of great and authentic art is really a disguised version of the traditional concept of beauty. It appears to be indistinguishable from beauty as a Platonic form. Heidegger also believed in a concept of ‘great art’ that was related to his conceptions of art as a founding event of truth. I plan to discuss the differences and parallels between Adorno’s and Heidegger’s conceptions of art and truth in the final chapter.

If there are no external norms, then, the judgement that a work is art, has to be in the terms laid down by the artwork itself. Adorno is suggesting that the artwork itself is the source of its own norms. If the work fully satisfies its own norms it is good, it is art. Conversely, if a work fails to satisfy its own norms then it is a failure and not art. This must be one of the senses in which he means there can be no scale, no ranking, for each artwork makes its own rank. This is reminiscent of Benjamin's claim in relation to Proust that ‘all great works of literature found a genre or dissolve one’.<sup>43</sup> It is clear that Adorno’s central belief in *Aesthetic Theory* is that the artwork is only completed in theory, in critique. This is the same theory that can be found in Friedrich Schlegel and the Jena Romantics. Art has to be of a constant standard because of the impossibility of criticizing inferior work. This is not just because artworks carry their theory within them, but because they must be completed by critique. The opposite view was held by Goethe that critique is not possible except to bring out what the work contains because the work is already complete in itself as it contains its own theory. As Benjamin commented in *The Concept of Criticism*: ‘Goethe’s whole theory of art proceeds from his view of the uncriticizability of works.’<sup>44</sup> A quotation from Goethe makes this clear. ‘True works of art contain their own theory and give us the measurement according to which we should judge them.’<sup>45</sup> For the Jena Romantics the critique was the final form of the work of art. A form that would inevitably be constantly renewed and refreshed in critique.

In the previous section concerning autonomous art, it became clear that some aspect of art’s opposition to the society in which it was formed must be apparent in any analysis of the



work. 'Reason, which in artworks effects unity even where it intends disintegration, achieves a certain guiltlessness by renouncing intervention in reality, real domination; yet even in the greatest works of aesthetic unity the echo of social violence is to be heard; indeed, through the renunciation of domination spirit also incurs guilt.'<sup>46</sup> This is it seems to me the most difficult aspect of Adorno's demands for aesthetics. Precisely identifying the source of the 'echo of social violence' in any work other than that it was very probably enjoyed only by a privileged minority could turn out to be the preserve of a cultured left wing elite. However, it is clear that for Adorno the criteria for success or failure, of coherence and articulation, are not to be found outside the artwork in external norms, but, within the artwork itself. 'In artworks the criterion of success is twofold: whether they succeed in integrating thematic strata and details into their immanent law of form and in this integration at the same time maintain what resists it and the fissures that occur in the process of integration.'<sup>47</sup> This is a complicated thought that bears on Adorno's conception of construction in twentieth-century art which he claims is derived from montage.

## Section Two: Construction

### Montage

Montage is one of the most important concepts within *Aesthetic Theory* as it underpins Adorno's view that twentieth-century art is both constructed and, as a result of the montage of empirical elements within the construction, fragmenting. It is an example of Adorno using a foreign word, in this case a French word, partly for its effect, as a form of mild shock. The use of 'montage' is itself a weak montage, a form of parataxis. Adorno was probably ironically self-aware of this conceit. 'Montage', as a French word, means assemblage, the mounting together of heterogeneous elements. As Benjamin Buchloch points out 'photomontage had been developed as early as the 1890s as a commercial technique for the design of advertising.'<sup>48</sup> Whilst montage seems to have started in one genre, that of photography, within the visual arts it quickly spread to other genres, particularly film and then to music and literature.

What does Adorno have to say about montage in *Aesthetic Theory*? There is an extended treatment in only one paragraph in the section of the book dealing with 'Coherence and Meaning.' Apart from this short section, comprising around 600 words in English, there are five other fragments scattered through the book. In a discussion of Benjamin's 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' Adorno comments that montage 'reached its acme in surrealism and was quickly weakened in film.'<sup>49</sup> Adorno was critical of Surrealist montage and accused it of 'possessing the remains of a complaisant irrationalism, for adaptation to material that is delivered ready-made from outside the work.'<sup>50</sup> Adorno is concerned about the transgressing of modernism's 'law of form' by the absorption of 'art-alien objects'.<sup>51</sup> He claims this has been going on 'since early modernism' and that 'this has led mimesis in art to capitulate – as in montage – to its antagonist.'<sup>52</sup> Montage developed, Adorno claims, out of a reaction to Impressionism, 'in antithesis to mood laden art.'<sup>53</sup> The cubist collages of Picasso and Braque are the epitome of this reaction. 'The principal of montage was conceived as an act against a surreptitiously achieved organic unity; it was meant to shock.'<sup>54</sup> Collage was quickly taken up by Dadaists and later by Surrealists. 'For the first time in the development of art, affixed debris cleaves visible scars in the work's meaning. This brings montage into a much broader context.'<sup>55</sup> This broader context is twentieth century art understood as construction. At another point in *Aesthetic Theory* Adorno makes one of his most important, and strange, statements concerning his central idea that montage was transformed into construction. 'Following an internal logic whose stages will need to be described by an aesthetic historiography that does not yet exist, the principle of montage therefore became that of construction.'<sup>56</sup> The 'aesthetic historiography that does not yet exist' is the aspect of this statement that is strange. At first sight this statement should be considered as a typically Adornian over-statement, a piece of hyperbole. A Hegelian interpretation of this comment would be that it is only when the constructive phase of art is over that its history could be written and this is probably part of the

import of the comment. In the longer section devoted to montage the ‘aesthetic historiography’ is clarified. First, there is a passage in which Adorno claims that: ‘All modern art after impressionism, probably including even the radical manifestations of expressionism, has abjured the semblance of a continuum grounded in the unity of subjective experience, in the “stream of lived experience”.’<sup>57</sup> Adorno then moves on to the subject of the relationship of montage to construction: ‘This is complemented by the aesthetic principle of construction, the blunt primacy of a planned whole over the details and their interconnection in the microstructure; in terms of this microstructure all modern art may be called montage.’<sup>58</sup> By including scraps of the material world in visual art, and by including in music ordinary sounds, such as Satie’s typewriters, or quotations of earlier music, montage destroyed the organic unity of the work of art as being composed solely of art elements. Max Paddison considers that Adorno’s views of ‘surrealist’ music are important with regard to a montage of the old with the new: ‘Weill, Krenek and Stravinsky in certain of their works ...’ juxtapose ‘historically devalued fragments in a montage-like manner which enables them to yield up new meanings within a new aesthetic unity.’ Paddison quotes from Adorno’s 1930 essay, ‘Reaction and Progress.’

Insofar as surrealist composing makes use of devalued means, it uses them *as* devalued means, and wins its form from the ‘scandal’ produced when the dead suddenly spring up among the living...But in any case, the ‘surrealist’ technique is capable of producing constructive unity, consistent precisely in its enlightened and abruptly expounded inconsistency – a montage of the debris of that which once was.<sup>59</sup>

The holding together of these elements in a construction, in a totality, is the essence of twentieth century art for Adorno:

Whatever is unintegrated is compressed by the subordinating authority of the whole so that the totality compels the failing coherence of the parts and thus however once again asserts the semblance of meaning. ...The idea of montage and that of technological construction, which is inseparable from it, becomes irreconcilable with the idea of the radical, fully formed artwork with which it was once recognised as being identical.<sup>60</sup>

Technical construction is the use in music of ‘pure’ natural sounds and in painting the use of ‘pure’ colours. This allows ‘the empirical’ into the work which is ultimately destructive. For how can a work that allows ‘the empirical’ in to itself still be fully autonomous, still be oppositional? This is another aspect of the disintegration Adorno believes is integral to twentieth century art.

As is so often the case with Adorno there is a connection to Walter Benjamin. It is possible to identify six usages of montage within Benjamin’s texts. These references demonstrate the extent to which the concept of montage extended over a number of different art genres. Montage appeared in ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’<sup>61</sup> with regard to film production and editing, and is discussed in the correspondence with Adorno. By

contrast in 'The Author as Producer' Benjamin describes succinctly the central technique of Dadaism.

The revolutionary strength of Dadaism consisted in testing art for its authenticity. Still lifes put together from tickets, spools of thread, cigarette butts, were linked with artistic elements. They put the whole thing in a frame. And they thereby show the public: Look, your picture frame ruptures the age; the tiniest authentic fragment of everyday life says more than paintings. Just as the bloody finger print of a murderer on a page of a book says more than the text. Much of this revolutionary content has sought survival in photomontage.<sup>62</sup>

The third usage of montage concerns photography, both as photomontage with the juxtaposition of images from different photographs coupled with text and as the addition of a text to a photograph in the form of a caption. The addition of a caption to a photograph is another form of montage. In his 'A Small History of Photography' Benjamin writes approvingly of what he calls Surrealist 'constructivist photography,' which 'is where the caption comes in, whereby photography turns all life's relationships into literature, and without which all constructivist photography must remain arrested in the approximate.'<sup>63</sup> As Esther Leslie remarks in her study of Walter Benjamin: 'Two seemingly dissimilar things, word and image, are forced together in a montage, clashing and dialogically relaying back and forth.'<sup>64</sup>

There is a fourth meaning which is theatrical. Brecht's alienating technique, described by Benjamin as: 'This discovery (alienation) of conditions takes place through the interruption of happenings.'<sup>65</sup> As Leslie remarks, 'In Brechtian drama the interruptions of montage counteract the illusion of a completed reality that can be passively consumed and complacently acknowledged by audiences.'<sup>66</sup>

The fifth usage of montage concerns 'literary montage.' This can be found in 'N', in *The Arcades Project*, where it is 'the method of this project.'<sup>67</sup> The whole methodology of *The Arcades Project* was, of course, montage. Also to be found in 'N', is a sixth usage of montage concerning history.

A central problem of historical materialism that ought to be seen in the end: Must the Marxist understanding of history necessarily be acquired at the expense of the perceptibility of history? Or: in what way is it possible to conjoin a heightened graphicalness [*Anschaulichkeit*] to the realization of the Marxist method? The first stage in the undertaking will be to carry over the principle of montage into history. That is, to assemble large-scale constructions out of the smallest and most precisely cut components. Indeed, to discover in the analysis of the small individual moment the crystal of the total event. And, therefore, to break with vulgar historical naturalism. To grasp the construction of history as such. In the structure of commentary.<sup>68</sup>

This would be history through images, a history that could be read in the same way a film is read but without reading ordinary language. The suggestion that philosophy, as aesthetic theory, or as negative dialectics, could be written as a form of montage would be Adorno's idea. To be literally montage, Adorno's texts would have to have been largely composed of quotations.

Robert Hullot-Kentor writing about Adorno and Benjamin, in a footnote, addresses their relation to montage.

How interpretation is to proceed was the question that ultimately divided Adorno from Benjamin. Benjamin wanted to present montages of images; they would speak out of their dense juxtaposition. In the vast quotations assembled in *Kierkegaard*, this book stands closest of all Adorno's writings to Benjamin's ideal: many of its passages are expected to speak for themselves. A good part of the obscurity of the book originates here. Adorno ultimately rejected montage as a form that would only relieve the dream, not interpret it, and return the work to the historicism that was his and Benjamin's aim to overcome. In Adorno's later studies quotations become sparser and the weight of interpretation increasingly falls to the work of the dialectical concepts.<sup>69</sup>

Adorno's texts took the structural, constructive aspect of montage as created through the models and constellations that go to make up the conceptual structure of the text. Another example of literary montage is the novel by Thomas Mann *Doctor Faustus*. Christa Bürger quotes Thomas Mann writing about *Doctor Faustus* in a letter to his son – 'determined to use any type of "montage"'. For what we both mean by the word is directly related to the curious manner in which the book goes beyond the literary, the way it "shakes off aesthetic illusion", in short its reality.<sup>70</sup> The novel is literally montage in that Thomas Mann incorporated sections of text written by Adorno on music theory, but in Mann's mind it is also a metaphorical montage in that he hoped it went beyond the work of art to become a form of reality.

In a note in the Paralipomena of *Aesthetic Theory* Adorno suggests that perhaps the use of montage is much older than he has allowed for, that it is not just a twentieth century phenomena. 'If recent art movements have made montage their principle, subcutaneously all artworks have always shared something of this principle; this could be demonstrated in detail in the puzzle technique of the great music of Viennese classicism, which nevertheless corresponds perfectly with the idea of organic development in that era's philosophy.'<sup>71</sup> Fredric Jameson interprets Adorno to mean no less than Beethoven's music can be thought of as montage. 'Anachronistic as it may seem, therefore Beethoven's music is *montage* and as non-fictional as Eisenstein or Juan Gris.'<sup>72</sup> Jameson has in mind Adorno's descriptions of Beethoven's music as being no more than the appearance of music and of the totality being made up a fleeting scraps of music which are hard to pin down. Jameson is right that Adorno hinted that principle of montage had been present in 'Viennese classicism' but he is I think over exaggerating the position with regard to Beethoven. However, it is instructive to think about whether and in what respects montage can be attributed to artworks that pre-date the twentieth century.

If Hölderlin's paratactical poetry can be considered a form of montage, if parataxis is montage which in a sense it is, then montage in the form of parataxis has been around a very long time. A famous example of literary montage can be found in *Madam Bovary*. In the scene of the agricultural fair Flaubert's prose switches scene quickly to and fro from the action in the square to Madam herself alone in her room looking out on the event. The effect is startling, and amusing. It could have been written to be filmed so cinematic is the treatment. If one thinks

about montage as shock then this has also been around in music for some time. Haydn for example in his 'Il Distratto' [The Absent-minded One] symphony (No. 60 in C) makes use of musical shocks. Two examples are: the orchestra suddenly comes in with a loud outburst in the second movement as if to remind the composer he has lost his way; in the last movement there is a moment where the music absent mindedly changes key from F minor to E flat which sounds extraordinarily odd and atonal. The 'Surprise' symphony (No. 94 in G Major) of Haydn also has a loud chord in the second movement to wake the audience up. However, these examples are more like jokes, which themselves do have an interruptive place in the flow of conversation. They are similar to Beethoven's musical joke at the end of the third movement of his 7<sup>th</sup> symphony where for a few moments it sounds as if we are to get a third repetition of the trio which is then cut short with five abrupt chords. With regard to the late string quartets of Beethoven, there are extremely odd musical moments, dissonances, very high ethereal playing in places and an almost Jazz set of exchanges between the players in the fourth movement of Quartet No. 14. (Op. 131). None of these however can be considered montage. If anything is montage, it is the *Grosse Fugue* which originally was the final movement to Quartet No. 13. (Op. 130). Its length and necessary fugal structure make it quite different to the five movements that precede it and in a sense qualify it as a montage but in a very loose sense. Beethoven removed it as the last movement and published it as a separate work (Op. 133) and wrote a different last movement. In the mid twentieth century it became common for this substituted movement to be dropped from concert programmes and the *Grosse Fuge* re-instated. As Adorno remarked - '...quite rightly ...restored to its place at the end of the great cyclical work it was intended to close.'<sup>73</sup>

Beethoven's quartet No. 13, if it can be taken as a montage, exemplifies one of the fundamental aspects of montage that of the relationship of part to whole. It is difficult to think of this quartet as an organic whole when the final movement has such an utterly different form. Further a form that, in musical historical terms, was out of date. Earlier Beethoven had used fugues as part of the construction of symphonic movements such as in the second movement of the *Eroica* symphony where after a re-statement of the funeral march a fugal section resolves the gloom. For Beethoven to make an entire movement out of a fugue was in a sense to go against his own earlier classical style. Adorno reads late Beethoven in this way. 'Beethoven's late works can therefore be understood as a critique of his classicist works, using the word critique in its proper sense to refer to an immanent logic of composition.'<sup>74</sup> Adorno then gives a long quotation from Marx's Eighteenth Brumaire concerning how the French revolutionaries had adopted classical symbols of the Roman Republic, and how the English Civil War rebels had adopted 'Old Testament ... trappings'. 'Thus Marx. Beethoven's development gave expression to this feeling of dissatisfaction with the drapery, with the claim to classical totality.'<sup>75</sup> Adorno sees this as Beethoven refusing a balance between extremes that would have created a classical totality. The late works have a different form of totality, of construction. 'The music has, as it were, holes,

artistically contrived fissures. This puts an end to the affirmative, hedonistic element otherwise always inherent in music, and in *this* respect there is a relationship between Beethoven and certain phenomena of modern music as exemplified by Arnold Schoenberg's statement: "My music is not lovely".<sup>76</sup> Adorno thinks the late works of Beethoven involve a refusal of balanced form as an organic totality, this could be described as a form of montage. An organic totality has a relationship of parts to whole that is balanced, the integrity of the structure depends on this balance. A montage work on the other hand is constructed out of parts that do not balance, parts that are in a sense mounted together in a kind of forced unity. That this can be read as a form of unity is in a sense the memory of the organic at work. As we have seen Adorno stresses the importance of construction for modern works of art in the twentieth century. He thinks montage as a new form of construction developed out of the older organic forms of the nineteenth century.

The blemishes that indelibly mark purely expressive, organic works offer an analogy to the antiorganic praxis of montage. This brings an antinomy into focus. Artworks that are commensurable to aesthetic experience are meaningful insofar as they fulfil an aesthetic imperative: the requirement that everything be required. This ideal, however, is directly opposed by the development that it itself set in motion. Absolute determination ... converges ... with absolute arbitrariness.<sup>77</sup>

That the organic turned into its opposite must be understood as a development, an evolution by art in a society increasingly dominated by late capitalism. Whilst Adorno was critical of many uses of montage, such criticism he claims has 'implication for constructivism, in which montage has camouflaged itself, precisely because constructivist form succeeds only at the cost of the individual impulse, ultimately the mimetic element.'<sup>78</sup>

### **Mimesis**

Adorno's concept of mimesis in *Aesthetic Theory* is extremely complex and derives not just from the philosophical heritage of Plato and Aristotle, but also from Walter Benjamin. In addition, Adorno was influenced by anthropological texts that sought to account for human development in the distant past particularly in the realms of magic and myth. Jameson comments that for Adorno mimesis is 'a foundational concept never defined nor argued but always alluded to, by name, as if it had preexisted all the texts.'<sup>79</sup> Tom Huhn argues that 'for Adorno, mimesis was the key term according to which he came to understand the dialectical relations between subjectivity and objects, and, more importantly, between subjective and objective becoming.'<sup>80</sup> Miriam Hansen considers mimesis in Adorno has several, context dependent, meanings. "Mimesis" notably is a central category in Adorno's thought and a notoriously difficult one at that. Like many of his key categories, mimesis has a number of different, possibly conflicting meanings depending on the constellation in which it is used.'<sup>81</sup> Jameson is right that Adorno's use of mimesis is undefined and Huhn is right that it is partly

concerned with subjectivity but Hansen is I think the most accurate commentator with her claim that in different contexts mimesis has different meanings for Adorno. This section will be an examination of the genealogy of Adorno's conceptions of mimesis.

It is always worthwhile considering what opposition Adorno may have had in mind, often unstated, when considering his use of a term such as mimesis. For Adorno there would have been oppositional echoes from Lukács and very probably Erich Auerbach. Mimesis in its most usual sense means an imitation of something. In the case of the traditional novel an imitation in prose of the lives of a group of individuals. So for Lukács, who valorised the form of critical realism he identified with the novels of Thomas Mann, a novel such as *Dr Faustus* exemplified an ideal form of twentieth century mimesis. Adorno on the other hand, whilst he admired Mann's work, considered Kafka and Beckett, whom Lukács thought to be degenerate bourgeois modernists, to embody a greater truth about society. In a sense this is still mimesis, but a form of Adornian negative mimesis. In effect Adorno accuses Lukács of having too simple and uncritical a conception of reality. 'Art exists within reality, has its function in it, and is also inherently mediated with reality in many ways. But nevertheless, as art, by its very concept it stands in an antithetical relationship to the status quo.'<sup>82</sup> Auerbach's great history of realist literature entitled *Mimesis* was first published in German in 1946. In *Mimesis* Auerbach argued that mimesis was fundamental to all forms and styles of Western literature in a history stretching from the *Odyssey* through to Virginia Woolf.<sup>83</sup> In their respective usage and conceptions of mimesis Auerbach is almost certainly too general for Adorno and Lukács too particular. However, they must both be assumed to form an opposition to Adorno's complex use of mimesis. It is clear from this comment in 'the 'Draft Introduction' to *Aesthetic Theory* that Adorno consider the traditional realist artwork such as an escapist novel is no longer acceptable as art in the current state of the world. 'The pure mimetic impulse—the happiness of producing the world once over— which animates art and has stood in age-old tension with its antimythological, enlightening component, has become unbearable under the system of total functional rationality.'<sup>84</sup>

Mimesis is a fully assimilated foreign word in both German and English. However, within a philosophical text, mimesis inevitably carries with it conceptual echoes from both Plato and Aristotle. Ricoeur draws a distinction between Plato and Aristotle with regard to their respective conceptualisations of mimesis. 'Platonic mimesis thereby distances the work of art twice over from the ideal model which is its ultimate basis. Aristotle's mimesis has just a single space wherein it is unfolded—human making [*faire*], the arts of composition.'<sup>85</sup> For Plato, mimesis is a type of imitation by temporal particulars of universal timeless forms. This imitation involves a form of memory that is also an inevitable forgetfulness, anamnesis. A temporal particular is an imitation of a form that involves a retrieval of memory of the partially forgotten eternal form. Works of art that imitate things of this world are therefore second order imitations as the things of this world are already imitations of timeless forms. For Aristotle by contrast,



mimesis was a straightforward imitation, a representation carrying with it the biological aspects of mimicry. Adorno also uses the word imitation [Nachamung] which is often employed in *Aesthetic Theory* as a synonym for mimesis when understood as simple imitation. Whilst this is the standard interpretation of Aristotle's concept of mimesis Phillippe Lacoue-Labarthe, in his analysis of Diderot's *Paradox*, identifies two types of mimesis in Aristotle.

First, a restricted form, which is the reproduction, the copy, the reduplication of what is given (already worked, effected, presented by nature). ... Then there is a general mimesis, which reproduces nothing given (which thus re-produces nothing at all), but which *supplements* a certain deficiency in nature, its incapacity to do everything, organise everything, make everything its work—produce everything. It is a productive mimesis, that is an imitation of *phusis* as a productive force, or as *poiesis*.<sup>86</sup>

In other words the production of art, the creative process is, *as a process*, an imitation of nature.

The important difference to note between the Platonic and Aristotelian conceptions of mimesis is that with Platonic mimesis, like imitates like, whereas with the first type of mimesis in Aristotle the imitation is of something unlike. Conversely, the second type of mimesis in Aristotle the act of creation for the making of art (or magic) imitates a force of nature, like imitates like and is thus a 'Platonic' form of mimesis. This distinction between like and unlike as mimesis of the same and mimesis of the other operates with Adorno's use of mimesis and imitation. Indeed it could be described as an Adornian dialectic of mimesis for he operates with both the Platonic and the first of the Aristotelian forms. Adorno's use of mimesis in *Aesthetic Theory* is more complex than the Platonic/Aristotelian distinction between mimesis of the same and mimesis of the other and this complexity in two respects partly derives from Walter Benjamin.

For Adorno, mimesis includes conceptual echoes from Walter Benjamin regarding language and play. In his essay 'On the Mimetic Faculty' Benjamin argues that it is language that now embodies the ancient faculty of mimesis. 'In this way language may be seen as the highest level of mimetic behaviour and the most complete archive of nonsensuous similarity: a medium into which the earlier powers of mimetic production and comprehension have passed without residue, to the point where they have liquidated those of magic.'<sup>87</sup> For Benjamin it is the magical and divinatory powers of archaic seers that have over time migrated into language. In his 'Doctrine of the Similar' this theory is described as follows: 'it is to writing and language that clairvoyance has, over the course of history, yielded its old powers.'<sup>88</sup> Shierry Weber Nichol森 describes Adorno's use of mimesis, which she argues is partly derived from Benjamin, as 'the hidden face of a figure whose explicit face is sometimes enigma, sometimes language, a figure in which subject and object, psyche and matter are both continuous and discontinuous, and to pursue the elusive mimesis is to begin to illuminate the whole conceptual design and form of *Aesthetic Theory*.'<sup>89</sup> She identifies Benjamin's short texts *A Berlin Childhood* as an important influence on Adorno. Whilst these texts do not deal overtly with mimesis Weber Nichol森 argues they can be read as significant because they deal with mimetic

play, with one thing representing another in the context of children playing with objects, toys and with each other. So the fundamental distinction between mimesis of the same and mimesis of the other have added to them the ideas derived from Benjamin concerned with archaic echoes, the nature of language as mimetic and the play element inherent in childhood mimetic games. Two texts by Adorno that pre-date *Aesthetic Theory* demonstrate how his ideas concerning mimesis developed, these are *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and *Negative Dialectics*. The archaic aspects of mimesis play a key part in Adorno and Horkheimer's concept of mimesis in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, whereas the play aspects of mimesis in philosophical language are stressed in Adorno's *Negative Dialectics*.

In the opening chapter of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* Horkheimer and Adorno make many references to work by cultural anthropologists such as Hubert and Mauss. This anthropological theorising sought to account for the origins and uses of magic and myth in early human development. Freud's *Totem and Taboo* was also cited in the discussion. Anson Rabinbach accurately describes the first chapter of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* as:

...an attempt to reconstruct the genealogy of sacrifice through an analysis of the concept of mimesis: first, in the order of animistic identification, then in magic, subsequently in myth, and finally in reason. At each of these stages the concept of mimesis is not understood as mere imitation, but as a form of mimicry or semblance that appropriates rather than replicates its object in a non-identical similitude.<sup>90</sup>

It is clear from the first chapter of their *Dialectic of Enlightenment* that Adorno and Horkheimer regard mimesis as a fundamental component of magic. 'Like science, magic pursues aims, but seeks to achieve them by mimesis—not by progressively distancing itself from its object.'<sup>91</sup> Mimesis is thus set up as an essential component of the development of the Enlightenment. First, the magical developed into the mythic stage, which in turn, developed into the rationality of the Enlightenment. However, it is important to stress that Adorno and Horkheimer regarded the magical as an early form of rationality. It was rational to use magic. 'One after the other, mimetic, mythic and metaphysical modes of behaviour were taken as superseded eras.'<sup>92</sup> It is clear that for Adorno and Horkheimer the magical aspect of mimesis is still an archaic echo embedded in modern enlightened rationality.

As well as the genealogy of mimesis in rationality, outlined in the first chapter of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, there are further important aspects to mimesis relating to the Jews. These aspects are discussed (by Adorno and Lowenthal) in the chapter 'Elements of anti-Semitism'. Anti-Semitism, they argue, is a mimetic comportment or behaviour towards the other. This mimesis of the other 'is based on false projection. It is the counterpart of true mimesis, and fundamentally related to the repressed form; in fact, it is probably the morbid expression of repressed mimesis. Mimesis imitates the environment, but false projection makes the environment like itself.'<sup>93</sup> The references to 'repression' and 'false projection' emphasises the Freudian aspect of this analysis. 'There is no anti-Semite who does not basically want to

imitate his mental image of a Jew, which is composed of mimetic ciphers.'<sup>94</sup> This account is also cast in the form of a genealogy of the relationship of the Jews to the societies in which they had lived over the centuries. 'The Jews were not the sole owners of the circulation sector. But they had been active in it for so long that they mirrored in their own ways the hatred they had always borne.'<sup>95</sup> Düttmann comments that: 'The protagonist of enlightenment is a Jew and a persecutor: as a Jew he persecutes himself, exacts upon himself what he struggles against.'<sup>96</sup> There is a further aspect of mimesis that relates to the Jewish faith and that is the ban on images and the ban on using the name of the deity. These are both mimetic taboos which both depend on the idea that the conception of the deity is for the Jews too sacred to be referenced by an image in whatever form or by language in the form of a name. So here are three further aspects to the complex of ideas involving mimesis. First, the mimesis involved in anti-Semitism and the horror of the Enlightenment ending in Auschwitz, second, the ban on images and third, the language ban on naming the deity. Adorno frequently uses the word 'taboo' in the sense of prohibition in *Aesthetic Theory*. Sometimes this refers to the ban on images or the ban on the use of the name of the deity, but sometimes it refers to Plato. In this case the 'mimetic taboo'<sup>97</sup> refers to Plato's objection to artist's making copies of what are already copies.

In *Negative Dialectics* Adorno argues that the 'matters of true philosophical interest at this point in history ...are nonconceptuality, individuality, and particularity.' A non-conceptual mode of understanding is intuitive, it is intuition. As Adorno explains, 'the intuitive mode mode of mental conduct does continue to exist in fact as an archaic rudiment of mimetic reactions.'<sup>98</sup> The non-conceptual aspect of philosophy has 'a playful element' which Adorno believes derives from its mimetic ancestry. Adorno seems again to be arguing that rationality, as it developed into conceptuality grew out of mimesis as he did in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Again it is made clear that the archaic relic of mimesis is not just a relic but a part of modern rationality. However, in *Negative Dialectics*, the Benjaminian play aspects of mimesis are emphasised because philosophical intuition as mimesis still contains a play element. 'To represent the mimesis it supplanted, the concept has no other way than to adopt something mimetic in its own conduct, without abandoning itself.'<sup>99</sup> This is 'the esthetic moment' of philosophy. 'Cogency and play are the two poles of philosophy.'<sup>100</sup> Adorno goes on to explain that in its presentation philosophy is inevitably expressive. 'Its integral, nonconceptually mimetic moment of expression is objectified only by expression in language.'<sup>101</sup>

Adorno's use of the word mimesis in *Aesthetic Theory* is complex as it includes all eight aspects of mimesis so far examined, mimesis of the same, mimesis of the other, mimesis as creation, mimesis as an archaic relic of primordial magic still embedded in rationality, the mimetic aspects of language, of play, and finally the Jewish and Platonic taboos. Within *Aesthetic Theory*, Shierry Weber Nicholsen has identified five main forms of mimesis.<sup>102</sup> However, whether there are eight or five or ten is difficult to decide because of the interweaving and the variety of contexts in which the word mimesis is used.

Mimesis has often used in a straightforward art historical sense of one artists following on from another. Kant used it in this sense in his discussion of genius in the *Critique of Judgement*: ‘Genius is the talent that gives the rule to art’.<sup>103</sup> Giving the rule to art means laying down the possibilities for action on the part of artists who follow on from the ‘genius’. ‘The products of genius must also be models, i.e., they must be exemplary.’<sup>104</sup> This is not a question of slavish copying, but more a question of recognising the importance and binding nature of changes and innovations brought about by the genius. The artist, according to Kant, has to proceed not by ‘copying’ but to use the model as something ‘to be *imitated*’.<sup>105</sup> This would also include a canon of prohibitions of things it is no longer acceptable to do. Adorno in *Aesthetic Theory* clearly recognised the importance and necessity, of such mimesis. It is a form of negative mimesis in the sense of an artist using a previous model not as a guide to copy but as a spur to move on to something new that nevertheless in an importance sense develops out of the earlier work.

That in which artworks over millennia knew themselves to be images of something reveals itself in the course of history, their critic, as being inessential to them. There would have been no Joyce without Proust, nor Proust without Flaubert, on whom Proust looked down. It was by way of imitation, not by avoiding it, that art achieved its autonomy; in it art achieved the means to its freedom.<sup>106</sup>

In essence this form of negative mimesis is the driving force of modern art and therefore lies at the heart of Adorno’s views on art.

In the section of *Aesthetic Theory* ‘Theories on the Origin of Art’ Adorno returns to mimesis in pre-history. He argues that whilst cave paintings are undoubtedly mimetic they should be understood as ‘stages of a process and in no way an early one.’ Cave paintings demonstrate an already existing ‘mimetic comportment—the assimilation of the self to its other,’<sup>107</sup> that must pre-date the making of such paintings. Such primordial ‘aesthetic comportment’ has, Adorno claims, been ‘preserved’ in art and indeed is a ‘necessity’ of art. ‘Art is in its most ancient relics too deeply permeated with rationality.’ Nowadays such ‘rationality’ as ‘aesthetic comportment’ is all too easily understood as ‘irrational’. The true rationality of art ‘mimetic comportment’ is that it pursues ends rather than means. ‘This is the source of art’s rationality, its character as knowledge. Aesthetic comportment is the capacity to perceive more in things than they are; it is the gaze under which the given is transformed into an image.’<sup>108</sup> Seeing ‘more’ in things makes aesthetic comportment very like reading a constellation. Indeed reading a constellation can be thought of as a form of mimetic play within and around the dialectically opposed concepts of the constellation. As far as reading a work of art is concerned it seems that for Adorno the subject mimetically responds to the expression embedded in the constructed constellation of the work. ‘Aesthetic comportment, however, is neither immediately mimesis nor its repression but rather the process that mimesis sets in motion and in which, modified, mimesis is preserved. ... Ultimately, aesthetic comportment is to be defined as the

capacity to shudder. ...Such a constitutive relation of the subject to objectivity in aesthetic comportment joins eros and knowledge.<sup>109</sup> ‘Shudder’ is used throughout *Aesthetic Theory* whenever Adorno refers to a primordial human reaction to nature. The ‘shudder’ is a mimetic comportment to the ultimate other of humanity, nature. One example of ‘shudder’ would be the overwhelming awe embedded in the idea of the sublime in late eighteenth century aesthetics.

Many commentators have read mimesis in *Aesthetic Theory* as a synonym for expression where it is counter-posed to construction as the dialectic of mimesis and rational construction. As Peter Osborne comments, ‘The dialectic of mimesis and rationality thus stands at the very heart of Adorno’s aesthetics.’<sup>110</sup> There is no doubt that this reading is correct for as Adorno states: ‘...The survival of mimesis, the nonconceptual affinity of the subjectively produced with its unposited other, defines art as a form of knowledge and to that extent “rational.” For that to which the mimetic comportment responds is the telos of knowledge, which art simultaneously blocks with its own categories. Art completes knowledge with what is excluded from knowledge, its univocity.’<sup>111</sup> This is the rational element of mimesis first encountered in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. The rationality of modern art for Adorno is exemplified by its form as a constructed illusion.

Art is not to be reduced to the unquestioned polarity of the mimetic and the constructive, as if this were an invariant formula, for otherwise works of high quality would be obliged to strike a balance between the two principles. But what was fruitful in modern art was what gravitated toward one of the extremes, ... The dialectic of these elements is similar to dialectical logic, in that each pole realizes itself only in the other, and not in some middle ground. Construction is not the corrective of expression, nor does it serve as its guarantor by fulfilling the need for objectification; rather, construction must conform to the mimetic impulses without planning...<sup>112</sup>

Mimesis as expression is the dialectical opposite of rational construction, and yet as at the same time is a primordial part of rationality. This in a sense of the dialectic of Enlightenment hidden within modern works of art. Christophe Menke comments that ‘The mimetic reenactment of aesthetic processuality is not the other *to* understanding, but rather the other in understanding.’<sup>113</sup>

In other words rationality is itself dialectical.

I will now examine with what at first sight seems like a straightforward use of mimesis in *Aesthetic Theory*. The complexity it reveals is symptomatic of the multiple ways Adorno uses the word. When a musician follows a score she derives the performance from the score by a form of mimesis, but she also interprets the score in a creative act of her own. Following the score can be understood as a mimesis of the same rather than of the other. Although there is of course the sense in which the score is other, the music is the other. This aspect is the most apparently straightforward of Adorno’s uses of mimesis in *Aesthetic Theory*. It looks like a mimesis of the same in the Platonic sense but is simultaneously a mimesis of the other. An account Adorno gives of an interpretive performance of music in his essay ‘Music and

Language’ demonstrates this. Adorno writes about interpretation being ‘essential to both music and language.’ For Adorno interpretation of music means playing the music. ‘To play music correctly means first and foremost to speak its language properly. This calls for imitation of itself, not a deciphering process. Music only discloses itself in mimetic practice.’<sup>114</sup> Adorno goes on to state that this can be entirely silent and solitary. An individual reading a score and performing the music as mind music can also count as a successful interpretation. At times, and in some places, Adorno suggests this might be the truest and purest form of interpretation.

What is essentially mimetic awaits mimetic comportment. If artworks do not make themselves like something else but only like themselves, then only those who imitate them understand them. Dramatic or musical texts should be regarded in this fashion and not as the quintessence of instructions for the performers: They are the congealed imitation of works, virtually of themselves, and to this extent constitutive although always permeated with significative elements. Whether or not they are performed is for them a matter of indifference; what is not, however, a matter of indifference is that their experience – which in terms of its ideal is inward and mute – imitates them. Such imitation reads the nexus of their meaning out of the *signa* of the artworks and follows this nexus just as imitation follows the curves in which the artwork appears. As laws of their imitation the divergent media find their unity, that of art. If in Kant discursive knowledge is to renounce the interior of things, then artworks are things whose truth cannot be thought except as that of their interior. Imitation [*Nachahmung*] is the path that leads to this interior.<sup>115</sup>

This approach to interpretation initially seems explains a well known aphorism from *Aesthetic Theory*, ‘The mimesis of artworks is their resemblance to themselves’.<sup>116</sup> However, this leads to the second sense of mimesis. The act of interpreting an artwork is ‘mimetic comportment’ in *Aesthetic Theory*. ‘If mimetic comportment does not imitate something but rather makes itself like itself, this is precisely what artworks take it upon themselves to fulfil.’<sup>117</sup> This can be read as the performer or the audience member mimetically comporting themselves to the work of art. This is the sense in which Huhn reads mimesis as the relationship of the subject to the object, of subjectivity to something other. It is also the second sense of Aristotelian mimesis that Lacoue-Labarthe identified above. ‘By pursuing its own identity with itself, art assimilates itself with the nonidentical: This is the contemporary stage of art’s mimetic essence.’<sup>118</sup> So expression is both mimesis of itself as an artwork and simultaneously mimesis of its opposite as a rationally constructed artwork. This mimesis to the other is seen by Adorno as a form of intuition. ‘The intuitive element in art differs from sensuous perception because in art the intuitive element always refers to its spirit. Art is the intuition of what is not intuitable; it is akin to the conceptual without the concept. It is by way of concepts, however, that art sets free its mimetic, nonconceptual layer.’<sup>119</sup> The intuitive aspect of mimesis is a hermeneutic process of sympathetic non-conceptuality that can of course only be expressed in conceptual language even as that language struggles to express the intuitive reading of the work of art.

The extent to which the language of art in all forms had become almost unreadable by the 1960s was a prime concern for Adorno. As was suggested above the language aspect of the

concept of mimesis was partly derived from Benjamin where the basic idea was that language makes itself like, imitates in some sense the world it describes. However, there was another aspect of Benjamin's interest in language that Adorno quotes at length in *Aesthetic Theory*. This is concerned with 'the sphere of the wordless' and with 'the unutterable'. 'What Benjamin calls the elimination of the unutterable is no more than the concentration of language on the particular.'<sup>120</sup> Adorno links Benjamin's ideas with 'Wittgenstein's famous maxim' from the *Tractatus* ('whereof we cannot speak thereof we must remain silent') and suggests it 'may be transposed to art'. 'The element that in art resembles language is its mimetic element; it only becomes universally eloquent in the specific impulse, by its opposition to the universal. The paradox that art says it and at the same time does not say it, is because the mimetic element by which it says it, the opaque and particular, at the same time resists speaking.'<sup>121</sup> Mimesis thus takes on the form of a kind of non-conceptual hermeneutics. As an example of this, Adorno suggests a poem by Verlaine that is notoriously difficult to interpret.

In that, however, by means of language, humanity itself becomes mimetic—is itself expressed in the nonconceptual without sacrificing its conceptual element—meaning achieves a fruitful tension to the work's content [Gehalt], to what has been composed. The meaning of a poem such as Verlaine's "Clair de lune" cannot be univocally established, yet this is not to say that its meaning does not reach beyond the incomparable resonance of the verses.<sup>122</sup>

In a passage where he is discussing Schubert's music and its expression, its 'eloquence' as being distinct from language. Adorno speculates about the incompatible relationship of eloquence to language in respect of the prose after Joyce. '...it would in part explain the effort of prose since Joyce to put discursive language out of action, or at least to subordinate it to formal categories to the point that construction becomes unrecognizable. The new art tries to bring about the transformation of communicative into mimetic language. ...The true language of art is mute.'<sup>123</sup>

So, for Adorno, the reading of a work of art within its own terms can be seen as a mimetic process. This placing of mimesis within the frame of hermeneutics is similar to the way Ricoeur analyses mimesis in *Time and Narrative*. Ricoeur is concerned with mimesis in Aristotelian terms as the mimesis involved in poetic composition. Ricoeur's analysis centres around mimesis as imitation of actions, people and events within a text (*mimesis*<sub>2</sub>). He identifies two further related forms of mimesis, one that pre-exists the creation of the text and that in an important sense makes the text possible (*mimesis*<sub>1</sub>) 'the familiar pre-understanding we have of the order of action.' The other is a form of mimesis involved in the reception of the text (*mimesis*<sub>3</sub>) 'a new configuration by means of this poetic refiguring of the pre-understood order of action.'<sup>124</sup> This threefold mimesis means that for Ricoeur *mimesis*<sub>2</sub> has 'a mediating function' which 'derives from the dynamic character of the configuring operation' of the plot between the 'pre-understanding' and 'the post-understanding of the order of action.'<sup>125</sup> An important aspect of this analysis by Ricoeur is that 'it is the reader who completes the work.' A

text such as Joyce's *Ulysses* 'challenges the reader's capacity to configure what the author seems to take malign delight in defiguring. In such an extreme case, it is the reader, almost abandoned by the work, who carries the burden of emplotment.'<sup>126</sup> As has already been understood Adorno also believed that the work of art was completed in interpretive philosophy in keeping by a perceptive and informed audience in keeping with the views of the Jena Romantics. There is one further form of mimesis which is fundamental to Adorno's whole understanding of the relationship of art to society.

Mimesis to the other is the main Aristotelian moment of *Aesthetic Theory*. As far as the Adornian artwork is concerned the central idea of mimesis to the other takes is as monadic comportment. The 'Paralipomena' contains a statement to this effect that would almost certainly have been added to the finished text of *Aesthetic Theory*.

The rationality of artworks has as its aim opposition to empirical existence: The rational shaping of artworks effectively means their rigorous elaboration in themselves. As a result they come into contrast with the world of the nature-dominating *ratio*, in which the aesthetic *ratio* originates, and become a work for-themselves. The opposition of artworks to domination is mimesis of domination. Even the immanently polemical attitude of artworks against the status quo internalizes the principle that underlies the status quo, and that reduces it to the status of what merely exists; aesthetic rationality wants to make good the damage done by nature dominating rationality.<sup>127</sup>

This is the mimetic comportment to the ultimate other, capitalism as negative totality, or the social aspect of art. This is the reality of the historical moment in which the artwork was created that is incorporated within the artwork by 'aesthetic rationality'. It is clear that Adorno hopes that the form of rationality employed in the creation of artworks has a utopian aspect, however illusory, in a bad world. Of all the forms of mimesis it is clearly the mimesis of the other in the sense of an artwork being a mimesis of domination that is the more fundamental for Adorno. His theory of the artwork depends on the oppositional relationship between the artwork and its other the administered world of late capitalism. Indeed his utopian ideas suggest that ideally the position should be reversed, that reality should imitate art.

Rather than imitating reality, artworks demonstrate this displacement to reality. Ultimately, the doctrine of imitation should be reversed; in a sublimated sense, reality should imitate artworks. However, the fact that artworks exist signals the possibility of the non-existing. The reality of artworks testifies to the possibility of the possible. The object of art's longing, the reality of what is not, is metamorphosed in art as remembrance. In remembrance what is qua what was combines with the nonexistent because what was no longer is. Ever since Plato's doctrine of anamnesis the not-yet-existing has been dreamed in remembrance, which alone concretizes utopia without betraying it to existence.<sup>128</sup>

Adorno's conception of utopia will be examined in detail at a later stage of this project. It is clear that for Adorno only art gives and hope for the possibility of change in the future precisely because they 'signal the possibility of the nonexistent.' In this way, for Adorno, memory and



expectation are closely intertwined. The next section will be an examination of Adorno's conception of judgement as it relates to the work of art.

## Section Three: Judgement

### Interpretation, commentary and critique

Adorno's idea that the way to understand an artwork is by 'submitting to the work's own discipline'<sup>129</sup> is significant. Understanding is not a term usually used in regard to art; terms such as appreciation, liking, enjoyment, stimulating are more normal. Understanding is normally reserved for some form of cognition. This suggests that Adorno takes the understanding of an artwork to be a form of cognition, an epistemology, the province in short of philosophy. Any charge of elitism might well be defused by this supposition of intellectual complexity rather than on the bare assertion of rank. However as Adorno recognised, forms such as the circus incorporate pre-artistic as opposed to sub-artistic elements and these survive in artworks.

Although the preartistic dimension becomes poisoned by its exploitation, to the point that artworks must eliminate it, it survives sublimated in them. It is not so much that artworks possess ideality as that by virtue of their spirituality they promise a blocked or denied sensuality. That quality can be comprehended in those phenomena from which artistic experience emancipated itself, in the relics of an art-alien art, as it were, the justly or unjustly so-called lower arts such as the circus.<sup>130</sup>

At another point, Adorno suggests that the lower arts, and indeed 'nonart' also await interpretation. 'Artworks, especially those of the highest dignity, await their interpretation. The claim that there is nothing to interpret in them, that they simply exist, would erase the demarcation line between art and nonart. Ultimately, perhaps, even carpets, ornaments, all nonfigural things longingly await interpretation. Grasping truth content postulates critique.'<sup>131</sup> This is redolent of Benjamin's ideas concerning the significance of apparently insignificant scraps and his ideas concerning redemption. Adorno seems to imply that a serious philosophical treatise (possibly quite brief) on the designs of Wilton carpets could be a critique on the same level as one of his books on composers in that there could be an aspect of truth to be discovered. That discovering the truth content of an artwork, or even a carpet, involves critique is clearly a significant aspect of Adorno's account of works of art. It relates to both cognition and understanding. The comment about carpets and ornaments suggests that the accusation that Adorno was an elitist concerned only with art of the first rank is misplaced.

Part of an artwork's internally produced rank resides in the critical relation to earlier works within interpretative time. There is a sense in which this critical relationship is deeply constitutive of the artwork. Who judges what is an artwork? Clearly artists make a judgement about earlier work in which they understand their work to be in a critical relation to. This new work in turn is judged by artists, critics and knowledgeable experts and knowledgeable enthusiasts whose appreciation does justice to the complexity of the work.

At times quality has historically asserted itself against precisely those works that were simply content to swim with the tides of the *Zeitgeist*. It is rare that works that have won great renown have not in some way deserved it. The development of legitimate

renown, however, necessarily coincided with the unfolding of the inner law of those artworks through interpretation, commentary and critique. This quality is not directly produced by the *communis opinio*, least of all by that manipulated by the culture industry, a public judgement whose relation to the work is questionable.<sup>132</sup>

This statement makes it even clearer that the *communis opinio* follows on from the well informed opinion of experts. Only the preliminary work carried out by the few experts in their understanding, appreciation, commentary and critique of the work enables the work to become a work of great renown. Interpretation, commentary and critique are key concepts that appear many times throughout *Aesthetic Theory*, always together, always linked. It is only through this interpretative process of understanding that the inner law of an artwork can be determined. The ranking of artworks is then dependent upon the experts who are capable of recognising what the work tells them. In this sense it is the work that makes the judgement. The critics, the theorists, the aestheticians, those who are sufficiently expert to see what the work is communicating are in a sense a creation of the work, as are the artists. This is not made explicit in *Aesthetic Theory* but it is implicit in the conception Adorno has of the work of art.

As Adorno remarks in the section 'Art Beauty' '...every theory of art must at the same time be a critique of art.'<sup>133</sup> In other words there cannot be any theory that is not precisely tied to the critique of a particular work of art. A critique in the Kantian sense would lay bare the conceptual assumptions embodied in the work. 'However, if finished works only become what they are because their being is a process of becoming, they are in turn dependent on forms in which their process crystallises; interpretation, commentary and critique. ...If the unfolding of the works in these forms is not to miscarry, they must be honed to the point where they become philosophical.'<sup>134</sup> This implies that the work of art is not completed by the artist, it is completed by the critical community. It is finally completed by being crystallised in philosophy.

It is possible to understand Adorno's conception of the completion of the work by commentary, critique and interpretation as a form of genius, not of creation, but of hermeneutics, as the genius of the receiver. This reversal of the usual meaning of genius would thus enable the rank of a work to be recognised by the quality, the degree of excellence of the interpretation, commentary and critique. This is a Romantic idea, that the work is only finally produced and completed by the receiver. It serves to shift genius from the producer of the work to the receivers. There is an aspect of this in Kant for the *sensus communis* forms the social counterweight to the creative genius, whereby the genius is reined in by and therefore ultimately controlled by, prevailing taste. Gadamer maintains that this double nature of genius is at the heart of Kant's account of genius. 'That the genius of creation is matched by genius in appreciating was already part of Kant's theory of taste and genius, ...'<sup>135</sup> Adorno is ambivalent about the notion of prevailing taste. A work that too many people enjoy uncritically might be thought to be well on the way to commodification. However, the genius of the elitist receiver does seem to fit Adorno only too well. But one must not ignore the extent to which Adorno's theory of art grows out of his understanding of the situation that modernism was in crisis, and

that this crisis is historical. The becoming of the artwork is of course another form of the time of interpretation. The time of creation, which in itself contains a variant of the time of interpretation exemplified in a critical relation to earlier work, this is in turn followed by the time of becoming of initial interpretation. This implies that artworks are never fixed, they are always in their times of becoming until finally at the end of their time of becoming their interpretation and re-valuation ceases and they perish and cease to be interpretable.

However, for Adorno, an artwork can also fail in quite mundane ways. A soloist can make mistakes in a performance, or an artist can make some error in their work. 'Artworks, right up to those of the highest level, know the lesson taught to the bungler whose fingers stumble on the piano keys or who sketches carelessly: The openness of artworks - their critical relation to the previously established on which their quality depends - implies the possibility of complete failure, and aesthetics alienates itself from its object the moment that by its own form it deceives on this score.'<sup>136</sup> This passage makes clear the importance of history for Adorno. It is stated here unequivocally that the quality of a work of art 'depends' on its 'critical relation to the previously established.' The key word here is 'critical'. It can be understood in two ways. First, that each work has a critical theoretical relationship to previous work encoded with its coherent structure. Second, that the critical community will recognise this relationship to the earlier work or works. The above passage also makes clear that the possibility of complete failure is somehow constitutive of artworks. Whilst it is clear their quality partly depends on their critical relationship to earlier work, any failure to establish a fully critical relationship would lead to mere stylistic repetition. 'Articulation is the redemption of the many in the one'<sup>137</sup> What is being saved? It must be redemption from failure that is the key to articulation. It does seem that without articulation the components of a work would simply fail to be internally coherent and so the work would not be redeemed and recognised as art.

When a new artwork appears, one that breaks with previous conventions in a radical way, or a group appear that signal a major stylistic change, then expectations based on the known and remembered can be partially confounded. Adorno is concerned to account for such change, but characteristically does not believe such progress, such radical change, is necessarily a guarantee of quality.

Undoubtedly, the historical materials and their domination - technique - advance; discoveries such as those of perspective in painting and polyphony in music are the most obvious examples. Beyond this, progress is also undeniable in the logical development of established methodology, as is evident in the differentiation of harmonic consciousness between the age of thoroughbass composition and the threshold of new music, or in the transition from impressionism to pointillism. Such unmistakable progress is, however, not necessarily that of quality.<sup>138</sup>

Many art historians, such as Ernst Gombrich would disagree with Adorno on this point. Progress, in the sense that Adorno means it, is from one work of art to another, one work can be seen as more progressive within a particular style than another, but this does not mean that the

more progressive is necessarily a better work of art for the main criteria for success and failure for Adorno are internal to each individual work. Therefore there is no real progress from one work to another, only progress within a work. The coherence and articulation and therefore the success of an artwork depend on its internal structure and whilst there are no general external norms that this success is dependent upon, there are particular external norms in the form of historical precedents. This is a further antinomy, an antinomy of history. The insistence on the particularity of artworks leads to the rejection of external norms in favour of the internal coherence of the artwork and yet at the same time the work cannot be recognised as an artwork unless it fits into some historical schema of which it is either a continuation, or a revolt against, either way it is connected by an external norm to the historical continuum.

However, Adorno also believes there is a hidden degeneration in an unlimited advance of materials and techniques at the point where art becomes anti-art or non-art. So, just as works of the present day may turn out to be anti-art, or not art at all, and soon fall into oblivion, so works from the past can also change status over time, sometimes they cease to be art. 'Works may become uninterpretable and fall mute; often their quality suffers; in general, the inner transformation of works most often involves a decline, a collapse into ideology. The past offers up ever fewer works of value.'<sup>139</sup> As works turn into popular affirmative classics the possibility that they can be rescued and re-invigorated for future generations becomes remote. 'Only the most advanced art of any period has any chance against the decay wrought by time. In the afterlife of works, however, *qualitative differences* become apparent that in no way coincide with the level of modernity achieved in their own periods. In the secret *bellum omnium contra omnes* that fills the history of art, the older modern may be victorious over the newer modern.'<sup>140</sup> This again makes clear that quality is internal to the individual work. The recognition of this quality is by interpretation. What then of a work that is constitutively uninterpretable? A work that has been created so as to resist interpretation, resist commentary, resist critique? Such a work must surely fail on these grounds alone. However, the full importance of interpretation commentary and critique can only be understood by first examining what Adorno meant by the spirit and truth content of a work.

### **Spirit and truth content**

We know that for Adorno, there is clearly one rank, one level which artworks must reach to be classified as art, nevertheless, as the next quotation demonstrates, the possibility seems to be left open that among these works of the highest rank there might still be some form of hierarchy. 'Although the question of whom to rank higher is idle, the same cannot be said of the insight that the voice of the maturity of the subject, the emancipation from and reconciliation with myth - that is, the truth content - reached a higher development in Beethoven than in Bach. This criterion surpasses all others.'<sup>141</sup> It is clear that the articulation and internal coherence of an individual artwork is paramount in deciding rank, that artworks provide their own rank.

However, it is not at this moment clear how truth content and spirit fit in. At first sight it looks from the quotation above as if truth content and spirit might be a higher criterion. Even though Adorno admits that it is impossible to rank one above the other there is, he claims, a sense in which Beethoven can and must be elevated above Bach. This is because a comparison of truth content will show that a higher spiritual development was reached by Beethoven. How is this to be understood? It looks as if it relates to the historical positions of the two composers. If, as I have suggested above, Adorno's account of art is deeply rooted in theories derived from Romanticism then one might expect to find that a Romantic composer such as Beethoven would produce work that was better fitted to Adorno's theory but more is at stake than this. Bach's music does not contain those wild internal dissonant moments and falling apart of structure that Adorno identifies in Beethoven. This is one historical point. Another would be that Bach's music is pre-revolutionary in a political sense, it pre-dates the French revolution. Adorno claims in *Aesthetic Theory* that the echo of the French revolution can be heard in Beethoven's music. In Hegelian terms, Beethoven's music is at a later stage of the development of humanity and contains the promise of revolutionary freedom and exemplifies the energy of the bourgeois revolution. It is situated at the start of the epoch of modernity. To describe it in this way is to echo Heidegger. If Beethoven is part of the inauguration of autonomous modern art then his work is foundational in Heidegger's terms. In keeping with Heidegger's (Hegelian) theory, then the aesthetics of this modernism would appear at the end of modernism, precisely when modern art turns into anti-art or non-art, the time of *Aesthetic Theory*. The question that this relation between rank and truth content raises is important. It looks as if truth content is the ultimate determinant of status. Why this should be so is not yet entirely clear. 'The actual arena of transcendence in artworks is the nexus of their elements. ... Art fails its concept when it does not achieve this transcendence; it loses the quality of being art.'<sup>142</sup> We already know that art which fails is not art. The failure is to have not achieved the concept of art which partly depends on unity, coherence and articulation. Consequently, to call an artwork great is almost a tautology. However the word 'transcendence' seems to suggest that there is something ineffable that is over and above the nexus of the elements. This relates to the suggestion I made earlier that Hegelian recognition is a vital concept to bear in mind. The recognition of the other as also a spirit when transferred to the realm of art involves treating the artwork as if it were a being, as if it were another spirit, however illusory such an aspect of the artwork might be. Spirit is something indefinable over and above the nexus of the elements of a work, over and above the work's immanent logic, some element that lifts the work to a higher level and yet at the same time threatens to destroy it. The key to this idea is how is this spirit to be recognised? Whilst spirit and truth content are clearly related to coherence and articulation the recognition of these latter depends on artistic criteria internal to the work, internal to the form of the work. 'If there is something like a common characteristic of great late works, it is to be sought in the breaking through of form by spirit. This is no aberration of art but rather its fatal corrective. Its highest

products are condemned to a fragmentariness that is their confession that even they do not possess what is claimed by the immanence of their form.<sup>143</sup> Adorno may well be thinking of Beethoven's late quartets which break with previously established quartet structure by pushing their own structures almost beyond the limit of coherence, some of the movements are no more than fragments.

So far the discussion has mainly concerned the concept of spirit, it is now time to turn to the concept of truth content. Precisely what does Adorno mean when he writes about an art work having truth content? 'Spirit, art's vital element, is bound up with art's truth content, though without coinciding with it. The spirit of works can be untruth. For truth content postulates something real as its substance, and no spirit is immediately real.'<sup>144</sup> As was suggested above, spirit can best be understood as a form of illusion, a semblance that somehow emerges, sometimes suddenly, in the experience of a work of art and in reflection upon the structure and content of the work. 'By reading the spirit of artworks out of their configurations and confronting the elements with each other and with the spirit that appears in them, critique passes over into the truth of the spirit which is located beyond the aesthetic configuration. This is why critique is necessary to the works. In the spirit of the works critique recognises their truth content or distinguishes truth content from spirit. Only in this act, and not through any philosophy of art that would dictate to art what its spirit must be, do art and philosophy converge.'<sup>145</sup> This passage makes it clear that whilst spirit is to be read from the 'aesthetic configuration,' the truth of spirit is somehow located 'beyond' it, in the philosophical critique of the work. Truth is not within the artwork, it is found from a reading of the artwork by means of philosophical critique, in this sense truth is to be found outside the artwork within discourse. In another passage Adorno again makes clear that spirit is to be found in the configuration of the artwork. 'The locus of spirit is the configuration of what appears. Spirit forms appearance just as appearance forms spirit; it is the luminous source through which the phenomenon radiates and becomes a phenomenon in the most pregnant sense of the word.'<sup>146</sup> In a further passage Adorno writes about the artwork and how spirit combines with the art object itself to form a kind of subject. This is a form of being that has an existence that is more than the existence of a mere thing. 'In the artwork the subject is neither the observer nor the creator nor absolute spirit, but rather spirit bound up with, preformed and mediated by the object.'<sup>147</sup>

In an earlier passage in *Aesthetic Theory* spirit is referred to as the 'other' or 'the negation' of the configuration of the artwork. This is once again to introduce an antinomy into the very idea of the artwork. If the artwork exists as a form of being, as opposed to being a mere thing, then this is because it has the two contradictory parts, object and spirit which are in dialectical tension, and yet as the tension is antinomic it cannot be resolved. The first part of this passage is as follows: 'If the spirit of artworks flashes up in their sensual appearance, it does so only as their negation: Unitary with the phenomenon, spirit is at the same time its other. The spirit of artworks is bound up with their form, but spirit is such only insofar as it points beyond

that form.’ The antinomy is quite clear here, spirit is opposed to ‘sensual appearance,’ spirit is dependent on the articulated coherent form and yet is somehow ‘beyond’ it in a different realm. The passage continues by making clear that the spirit of an artwork cannot necessarily be grasped even by the most careful and detailed technical analysis of the work.

The claim that there is no difference between articulation and the articulated, between immanent form and content, is seductive especially as an apology for modern art, but it is scarcely tenable. This becomes evident in the realisation that technological analysis does not grasp the spirit of a work even when this analysis is more than a crude reduction to elements and also emphasises the artworks context and its coherence as well as its real or putative initial constituents; it requires further reflection to grasp that spirit.<sup>148</sup>

‘Further reflection,’ also known as ‘second reflection’ in *Aesthetic Theory*, is another Adornian code for critique or philosophy. The truth and spirit of an artwork Adorno believes can only be revealed by the ‘beyond’ of philosophical reflection. As the same passage continues it becomes clear that this philosophical reflection enables the political understanding of an autonomous work of art. Indeed it is only the work ‘as spirit’ that opposes the world of late capitalism, it does not do it purely as an artwork but as spirit. ‘Only as spirit is art the antithesis of empirical reality as the determinate negation of the existing order of the world. Art is to be construed dialectically in so far as spirit inheres in it, without however art’s possessing spirit as an absolute or spirit’s serving to guarantee an absolute to art. Artworks, however much they may seem to be an entity, crystallize between this spirit and its other.’<sup>149</sup> As we saw in the previous chapter, the notion of crystallization, deriving probably from Simmel, is a useful metaphor for apparent opposites. A liquid substance changes into a solid and yet is still fundamentally the same substance except that it is now a solid structure, it cannot be both liquid and solid and yet at different times and in different conditions it is. Spirit in this passage is not at all like Hegel’s notion of ‘absolute’ spirit because for Adorno spirit is restricted to works of art. Indeed he claims this is the only way in which spirit can be thought about, ‘Spirit today is not imaginable in any other form; art offers its prototype.’<sup>150</sup>

It is already possible in the light of the discussion so far to begin to work out what might be meant by the concept of the truth content of an artwork. It has already been established that truth content can have a higher status than rank in regard to comparing Beethoven with Bach. If the full understanding of a work, is a form of cognition carried out by commentary, interpretation and critique that can only be completed by philosophy, then, the truth content of a work will be what is revealed in this process of becoming. The idea that great works of the past can wait for their re-interpretation has been discussed above, but not in relation to truth content. ‘Authentic art of the past that for the time being must remain veiled is not thereby sentenced. Great works wait. While their metaphysical meaning dissolves, something of their truth content, however little it can be pinned down, does not; it is that whereby they remain eloquent.’<sup>151</sup> It must be assumed that only works which can provide sufficient content for the process of



becoming of critical interpretation to arrive at the end point of philosophical truth content have the rank of art. This process of becoming means that over interpretative time a series of differing truth contents can be envisaged for any particular artwork. 'The truth content of artworks, on which their rank ultimately depends, is historical right into its innermost cell.'<sup>152</sup> The idea that history is immanent to artworks does seem to bear out the suggestion that for Adorno a time of interpretation is operating. In other words each artwork has its own history of becoming as successive interpretations serve to keep it alive. But there is another aspect to truth content that relates to the utopian time of artworks. The quotation immediately above continues: 'Truth content becomes historical by the objectification of correct consciousness in the work.'<sup>153</sup> In this account truth content is linked to the utopian aspect of works of art referred to above, to the possibility of freedom. However, truth content is also intimately bound up with the judgement of artworks through their interpretation, commentary and critique. Activities that are best carried out at a philosophical level. 'The truth content of artworks is the objective solution of the enigma posed by each and every one. By demanding its solution, the enigma points to its truth content. It can only be achieved by philosophical reflection. This alone is the justification of aesthetics.'<sup>154</sup> Ultimately artworks can only be understood by philosophy, by cognition. This is not just because this is the best mode of understanding but because artworks are themselves a form of cognition. 'Because the element of truth is essential to artworks, they participate in knowledge, and this defines the only legitimate relation to them. ... The knowledge of artworks is guided by their own cognitive constitution: They are the form of knowledge that is not knowledge of an object. This paradox is also the paradox of artistic experience.'<sup>155</sup> Artworks are only completed by critical interpretation at the highest level, that of philosophy. If Adorno were to be indicted as an elitist then there would seem to be more possibility of doing so successfully by this linking of philosophy and art. It would seem to exclude non-philosophers from the highest form of critical engagement with art. 'The truth content of an artwork requires philosophy. It is only in this truth content that philosophy converges with art or extinguishes itself in it. The way toward this is defined by the reflected immanence of works, not by the external application of philosophemes.'<sup>156</sup> It is only by the 'reflected immanence' of works, by what Adorno calls second reflection that philosophical thought operates in regard to artworks and not from an imposed external theory. The mimetic philosophical interpretation of a work of art reveals that work's illusory spirit and truth content. Both are historical in the sense that they must relate to the time in which the work was created in 'opposition' to the external domination of the administered world. This is why Beethoven stands higher in Adorno's estimation of spirit and truth content than Bach. Beethoven's music carries within it in the brass fanfares and sheer driving energy of its developmental sections an encapsulation of the freedoms and hopes of the French Revolution coupled with the energy and speed of the bourgeois revolution. Truth content and spirit are only recognised by critique which at its highest level is philosophy and so a return is made to Adorno's conception of philosophy.

### Art and philosophy

In order to underscore Adorno's conception of both art and philosophy it is instructive to indulge in an exercise in word substitution. An exercise in montage. In the quotation that follows from *Aesthetic Theory* I have consistently replaced the word art with the word philosophy

The impossibility of a univocal construction of the history of philosophy and the fatality of all disquisitions on its progress—which exists and then again does not exist—originate in philosophy's double character as being socially determined in its autonomy, when its immanent structure explosively contradicts its social relations, autonomy is sacrificed and with it philosophy's continuity; it is one of the weaknesses of the history of ideas that it idealistically ignores this. For the most part, when continuity shatters it is the relations of production that win out over the forces of production; there is no cause to chime in with such social triumph. Philosophy develops by way of the social whole; that is to say, it is mediated by society's ruling structure. Philosophy's history is not a string of individual casualties; no univocal necessities lead from one phenomenon to the next. Its history may be called necessary only with regard to the total social tendency, not in reference to its individual manifestations. Its pat construction from above is as false as faith in the incommensurable genius of individual works that transports them out of the realm of necessity. A noncontradictory theory of the history of philosophy is not to be conceived: The essence of its history is contradictory in itself.<sup>157</sup>

This montaged substitution makes sense within Adorno's terms. It makes sense precisely because he does think of art and philosophy as being as fundamentally related as did Schelling. Indeed a few pages later on in *Aesthetic Theory* he underscores this relationship as one of a shared history.

Nevertheless the history of the whole of bourgeois art was not possible except as the effort if not to solve the antinomy of nominalism then at least to give it shape, to win form from its negation. In this the history of modern art is not merely analogous to the history of philosophy: It is the same history. What Hegel called the unfolding of truth occurred as the same process of unfolding both in art and philosophy.<sup>158</sup>

That both philosophy and art share history as such is obvious. What Adorno means is that they both developed together as twin aspects of modernity. I have made the point before that Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* has a strong Kantian aspect in that he operates throughout with unresolvable antinomies. The questions of great art and disintegration would seem to be another such antinomy. On the one hand a work of art has to be as perfect as it can be within the terms of its construction as a work. On the other hand the montage form of twentieth century construction is always threatening to disintegrate. Great works disintegrate finally, not because they obey a post-Hegelian topos of the end of art, but because of their inevitable construction. The dissonant fracture that makes them great in the first place will ensure they fall apart. This is intertwined with a politically driven sociological theory concerning commodification and bourgeois taste. The artwork is both autonomous and social, it operates in its own art terms and

yet carries the stigmata of its social time encoded within it. Interpretation, commentary and critique thus have a dual role that is critical in two senses. In the art sense as art theory, as aesthetics, and in the social sense as sociology, as political theory. The one discipline that can and must deal with these two aspects is philosophy. This is why the history of art and the history of philosophy are the same history. Why for Adorno there is no difference between the two senses of critique, not just because he refuses to accept disciplinary boundaries but because theory is also both autonomous and social because as I have noted before theory or philosophy has the same structure as art.

This analysis of Adorno's theory of the artwork has uncovered two main, yet linked, problems with Adorno's account of art. The first is his understanding of rank and the second is his understanding of the completion of art by a form of philosophy. As to the first it is clear that he is using rank like the traditional notion of beauty, but, in antinomical opposition to the concept of failed art. This opposition is very important. In the *Origin of Negative Dialectics*, Susan Buck-Morris suggests that Adorno does not just operate with double oppositions but with quadruple oppositions.<sup>159</sup> The example she gives is History – Nature where both History and Nature whilst being opposed to each other are also internally opposed, so that History has an opposition between social history which is historical and actual history which is not purely historical. Similarly, on the other side of the main opposition, Nature splits oppositionally between that which exists in history and that which does not yet exist. So each of the two main poles is itself split into two poles. If one assumes this model is operating in *Aesthetic Theory* then art, which must be of high rank to be art, is opposed to failed art. If the main opposition is between success and failure then what might be the two internal oppositions to these poles? Successful art would split into autonomous art in opposition to heteronomous art, the wares of the culture industry. Failed art would split to be internally opposed by works that fail to innovate, are mere repetitions of earlier art, works that have the appearance of being art and on the other hand by works that are uninterpretable. Such anti-art works are so radical they fail all the criteria for inclusion in the category of art except pure opposition to what went before. So failed art splits between works that copy what went before without developing it in any way and works that are so utterly opposed to what went before that they are unrecognisable as art. If such works are unrecognisable as art then they are a crisis not just for art but for critique because art, for Adorno, *is* open to interpretation, commentary and critique. A work that was not open to such interpretative strategies, a work that could not be completed in philosophy must fail. The main problem with Adorno's conception of rank is deciding what to include as art and what to exclude. It is the distinction between art and failed art that is crucial. Adorno appears to make this decision based on the quality of the analysis of the truth content of the work and the experience of the spirit of the work. This is the second main problem, the completion of art by philosophy. Adorno in effect restricts the kind of works that can be identified as art to ones that are structured in the requisite way so they can be completed by philosophy. Adorno has in effect

developed a form of definition of art that depends for its ultimate justification on the concept of rank as explicated by the completion of the artwork by philosophy.

I will now return to the concept of mimesis as there is a further form of Platonic mimesis at work within *Aesthetic Theory* and this concerns a different other of any artwork, namely theory. This theory, for Adorno, is aesthetics, it is philosophical and interpretative conceptuality. I will argue that this is also a form of mimetic comportment. If one asks the question ‘what is the relationship between the work of art and its re-inscription as an interpretation?’ there is a strong possibility that it could be mimetic. The interpretation does not mirror the work, it is not simply an imitative description. According to Adorno the interpretation, and for him philosophy, is interpretation, it extends the work of art and for the moment in which it is made completes the work. Any later interpretation may well be influenced by the earlier by accepting or rejecting some or all of the earlier interpretation and this subsequent interpretation completes the work for the time being at that time. In *Aesthetic Theory* there is a sense in which theory is a mimesis of art. It is art repeated but in theoretical terms. It is not a direct imitation, a mockery in the literal sense, but a transformed repetition, transformed literally into a different form. What is written about art, has to be recognisably about that artwork that form of art. The mimesis partly resides in the recognition of the work of art in the and by the theory, and partly in the inescapable referential nature of the theorising. The theory must refer to the art. This is true for artworks regarded as theory demonstrated in art. Theory here is not in a text composed of theoretical sentences made up of words but in an actuality of theory staged as a work of art. A work of art is inevitably related to previous artworks and is in an important sense a theoretical statement in the form of an artwork, a statement about art.

Is there a connection between parataxis and mimesis as Adorno seems to understand them? In parataxis two ideas are juxtaposed so as to allow a new meaning to emerge. The elements from which the meaning will emerge are juxtaposed so the mimesis involved will be that seen by the reader, and possibly intended by the writer. What the reader will read are similarities and or differences that will give rise to a fresh insight, a fresh meaning. It is the production of the new by mimesis operating as mimesis of the same by the same, one thought from two thoughts, one idea from two ideas, one concept from two concepts. This can also be viewed as two unlike concepts giving rise to a third by mimesis of unlike others. In either case it is a relational mimesis, two moments, giving rise to a third in a form of non-conceptual realisation, a reading as opposed to a deduction.

When this is extended from parataxis to constellation, from two ideas to a constellation of ideas, a juxtaposition of concepts then again what emerges is not a conceptual deduction but more like a mimesis operating within the elements of the constellation. This, when extended to a long sectional work, *Aesthetic Theory* itself, which has precisely been designed to present a set of presentations together so that some response, (or responses) can emerge for the reader

mimetically, through a form of mimetic comportment. The well-read reader has to be familiar with the territory of *Aesthetic Theory*, otherwise *Aesthetic Theory* becomes really difficult to read as it is not attempting to be a discursive guide to the territory – to be more precise – to the two territories of art and theory that are intertwined themselves into a mimetic relationship. The mimesis in the case of *Aesthetic Theory* must be between the reader and the text. This, perhaps, goes some way to explain the observation that many artists have found the book to be relevant to them in pursuit of their own work<sup>160</sup> and perhaps why for academic readers and commentators it has proved a slow burn within the reception of Adorno's work. Reading *Aesthetic Theory* is in short a mimesis. At a number of points in this chapter the subject areas of history and time have been apparent. The next chapter examines time and the various temporalities at work within *Aesthetic Theory*.

## CHAPTER FOUR

ADORNO AND TIME – TEMPORALITIES IN  
*AESTHETIC THEORY*

To remark that *Aesthetic Theory* is fundamentally structured by time is to do no more than indicate that time, in various different forms, emerges as important in any analysis of the text. Even the basic form of dialectical opposition, the antinomy, that Adorno uses throughout the text is in a sense a spatialized temporal form as it oscillates back and forth in an endless suspension of an achieved meaning or fixed understanding. In this chapter *Aesthetic Theory* will be examined from the standpoint of the relationship between four fundamental forms of time, chronological time, historical time, the time of the artwork and phenomenological time. Finally I will examine Adorno's conception of the instant. Chronological time, a social form of cosmological time, and phenomenological time have a long philosophical history. Historical time and the time of the artwork are, from a philosophical point of view, more modern forms of constructed temporality. The instant is an Adornian Benjaminian construct.

In *Time and Narrative* Ricoeur attempts to discover a way of unifying our thought of time by mediating cosmological time, the 'time of the world', with phenomenological time, 'lived time' through the concept of narrative. The aporia between the cosmological time of Aristotle and the phenomenological time of St Augustine is bridged for Ricoeur by connectors such as the sundial, the clock, and the calendar<sup>1</sup>. The dated past as a narrative, as a history, because of its origins in both cosmological time and lived time seems to offer Ricoeur the mediating concept he is searching for. Inconclusive as it is, Ricoeur's extraordinarily long and detailed examination of this problem is nevertheless a significant achievement. He develops a bridge between the two positions in terms of narrative based on such social connectors as the calendar. However, the two positions of cosmological and phenomenological time remain counterposed as basic assumptions in contradiction. Narrative can never do more than mediate between them. Rather like a Kantian antinomy the whole discussion needs entirely reconfiguring in different terms. As Ricoeur shows, Heidegger attempted to do this with his temporal self-interpreting concept of *Dasein*, but largely failed because the interpretation is obsessed with the mystical nature of Being. A better approach would probably be through a grounding in the sociality of human life similar to Lefebvre's concept of everyday life.<sup>2</sup> It is not the central issue here.

Chronological time has its origins in the everyday earth events such as the movement of the sun and the varying lengths of day and night, the transitions from winter to summer and the repetition of the seasons. Astronomy and science advanced this socially-invented theoretical construct of cosmological time into a uniform structure. Up until the mid-twentieth century chronological time was periodically corrected by astronomical observations. Following the invention of the atomic clock and its successors, cosmological time based on observations has been found to be incorrect against this new form of 'absolute' physical time. However, ironically, the old cosmological time, in terms of the rotation and orbit of the earth is now again used to regulate the new absolute time of physicists. Atomic clock time which many computer systems now run on has to be periodically re-adjusted to keep chronological time consistent with the everyday experience of night and day. Chronological time is the base level form of time in contrast with which historical, phenomenological and the time of the artwork make sense. Walter Benjamin called it 'empty homogeneous time' in his *Theses on the Philosophy of History*. Adorno sometimes called it empirical time.

Historical time is the expanded perspective of human history. It too is ultimately based on chronological time in terms of calendars and dates and datable events. Its phenomenological basis may well be in the everyday involving longer horizons both forwards and backwards in time, year, decade, lifetime, century. This enlarged horizon includes the biological clock sequences involved in the ideal of a long life. Sequences that start with birth and end in death. Sequences that can be truncated to a shorter life than the ideal for multiple causes of death. There is for everybody a life story, a narrative, a history. There is a similar story for families, for social groups, for societies, and for nations. These histories can be entirely invented.<sup>3</sup> The construction of any history is always carried out from the standpoint of a present moment and the social interests inherent in that present can determine the historical interpretation.

Phenomenological time on the other hand is the experiential time of subjectivity. Being-with-others is a part of everyday life which is structured by the organising and fulfilling of the elements of living against the background of the natural sequences of day and night and the perception of measured time. Memory and expectation are built into this ordering of events of everyday life. The phenomenological experience of time is not uniform. There are variations in experience, waiting, boredom, concentration, activity, inter-personal relationships - all have different experiential temporal registers. The recognition of the different experiences of phenomenological time as being of apparently different lengths depends on a contrast with chronological time.

Artworks exist in the three forms of time so far described. Art events, be they music, film, drama and visual art media, exist in chronological time. Artworks also exist in history. They have a 'life' in the culture for which they were created. Every artwork has a history, it exists in historical time within the history of the art-form it exemplifies. This art-form history is itself fixable and identifiable in relation to general social, economic and political history. In

chapter two I explored the curious nature of Adorno's idea that artworks are forms of being, kinds of 'selves' with an ontological status in time. The history of any work of art consists of a series of re-interpretations within the critical and interpretative community that keep the artwork 'alive' and relevant to a present that is chronologically and in terms of datable history, historically later than the one in which it was created. Artworks also exist in the phenomenal time of the person experiencing them. There is an important distinction to be made here, which is implicit in Adorno's thought but perhaps not always clearly signalled. The distinction is between the experiential time of the person experiencing the artwork and the time of the artwork in terms of the ways in which that artwork manipulates the experience of time – 'aesthetic time' – because of the method of its construction. The time of the artwork is the internal time-structure of artworks but of course this can only be experienced in phenomenal time. Many artworks be they music, film, theatre and or visual art media involve time, internal time, the time of the artwork. This is because they have been structured by their makers so as to alter the perception of phenomenological time, and therefore also of chronological time. This is what Adorno means by the time of the artwork.

These four temporal forms of time, chronological, historical, the time of the artwork and phenomenological time are all mediated by Adorno's philosophical position that truth has a temporal basis. There are no eternal truths for Adorno, the nearest thing to an eternal truth would be negative, that there are no eternal truths, this is itself an historical position. I will return to the question of truth in the next section. History is fundamental to Adorno's philosophy. That Adorno is deeply concerned about a crisis in our perception of time is clear from the following comments from *History and Freedom*.

Thus the widespread preoccupation with the metaphysics of time arises from the circumstance that our consciousness of time itself has gone into crisis. Time has ceased to be something we can take for granted, it is no longer substantial, ... Enrico Castelli, the Italian philosopher, has written a fascinating book about the way in which the metaphysics of time is built on the loss of time.<sup>4</sup>

How such change can be perceived is difficult to conceive. What Adorno has in mind are philosophical investigations of time such as those of Bergson, Husserl, and Heidegger, as well as artwork investigations of time by Proust and Joyce and the scientific conceptual revolution concerning time brought about by Einstein's general theory of relativity. In this theory time and space are irrevocably linked by the speed of light, they can no longer be thought of as separate abstractions but as a unified abstraction called space-time.<sup>5</sup> 'Newton's laws of motion put an end to the idea of an absolute position in space. The theory of relativity gets rid of absolute time.'<sup>6</sup> In one sense this conceptual revolution spatialised time. It is the spatialisation of time in music, as will be seen in the second section of this chapter, that Adorno identified as crucial to understanding what had happened in the development of avant garde music up to the 1960s.



This chapter will consist of three sections. The first two consist of a description and analysis of two forms of time, apart from chronological time which I consider has been sufficiently described for these purposes above. I will start with historical time, then move on to a genealogical history concerning the time of the artwork and its relationship to phenomenological time. In the final third section I shall discuss Adorno's conception of the instant as a form of understanding.

## Section one: Historical time

In *Aesthetic Theory* Adorno addresses the history of aesthetics from the standpoint of a Marxist history of autonomous art. Adorno's Marxism is a type of Western Marxism. It creates a distinction between the ordinary empirical history of events and the history of modes of production, or real history. The idea of ordinary history is misleading for Adorno because it is temporally indifferent. Adorno often distinguishes between what he calls a 'crude history of ideas' and real history (*realen Geschichte*<sup>7</sup>) which is partly embedded in the artwork. 'The interdependence of quality [Rang] and history should not be conceived according to the stubborn cliché of a crude history of ideas that insists that history is the court that determines quality. This wisdom is a historicophilosophical rationalization of its own inadequacy, as if no judgement were possible in the here and now.'<sup>8</sup> In other words the historical valuation of an artwork of quality has to be understood from the genealogical standpoint of the present. Only in the present can such a judgement be made. It is the judgement of the present on the past that is vitally important for Adorno as well as the judgement of the present on the present and what this might imply for the future. Art, for Adorno, is always thought of as being historically located: 'The concept of art is located in a historically changing constellation of elements; it refuses definition.'<sup>9</sup> If there is a unifying theme to be found in Adorno's treatment of time in *Aesthetic Theory* it lies in his conception of history which is derived from Hegel, Marx and Nietzsche, and partly filtered through Lukács and Benjamin. As the concepts of history and historical time play such an important role in *Aesthetic Theory* it is important to be clear about the complex conceptual history that lies behind them. In the first instance it is salutary to remember that history itself has a history.

### Conceptual background to Adorno's idea of history

In his *Futures Past* Koselleck analyses the changing concept of history in the late Eighteenth century. Koselleck's analysis in terms of experience and expectation reveals a new temporalisation of history. According to Koselleck 'historical time is ... an entity which alters along with history and from whose changing structure it is possible to deduce the shifting classification of experience and expectation.'<sup>10</sup> Before the Eighteenth century, Koselleck argues, expectations were largely based on experience. The shift implied in the concept of *neu Zeit* meant that, following the ruptural event of the French Revolution and the invention of the

modern conception of progress, expectation could from then on be formed on organisation in the present for the future. The modern in all areas, art, technology, politics and finance is orientated to future expectations. There is a further aspect to Koselleck's conception of history contained in his article 'Geschichte' namely the concept of history as a 'collective singular'. As Ricoeur explains, 'This is the master category, the condition under which the time of history can be thought. There is a time of history insofar as there is one single history.'<sup>11</sup> The collective singular history covers both 'a series of events and the ensemble of discourses pronounced regarding this collective singular.'<sup>12</sup> Ricoeur goes on to explain that 'In producing itself, history articulates its own discourse.'<sup>13</sup>

In his late book *Memory, History, Forgetting* (2004) Ricoeur theorises a 'threefold frame' for history consisting of 'documentary proof, the causal and teleological explanation, and the literary emplotment.'<sup>14</sup> This 'threefold frame' 'remains the secret of historical knowledge'. All three elements are necessary for a text to be considered conceptually as history. They are in Ricoeur's view the fundamentals of an epistemology of history. Historical narratives deal with complex events such as the English civil war or the French revolution, or with wider conceptualities such as Braudel's *Mediterranean*. Historical narratives also cover even broader areas in the form of 'world-scale narratives'<sup>15</sup> Here Ricoeur mentions Marx, Nietzsche, and Croce in a list that includes noted historians such as Ranke and Michelet. Ricoeur does not cite Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* but it is a good, if extreme, example of a 'world-scale narrative' even if it is a set of unfinished, or unfinishable, fragments. For a narrative to be history, in Ricoeur's view, the three aspects of the 'three fold frame' need to be in place and by implication in balance. One imbalance that can occur is found in the rhetorical power of some historical narratives, which can be driven by a framework of belief, an ethical position that itself creates an interpretation of history in the form of a narrative structure.

The *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is driven by such a polemical rhetoric. It is a history of reason. It also claims to be a philosophy of history. It is strong on narrative rhetoric, strong on causal and teleological explanation, but one of the main documents, *The Odyssey* is itself invention, albeit storytelling of a high order. So the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* it is not really history, yet it is trying to account for a real historical situation, in the then, recent past in terms of Nazi fascism and the Holocaust and for, the then, contemporary situation of Western capitalist society. It is an attempt to understand 'our time' by trying to understand the past in the present. It is 'a piece of documentation' but the authors 'hope it is also more.'<sup>16</sup> 'Our concept of history does not believe itself elevated above history, but it does not merely chase after information in the positivist manner. As a critique of philosophy it does not seek to abandon philosophy itself.'<sup>17</sup> These fragmented texts are a kind of symbolic symptom of the difficulty of the problem addressed namely 'the necessity for enlightenment to reflect on itself if humanity is not to be totally betrayed.'<sup>18</sup> The whole concept behind the book revolves around the distinction

between philosophy and history that is captured in the idea of a philosophy of history. For there to be a philosophy of history there must be a fundamental conceptual distinction between philosophy and history.

The claim to be a philosophy of history makes the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* primarily a philosophical text. The precedent is Hegel with his *Philosophy of History* where Hegel identifies three forms of history. 'Original' which is in effect eye-witness testimony from the past. 'Reflective' which is also divided into three as 'universal,' 'pragmatical' and 'critical' which is what is normally thought of as history by historians of Hegel's time. The third form of history is 'Philosophical' which is 'the history of the world' which 'presents us with a rational process' This is the history of "Reason".<sup>19</sup> Marcuse summarises Hegel's position very succinctly:

The forms of the mind manifest themselves in time, and the history of the world is an exposition of mind in time. The dialectic thus gets to view reality temporally, and the 'negativity' that, in the *Logic*, determined the process of thought appears in the *Philosophy of History* as the destructive power of time.

The *Logic* had demonstrated the structure of reason; the *Philosophy of History* expounds the historical content of reason.<sup>20</sup>

As Marcuse points out, Hegel was continuing an eighteenth century philosophical tradition 'that history was progress.'<sup>21</sup> However, what is strange about Hegel's history is that it is ultimately not temporal at all.

While we are thus concerned exclusively with the Idea of Spirit, and in the History of the World regard everything as only its manifestation, we have in traversing the past—however extensive its periods—only to do with what is *present*; for philosophy, as occupying itself with the True, has to do with the *eternally present*. Nothing in the past is lost for it, for the Idea is ever present; Spirit is immortal; with it there is no past, no future, but an essential *now*. This necessarily implies that the present form of Spirit comprehends within it all earlier steps.<sup>22</sup>

In a sense the end of history, as the highest position of the absolute, had been reached in the present of Hegel by Hegel. As Adorno and Horkheimer writing about Hegel put in it the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: 'by finally postulating the known result of the whole process of negation, totality in the system and in history, as the absolute, he violated the prohibition and himself succumbed to mythology.'<sup>23</sup> As Ricoeur understands history, from an epistemological point of view, then Hegel is not engaged in history as practised by historians. 'How is it, the philosopher asks, that Spirit has a history? By the epochal character of the question, philosophical history has already seceded from the history of the historians. Factuality has lost all philosophical interest; it is relegated to mere narrative.'<sup>24</sup> Following on from Hegel, Marx re-conceptualized the concept of a 'world-scale narrative' and based it on an analysis of the real concrete conditions of economic life. In *The German Ideology* Marx and Engels make clear how an analysis of the reality of social and economic conditions will rewrite history as 'real

history.<sup>25</sup> ‘Already here we see how this civil society is the true source and theatre of all history, and how absurd is the conception of history held hitherto, which neglects the real relationships and confines itself to high-sounding dramas of princes and states.’<sup>26</sup> This rewriting of history is what Adorno understands as the philosophy of history. Nietzsche seems to have been a very influential source for the concept of history that Adorno employed, especially with regards to both the future and the idea of a natural history. It is worth recalling that the subtitle to *Beyond Good and Evil* is ‘Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future’, and that it contains a chapter entitled ‘On the Natural History of Morals.’ In his ‘Untimely Meditation’ on *The Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life*, Nietzsche also distinguishes between three ‘species’ of history, ‘a monumental, an antiquarian and a critical species.’<sup>27</sup> Nietzsche in discussing the third species, the ‘critical history’ introduces Hegel’s idea of a ‘second nature’ (derived from Aristotle).<sup>28</sup> ‘The best we can do is to confront our inherited and hereditary nature with our knowledge, and through a new, stern discipline combat our inborn heritage and implant in ourselves a new habit, a new instinct, a second nature, so that our first nature withers away.’<sup>29</sup>

Throughout the essay Nietzsche counter-poses two ideas, ‘life’ and ‘history’ which at one point he describes on the analogy of ‘a constellation’ between which has appeared a new star that alters the constellation, this new star is ‘*the demand that history should be a science.*’<sup>30</sup> This text of Nietzsche’s may well be the origin of Benjamin’s concept of constellation. Compared to the ancient Greeks with their ‘unhistorical sense’ modern men are for Nietzsche ‘walking encyclopedias’<sup>31</sup> Even philosophy, according to Nietzsche, has been caught in the historical trap of only examining its past and being incapable of ‘action’ in the present, ‘a self-restrained knowing which leads to no action.’<sup>32</sup> Nietzsche objects to any type of history that takes the form of Hegelian teleology. He emphasises how the past should be interpreted in terms of the present as a form of genealogy. ‘*If you are to venture to interpret the past you can do so only out of the fullest exertion of the vigour of the present.*’<sup>33</sup> Furthermore the only point in studying history is for the sake of action in the present that will create a better present in the future. Nietzsche continues, ‘only he who constructs the future has a right to judge the past.’<sup>34</sup> ‘I demand that man should above all learn to live and should employ history only in *the service of the life he has learned to live.*’<sup>35</sup> It is clear from the following quotation that Nietzsche expected ‘we philosophers’ to be critical of the age in which they lived. By ‘we’ he meant not only the cohort of professional philosophers he held in such undisguised contempt but the wider cultured general readers of his works. ‘...the greatness of their task, [philosophers] in being the bad conscience of their age. By laying the knife vivisectionally to the bosom of the very *virtues of the age* they betrayed what was their own secret: to know a *new* greatness of man, a new untrodden path to his enlargement.’<sup>36</sup>

For Ricoeur, Nietzsche’s critical history ‘constitutes only one moment, that of judgement’<sup>37</sup> the judgement of the present on the past. Whilst this is correct there is surely another aspect to ‘critical history’ namely the judgement of the present on the present. This

genealogy can be understood in two diametrically opposed ways. It can be understood as a dissatisfaction with the present that looks for a return to an earlier age or stage of civilisation that seeks a restitution, a return of the past in the future. Alternatively the dissatisfaction with the present looks for change in the present that overturns those aspects in the past that led to the present and are still active in it, such change will bring about happiness in the future. The first is a reactionary utopia as exemplified by Nietzsche and Heidegger, the second is a progressive utopia as exemplified by Marx and Adorno. I will examine Adorno's conception of the linked ideas of freedom, happiness and utopia in the next chapter.

Hegel's theory of a philosophy of history incorporates, as Marcuse points out, an important distinction between progress as human historical change and nature. 'Since Aristotle, historical change has been contrasted with changes in nature. Hegel held the same distinction. He says historical change is "an advance to something better, more perfect," whereas mutation in nature "exhibits only a perpetually self-repeating cycle." It is only in historical change that something new arises.'<sup>38</sup> Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* continues Hegel's investigation of the development of reason but in a negative sense, as a Marxist critique of the development of Western rationality. The same distinction between nature and history can be found in the introductory section 'The Concept of Enlightenment'. The scientific rationality of the enlightenment is a form of domination over nature. 'In their transformation the essence of things is revealed as always the same, a substrate of domination. This identity constitutes the unity of nature.'<sup>39</sup> Myth had a different relationship to nature in that it sought to communicate with it by magic and ritual but this in essence was also its opposite, a rational control over nature. The dialectic of enlightenment being between the poles of myth and reason. 'Just as myths already entail enlightenment, with every step enlightenment entangles itself more deeply in mythology.'<sup>40</sup> Only by abolishing 'the false absolute, the principle of blind power'<sup>41</sup> will the enlightenment 'fulfil itself.'

In his 1932 article 'The Idea of a Natural History' Adorno counter-poses nature, understood as myth, with history understood as 'the occurrence of the qualitatively new.'<sup>42</sup> This dialectical concept of nature-history is based on 'aesthetic material,'<sup>43</sup> derived from the work of Lukács and Benjamin. In *History and Freedom* Adorno revisits this discussion:

Through the medium of aesthetics questions concerning the philosophy of history and even metaphysics become legible. ... for a whole series of thinkers the experience of art has become a sort of key to other branches of philosophy. ... What is at issue, rather, is a particular relation to the experience of structures that purport to be meaningful and that provide a model both of meaning that can be explored and of the crisis of meaning.<sup>44</sup>

It is not aesthetic material as such that is important for Adorno but any 'structure' that purports to be 'meaningful' which includes artworks as well as philosophical theories. Once again Adorno presents the artwork from a structural point of view as being similar to a philosophical theory which for him is a constellation of concepts intended for interpretation. Hegel's idea of

second nature was used by Lukács, according to Adorno, to describe ‘a world of convention as it is historically produced,’<sup>45</sup> a world of convention that has, in ideological terms, become a second nature, hence a myth. Adorno goes on to state that there is only one correct formulation for the problem of natural history and that is ‘as interpretations of concrete history.’<sup>46</sup> There is a ‘constellation’ of ideas involved that make up an ‘alternative logical structure,’ those ideas are ‘transience, signification, the idea of nature and the idea of history.’ These ideas ‘gather round a concrete historical facticity,’<sup>47</sup> history in short is an interpretation of this constellation, this interpretation is itself ‘new’. An historical interpretation can be the production of the new in the same way as the making of an artwork is the production of the new. So for Adorno, history, like philosophy and art is modelled on structured forms. However, there are several temporal forms in *Aesthetic Theory* that are best thought of as historical forms of temporalisation. These temporal forms are, following Nietzsche, based on both the present as genealogy and on the expectation of change in the future

Any form of history has to account for change and for its opposite, no change. It is difficult to conceive of a history of a period of time in which there was no change. In Aristotelian terms no change would imply no time had passed as the passing of time depends upon the observation of change. Allied to the concept of change are the related ideas of progress and the new. The constant production of the new is a form of repetition and thus a form of no change. The new is usually associated with progress in the sense that *this new* is better than *the last new* and hence tied in with fashion. There is a form of non-changing temporality, the ‘ever-same’ that Adorno uses throughout *Aesthetic Theory*. This concept is Marxist in origin. For Adorno ever-same time is not neutral like chronological time. Ever-same time is negatively charged. It is the time of the commodity. The ideas behind the concept of the ever-same can be found in Benjamin’s set of short statements entitled ‘Central Park.’ There are two different ideas involved in ‘Central Park’. One derives from Nietzsche’s idea of the eternal return and the other from Baudelaire’s idea of the new. Benjamin puts them into a relationship. ‘Baudelaire’s poetry reveals the new in the ever-selfsame, and the ever-selfsame in the new.’<sup>48</sup> In this paradoxical de-temporalization the eternal return aspect belongs to fashion – ‘Fashion is the eternal recurrence of the new.’<sup>49</sup>

There is a further aspect of Adorno’s Marxist approach to history which was filtered through his absorption of another influence from Walter Benjamin. In the 17<sup>th</sup> thesis of Benjamin’s *Theses on the Philosophy of History* there is a statement that clearly influenced Adorno. Benjamin begins by contrasting ‘Historicism’ with a ‘Materialist historiography’ in order to make the point that ordinary history simply accumulates ‘a mass of data to fill the homogenous, empty time.’ A Marxist history by contrast ‘is based on a constructive principle’. By this Benjamin means a construction that brings thought to a halt. ‘Thinking involves not only the flow of thoughts, but their arrest as well. Where thinking suddenly stops in a configuration pregnant with tensions, it gives that configuration a shock, by which it crystallizes

into a monad. A historical materialist approaches a historical subject only where he encounters it as a monad.<sup>50</sup> Here the constellation of historical understanding is turned into a monad as an historical repository created by shock and crystallization. It is in this monadic structure, Benjamin claims, that a historical materialist ‘recognizes the sign of a Messianic cessation of happening, or, to put it differently, a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past. He takes cognizance of it in order to blast a specific era out of the homogenous course of history – blasting a specific life out of the era or a specific work out of the lifework.’<sup>51</sup> Adorno interprets this passage in *History and Freedom* in the following way. ‘The truth is that, while the traditional view inserts facts into the flow of time, they really possess a nucleus of time in themselves, they crystallize time in themselves. What we can legitimately call ideas is this nucleus of time within the individual crystallized phenomena, something that can only be decoded by interpretation.’<sup>52</sup> One of the implications of this Benjaminian view of time is that history is both continuous and discontinuous, that within the chronological continuity of history are atemporal discontinuities, facts or artworks are alike in this. For Adorno both facts and artworks sediment historical time within themselves, in this they are equally monadological. Both require decoding by interpretation in the case of historical facts by the philosophy of history. In the case of the artwork by aesthetic theory.

The influence of Benjamin’s 17<sup>th</sup> Thesis can be seen very clearly in this quotation that follows from *Aesthetic Theory* where Benjamin’s account of a ‘materialist’ history is transposed by Adorno to art.

Appearance, however, and its explosion in the artwork are essentially historical ...as something that exists, the artwork has its own development. What appears in the artwork is its own inner time; the explosion of appearance blasts open the continuity of this inner temporality. The artwork is mediated to real history (*realen Gestichte*) by its modalogical nucleus. History is the content of artworks. To analyze artworks means no less than to become conscious of the history immanently sedimented in them.<sup>53</sup>

Here materialist history has been replaced by appearance but virtually all the other elements are present.

### **Adorno on history**

History according to Adorno, in his Lectures of 1964-5 *History and Freedom*, never gives the truth of any situation in the past because it never gives a true interpretation of the situation, one that unmask the real. History is effectively ‘meaningless’. Adorno has ‘a conception of the philosophy of history that permits us to *comprehend* history, that is to say, to go beyond its bounds as mere existence [*Dasein*] and to understand it as something *meaningless*. And this meaninglessness is itself nothing but the dreadful antagonistic state of affairs I have been attempting to describe to you.’<sup>54</sup> The philosophy of history, ‘rewrites’ history by interpretation. Adorno gives as an example the French Revolution, which he recounts by running through the



standard ‘causes’ as well as larger patterns such as the change from feudalism to bourgeois individualism.

What this tells us about the theory of history, then, is that, taken in isolation none of these factors would suffice to give even an approximate explanation of the course of history. In short you need to grasp the complexity of the pattern, by which I mean the overall process that asserts itself, the dependence on that global process on the specific situation, and then again the mediation of the specific situation by the overall process. Furthermore, in order to understand this conceptual pattern, you need to press forward to the concrete, historical analysis I have hinted at and that goes beyond the categories I have been discussing.<sup>55</sup>

Grasping ‘the complexity of the pattern’ is exactly like understanding and interpreting the relationships set up in a philosophical constellation of concepts. What this example also makes clear, and Adorno confirms this in the next lecture, is that his account of the French Revolution is essentially a historian’s account, albeit a Marxist historian’s account. The way in which this account ceases to be merely history and becomes philosophy of history would then lie in the dialectical methodology of the interpretation. As Adorno states, ‘the philosophy of history merges with the writing of history.’<sup>56</sup> This he claims is derived from Hegel and Marx. ‘Thus it is important to realise that the philosophy of history does not fall outside the scope of historical research, but that the constellation of historical events, both as a whole and in detail, should regard itself as the philosophy of history proper.’<sup>57</sup> So history can become philosophy just as philosophy can become history, divisions between disciplines are not real, conceptual interpretation does not recognise such artificial boundaries. In a subsequent lecture Adorno identifies ‘the central question of any theory of the philosophy of history’<sup>58</sup> namely Marx’s theory of value in social exchange.

A further aspect of the relationship between nature and history concerns Adorno’s conception of philosophy itself. ‘...the interweaving of nature and history must in general be the model for every interpretative procedure in philosophy. ...it provides the canon that enables philosophy to adopt an interpretative stance without lapsing into pure randomness.’<sup>59</sup> It provides a link between conceptual rigour and lived experience. He goes on to argue that interpretation is the only form philosophy can take today, further that philosophy today is a form of criticism ‘of phenomena that have been brought to a standstill.’<sup>60</sup> Such phenomena appear as second nature, interpretation makes clear such phenomena are historically formed: ‘...interpretation means reading nature from history and history from nature. Interpretation teases out of the phenomena, out of second nature, out of what has been mediated by history and society, the fact that they have evolved ...nature is present in history as transience, ...history is present in nature as something that has evolved and is transient.’<sup>61</sup> In the next section the ‘second nature’ of the time of the artwork will be explored, but before then I will examine the set of ideas involved in Marx’s concept of the commodity and the way in which Adorno appears to have interpreted them.

### **Commodity, absolute, abstraction**

For Adorno the relationship between the new and the ever-same is a dialectical relationship. 'The dialectic of commodity production: the product's novelty (as a stimulant to demand) takes on a significance hitherto unknown; in mass production the ever-selfsame manifests itself overtly for the first time.'<sup>62</sup> One important aspect of Adorno's 'ever-same' time concerns repetition. The repetition involved in the relationship of exchange. This relationship, Adorno claims, became distorted once the exchange became that of commodities, within capitalism. A clear indication of Adorno's thinking on this point can be found in his article, 'Progress.'

In bourgeois society, which created the concept of total progress, the convergence of this concept with the negation of progress originates in this society's principle: exchange. Exchange is the rational form of mythical ever-sameness. In the like-for-like of every act of exchange, the one act revokes the other; the balance of accounts is null. If the exchange was just, then nothing really should have happened, and everything stays the same. ...the societally more powerful contracting party receives more than the other. By means of this injustice something new occurs in the exchange: the process, which proclaims its own stasis, becomes dynamic.<sup>63</sup>

The 'unequal' exchange is an exchange of commodities. Time is built in to Marx's idea of the commodity. The labour time of the production of a wage-slave working on an hourly rate is transformed into the commodity being made. As Marx put it, 'The two marks, with which he bought twelve hours' use of labour power, are the price of twelve hours' labour. Labour power, therefore, is a commodity, neither more nor less than sugar. The former is measured by the clock, the latter by the scales'<sup>64</sup> The commodity produced as a result of this labour power possesses a certain social time value, this time value is then re-valued when the commodity is sold on the market. This re-valuing of the commodity time of the maker is one of the sources of the perceived injustice that is the basis for Marx's attack on monopoly capitalism. In this sense the commodity is a temporal form that is always the same by virtue of this re-valuing of the original time of production. Indeed, Marx claims that economics is at basis about time. Labour power has a time aspect as does obviously the length of the working day or indeed the length of a working life. Socially free time as envisaged by Marx in his time might have been a reality for some people then but now, in the twenty-first century, it must be considered to be based on 'utterly untenable nineteenth-century assumptions.'<sup>65</sup>

Marx argued that just as Robinson Crusoe does not produce commodities neither does a peasant family in a traditional setting. The production of commodities is social and is dependent on the commodity producer being in a social structure where the production and exchange of commodities is paid for by capital which in turn increases as the exchange value of the commodity is realised and its surplus value released in the form of an increase in capital. This entire cycle can only be understood in terms of time as it only works in time. It is conceptually based on time which is why Marx makes the claim that economics is fundamentally about social time. You could also argue that Robinson Crusoe can no more make art than he can a commodity.

Marx famously describes a commodity as ‘ a very queer thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties.’<sup>66</sup> A commodity whether it takes the form of so many yards of linen or a coat is essentially an abstract concept. One ‘theological’ nicety is that commodities as ‘productions of the human brain appear as independent beings endowed with life,’ that enter ‘into relation both with one another and the human race.’ This is the ‘fetishism’ of commodities which ‘has its origin ...in the peculiar social character of the labour that produces them.’ This comment makes it clear that Adorno’s concept of the work of art as a form of being conceptually similar to Marx’s concept of the commodity. The abstract commodity as a being can be so much flax, so many yards of linen or a coat. The concept of the abstract does not inhere simply in the commodity form for Marx. In one of Marx’s early writings, *Critique of Hegel’s Doctrine of the State* he discusses the concept of primogeniture as an abstraction ‘of independent private property’.<sup>67</sup> Primogeniture in effect becomes a form of fetish that entirely obscures ‘the barbaric stupidity of independent private property.’<sup>68</sup> Private property is autonomous within the state according to Marx. It is precisely the autonomy of abstract private property that gives the illusion of independence to the state, this is its real ‘species-being’.<sup>69</sup> If the autonomy of the state derives from abstract private property then the illusion must surely also extend to the autonomy of art. This is a further antinomy of art, that its autonomy in its ‘species-being’ is an illusion. This is another of Adorno’s antinomies, the work of art is autonomous but its autonomy is at the same time an illusion.

Just as a commodity can take on any form, so can the abstract concept of the work of art. It can be a poem, a symphony, a painting or an installation. These artwork forms are obviously not progressions in a process as in flax-linen-coat but they are exemplars of an abstract form, the work of art. So, Adorno’s abstract concept of the work of art looks as if it is modelled on the abstract concept of the commodity. Hence it is no surprise to find that in a paragraph devoted to the discussion of the new in *Aesthetic Theory*, in the section known as ‘Situation’, Adorno stresses the abstractness of the new. ‘The new is necessarily abstract.’<sup>70</sup> Later on he states, ‘...The abstractness of the new is bound up with the commodity character of art.’<sup>71</sup> As this paragraph progresses it moves from a discussion of Poe to Baudelaire. It is precisely in Baudelaire’s work that the new in poetry is seen by Adorno to be aligned with the new in consumer goods. Indeed to be not just aligned but identical.

The power of his work is that it syncopates the overwhelming objectivity of the commodity character—which wipes out any human trace—with the objectivity of the work itself, anterior to the living subject: The absolute artwork converges with the absolute commodity. The modern pays tribute to this in the vestige of the abstract in its concept. If in monopoly capitalism it is primarily exchange value, not use value, that is consumed, in the modern artwork it is abstractness, that irritating indeterminateness of what is and to what purpose it is, that becomes a cipher of what the work is.<sup>72</sup>

The historical truth of artworks does not reside in the work itself but in the critique and interpretations that develop over time and surround it. 'The historical development of works through critique and the philosophical development of their truth content have a reciprocal relationship.'<sup>73</sup> It is the truth of artworks that is historical, whether they are art or non-art is a temporal historical decision.

The antinomy of aesthetic reification is also one between the ever fractured metaphysical claim of works to being exempted from time, and the transience of everything that establishes itself in time as enduring. Artworks become relative because they must assert themselves as absolute. ... The perennial revolt of art against art has its *fundamentum in re*. If it is essential to artworks that they be things, it is no less essential that they negate their own status as things, and thus art turns against art. The totally objectivated artwork would congeal into a mere thing, whereas if it altogether evaded objectification it would regress to an impotently powerless subjective impulse and flounder in the empirical world.<sup>74</sup>

It is now clear that this discussion of commodity, absolute and abstract will allow a re-formulation of what it is that Adorno understands by his concept of an artwork. The autonomous work of art is, like the commodity form, an illusion, a semblance, both subject and object, both being and thing, both a commodity and a work of free spirit, both within time as 'transient' and an 'absolute,' this is the relativity of artworks. 'Artworks become relative because they must assert themselves as absolute.'<sup>75</sup> It is this absolute aspect of works of art that make them either art or not art. This is the temporal dialectic at the centre of Adorno's conception of the work of art, that it is both transient and absolute. This antinomy is what makes the work of art an absolute commodity precisely because Adorno's concept of the work of art is modelled on the commodity form. The work of art is transient because the critique of it is always in a process of becoming and at any one historical moment this critique can in that historical moment reveal the truth, the absolute, about that work of art, a revelation of the truth in the metaphysical medium of philosophy. A truth that is always historically mediated.

## Section two: The time of the artwork

The time of the artwork involves both the temporal structure of the artwork and the phenomenological time experience of that work. There is a simple distinction within common sense and ordinary knowledge between chronological time and phenomenological time. Chronological time is invariable but our phenomenal experience of it varies. Sometimes we are bored and time passes slowly, sometimes we are engaged in some activity and time seems to pass quickly, or we are not even aware it has been passing. During the chronological time spent listening to a piece of music the listener can experience the aesthetic time of the work as somehow removed, somewhat separated from the background chronological time. It can be longer or shorter than chronological or just vaguely out of chronological time altogether. This is not just true of music but of any activity where the person involved is fully engaged and concentrating on what they are doing or experiencing. Conversely chronological time can seem to stand still or slow down when one is bored. In any art form where time is involved such as music, drama, dance, poetry and the novel, the constituent parts or sections have to be experienced in a particular order over time for the whole to appear and be appreciated.

Adorno uses the term 'empirical time' (*empirische Zeit*<sup>76</sup>) in two discussions in *Aesthetic Theory* in contrast to the phenomenological time of the experience of an artwork. 'Empirical time' is best understood as chronological time. Because the word empirical is sometimes used by Adorno in a pejorative sense to refer to the administered world of late capitalism care has to be taken to be sure whether he is using it in the general sense of chronological time or the pejorative sense. An example of this pejorative usage of empirical is: 'All artworks, even the affirmative, are a priori polemical. The idea of a conservative artwork is inherently absurd. By emphatically separating themselves from the empirical world (*empirischen welt*), their other, they bear witness that that world should be other than it is; they are the unconscious schemata of that world's transformation.'<sup>77</sup> There is a clear description in *Aesthetic Theory* of the difference between empirical time and musical time.

...there is no mistaking time as such in music, yet it is so remote from empirical time that, when listening is concentrated, temporal events external to the musical continuum remain external to it and indeed scarcely touch it; if a musician interrupts a passage to repeat it or pick it up at an earlier point, musical time remains indifferent, unaffected; in a certain fashion it stands still and only proceeds when the course of the music is continued. Empirical time disturbs musical time. If at all, only by dint of its heterogeneity, not because they flow together.<sup>78</sup>

This is the sense in which each individual piece of music has its own temporal structure and this structural time flow is clearly dependent on the music being played. In a sense the time flow of a musical work is a self-contained time span, it takes place within chronological time, is measured by chronological time but is never exactly the same from one performance to the next. For example, a Beethoven symphony, such as his Seventh, when conducted by Toscanini was

over four minutes shorter than the same work conducted by Klemperer. As a self-contained temporal span, which can vary in chronological terms depending on the interpretive performance, the musical work of art is also variable in phenomenological terms from the point of view of the listener.

In this section I intend to approach the time of the artwork as a key aspect of Adorno's understanding of the history of music. Nikolaus Bacht noticed that 'Adorno's temporal concepts change in the application to different historical epochs.'<sup>79</sup> This is true, but what it means is that Adorno's discussions and views on time in music are largely historical. By this I mean he traced a series of fundamental changes in musical time from the era of Bach through Beethoven Wagner, Schoenberg, Stravinsky to the era of the experimental music of the 1960s. These fundamental changes in music all involve alterations in musical time as an important aspect of the developments that took place in composition. It is important to be clear from the outset that Adorno's various accounts of music are historically situated. All these changes in temporal concepts are understood from the standpoint of the present moment in which he wrote about them. He started writing about music in the early 1920s, the time of Schoenberg, Webern, Berg and Stravinsky. At that time he was largely writing about the relationship between atonal and 12 tone row music. His last group of texts on music from the 1950s and 1960s, by contrast, were written at a time when 12 tone row music was being superseded by aleatory music, music of pure sound and chance, the anti-art of music. I plan to reconstruct Adorno's conception of the changes that occurred to the time of the musical artwork as a history of time in music which is orientated to understanding the past from the standpoint of the present, bearing in mind of course that there were a series of presents for Adorno. This history of musical time is therefore genealogical.

That the art of the past is best understood in terms of the art of the present derives partly from the work of Walter Benjamin and exemplifies Adorno's approach to history which as was seen above operates from the standpoint of the present. Two comments from *Aesthetic Theory* exemplify this position: 'The principle of method here is that light should be cast on all art from the vantage point of the most recent artworks, rather than the reverse'.<sup>80</sup> At another point Adorno gives as examples the claim that Beethoven can be more clearly heard after Berlioz, and that in painting the Impressionists seemed far better after Gauguin - 'The merits of a work, its level of form, its internal construction, tend to become recognisable only as the material ages or when the sensorium becomes dulled to the most striking features of the work.'<sup>81</sup> In his essay on the 'Relationship of Philosophy and Music' from 1953 Adorno states that in contrast to any (Heideggerian) attempt to reconstruct the 'ontological origin' of music, a 'philosophical knowledge of music' should be conducted 'from the standpoint of the present.' Adorno continues:

Beethoven, for example, is revealed much more readily when one starts from what confronts us today ... what today becomes visible in him, and similarly in Bach, is not

the product of a more or less fluid intellectual history, but is determined right down to its details by the state that compositional processes have reached today—processes that drastically extend the laws of construction that Beethoven's or Bach's work contained in encapsulated form during the nineteenth century. It is only from the vantage point of the most advanced production that light is shed on the entire species.<sup>82</sup>

Adorno's belief that it is necessary to understand the artworks of the past in terms of the artworks of the present will be demonstrated in what follows. It is the key to understanding his views on time in music.

### **Adorno's history of time in music: Bach to Mahler**

This account of the history of time in music, as understood by Adorno, starts with Bach and his contemporary Telemann. Bach wrote highly constructed music - 'In Bach's oeuvre it is his technique, the complexity and density of the composition, that is truly progressive.'<sup>83</sup> But the importance of Bach's music for Adorno is not just about construction, it also marks a significant change in the concept of musical tonality - 'Fugue is the form in which polyphony that has become tonal and fully rationalized is organised.'<sup>84</sup> Adorno describes a double-fugue of Bach's as 'astonishing not so much for its chromaticism ...but rather for its wavering, deliberately vague harmonization ...it is music broken down into countless coloured facets.'<sup>85</sup> Adorno calls this effect 'modern'. In *Aesthetic Theory* Bach is described as '...a virtuoso in the unification of the irreconcilable. What he composed is the synthesis of harmonic thoroughbass and polyphonic thinking. This synthesis is seamlessly integrated into the logic of chordal progression divested, however, of its heterogeneous weight because it is the pure result of voice leading; this endows Bach's work with its singularly floating quality.'<sup>86</sup> This 'floating quality' for Adorno marks Bach's work off as both archaic and modern.

A Bach fugue is a great feat of organisation in time. Once the first voice begins then others must join in and so the whole fugue progresses under its own logical temporal dynamic. Adorno also describes a fugue from the *Well-Tempered Clavichord* as '...a driving, thoroughly dynamic, thoroughly 'modern' effect.' The fugue, like any artistic form in modernism soon became outdated. 'Fugues became fetters historically. Forms can be inspiring. Thorough motivic work, and hence the concrete structuration of music, is predicated on the universal element in the fugal form.'<sup>87</sup> Adorno clearly thought that the constructed nature of the fugue continued to have relevance for later composers. Adorno explains that Schoenberg believed 'Bach's technique of the developing variation ...then became the compositional principle in Viennese Classicism.'<sup>88</sup> At the end of the essay 'Bach Defended against his Devotees' Adorno once again makes it clear that Bach is best understood in terms of the music of the present day and not in terms of a spurious historicism. 'Justice is done to Bach not through musicological usurpation but solely through the most advanced composition which in turn converges with the level of Bach's continually unfolding work.'<sup>89</sup> Indeed it is precisely in those orchestral arrangements [instrumentations as Adorno terms them] of Bach, by both Schoenberg and

Webern, that Adorno claims Bach is in an important sense re-invented and re-interpreted best. ‘Such instrumentations are models of an attitude to Bach which corresponds to the stage of his truth. Perhaps the traditional Bach can no longer be interpreted. If this is true, his heritage has passed on to composition, which is loyal to him in being disloyal; it calls his music in name in producing it anew.’<sup>90</sup> The instrumentation of Bach’s music by Webern and Schoenberg were important to them as a means of economic support as they could and did gain an income from such instrumentations that was far more difficult to achieve with their own works. In one sense they were part of the re-discovery of much of Bach’s work that took place in the early twentieth century. The *Art of Fugue* was first performed in Leipzig in 1922. Listening to these works when one is familiar with Bach’s works is an interesting experience because it is clear how close both Schoenberg and Webern are to Bach in their return to his music. These works are not arrangements of Bach that simply sound more modern, but works in their own right that explore possibilities in his work in a contemporary idiom. The history of art in all forms is, as Adorno clearly knew, full of such returns. In *Aesthetic Theory* Adorno writes about Bach being difficult to ‘comprehend.’ ‘The more intensively one seeks to comprehend Bach, the more puzzling is the gaze he returns, charged as it is with all the power that is his.’<sup>91</sup> For Adorno it is the structure of the music of Webern and Bach that defines the experience of time in the music – ‘both unfold in time ... in both cases the musically established time does not coincide with that of its chronometric duration.’<sup>92</sup> This idea, that musical time and clock time are independent, was exploited by Telemann and other composers of music intended as light entertainment for aristocratic audiences.

Bach’s contemporary Telemann wrote court music to be listened to as diversion. This was music specifically written to help time pass. The kind of music Adorno refers to at one point in *Aesthetic Theory* as ‘Dinner music’ [*Tafelmusik*] with its ‘miserable mechanical clattering.’<sup>93</sup> Bacht quotes Adorno on this point: ‘Adorno states in *Zweite Nachtmusik* “Preclassical music ... is supposed to kill time; it is ‘divertimento’ and its socially determined function, that of entertainment appears technically as the music’s fear of the course of linear time.”’<sup>94</sup> This is Adorno’s model for the heteronomous art music of the culture industry. Music that is simply written and intended as mere entertainment, in some cases as no more than background music to conversation. It is music that helps time pass for the privileged who have time in which to be bored. But it is also an example of the manipulation of phenomenal time by the time of the music.

In *History and Freedom* Adorno gives an example of how something ‘age-old’ can be transformed into something ‘radically different.’ The musical divertissement of the ‘absolutist courts’ was specifically written keep the audience from being bored. ‘...if the members of the aristocracy had no need to amuse themselves, to kill time such music would not have come into being. The innermost essence of this music is to compress temporal extension to a single point so that a lengthy elaboration sounds as if it had lasted no more than a moment.’<sup>95</sup> This style of



writing music with a compressed temporality Adorno claims was then transferred to Haydn, Mozart and ‘ultimately, Beethoven’s last quartets.’ This illusion of time passing quickly is an effect of the music. In Viennese classicism, so Adorno claims, this effect is exploited in the structuring of the music by the sonata form. ‘The term sonata describes works that are highly articulated, motivically and thematically wrought, and internally dynamic; their unity is a clearly differentiated manifold, with development and reprise.’<sup>96</sup> This music continues the *Tafelmusik* trick of appearing to take less time than clock time and also exploits memory and expectation within the development of the elements that go to make up the dynamic whole, and in the repetitions, reprises and echoes. ‘Thanks to its integration, great music will undoubtedly deal with the passage of time by making it shorter. Its ability to drive out boredom has, like entire heteronomous musical categories, become an element of the music itself and of its autonomous status.’<sup>97</sup> This is an important statement by Adorno because ‘great music’ as autonomous art embodies a trick of time that was derived from lesser music such as Telemann’s *Tafelmusik*.

Adorno considers that ‘One of the most central questions in musical aesthetics’<sup>98</sup> is the question of ‘the irreversibility of time’ in terms of musical elements being necessarily before or after each other in a composition as a ‘meaningful sequence of moments.’<sup>99</sup> He describes ‘development’ as ‘a variation in which a later element presupposes an earlier one as something earlier, and not vice versa.’<sup>100</sup> This sequence has a ‘logic’ to it. On the other hand only two years later he identifies an effect in Beethoven’s music that is a form of illusion of a previous musical event having taken place.

The most powerful effects of Beethoven’s form depend on the recurrence of something which was once present simply as a theme, that reveals itself as a result and thus acquires a completely transformed sense. Often the meaning of the preceding passage is only fully established by this later recurrence. The onset of a reprise can engender a feeling of something extraordinary having occurred earlier, even if the perceived event cannot in the slightest be located at that specific point.<sup>101</sup>

Music has its own time, the time of the work, which in traditional works such as those by Beethoven, memory and expectation play their part. ‘Precisely in its great and emphatic forms, music embodies complexes that can only be understood through what is sensuously not present, through memory or expectation, complexes that hold such categorial determinations embedded in their own structure.’<sup>102</sup> The key thing about the music of Beethoven is that it is fully structured by musical time.

The illusion of time passing quickly is, for Adorno, one of the central aspects of Beethoven’s symphonic technique. ‘The abbreviation of time through the static repetition of motifs.’<sup>103</sup> He identifies two ‘types’ of music in Beethoven ‘an intensive’ and ‘an extensive’ both of which relate to time but in different ways. ‘The intensive type aims at a contraction of time. It is the true symphonic type...’<sup>104</sup> In ‘Zweite Nachtmusik’ of 1937 Adorno maintains that a symphony ‘has its own temporal progression yet lasts, through its concept, for only a

moment.’<sup>105</sup> This idea of Adorno’s that a musical work can be grasped in an instant will be discussed fully in the final section as it is central to Adorno theory of the work of art. In the second ‘extensive type’ ‘time is set free: the music takes its time ... it does not fill time but controls it. One might perhaps talk here of a geometrical – instead of a dynamic – relationship to time.’<sup>106</sup> But he does admit that he finds the ‘actual organising principle of the extensive type is still very obscure to me.’<sup>107</sup> The first type is characteristic of the early works and both types can be found in the large scale late works, with the extensive type contributing to the feeling of disintegration in the music.<sup>108</sup> In *Quasi Una Fantasia* Adorno also writes about this two fold split in the forms of time in Beethoven. The first being Beethoven’s keeping faith with ‘the general idea of Viennese Classicism with its belief in thematic development and hence the need for a process of unfolding in time.’ The other aspect, the second ‘type’ he calls an ‘accentual dialectic [*Schlagstruktur*]. By both compressing the unfolding of time and mimicking it, time is abolished and, as it were, suspended and concentrated in space.’<sup>109</sup> As musical composition progressed in the nineteenth century it is precisely this aspect of spatiality that Adorno sees exhibited next in the work of Wagner and later in the work of Schoenberg and Stravinsky.

This spatiality is also present in Beethoven’s *Missa Solemnis*. This work from Beethoven’s late phase clearly fascinated Adorno. It is a large work for huge forces which as Adorno remarked to Gretel Adorno cannot from a momentary hearing be by anyone other than Beethoven.<sup>110</sup> Yet, although it sounds like Beethoven, it is not symphonic, it is a religious mass. It therefore has a static fixed quality with themes and motifs appearing and disappearing but very little in the way of development other than the driving inevitability of a massive fugue. As a mass it skips surprisingly quickly over some of the important religious aspects and is more a structured hymn to humanity than a traditional mass as an act of Christian worship. ‘It does not fall within the stylistic of the late Beethoven’.<sup>111</sup> Adorno claims the music is written in an entirely different way, it may sound like late Beethoven but the structure is atypical and this, for Adorno, is because of the systematic ‘exclusion of the principle of development.’<sup>112</sup> Beethoven, as Adorno notes, claimed it was ‘the greatest of his works’. Adorno’s conclusion, concerning this strange work, is that it is only now (1957) after ‘the principle of the musical development has run its course historically’ that it is possible to appreciate that the *Missa* is structurally thoroughly modern. Contemporary ‘composition now finds itself obliged to accumulate sections’ and ‘to articulate fields’<sup>113</sup> in just the same way as Beethoven found himself doing when he had to step back into an archaic form. The *Missa* does not play tricks with time, it spatialises time and with the use of repeated musical motifs it is quite Wagnerian.

The next major change in musical time comes with Wagner whose leitmotifs are not developmental but structured wholes that Adorno considers to be more spatially than temporally arranged. Adorno first wrote at length about Wagner in his book *In Search of Wagner*. Four chapters were published in 1939 and the full book was finally published in 1952. In a lecture of 1963, ‘Wagner’s relevance for Today’ Adorno admits that ‘With regard to Wagner the situation

has changed generally' and that this is because of 'what has newly come to our attention about Wagner'<sup>114</sup> In the earlier book Adorno had criticised Wagner's leitmotifs as ever-same. In the 1963 lecture Adorno revised the reasons why he had made this judgement. The 'sequences' of leitmotifs 'is much more profoundly connected to the problems and tasks of the internal organization of Wagner's music than I was capable of comprehending thirty years ago.'<sup>115</sup> Adorno claims this gives the music a static quality, a 'peculiar sensation of floating'<sup>116</sup> which ties in to the static nature of contemporary music. However, Adorno is now able to appreciate the extent to which the chromaticism is subtly worked in small particulars that 'generate' the totality of the 'great dense tonal surfaces... the melding of differential tones into fields, is another thing that has attained its first full realization today.'<sup>117</sup> A further aspect is dissonance in Wagner's music: 'It has more power, more substantiality than consonance, and this points compellingly in the direction of the new music.'<sup>118</sup> Nevertheless, Adorno still maintains that the 'constant sameness' of such 'unceasing change' of continual 'becoming' 'ultimately turns static.'<sup>119</sup> In the *Philosophy of New Music* Adorno describes Wagner's operas as being 'like giant containers, and as such give evidence of that spatialization of temporal movement', which he describes as a 'suspension of musical time consciousness.'<sup>120</sup> Ultimately, for Adorno, 'Everything in Wagner has its temporal core.'<sup>121</sup> There is a comment by Wagner about Mozart that Adorno quotes in 'Difficulties.' This comment may well be a source for Adorno's view that the older work of art can be illuminated by later ones. Wagner commented that in some of Mozart's compositions one 'could hear the dishes clatter on the table.' In other words Wagner could hear the echo of *Tafelmusic* in Mozart when compared to the position musical composition had reached in his own time. As Adorno comments, 'One hears, through what is newer, weaknesses of the old that were once hidden.'<sup>122</sup> So whilst Webern and Schoenberg could hear Bach in terms of their own music in positive terms, Wagner heard the divertimento lightness inherent in some of Mozart's works. The history of artworks is thus a constant re-valuing and de-valuing of works from the past.

Mahler's music involves enormously long symphonic works made up from separate sections that, for Adorno, at once acknowledge the impossibility of continuing the symphonic form whilst at the same time continuing it and bringing it to an end. In *Aesthetic Theory* he describes Mahler's work as 'The collapsing constellations of symphonic music'<sup>123</sup> The structure of the symphonies, some of which are extremely long, is sectional. As Adorno remarks, 'The only totality known to this symphonic art is one which arises from the temporal stratification of its individual segments.'<sup>124</sup> It seems clear that Adorno, at least, considered the symphony as an art form to have come to an end with Mahler. This is a similar view to those who think that painting came to an end with Duchamp's ready-mades. Just as there are symphonies after Mahler so there are paintings after Duchamp. Adorno was scathing in his dislike of the work of composers who looked back in emulation of an earlier style. About Sibelius, who continued to write symphonies Adorno commented that 'attempts to go on speaking the traditional language

of music are stricken with impotence.<sup>125</sup> Presumably Adorno's contempt for Sibelius derives from Sibelius's insistence on continuing to work with a form that Adorno considered outmoded, the symphony. For Adorno, Sibelius looked to the past in a different way to Schoenberg and Webern.

### **Adorno's history of time in music: the twentieth century**

The next generation of composers such as Schoenberg, Stravinsky and Webern created much shorter works than Mahler. Adorno noted the increasing frequency with which very short works were being created in the early twentieth century. He had in mind the extreme brevity of some of the compositions by Webern.

Their brevity originates precisely from the need for the highest level of consistency. This prohibits the superfluous and turns against that temporal extension that has been the basis of the conception of the musical work since the eighteenth century, certainly since Beethoven. A single blow strikes the work, time, and semblance. ... Music contracted to a moment, is true as an eruption of negative experience. It touches on real suffering.<sup>126</sup>

Adorno sees in this form of very short composition a political aspect, a sense in which the work is aligned with 'correct consciousness.' Once again he refers to music being contracted to a moment, an aspect of his theory of the artwork that will be examined in the final section. After the experience of expansive works such as Mahler's such short work seem to Adorno like 'negative experience'.

The development of twelve-tone music by Schoenberg was understood by Adorno to be a development from the older form of theme and variations where a basic set of notes are subject to change whilst remaining the same. In *The Philosophy of New Music* he writes: 'Twelve-tone technique arose out of the genuinely dialectical principle of variation. This principle postulated that insistence on what is ever the same and its sustained analysis in composition—for all motivic labour is analysis insofar as it divides the given into the most minimal elements—results in what is ceaselessly new.'<sup>127</sup> Adorno believed that the method of composition of Schoenberg and Berg 'does not coherently organise temporal succession.'<sup>128</sup> But although the new music is radically different from what came before in both tonality and temporal structure it nevertheless developed out of 'motivic, thematic composition.' Both the older form of dynamic music and the new form of serial music share the same outcome from entirely different methods, that of 'total organisation'. 'In serial composition a whole unity is regarded as a fact, as an immediate reality. In thematic, motivic music, on the other hand, unity is always defined as becoming and thus as a process of revelation.'<sup>129</sup>

Writing about Schoenberg's techniques in *The Philosophy of New Music* Adorno described how his 'music achieves an absolutely new relationship to the time within which each work transpires. Music is no longer indifferent to time, for in time it is no longer arbitrarily

repeated; rather, it is transformed.<sup>130</sup> Time is negated ‘through the suspension of all musical elements as a result of omnipresent construction.’<sup>131</sup> This music takes the spatiality of late Beethoven and Wagner a stage further, there are no longer repetitions, developments and echoes. ‘Formerly, the intervals were the unequivocal site of musical meaning: of the not yet, the now, and the after; of the promised, the fulfilled, and the neglected; of moderation and dissipation; of abiding form and transcendence of musical subjectivity. Now the intervals have become mere building blocks, and all the experiences accumulated in their differences appear lost.’<sup>132</sup> The music is no longer in a dynamic process of becoming. ‘Today music rebels against conventional temporal order;’<sup>133</sup> In the *Philosophy of New Music* Adorno wrote about the lack of temporal development in Schoenberg’s ‘twelve tone constructions’ this is ‘because it tolerates nothing external to itself on which development could be tested.’

The case of Stravinsky is interesting because when he came to revise his first long text on Schoenberg Adorno decided to make it dialectical by contrasting the music of Schoenberg with that of Stravinsky. This dialectically organised text became the *Philosophy of New Music*. In this text Adorno described Stravinsky’s music as spatialising time - ‘in Stravinsky–music casts itself as the *arbiter temporis* and prompts listeners to forget the experience of time and deliver themselves over to its spatialization. ... Time is suspended, as if in a circus scene, and complexes of time are presented as if they were spatial.’<sup>134</sup> Some years later in *Quasi Una Fantasia* Adorno admitted he had misread the temporal aspects of Stravinsky’s music. He admitted that he had failed to allow Stravinsky’s work to speak for itself and had judged it by external values. ‘By opposing the static ideal of Stravinsky’s music, its immanent timelessness, and by confronting it with a dynamic, emphatically temporal, intrinsically developing music, I arbitrarily applied to him an external norm, a norm which he rejected. In short, I violated my own most cherished principle of criticism.’<sup>135</sup> Although he went on in this article to attack Stravinsky in certain respects it is a second example of Adorno changing a musicological aesthetic judgement from an earlier time.

As far as the music of the late Schoenberg is concerned Adorno identified a greater tendency to negate time in the music than was present in the earlier works where the concept of the developing variation still operated. Adorno thinks this new music is static compared to the earlier works. It is spatially rather than temporally organised in that sections are placed alongside each other. Even though these sections are successive in chronological time they are not successive in musical time. ‘The reversal of the musical dynamic into a static-dynamic of the musical structure...clarifies the peculiarly rigid systematic character that Schoenberg’s composition acquired in its late phase. ... The music no longer presents itself as being in a process of development. ... Accordingly, the music becomes static.’<sup>136</sup> The new music is constructed rather than composed. ‘In construction the dynamic reverses completely into the static: The constructed work stands still.’<sup>137</sup> The new music comes to a standstill. ‘In traditional listening the music unfolds from the parts to the whole, in tune with the flow of time itself. This

flow – that is to say, the parallel between the temporal succession of musical events and the pure flow of time itself – has become problematical and presents itself within the work as a task to be thought through and mastered.<sup>138</sup>

One question that perhaps should be addressed at this point is to determine whether for Adorno there is a difference between composition and construction? Clearly the music of the early classical composers of modernism is best described as composed, as written. Obviously there is a constructive aspect to this composition but construction as Adorno understands it in the twentieth century is not the essence of how Beethoven's music is created. Although there is a contrary position in 'Difficulties.'

The movements of the greatest composers are based on a discrete number of *topoi*, of more or less rigid elements, out of which they are constructed. The aspect of the organic, the developing, which is central to Viennese classicism, proves, in the light of these *topoi*, to be largely an art of appearances. Music represents itself as if one thing were developing out of the other, but without any such development literally occurring. The mechanical aspect is covered up by the art of composition...<sup>139</sup>

It looks once again as if Adorno has changed his mind in this late text over the 'organic' composition of the classical works of the bourgeois revolution. Twelve tone music can be said to be constructed, rather than composed, because setting up the row determines the course the music must take if it is to work through the possibilities inherent in the initial row. There is still, however, a great deal of freedom for a composer such as Schoenberg to depart from the strict rigour of the system. Other composers however, dedicated themselves to following the rules of twelve tone composition as if following the rules was all that had to be done. This happened to such an extent that Adorno in his significant article, 'The Aging of the New Music,' clearly felt that such music was coming to a dead end. 'Twelve-tone technique has its justification only in the presentation of complex musical contents, which cannot otherwise be organised. Separated from this function, it degenerates into a deluded system.'<sup>140</sup> In the later twentieth century music became so highly technically constructed that it no longer makes sense to call it a composition, no more sense than to call a wall piece by Donald Judd a painting even if there are fundamental aspects of the work that rely on the history of painting.

Artistic consistency, the fulfilment of the work's own obligation—without which aesthetic seriousness is inconceivable— is not there for its own sake, but in order to present what was once called the artistic idea, and what in music might be better called the composed. In music, however, that is all construction, nothing is composed anymore.<sup>141</sup>

Adorno argued that whilst in late Schoenberg time had become static, the new composers such as Boulez and Stockhausen were creating music that was virtually 'independent of time' with no discernable development or drive. 'The radicalized constructivists that go beyond Schoenberg drew the logical consequences from this when they lose all interest *in* drive-like relations at the

level of detail, and even resist them...'<sup>142</sup> The consequence of this change is that music is no longer operating with musical time in the traditional sense. The music is inevitably within clock time and because of this 'it is dynamic in such a way that in the course of the music the identical becomes the non-identical just as the non-identical can become the identical as, e.g., in an abbreviated reprise.'<sup>143</sup> Music has an inescapable relationship to clock time for it must take place within time. However the constructed nature of the new music of the 1950s and 1960s is such that the traditional internal music time of the works is no longer exploited, even if it appears to be there as a temporal form of 'second nature' to any listener skilled in listening to the older music. 'It is to Stockhausen that we owe the insight that in a certain sense the whole rhythmical and metrical structure of music, has remained within the bounds of tonality.'<sup>144</sup> However with Stockhausen Adorno was in no doubt music had moved on to something new and indeterminate. As this description of *Zeimaße* makes clear. 'Dynamic freed from every static reference and no longer discernible as such by its contrast to something fixed, is transformed into something that hovers and no longer has direction. In the manner of its appearance, Stockhausen's *Zeimaße* evokes a through-composed cadence, a fully presented yet static dominant.'<sup>145</sup> Even rhythm is strictly controlled and Adorno commented in 'Vers une musique informelle'. 'These composers have above all attempted to bring rhythm under the strict domination of twelve-tone procedure, and ultimately to replace composition altogether with an objective-calculatory ordering of intervals, pitches, long and short durations, degrees of loudness; an integral rationalization such as has never before been envisaged in music.'<sup>146</sup> Adorno understood this rationalization to be part of the same process, first identified by Max Weber, '...one might perhaps say that the serialists did not arbitrarily concoct mathematizations of music, but confirmed a development that Max Weber, in the sociology of music, identified as the overall tendency of more recent musical history—the progressive rationalization of music. It is said to have reached its fulfilment in integral construction.'<sup>147</sup> Adorno then comments that one might as well compose with a computer. The aspect of time that is missing for Adorno in the new music is 'musical time.' Stockhausen was well aware of this according to Adorno as Stockhausen 'refers to the antinomy of material and composed music. Stockhausen became conscious of it in the context of the problem of the relationship between physically measurable and authentically musical time.'<sup>148</sup> Adorno admitted that he found it very difficult to hold some music by Stockhausen, Boulez and Cage in his head and to think about how it was written and exactly what was going on in the music as he listened to it. 'My productive imagination does not reconstruct them all with equal success. I am not able to participate, as it were, in the process of composing them as I listen, as I still could with Webern's String Trio, which is anything but a simple piece.'<sup>149</sup> As will be discussed in the next section it was very important for Adorno that he could hold a piece of music in his head and understand it. The new music seemed to evade this form of conceptualisation. The new music also evades another traditional form of conceptuality the ability of the composer to know more

or less what had been achieved in the score, to have some clear idea of the outcome before the music was performed. No doubt, throughout history, composers have always had that element of surprise, shared by painters, when a work is first performed, or hung on a gallery wall. At that moment a certain distancing and objectivity about the work can occur. However, with some of the new music the outcome was far from certain at the first performance. ‘Lately, compositional methods are frequently specifically termed experimental whose own results, the composed work itself, cannot be predicted either in the process of composing or in the imagination of the composer.’<sup>150</sup> With the experimental music that arrived next this was almost the whole point of the sound experience as it only with difficulty be called music in any traditional sense.

The great change that took place in music in the 1950s was the move by John Cage and others to use sound not derived from orchestral instruments. They used ‘found’ sound and combined these sounds with methods involving chance. This aleatory music clearly had a profound effect on Adorno because however hard he tried, he found it very difficult to equate it with the negative dramas of Samuel Beckett. ‘Into this situation of serialism barged John Cage; it explains the extraordinary effect he had. His principle of chance, which is familiar to you under the name of aleatory music, wants to break out of the total determinism, the integral, obligatory musical ideal of the serial school.’<sup>151</sup> However one thing that became apparent with aleatory music was that it did enable serial music to be thought of in a different way. The chance elements buried in serialism became visible. Perhaps it was exactly this aspect of such new music that Cage and others had noticed. As Adorno noted in ‘Vers une musique informelle:’

The challenge of the first twelve-note composition to ears schooled in free atonality lay in the way that it strictly related successive musical complexes to each other, without one terminating in the other as if that were its rightful goal. To that extent the element of chance, which is intensified with the growing tendency towards integral construction, is undoubtedly implicit in twelve-note technique. Initially it is the individual successions that sound accidental.<sup>152</sup>

This is why time in the new music seems to stand still, why Adorno thinks time becomes space. There is no organic temporal logic to the succession of sound complexes, to this extent the music is the equivalent to a Dadaist collage rather than an abstract painting. With an abstract painting, such as those of Kandinsky, the elements and logic of earlier objective painting are still there on the canvas to be read as an abstract landscape. With Dadaist collage on the other hand such a visual link to work of the past is deliberately broken even if the work still contains abstract constructed elements from earlier painting. ‘Ligeti ...observed correctly that in their effect the extremes of absolute determination and absolute chance coincide. Statistical generality becomes the law of composition ...it comes close to the Dadaist and surrealist actions of the past’ but without ‘any politically demolishing content.’<sup>153</sup> The lack of political content is



seen here, rather surprisingly for Adorno, to be a missing component in aleatory music. But far more than agit-prop content is missing, in some of it music is missing, this is the anti-art of music. ‘John Cage’s Piano Concerto, whose only meaning and internal coherence is to be found in its rejection of every notion of coherent meaning, presents us with catastrophe music at its most extreme.’<sup>154</sup> This work for prepared piano is referred to several times by Adorno. In ‘Vers une musique informelle’ Adorno is clearly ambivalent about such music and about anti-art in general which was spreading to all art forms and genres in the 1950s and 1960s. ‘The aspirations of Cage and his school have eradicated all topoi, without going into mourning for a subjective, organic ideal in which they suspect the topoi of maintaining an after-life. This is why to dismiss anti-art as pretentious cabaret and humour would be as great an error as to celebrate it.’<sup>155</sup> The meaning, as with Beckett, becomes the lack of meaning, ‘even negated meaning is still meaning.’<sup>156</sup> The lack of meaning is meaningful in a society in which everything is false. The problem of meaning with anti-art is acute for Adorno because how do you tell the difference between ‘authentic’ anti-art such as he seems to believe Cage created and other works that simply are negative because that has become the fashion? In *Aesthetic Theory* Adorno addresses this problem.

The dividing line between authentic art that takes on itself the crisis of meaning and a resigned art consisting literally and figuratively of protocol sentences is that in significant works the negation of meaning itself takes shape as a negative, whereas in the others the negation of meaning is stubbornly and positively replicated. Everything depends on this: whether meaning inheres in the negation of meaning in the artwork or if the negation conforms to the status quo; whether the crisis of meaning is reflected in the works or whether it remains immediate and therefore alien to the subject. Key events may include certain musical works such as Cage’s Piano Concerto, which impose on themselves a law of inexorable aleatoriness and thereby achieve a sort of meaning: the expression of horror.<sup>157</sup>

This attempt by Adorno find a deeper political meaning in Cage’s work is important but it does not solve the problem fully. Distinguishing between good anti-art and bad anti-art would seem to come down to a matter of judgement, almost a matter of taste, Adorno’s taste. From a purely constructive point of view there is no difference, Adorno maintains, between organised and chance music. ‘The technically integral, completely made artwork converges with the absolutely accidental work; the work that is ostensibly not the result of making is of course all the more fabricated.’<sup>158</sup> This is because the decision to make a musical work of pure chance, the setting up of the circumstances in which the work will take place, the choice of the time span for the work is still a decisive conceptual constructive decision even if there is no ‘music’ to listen to.

Anti-art in music completely negates musical time. In one sense with some works such as Cage’s *4’ 33’’* musical time becomes clock time and the phenomenological time of experiencing the work as time passing becomes the most important aspect of the work. John Cage’s *4’ 33’’* is a work where the audience spends four minutes and thirty three seconds listening to the ambient sound in their location instead of listening to an expected composition.

This work by Cage exemplifies better than almost any other work of musical art from the twentieth century the experience of the work as an experience of time passing. Time does seem to pass slowly, the sound is not concentrated on the performer sitting at the piano but comes from the surrounding space. What you hear depends partly on how acute your hearing is. In this piece all sounds are relevant. It is partly a piece of theatre, an early example of performance art. The performer approaches the piano, opens the lid to the keyboard, opens the music all the while holding a stop watch in one hand whilst keeping an eye on it so he or she can periodically at set times turn over the pages of the score that is not being played and open and close the piano keyboard lid to signal the breaks between movements. The audience is expectant, waiting for something to happen, slowly it begins to dawn on those who are not outraged by the situation that the ambient sounds of the time of the work are the work. The work sounds different every time because however well sound proofed the performance space, there is always the hum of the building systems and the sound of the audience itself. This is a work of pure duration, it depends on random sound to occur and be heard, it is pure anti-art, but it is a planned overall conceptual construction. In a sense it is a work that can be experienced in a moment even if that moment lasts four minutes thirty three seconds. It is tempting to say that with this work phenomenal time is identical with clock time but this will not be true for most members of the audience because the four minutes thirty three seconds can seem a much longer time. Time slows down. Listening to this work, or listening with this work, becomes a Zen-like meditation on the present moment that is out of time. In this sense, 4' 33" restores a form of musical time to music. Stewart Martin is correct to point out that anti-art forms a part of Adorno's conception of autonomous art<sup>159</sup> but it still remains a problem for interpretation, for completion by philosophy.

Adorno's basic thesis regarding musical time is that time in music became progressively spatialised. This mirrors the spatialisation of time of relativity theory. The time in which he wrote his last thoughts on this subject, the late 1960s, was a time when visual art was also becoming increasingly spatialised. An equivalent spatialisation occurred in the avantgarde novel of the time with William Burrough's cut ups and repastings in texts such as *Dead Fingers Talk*. Non narrative films were common in art house cinemas. Time and memory had been central to many literary works of art of the early 20th century. There is Proust's remembrance of an entire life and its detail, and there is Joyce's remembrance of a single day as if it were an odyssey. It could be argued that the multiple viewpoints of synthetic cubism reveal a series of memories experienced at the same time of the traces of the still life that formed the basis for the composition. The other later forms of twentieth century artwork that Adorno may have had in mind as being very short as Weber's early pieces are short would in all probability have been happenings, and works like those of Jean Tinguely that literally set themselves on fire and exploded into chaotic remains over a short period of time. In Tinguely's 'Homage to New York' (1960), which was widely covered in the press, on TV and in cinema newsreels at the time, the

planned chaos ended in farce when the Museum of Modern Art authorities called the fire brigade. In England John Latham built towers of books, 'Skoob Towers' which existed for a few hours before he then set them on fire and they reduced to ash. It has been argued by Pamela M. Lee that the avantgarde visual art of the 1960s was deeply concerned with 'a pervasive anxiety' about time that she describes as '*chronophobic*.'<sup>160</sup> Another aspect of the very significant changes that took place in the visual arts as part of the expansion of forms with the visual arts was the spatial nature of the work. Tinguely's and Latham's work took place in the space previously occupied by sculpture. Works came off the gallery wall and onto the floor, came off the plinth, went out of the door, or out of the window and even took the exhibition space apart and re-built it. Art work went out into the streets, out into the landscape, became performances, rituals, shamanistic events sometimes involving the audience as co-creators. All this leads one to the conclusion that far from being a mandarin cultural conservative Adorno was attuned to the zeitgeist in an extraordinarily perceptive way. Reading any text is a time-based activity. It takes less time to read a discursive text, even by Hegel, of say 400 pages than it takes to read a paratactical text such as *Aesthetic Theory* of similar length. *Aesthetic Theory* is undoubtedly a spatially organised text. It is this constructed, spatialised aspect about the text that most resembles the avant-garde music of the mid twentieth century. From Beethoven to Stockhausen, from Hegel to Adorno is very much the same journey.

In the third chapter of this study Adorno's theory of the artwork was discussed with regards to the topic of success and failure. Towards the end of the section of *Aesthetic Theory* generally known as 'Coherence and Meaning' there is a comment concerning the relationship of modern art to the art of the past, in particular to the successful works of the past. 'Modern art, with its vulnerability, blemishes and fallibility, is the critique of traditional works, which in so many ways are stronger and more successful: It is the critique of success.'<sup>161</sup> In parallel to this it is possible to understand *Aesthetic Theory* as a critique of philosophical aesthetics of the past. For Adorno both art and philosophical aesthetics take on the forms they do in the twentieth century partly as a reaction to what went before and partly as a reaction to the present in which they take on the only forms possible.

This section has explored Adorno's genealogical conception of history by examining his statements concerning time in relationship to a series of composers set in calendrical time. Underlying his conception of history is Adorno's fundamental belief that truth is historical, that the truth, the absolute aspect, of any work of art is only identified by philosophical critique. The truth of a work of art, its participation in the absolute, is always now in the present time of interpretation, commentary and critique.

## Section three: The instant

### Structured listening

There is one further aspect of Adorno's theory of the artwork which at first sight looks as if it is about time. This is his conception of the instant in which a work can be fully comprehended. In his article 'The Radio Symphony' Adorno writes about the suspension of time that can occur for him when listening to Beethoven's music. 'While listening to a typical romantic symphony one remains fully conscious, sometimes all too conscious, of the time it consumes, despite the immensely progressive novelty of the details. With Beethoven it is different. The density of thematic interwovenness, of "antiphonic" work, tends to produce what one might call a suspension of time consciousness.'<sup>162</sup> Whilst I agree this does occur his next statement that this 'suspension of time consciousness' can turn into a drastic 'contraction of time' seems to me to be unusual. 'When a movement like the first of Beethoven's Fifth or Seventh Symphonies, or even a very long one such as the first of the *Eroica* is performed adequately, one has the feeling that the movement does not take seven or fifteen minutes or more, but virtually one moment. It is this very power of symphonic contraction of time which annihilates, for the duration of the adequate performance, the contingencies of the listener's private existence...' The experience of a piece of music depends partly on how skilled the listener is. Adorno writes about a form of structured listening. 'The understanding of the meaning of a fleeting musical passage often depends on the intellectual comprehension of its function in a whole that is not present; the purportedly immediate experience itself depends on what goes beyond pure immediacy.'<sup>163</sup> In the first chapter to his *Introduction to the Sociology of Music* entitled 'Types of Musical Conduct,' Adorno describes a set of Weberian 'ideal types' of listener. The first of these, the *expert*, is extremely illuminating, partly because Adorno could be describing himself.

He would be the fully conscious listener who tends to miss nothing and at the same time, at each moment, accounts to himself for what he has heard. ... Spontaneously following the course of music, even complicated music, he hears the sequence, hears past, present, and future moments together so that they crystallize into a meaningful context. Simultaneous complexities – in other words, a complicated harmony and polyphony – are separately and distinctly grasped by the expert.

The fully adequate mode of conduct might be called "structural hearing."<sup>164</sup>

Adorno then admits this is a very small class of listeners. 'more or less limited to the circle of professional musicians.' The characteristics of the '*expert*' listener are illuminating because they make clear that this 'structural hearing' depends in the first instance on the work itself. It is the structure of the work that is heard. 'Simultaneous complexities,' or constellations, set out in the musical time of the work as 'past, present and future moments' 'crystallize into a meaningful content.' In his essay 'Criteria of New Music' Adorno describes this form of intellectual conception of a music whole with respect to Beethoven.

The great, classical symphonic movements of Beethoven, the first movement of the *Eroica* or of the Seventh, can be heard ideally as if they lasted only a moment. If in Beethoven, the profane composer, empty, alienated time fatally oppresses the human subject, if life becomes separated out into a mere sequence of experiences, then in the name of the secular tension between freedom and necessity the sovereign subject will force them together once again into that epiphany that theology once taught as the eternity of the fulfilled moment, the concentration of the mere passage of time into a single instant, *Kairos*.<sup>165</sup>

This is a strange claim that the consciousness of chronological time passing is suspended and a work can be experienced almost out of time in an instant. Adorno is claiming this is a form of total experience of an artwork that is out of time, this is the instant in which an artwork is grasped as a whole work. This seems to mean that Adorno thinks great works of art are in some sense out of time, not in a Platonic sense as being ideal eternal forms, but in a purely experiential sense which could also be thought of as an intellectualization of the musical work of art so that it becomes a form of philosophical experience of a phenomenal experience. It is already clear, from the discussion in the previous section, that with the music of Stockhausen, Boulez and Cage Adorno found he could no longer carry out this expert 'structured listening'. This is a skill that for Adorno depends on the music itself being structured and 'composed' in a recognisable way that can be understood completely during a first careful listening. Structured listening seems to require a musical intelligence steeped in the classics of modern music and of the older classical heritage. The new music resists interpretation and hence resists comprehension.

### **The artwork comprehended in an instant**

There are a large number of terms in *Aesthetic Theory* that in one way or another bear on the concept of the instant with regards to the artwork. These include, instant, fireworks, shock, explosion, ephemera, crystallisation, and apparition. A fundamental statement concerning this usage by Adorno would be 'The artwork is at once both process and instant.'<sup>166</sup> This embodies an antinomy of artworks as Adorno understood them. 'Every artwork is an instant [*Augenblick*]; every successful work is a cessation, a suspended moment of the process...'<sup>167</sup> *Augenblick* translated literally means 'in the blink of an eye'. However it should be thought of as a temporal term but as a form of awareness of something. Dahlstrom suggests, following McNeill, that *Augenblick* is best translated as 'glance of the eye' and should not 'be understood as a "moment of time" in the sense of an "instant"'. Rather, it refers to the unfolding disclosure of the presencing of a situation *in the duration appropriate to it*.<sup>168</sup> This is a phenomenal description of a very short experience like watching a firework explode, but it is more than just an experience, it is also a form of understanding. As Adorno states in *Aesthetic Theory* 'Ernst Schoen once praised the unsurpassable nobles of fireworks as the only art that aspires not to duration but only to glow for an instant and fade away. It is ultimately in terms of this idea that the temporal arts of drama and music are to be interpreted, the counterpart of a reification

without which they would not exist and yet that degrades them.<sup>169</sup> The firework concept is also used to clarify the semblance character of a work of art which appears as if it were an apparition. ‘The phenomenon of fireworks is prototypical for artworks ... Fireworks are apparition *κατ’ ἐξοχή* [pre-eminently/par excellence] ... They appear empirically yet are liberated from the burden of the empirical, which is the obligation of duration; they are a sign from heaven yet artifactual, an ominous warning, a script that flashes up, vanishes, and indeed cannot be read for its meaning.’<sup>170</sup> This is another example of visual language at work. For Adorno it is essential that the instant is seen, is perceived, is understood. There are two aspects to this concern with the instant. The first concerns very short artwork times, that is artworks that are brief such as many works by Webern. The second aspect refers to the almost timeless instant in which the work is understood.

‘In art something momentary transcends; objectification makes the artwork into an instant. Pertinent here is Benjamin’s formulation of a dialectic at a standstill... If, as images, artworks are the persistence of the transient, they are concentrated in appearance as something momentary. To experience art means to become conscious of its immanent process as an instant at a standstill.’<sup>171</sup> This parallels the moment in which a constellation of ideas or concepts is understood in Adorno’s philosophical theory of meaning. This is borne out by the following statement where it is clear from the word ‘today’ that Adorno is discussing the 1960s: ‘Today it is conceivable and perhaps requisite that artworks immolate themselves through their temporal nucleus, devote their own life to the instant of the appearance of truth, and tracelessly vanish without thereby diminishing themselves in the slightest.’<sup>172</sup> This statement, in the context it is taken from, is mostly an argument against the permanence of art, about the danger of conceiving of artworks as if they will persist through time. It also makes clear that the truth of art in the present time of the 1960s can ultimately only be approached through philosophy, through the model of Adorno’s theory of meaning. The time of understanding of art is like the blink of an eye, it is the glance in which understanding is achieved. It exactly mirrors the metaphorical mental glance given by the philosophical interpreter to the constellation of concepts.

The idea of a shudder of recognition may derive in part from Benjamin’s writing on Baudelaire, and in particular from Baudelaire’s poem *En Passant* where an exchange of a single glance with a female passer-by opens for the poet a possibility of love that could have been, in that instant was achieved, and yet cannot be. Adorno often mentions cubist collage in this respect, which he calls montage, and says ‘was meant to shock’ and ‘which developed out of the pasted-in newspaper clippings and the like during the heroic years of cubism.’<sup>173</sup> I discussed the subject of montage in the previous chapter as it is one of the central concepts of *Aesthetic Theory* and has implications far beyond the instant. The relationship between montage and the instant is clearly significant. The whole point of a montage is that its shock effect is experienced in an instant. For it to work as intended a montage has to be immediately apparent. A montage is not something to be searched for or noticed for the first time at a later experience of the work

in question. The shock of a montage must be immediate, it must take place in the instant in which it is first apprehended, otherwise the entire point of it is lost. There is thus a Surrealist/Dadaist aspect buried in Adorno's conception of not only the work of art but also philosophy.

Adorno also speculates that the shudder is akin to 'afterimages' of the 'primordial shudder' felt by early man in the face of a strange and hostile Nature. To be 'overwhelmed by an important work' is not the same as to be surprised at catching a glance of it when moving through a picture gallery, yet Adorno seems to want to insist that a full scale symphonic work can have the same effect in that explosive moment when the whole is comprehended. So the artwork has embedded in it this antinomy of time as both an instant and a becoming over time.

That in many of its elements the artwork becomes more intense, thickens, and explodes, gives the impression of being an end in itself; the great unities of composition and construction seem to exist only for the purpose of such intensity. Accordingly, contrary to current aesthetic views, the whole exists in truth only for the sake of its parts— that is its *καίρως* the instant— and not the reverse; what works in opposition to mimesis ultimately seeks to serve it.<sup>174</sup>

This is the moment of truth of a great work of art when the whole is experienced and understood in an instant, the moment when the constellation of the parts explodes into a unity. This is the reality of 'Augenblick'. So the experiential time of an artwork culminates for Adorno in this strange encapsulation of the totality of what a work means in a short space of time, the blink of an eye. This is not a temporal experience in terms of either musical time or phenomenological time. It is a form of understanding described as if it were a temporal moment. That it is a temporal moment is just an illusion. This may well have been Adorno's experience but I am not at all sure to what extent it is shared by others. It seems to be more of the same conceit, first identified in Chapter 2, that ultimately art and philosophy share the same 'moment' of recognition and understanding when art through the interpretation of aesthetic theory turns into philosophy. Structural listening as was seen above is how understanding philosophy works for Adorno, it is the same structural model of constellation, crystallization, understanding. This is a temporal model, first the constellation is constructed, and then the moment of understanding is reached. One way of describing *Aesthetic Theory* would be to describe it as a history of aesthetic theories understood and re-interpreted from the perspective of the time in which it was written. This perspective is grounded in Adorno's analysis of the meaning of the present. The unsatisfactory present of the 1960s, was for Adorno a bad present in political, artistic, aesthetic and philosophical terms. A time when Adorno had doubts whether art could survive, whether aesthetics could survive, or whether philosophy could survive. The survival of these three seemed possible only as negative forms.

Adorno's conception of the artwork as an instant is clearly closely related, in a structural and conceptual sense, to his conception of how philosophy works. In metaphorical

terms, as a form of instant pattern recognition. This recognition of a moment also operates within his conception of history and in his theory that works of the past are best illuminated by the forms and structures of works in the present. The new reveals the old. The present moment then becomes the essential element in his conception of history, of art and of philosophy. Truth for Adorno is always located in the present instant. In the next, and final, chapter I will rotate this investigation from time, history and memory to examine Adorno's conception of expectation. This will take two forms, as the expectation of utopia and as the expectation of aesthetics.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### EXPECTATIONS

Time and history were the subjects of the previous chapter. In a deeper sense the chapter was concerned with memory. Adorno's memory of art since the bourgeois revolution. In this, the final chapter, I will analyse the topos of expectation in *Aesthetic Theory* from three viewpoints. The first concerns Adorno's various conceptions of utopian expectation. The second compares the theories of art of Adorno and Heidegger with particular reference to their conceptions of expectation for art in historical time. These conceptions of expectation in art relate directly to their respective theories of truth. The final viewpoint concerns the problems surrounding the continued existence of philosophical aesthetics. Expectation is embedded as a topos within the European tradition of the philosophy of art. This tradition is referred to continually in *Aesthetic Theory* and includes and informs the wider frame of reference concerned with both theorising and experiencing art, commonly known as philosophical aesthetics. It is the expectation of philosophical aesthetics as a discipline dealing with contemporary art that is part of the problem. First, however, some general remarks, about the concept of expectation.

#### **Section One: Expectation**

There is a conceptual link between memory and expectation as there is between memory and forgetting. There is no forgetting without memory, forgetting only makes conceptual sense when thought of in terms of memory. Expectation has a similar conceptual relationship to memory as again there can be no expectation without memory, or without experience as Koselleck terms memory.<sup>1</sup> Expectations are dependent on memory. For both expecting and forgetting memory is essential. Indeed one might well claim that both expecting and forgetting are aspects of memory operating in time present, the one operating with time to come and the other with time past. Expectations are generally uncertain. The only certain expectation in human life is death and as such it is a limit case of expectation. Indeed one could claim that as death is certain the only aspect of death that is really open to expectation is when one might expect to die. If one brackets out the certainty of death then the concept of expectation takes on a social form based on the uncertain outcome of human action and belief.

#### **Brief history of expectation**

Expectation has taken various forms in the history of philosophy and I shall briefly examine some of the key forms of expectation. First of all it is a formal aspect of the concept of time in Augustine's three-fold present as described in Book XI of his *Confessions*. 'The present time of past things is our memory; the present time of present things is our sight; the present time of

future things is our expectation.<sup>2</sup> This wide form of expectation takes on different forms depending on the context.

Husserl distinguishes between what he calls the ‘remaining-open’ aspect of expectation and the ‘prophetic’ ‘In general, expectation lets much remain open, and this remaining open is again characteristic of the components concerned.’<sup>3</sup> The ‘remaining-open’ aspect of expectation is the acceptance of contingency, in that things may turn out otherwise than expected. The ‘prophetic’ aspect can take the form of a carefully made plan that has an expected outcome judged to be almost certain in its outcome because the planner considers that all likely contingencies have been allowed for in the plan. Such a ‘prophetic’ expectation still has an aspect of ‘remaining-open’. Prophecy, the attempt to foretell the future, is an ancient form of expectation. A version of ‘prophetic’ expectation with a long history is discussed by Frank Kermode in *The Sense of an Ending*.<sup>4</sup> This is the extraordinarily strong belief in an apocalypse, held by a series of religious sects. A belief that a certain date in the future is the day when the world will end. This apocalyptic belief is related to what Ricoeur calls ‘the modalities of Christian hope stemming in one way or another from faith in the Resurrection.’<sup>5</sup> By contrast in *The Conflict of the Faculties* Kant attempts to answer the question as to whether ‘the human race is constantly progressing?’ In order to answer this question Kant introduces the concept of a ‘predictive history.’ This is ‘divinatory’ of ‘future time’ and is another form of prophecy. Kant’s discussion of the problem examines various unsatisfactory bases for such divination. He concludes that there is, however, an ‘Event of Our Time’ which ‘demonstrates’ the ‘moral tendency of the human race’ to progress. This event is the French revolution – ‘The revolution of a gifted people which we have seen unfolding in our day.’<sup>6</sup> For Kant the sympathy of spectators such as himself for the cause of the revolution displays a ‘moral disposition in the human race.’ Kant argues that whatever the eventual outcome of the revolution it opens up the possibility of hope for the future progress of the human race. Kant concludes that – ‘the painful consequences of the present war can compel the political prophet to confess a very imminent turn of humanity toward the better that is even now in prospect.’<sup>7</sup> As was described in the previous chapter, Koselleck argued that a significant change in the idea of history took place in the late eighteenth century. Kant’s ‘divination’ is an example of this change in the nature of historical time, involving as it does the idea of history having a prospective aspect. Following Koselleck’s analysis Ricoeur claims that ‘the word “revolution” now bears witness to the opening of a new horizon of expectation.’<sup>8</sup> Ricoeur considers Koselleck’s expression ‘horizon of expectation’ to be well chosen because it ‘is broad enough to include hope and fear, what is wished for and what is chosen, rational calculations, curiosity– in short, every private or public manifestation aimed at the future.’<sup>9</sup> Kant’s question concerned the progress of the human race. Ricoeur argues that progress gave way to utopia. ‘The idea of progress which still bound the past to a better future, one brought closer by the acceleration of history, tends to give way to the

idea of utopia as soon as the hopes of humanity lose their anchorage in acquired experience and are projected into an unprecedented future. With such utopias, the tension becomes a schism.’<sup>10</sup>

When Thomas More invented his imaginary island Utopia ‘no place’ in the sixteenth century it was with a critical intent.<sup>11</sup> This fictional island was contrasted with sixteenth century England which was described as a country with a corrupt and unjust society. The corruption and injustice, according to More, derived from the misuse of private property. Utopia, by contrast, was an ideal society based on communal property. It was not set in the future, but just somewhere else on the globe, supposedly recently discovered by a traveller. So the concept of utopia has, from its inception, been critical of the present state of society. However, since the sixteenth century the idea of utopia has acquired a setting in the future. Utopia thus became entwined with the older concept of prophesy. A utopian prophesy involves a further aspect which must always have been present within prophesy and that is the hope that the prophesy will come about in a future present. Kant’s ‘political prophet’ is looking forward to the hope of a better world in the future – it is a utopian hope. Hope is therefore a further form of expectation.

In *The Critique of Pure Reason* Kant describes three fundamental questions. ‘All the interests of my reason, speculative as well as practical, combine in the three following questions:

1. What can I know?
2. What ought I to do?
3. What may I hope?’<sup>12</sup>

Kant argues that ‘all *hoping* is directed to happiness’. Happiness for Kant is the fulfilment of our desires by following an absolute morality. Hope for a better future is a key form of expectation. Ernst Bloch argued in *The Principle of Hope* that art as expressed in its materials should not be thought of as merely contemplative as in the aesthetics of Kant and Hegel but as possessing a ‘pre-appearance [*VorSchein*].’<sup>13</sup> A later translation of the same passage from *The Principle of Hope* in a collection of essays and extracts from various texts by Bloch, renders ‘pre-appearance’ as ‘anticipatory illumination’. Bloch understands art’s anticipatory illusion to be ‘immanent’ and ‘completed’ as opposed to the religious anticipatory illumination which points to a belief for the future. The anticipatory illumination of art seems to consist for Bloch in the manner in which the materials employed in the structure of an artwork come to an ‘expressed resolution.’ ‘Anticipatory illumination itself is the attainable in that the metier of driving a thing to its end occurs in the dialectically spread and open space in which any object can be aesthetically portrayed.’<sup>14</sup> The way the artwork is constructed or composed is real rather than illusory. For Bloch a ‘real content’ is utopian, – ‘the anticipatory illumination is ordered according to the dimension and status of its utopian meaningful subject, [and] provides a *connection to knowledge* at the very least, and it provides a connection to the *material of grasped hope* at the very most.’<sup>15</sup> Disconcertingly vague as Bloch’s formulation of anticipatory

illumination is he is clear that it is only ‘since Marx’ that anticipatory illusion is attainable.<sup>16</sup> Bloch describes hope as ‘the utopian function’<sup>17</sup> an anticipation of the real or ‘concrete utopia’ which ‘designates precisely the power and truth of Marxism.’<sup>18</sup> Marxist socialism, for Bloch, develops utopia into a science. Hope is thus a central part of the concept of utopia for Bloch. Utopian hope, as a Marxist science, falls into the category of prophesy.

It is now clear that there are a number of different and related modes of thinking about, or being aware of the future that, following Koselleck, involve the basic idea of a horizon of expectation. Something in the future is expected, it can be described, it can be envisaged, it may conceivably become a reality, it can be hoped for. Following Husserl and Heidegger there seems to be a general orientation within Western societies towards the horizon of expectation as a way of being in the world. This basic mode of expectation involving a horizon is fundamental to a whole set of tropes of expectation which include all of the following, boredom, hope, prophesy, and belief. Utopia can involve all of these in varying degrees. This mode of expectation is also fundamental to merchant trading through the ages and to capitalism. The hope and expectation that investment in the present will yield a profit in the future.

### **Adorno and utopian expectation**

Adorno addresses the idea of utopia in his essay ‘Aldous Huxley and Utopia’ in *Prisms*. According to his biographer, Detlev Claussen, this essay originated in a seminar where Huxley’s *Brave New World* was introduced by Herbert Marcuse.<sup>19</sup> The seminar included Adorno, Horkheimer, Eisler, and Brecht. It took place in Los Angeles in 1942. *Brave New World*, then a widely read and fashionable novel, became a post-war best seller that in many ways exemplified the culture industry, though this aspect of the novel, surprisingly, is not mentioned by Adorno. In this essay Adorno characteristically describes society as both ‘practical’ and ‘irrational.’ Society is irrational because commodity production blocks the real needs of humanity. Adorno asks what would happen if commodity production were to be abolished - ‘For the first time, productivity would have an effect on need in a genuine and not a distorted sense. It would not allay unsatisfied needs with useless things; rather, satisfaction would engender the ability to relate to the world without subordination to the principle of universal utility.’<sup>20</sup> Adorno criticizes Huxley for failing in his analysis of present day society. ‘Full of fictitious concern for the calamity that a realized utopia could inflict on mankind, he refuses to take note of the real and far more urgent calamity that prevents utopia from being realized.’<sup>21</sup>

In their 1964 discussion of utopia Adorno and Bloch agree that utopia is negative in two senses. First because utopia is a negation of the present state of affairs, of the totality of society as it is. Utopia is critical in precisely the same sense for Adorno and Bloch as it was for More. Bloch points out, early on in the discussion, that utopia historically moved from being spatial to being temporal – ‘there is a transformation of the topos from space into time.’<sup>22</sup> The second sense in which utopia is negative is that Adorno argues that it is fundamentally the negation of

death. They also agree that the communist East no longer has any interest in utopia. Adorno argues that no one category can be utopia, not freedom nor happiness but that utopia must involve all categories.<sup>23</sup> ‘Whatever utopia is, whatever can be imagined as utopia, this is the transformation of the totality.’<sup>24</sup>

In *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno writes about the impossibility of concretizing utopia. ‘Art is no more able than theory to concretize utopia, not even negatively. A cryptogram of the new is the image of collapse; only by virtue of the absolute negativity of collapse does art enunciate the unspeakable utopia.’<sup>25</sup> Utopia cannot be concretised, it cannot be spoken about in a positive fashion, only by its own collapse into fragments does art point to utopia as something that cannot be spoken of. Conceptual thought, ‘theory’ cannot discursively account for utopia. Such conceptualisation can only be attempted in negative dialectics. Only in antinomical theory that is always open can utopia be written about. Yet another aspect of the antinomy of utopia is that one must remain resolutely silent about it and yet attempt to articulate it. Adorno goes on to comment that this is ‘an age in which the real possibility of utopia—that given the level of productive forces on the earth could here and now be paradise—converges with the possibility of total catastrophe.’<sup>26</sup>

The main way in which Adorno thinks of utopia in *Aesthetic Theory* is as the negation of the administered world encapsulated within the autonomous artwork. In his letter to Walter Benjamin of 18<sup>th</sup> March 1936 Adorno explained his conception of ‘the autonomous work of art’ as ‘inherently dialectical; within itself it juxtaposes the magical and the mark of freedom.’<sup>27</sup> This is the semblance of freedom within the autonomous artwork that serves to operate as a negative reflection of society. ‘In the midst of a world dominated by utility, art indeed has a utopic aspect as the other of this world.’<sup>28</sup> There is always, for Adorno, the ever present danger of art’s utopian aspect being identified as affirmative of the society it appears to be opposed to – ‘art may not be utopia in order not to betray it by providing semblance and consolation.’<sup>29</sup> This is the utopian antinomy of art. There is, however, still an affirmative aspect to artworks that is purely internal.

The constellation of the existing and the nonexisting is the utopic figure of art. Although it is compelled toward absolute negativity, it is precisely by virtue of this negativity that it is not absolutely negative. By no means do artworks primarily develop this inwardly antinomical affirmative element as a result of their external attitude to what exists, that is, to society; rather, it develops immanently in them and immerses them in twilight.<sup>30</sup>

This internal structure of artworks has a utopian aspect that is specifically related to structure, to how it is constructed. This is the utopian aspect to construction according to Adorno which takes two forms. The first is that ‘Unconsciously every artwork must ask itself if and how it can exist as utopia: always only through the constellation of its elements.’<sup>31</sup> Construction is rational organisation which for Adorno is a central principle behind the irrationality of a rationally organised world of total administration. The rationality of construction in an artwork as the

negation of rationality in the administered world is therefore utopian, ‘the negative appearance of utopia.’<sup>32</sup> But this first negative form of utopian construction also points forward to a possibility for hope in the future. An original work of art has a utopian aspect that points to the future. ‘The concept of originality, as in Benjamin’s sense of the “originary”, does not so much summon up the primordial as the *yet to be* in works, their utopic trace.’<sup>33</sup> This is the second form of utopian expectation of construction. The form of an artwork, the rational construction, is a pointer to, however illusory, perfected forms in the future. ‘Each artwork is utopia insofar as through its form it anticipates what would finally be itself.’<sup>34</sup> This is the not yet existing aspect of utopia inherent in artworks. Adorno speculates that highly technical artworks may yet result in entirely new forms of art in the future. ‘The many interrelations with technocracy give reason to suspect that the principle of construction remains aesthetically obedient to the administered world; but it may terminate in a yet unknown aesthetic form, whose rational organization might point to the abolition of all categories of administration along with their reflexes in art.’<sup>35</sup> This is one of the most important statements Adorno makes in *Aesthetic Theory* with regard to utopian expectation. It is not just that he is envisaging a new ‘aesthetic form’ but that the emergence of such a form should occur out of rational construction. That the rationality of the administered world could possibly turn against itself by being taken up by art. ‘If the utopia of art were fulfilled, it would be art’s temporal end. ...Hegel ...betrayed utopia by construing the existing as if it were the utopia of the absolute idea.’<sup>36</sup> The end of art for Adorno is co-terminous with the end of the epoch of capital and yet paradoxically this end of art is could also be a beginning.

A further aspect of Adorno’s ideas about utopia concerns happiness – ‘Art is the ever broken promise of happiness.’<sup>37</sup> Adorno frequently invokes Stendhal in *Aesthetic Theory* with respect to the promise of happiness made by artworks - ‘art as the *promesse du bonheur* implies that art does its part for existence by accentuating what in it prefigures utopia.’<sup>38</sup> This prefiguring is only encapsulated in art. No action in the wider world can produce happiness. ‘Art’s *promesse du bonheur* means not only that hitherto praxis has blocked happiness but that happiness is beyond praxis. The measure of the chasm separating praxis from happiness is taken by the force of negativity in the artwork.’<sup>39</sup> The expectation of utopia is also tied to remembrance in a Platonic sense. In one version of Plato’s theory of forms the ideal forms have been forgotten and can only be retrieved by a form of memory. ‘Ever since Plato’s doctrine of anamnesis the not-yet existing has been dreamed of in remembrance, which alone concretizes utopia without betraying its existence.’<sup>40</sup> The idea of utopia as the not yet existing is conceived of by Adorno as funereal, as a memorial - ‘draped in black ... recollection of the possible in opposition to the actual that suppresses it; it is the imaginary reparation of the catastrophe of world history; it is freedom, under which the spell of necessity did not—and may not ever—come to pass.’<sup>41</sup> Adorno did not believe political art was necessarily good art however politically correct its content. As the artwork is the negative of the administered world it is inevitably political in Adorno’s view. He makes this clear in a brief discussion of Brecht in

*Aesthetic Theory*. 'Praxis is not the effect of works; rather it is encapsulated in their truth content. This is why commitment is able to become an aesthetic force of production.'<sup>42</sup>

### **The utopian moment of negative dialectics**

The final aspect of Adorno's complex cluster of ideas concerning utopia concerns the issue of how to write philosophical theory in the form of negative dialectics. This is Adorno's epistemological utopia and adds to the understanding of his style of writing in both *Negative Dialectics* and *Aesthetic Theory*. This idea can be found in the final section of the 'Introduction' to *Negative Dialectics* which ends with some illuminating comments concerning Adorno's belief in the utopian aspect of conceptual thought. The subject matter of the last section is rhetoric. 'In philosophy, rhetoric represents that which cannot be thought except in language.'<sup>43</sup> Rhetoric is a form of expression and 'all approved traditional philosophy from Plato down to the semanticists has been allergic to expression.'<sup>44</sup> Only dialectics, according to Adorno can 'attempt a critical rescue of the rhetorical element.'<sup>45</sup> Rhetoric is a manner of saying something without saying it directly, the power of words to convey thoughts that are embodied in language by means of the expressive qualities of that language. It is similar to the 'more' that for Adorno can be read in a constellation, the same more that is expressed by an artwork as spirit over and above its thing-like elements. Dialectical theory for Adorno has a rhetorical expressive aspect, a non-conceptual aesthetic dimension of language. Adorno seems to believe that when philosophical theory uses dialectics it is employing rhetoric to express more than the dialectical or antinomically opposed concepts say on their own. It is their dialectical relationship that gives rise to this expression. 'It is in the rhetorical quality that culture, society and tradition animate the thought.'<sup>46</sup> The very language of dialectical thought where ideas and concepts are set in opposition to one another has resonances beyond the mere form of words because the reader has to think about what they are reading. The reader is not discursively presented with a narration to read without involvement. The reader is forced to engage with the text by the act of reading it. 'In dialectics ...the rhetorical element is on the side of the content. Dialectics seeks to mediate between random views and unessential accuracy, to master this dilemma by way of the formal, logical dilemma.'<sup>47</sup> The setting of ideas in opposition, dialectical or antinomical, is dependent on the logic of contradiction, it is entirely logical that such oppositions should be understood as contradictory. Yet it is precisely from out of this clash of logical opposition that Adorno claims the expressive rhetorical aspect of thought emerges. 'But dialectics inclines to content because the content is not closed.'<sup>48</sup> Dialectical reflective thought keeps content open [*Offenen*] as opposed to 'the formal juridicality of thinking [*Denkgesetzlichkeit*].' This is the aesthetic of theory. This is one of the things the title *Aesthetic Theory* means.

The final section of the last paragraph of the 'Introduction' to *Negative Dialectics* concerns utopia and its relationship to this conception of rhetoric.

The cognition which wishes for content, wishes for utopia. This, the consciousness of the possibility, clings to the concrete as what is undistorted. It is what is possible, never the immediately realized, which obstructs utopia; that is why in the middle of the existent it appears abstract. The inextinguishable color comes from the not-existent. Thinking serves it as a piece of existence, as that which, as always negatively, reaches out to the not-existent. Solely the most extreme distance would be the nearness; philosophy is the prism, in which its colors are caught.<sup>49</sup>

‘The cognition [*Erkenntnis*] which wishes for content [*Inhalt*], wishes for utopia’ refers to Adorno’s belief that in the world as it is the only form that thought, cognition, can take is in a dialectical form that is necessarily incomplete, open and hence does not have a fixed content. Only in a changed world could discursive thought, or something like it, re-emerge. ‘This, the consciousness of the possibility, clings to the concrete as what is undistorted.’ Only in things that are actual, that are not distorted by conceptuality can the possibility of utopia be found. ‘It is what is possible, never the immediately realized, which obstructs utopia; that is why in the middle of the existent it appears abstract.’ Adorno has performed a dialectical reversal by stating that possibility blocks utopia. The expectation of utopia blocks it; only in immediate reality among existing things can utopia be found, yet compared to these utopia seems a pure abstraction. ‘The inextinguishable color comes from the not-existent [*Nichtseinden*].’ Because utopia does not exist, because it is a possibility in the future it has the status of the non-existent and yet it has an inextinguishable colour. Utopia is like a colour that cannot be extinguished. This is a poetic metaphor that precisely represents Adorno’s idea of rhetoric. The reason for this metaphor will become clear in the final sentence. But before that we have: ‘Thinking serves it as a piece of existence, as that which, as always negatively, reaches out to the not-existent.’ Thought is the servant of utopia. Negative thought points to that which does yet not exist. ‘Solely the most extreme distance would be the nearness; philosophy is the prism, in which its colors are caught.’ Although utopia is far distant and does not exist it is also close by because philosophy is ‘the prism in which its colours are caught.’ Negative dialectical philosophy catches the colour of utopia. It is the rhetoric of ‘prismatic thought’<sup>50</sup> that allows the colour of utopia to show itself, however illusory such a showing may be. This utopian element involved in writing a negative dialectical text is clearly closely related to the utopian aspect involved in the construction of an artwork and is another Adornian parallel between art and philosophy.



## Section Two: Expectation in art – Heidegger and Adorno

### The one-sided relationship

All the way through this study the figure of Heidegger has been in the background. Many philosophers regard Heidegger as one of the leading philosophers of the twentieth century largely because of his analytical abilities and his re-invigoration of phenomenology by his stress on the centrality of existence in any account of human life and thought. Now the topic of this study has moved to expectation it is appropriate to explore the relationship between Adorno and Heidegger in terms of their respective conceptions of expectation in relation to their theories concerning the work of art. As Samir Gandesha remarks, in his essay ‘Leaving Home,’ ‘comparatively little has been written on the complex and fraught question of Adorno’s relation to Heidegger.’<sup>51</sup> Far more has been written about the relationship between Critical Theory, Adorno and the post-Heideggerian philosophers of France. In their ‘Introduction’ to *Adorno and Heidegger* Iain Macdonald and Krzysztof Ziarek, the editors, address the problem of the relationship between Adorno and Heidegger. They describe it as a one-sided relationship, in that Heidegger, towards the end of his life, is reported as saying he had never read anything by Adorno. Whereas Adorno, from the start of his philosophical career to the end, carried out an oppositional ‘polemic’ with regard to Heidegger’s work. The editors argue that ‘Critical examination of the material leads in a rather different direction, suggesting that the terms of the critique sharpen because there are undeniable points of proximity between Adorno and Heidegger.’ The editors list resemblances such as their respective views on technology, positivism, social existence, and ethical problems. ‘But such resemblances, often superficial, rest on a deeper commonality: the imperative that philosophy should serve history and experience, that it should be concerned with “relevant things”.’<sup>52</sup> Bubner in his article ‘Concerning the Central Idea of Adorno’s Philosophy’ argues that Heidegger’s theory of Being in some respects ‘comes very close indeed to mirroring many of Adorno’s theses. In order to undermine the outward impression that he might have shared similar insights with Heidegger, Adorno emphasized, in the strongest possible terms, the substantial differences between their two philosophical standpoints.’<sup>53</sup>

Five of Adorno’s publications directly address Heidegger. His inaugural lecture of 1931 ‘The Actuality of Philosophy,’ opens with ‘that question which today is called radical and which is really the least radical of all; the question of being...’<sup>54</sup> Adorno goes on to criticise Heidegger’s philosophical approach and concludes that ‘phenomenological philosophy is preparing for its own final disintegration.’<sup>55</sup> In his essay ‘The Idea of Natural History’ (1932) Adorno accuses Heidegger of still being at best an idealist and at worst tautological.<sup>56</sup> ‘Heidegger says that it is no mistake to move in a circle, the only concern is to enter it in the proper fashion. I am inclined to agree with him. But if philosophy is to remain true to its task, then entering the circle correctly can only mean that being which determines or interprets itself as being makes clear in the act of interpretation the element through which it interprets itself as

such.<sup>57</sup> Over thirty years later in *The Jargon of Authenticity* Adorno attacked Heidegger's use of language, '*Heideggerrei*,<sup>58</sup> as well as his whole philosophical position. In *Negative Dialectics* Heidegger is 'the crucial interlocutor.'<sup>59</sup> In 'Art and the Arts' (1967) Adorno devotes three paragraphs to discussing Heidegger: 'Heidegger's text on the 'Origin of the Work of Art' in *Holzwege* has the merit of providing a sober account of the thing-like nature of art objects, a feature that, as Heidegger remarks with justifiable irony, the much acclaimed aesthetic experience cannot ignore.'<sup>60</sup> Adorno goes on to point out that Heidegger claimed 'that all art is essentially poetry' and that 'Heidegger specifically emphasized the linguistic nature of all art.'<sup>61</sup> Adorno then proceeds to accuse Heidegger of being vague: 'this vagueness infects Heidegger's metaphysics of art, turning it into a tautology. The origin of the work of art, he maintains emphatically, is art. And, as always in Heidegger, origin is a matter not of genesis in time but of the essence of works of art.'<sup>62</sup> Furthermore as Adorno states in the last of these three paragraphs, 'in the case of Heidegger, art is dissipated in a realm of pure essences without content.'<sup>63</sup> By contrast Adorno always stresses the importance of the inner structure of an artwork. There are critical references to Heidegger scattered throughout Adorno's texts. The Swabian spectre haunts his thought throughout *Aesthetic Theory*.

Gandhesa makes it clear that Adorno had read Heidegger's 'The Origin of the Work of Art' essay on its first publication (1950) in Heidegger's collection of essays *Holzwege* because: 'Adorno tried to persuade Horkheimer to review Heidegger's text *Holzwege* for the journal *Der Monat*, stating that – "Heidegger was in favour of false trails that are not very different from our own".'<sup>64</sup> There are remarkable apparent parallels between Heidegger's views on art and those of Adorno. Both have an orientation to time, history and expectation, however, these orientations differ significantly because their conceptions of time, history and expectation are not the same. Adorno understands modern art as developing by negation of previous work. This is a form of expectation of change in art, of the ceaseless production of the new. He never argues that this is an improvement, or progress, or evolution because (as was discussed in chapter three) artworks are individual and singular. It is one of the antinomies of art for Adorno that artworks are utterly singular and yet at the same time part of the wider concept of art. This is precisely why a monad is such a good model, both for the individual artwork and for art in general, because a monad is both a particular and a universal. For Adorno artworks cannot be judged one against another, they are either art, or they are not art. This series of modern artworks is located for Adorno in the historical era of the development of capitalism. The revolutionary expectations that this era held in the time of Beethoven and later articulated by Marx have clearly not been realised. Heidegger also believes that art is temporal and historically situated but that certain works of art open a horizon of expectation for a new era. This is a form of expectation in art, a mode of prophesy that can only be understood at a later date. This is a strange conception of time.

## Great art

In their respective discussions of art and artworks, Adorno and Heidegger seem to share the view that in any such discussion only artworks of the highest rank are worthy of discussion. Heidegger states this to be the case in a revealing aside in *The Origin of the Work of Art*: 'The work is to be released by the artist to its pure self-subsistence. It is precisely in great art - and only such art is under consideration here - that the artist remains inconsequential as compared to the work, almost like a passageway that destroys itself in the creative process for the work to emerge.'<sup>65</sup> This phrase, whether consciously or not I cannot judge, echoes Wittgenstein's final remarks in the *Tractatus* about throwing away the ladder as a metaphor for discarding first simple thoughts in developing complex conceptions.<sup>66</sup> Great art is conceived by Heidegger as foundational art. It is art that helps define the quality of truth in the Being of an epoch. In this sense, art looks forward in time, even if this looking forward is identified retrospectively. The epoch, whether it is Greek civilisation or the middle ages, is conceived as historical, as temporal, as a form of macro *Dasein* in the shape of 'the destiny of an historical people'<sup>67</sup> 'The origin of the work of art - that is the origin of both the creators and the preservers, which is to say of a people's historical existence - is art. This is so because art is in its essence an origin: a distinctive way in which truth comes into being, that is, becomes historical.'<sup>68</sup> Just as *Dasein* lives towards death, so epochs also develop and have an existence that will end in death. The art of the epoch is temporal (although not in the same sense as *Dasein*) for it too will die at the end of the epoch. 'The beginning already contains the end latent within itself.'<sup>69</sup> When an epoch ends, the memory of it can, to a limited extent, be preserved in its art by the 'preservers'. A new epoch will create new art specific to and indicative of, the truth of its founding.

An account of great art and aesthetics occurs in Heidegger's lectures on Nietzsche. 'For, in truth, the fact whether and how an era is committed to an aesthetics, whether and how it adopts a stance towards art of an aesthetic character, is decisive for the way art shapes the history of that era - or remains irrelevant for it.'<sup>70</sup> The shaping of the history of an era is a form of prophetic expectation. Great founding art for Heidegger is prospective, it looks forward, it opens up possibilities. 'Aesthetics begins with the Greeks only at that moment when their great art and also the great philosophy that flourished along with it comes to an end.'<sup>71</sup> Precisely what historical period is being alluded to here is unclear, but it is probably that the 'great philosophy' of the Greeks consists of the fragments of the Pre-Socratics, particularly those of Parmenides and Heraclitus and that the inauguration of aesthetics come later with Plato. However what is being set up is the idea that aesthetics follows on from an end of art which is a thoroughly Hegelian idea. It soon becomes apparent, that the modern age is an age of aesthetics, and thus an age of 'irrelevant art'.

The third basic development for the history of knowledge about art, and that now means the origin and formation of aesthetics, is once again a happenstance that does not flow immediately from art or from meditation on it. On the contrary, it is an occurrence that

involves our entire history. It is the beginning of the modern age. Man and his unconstrained knowledge of himself, as of his position among beings, becomes the arena where the decision falls as to how things are to be experienced, defined and shaped.<sup>72</sup>

The modern age is the age of subjectivity, of the scientific investigation of the human, and of the failed attempts to unify science under philosophy. Aesthetics, then, is understood by Heidegger as an expression of the ‘modern age,’ an integral part of the historical development of ‘man.’

What makes art great is not only and not in the first place the high quality of what is created. Rather, art is great because it is an “absolute need”. Because it is that, and to the extent it is that, it also can and must be great in rank. For only on the basis of the magnitude of its essential character does it also create a dimension of magnitude for the rank and stature of what is brought forth.

Concurrent with the formation of a dominant aesthetics and of the aesthetic relation to art in modern times is the decline of great art, great art in the designated sense.<sup>73</sup>

So greatness in art, quality in art, for Heidegger, is ultimately dependent on this concept of ‘absolute need.’ The structure of these two linked concepts, of greatness in art and ‘absolute need’ for art looks circular, as each depends on the other. Art must be great so it can fulfil the ‘absolute need.’ If the art fulfils the need, it is great. Art must be great precisely because it has fulfilled the need. It is art’s ability to fulfil the need that enables history to judge it to be great art. This is very similar to Marcuse’s idea of great art as ‘a self-validating hypothesis.’ Heidegger goes on to explain that the aesthetics of Hegel is the high point of aesthetics and at the same time another point where great art comes to an end. Art continues but it is no longer great ‘in the designated sense’. Aesthetics after Hegel, on Heidegger’s account, becomes increasingly scientific in two senses. Aesthetics becomes an historical investigation of facts about art as a part of art history and aesthetics also develops as a psychology of art.

### **Truth in art**

In ‘The Origin of the Work of Art’ Heidegger develops his concept of truth, first described in *Being and Time* as ‘Dasein’s disclosedness.’<sup>74</sup> Truth for Heidegger is not propositional but ontological, it is the disclosedness of Being. ‘Being (not entities) is something which ‘there is’ only in so far as truth is. And truth is only in so far as and as long as Dasein is. Being and truth ‘are’ equiprimordially.’<sup>75</sup> In *The Essence of Truth* Heidegger makes it clear that for him propositional truth is a second order form of truth based on the ‘disclosedness’ of being. ‘Truth as correctness is grounded in truth as unhiddenness. . . Truth as correctness of assertion is quite impossible without truth as the unhiddenness of beings. For that to which the assertion must direct itself, in order to be correct, must already be unhidden.’<sup>76</sup> Heidegger’s account of truth is bound up with time and historicity precisely because the significance of an important disclosure of truth can only be recognised at a later time. ‘Genuine historical return is the decisive

beginning of authentic *futurity*. ...In the end it is *historical* return which brings us into what is actually happening *today*.<sup>77</sup>

Daniel Dahlstrom identifies a 'triangulation' in Heidegger's account of truth in *Being and Time*. This triangulation is between being, truth and time.<sup>78</sup> Heidegger's account of truth is thus radically temporal. This time is not what Dahlstrom calls 'a fleeting time, the time of the world,' such ordinary time, according to Heidegger, is less fundamental than 'ecstatic timeliness' and is based on it.<sup>79</sup> So just as there is a more fundamental form of time for Heidegger so there are also more fundamental forms of truth and being. Truth for Adorno is not propositional either. As was discussed in chapter three for Adorno, truth understood as truth content is historical, embedded in the construction of an artwork, and understood as part of its spirit and identified only by philosophical interpretation. In his 'Notes on Philosophical Thinking' Adorno gives an account of philosophical truth. 'Thoughts that are true must incessantly renew themselves in the experience of the subject matter, which nonetheless first determines itself in those thoughts. The strength to do that, and not measuring out and marking off conclusions, is the essence of philosophical rigor. Truth is a constantly evolving constellation...'<sup>80</sup> Truth for Adorno is temporal, it is renewed afresh in experience whether is aesthetic or philosophical experience. Indeed separating the two is virtually impossible because in Adorno's theory of the artwork aesthetic experience of an artwork depends on philosophical interpretation to uncover the truth content of the work at a particular historical moment. It seems that truth for Adorno is not to be found in theoretical structures, whether in the sciences or a philosophy, but in the details of material reality as experienced at an individual level.

Resistance to the decline of reason would mean for philosophical thinking, without regard for established authority and especially that of the human sciences, that it immerse itself in the material contents in order to perceive in them, not beyond them, their truth content. That would be, today, the freedom of thinking. It would become true where it is freed from the curse of labor and comes to rest in its object.<sup>81</sup>

By contrast in his later essay 'On the Essence of Truth' Heidegger argues that truth is not propositional and maintains that '*The essence of truth is freedom*.'<sup>82</sup> The essence of this freedom lies in the openness of the disclosure of Being, a disclosure that is at the same time a 'concealing.' The truth of Being had, as we learned at the start of *Being and Time*, been 'forgotten' historically by metaphysics. 'In the thinking of Being the liberation of man for ek-sistence, the liberation that grounds history, is put into words. ...the ably conserved articulation of the truth of being as a whole.'<sup>83</sup> There is an implication here that Heidegger thinks of his entire project of the 'overcoming of metaphysics' as an historical event, a founding event for a new epoch of history. Lambert Zuidervaart argues that for Heidegger understanding 'is essentially futural.'<sup>84</sup> Zuidervaart also argues that both Heidegger and Adorno share very much the same insight 'into the nonpropositional and disclosive character of artistic truth.'<sup>85</sup>

Zuidervaart identifies Heidegger's concept of authenticity as central to his theory of truth because in terms of understanding, 'authenticity has a projective character and is future orientated.'<sup>86</sup> Zuidervaart also criticises Adorno's concept of philosophical experience as having an 'elitist element' in that 'by describing others as incapacitated by the societal system, he has effectively disqualified them as participants in the critical process.'<sup>87</sup> Different as Heidegger's and Adorno's conceptions of authenticity and experience are, Zuidervaart argues that both serve to underpin truth in their respective conceptions of truth in a 'nondiscursive' way. 'Both of them recognise that truth is not simply a theoretical concern, that truth must be borne out in contemporary lives and practices and institutions.'<sup>88</sup> This vague and un-contentious judgement does not go far enough towards uncovering the parallels between Adorno and Heidegger.

Heidegger's idea of the aspect of truth as a founding event of history is developed in 'The Origin of the Work of Art' where he makes it clear that the truth of the work is 'in' the work: 'In the work, the happening of truth is at work. But what is thus at work is so *in* the work.'<sup>89</sup> The entire essay is as much about truth as about art. It is his analysis of art that enables Heidegger to develop his concept of truth. Heidegger introduces the artist as 'maker' of the work, more specifically as 'creator' of the work: 'to create is to let something emerge as a thing that has been brought forth. The work's becoming a work is a way in which truth becomes and happens.'<sup>90</sup> A few pages later we read: 'Createdness of the work means truth's being fixed in place in the figure. Figure is the structure in whose shape the rift composes itself. This composed rift of the fugue of truth's shining. What is here called figure [*Gestalt*] is always thought in terms of the particular placing [*Stellen*] and enframing [*Ge-stell*] as which the work occurs when it sets itself up and sets itself forth.'<sup>91</sup> This description by Heidegger looks close to Adorno's idea of the work as a construction, a 'gestalt' is a structured whole, but the difference lies in the importance Heidegger attaches to the placing of the work in society, for Heidegger the work is not autonomous. The importance of the work of art, its truth, is only revealed retrospectively. It depends on the development of history precisely because it has affected this development. It is a hermeneutic circle of understanding. The past affects the future but the effect can only be identified in the future retrospectively. The importance of the work along with its truth can only be identified at the end of the era it founds. This mirrors Hegel's eras of art only the first of which would have been foundational in Heidegger's sense. This also is very close to Adorno's idea that the art of the past is best illuminated by the art of the present, and similarly that theory in the present can reveal truths implicit in theories of the past. This hermeneutic circle of understanding that they both share is one of the closest parallels between Adorno and Heidegger.

In *The End of Art* Eva Geulen takes up the topos of the end of art in both Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* and Heidegger's *The Origin of the Work of Art* essay. She questions 'whether in the last analysis Adorno is concerned with art or even with aesthetic experience, or if these are actually functions of a latent theory of language.'<sup>92</sup> Geulen is right to raise this concern to

the extent that Adorno's theoretical position with regards to both art and philosophy is a form of 'reading' which inevitably involves a theory of language but it is in my view better understood as a theory of meaning in the epistemological sense. By contrast she argues that Heidegger fails to 'escape aesthetics'<sup>93</sup> because he still ties art to truth in keeping with the idealist Romantic tradition. Geulen traces Heidegger's various re-formulation of Hegel's 'end of art' topos in the appendices to 'The Origin of The Work of Art' essay and concludes that 'the familiar end of art appears on the horizon wherever Heidegger commits art to beginning, founding, and anchoring history.'<sup>94</sup> For Heidegger the end is always a beginning even if it cannot be recognised as such at the time.

Heidegger's 'preservers' have a form of true knowledge of the work as opposed to a mere 'aestheticising connoisseurship of the work's formal aspects.'<sup>95</sup> This is in effect Heidegger pointing to an ontological understanding of the work of art, it is the work of art as a form of the truth. Heidegger never says that the work requires philosophy to complete it as does Adorno but rather that the 'preservers' have a form of true experience of the work. Heidegger also states that: 'The proper way to preserve the work is co-created and prescribed only and exclusively by the work. Preserving occurs at different levels of knowledge, with always differing degrees of scope, constancy, and lucidity. When works are offered for sheer artistic enjoyment this does not yet prove that they stand in preservation as works.'<sup>96</sup> Heidegger has already stated in his example of the Greek temple that, whilst it still discloses a world which no longer exists, it can be now be no more than a form of remembrance of that world. This remembrance can only be preserved by what Heidegger calls 'the art industry.'<sup>97</sup> 'But even this remembrance may still offer to the work a place from which it joins in shaping history. The work's own peculiar actuality, on the other hand, is brought to bear only where the work is preserved in the truth that happens through the work itself. The work's actuality is determined in its basic features by the essence of the work's being.'<sup>98</sup> A few pages further on we find: 'Thus art is the creative preserving of truth in the work. *Art then is a becoming and happening of truth.*'<sup>99</sup>

'Truth, as the clearing and concealment of beings, happens in being composed. *All art*, as the letting happen of the advent of truth of beings, is as such, *in essence, poetry.*'<sup>100</sup> By poetry Heidegger explains he does not mean that all art is linguistic in the sense of a written text but in the sense of being enabled by language understood in a wider sense. 'Language, by naming beings for the first time, first brings being to word and to appearance. Only this naming nominates beings to their Being *from out* of their Being.'<sup>101</sup> In this sense of poetry as language, art is 'the setting-into-work of truth.' 'The essence of art is poetry. The essence of poetry, in turn, is the founding of truth.'<sup>102</sup> Truth 'is thrown' towards the preservers, 'a historical group of human beings'<sup>103</sup> and in this manner truth in art becomes a founding event in history. 'Whenever art happens—that is, whenever there is a beginning—a thrust enters history; history either begins or starts over again.'<sup>104</sup> Both art and thinking are truth as a founding event, both the overcoming of metaphysics and the creation of a work of art are origins. For Heidegger this

founding event is only historical in the sense that it founds the history of an epoch. A founding event of truth looks forward in expectation but is only identified retrospectively in memory in the same manner as Hegel's three epochs and their forms of art are identified retrospectively. For Heidegger by contrast the significance of the artwork entirely depends on its position as a founding event of truth in the history of an epoch. An importance that can only be identified retrospectively and makes an important artwork a social event in time.

### **Epochal expectations**

Whether Heidegger's concept of the '*Gestell*' of the technological world of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is an epoch the truth of whose founding was inaugurated by great art is not a question that is addressed in the 'Work of Art' essay. Neither is the obverse, as to whether the age of technology fails to be a truly authentic epoch precisely because it is not founded on great art. Heidegger's concept of the '*Gestell*' of the technological world of the twentieth century structurally plays much the same role in his later thought as does 'the administered world' of monopoly capitalism in Adorno's work. Each concept acts as an ultimate opposition to art. These are political positions; Adorno has a left-wing position, whereas Heidegger holds a right-wing position.

In 'The question Concerning Technology' Heidegger uses 'the word *Gestell* as the name for the essence of modern technology.' He explains that 'Enframing [*Gestell*] means the way of revealing that holds sway in the essence of modern technology and that is itself nothing technological.'<sup>105</sup> Heidegger clearly understands this '*Gestell*' as a form of revealing of unconcealment, 'lets what presences come forth into unconcealment.'<sup>106</sup> The discussion takes an extremely interesting and revealing turn a page later when Heidegger explains that whilst in chronological time modern 'machine power technology' started in the eighteenth century and the 'modern physical science' that made it possible started earlier in the seventeenth century these dates alone do not provide the truth 'historically.' There is chronological history in which this sequence of discoveries can be traced but for Heidegger this is not 'real' history (with apologies to Marx!). This is because as the Greeks knew and stated – 'That which is earlier with regard to its rise into dominance becomes manifest to us men only later. That which is primally early shows itself only ultimately to men.'<sup>107</sup> This means that the 'real' historical truth of the *gestell* of technology is much earlier than ordinary history would account for and can only be identified at a later stage. The identification of the origin of technology is thus thrust forward in time in exactly the same way as for art. Two pages later this concept of 'real' history is described. It results from 'a way of revealing, destining [*Geschick*]. It is from this destining that the essence of all history [*Geschichte*] is determined. History is neither simply the object of written chronicle nor merely the process of human activity. That activity first becomes history as something destined'.<sup>108</sup> This he states is what makes ordinary chronological history, which he calls 'historiography,' as a 'science' possible.



This discussion has now reached a position where the parallels and differences between Adorno and Heidegger theories of art can be made explicit. They both stress the significance of great art but for entirely different reasons. For Heidegger only 'great art' can disclose truth as an historical founding event. For Adorno great artworks are the only form art takes, everything else is not art. So there is a shared stress on the importance of great art, even if the meaning of the concept differs markedly. There is a perception by Adorno that in the modern age it is increasingly difficult to create important works of art, whereas for Heidegger it is impossible to create 'great art' in the age of technology. For Heidegger, the modern age is the framework of the technological age at work; for Adorno, it is the administered world of monopoly capitalism. Heidegger's '*Gestell*' and Adorno's 'administered world' play virtually the same role as oppositional constraints. For both, artworks are historical, but they have a very different concept of history. For Heidegger this points backwards to a golden age in the past to a founding of history at the time of the revelation of truth by the artwork. For Adorno aesthetic history is the history of the autonomous singular works of modern art understood from the point of view of the present moment. They both have a utopian aspect to art. For Adorno it is the freedom encapsulated however illusorily with the construction of a modern work of art in contrast to the negativity of the administered world within the spirit of successful artworks. This is paralleled in Heidegger. In the final chapter of *The End of Philosophy* Heidegger introduces the idea of an 'unworld' which is very closed to Adorno's concept of the administered world. 'In the age of the exclusive power of power, that is, of the unconditional pressing of beings toward being used up in consumption, the world has become an unworld in that Being does presence, but without really reigning.'<sup>109</sup>

Heidegger's idea that art is foundational in origin, foundational for an epoch of history also involves a prophetic utopian expectation. It could be argued that they share a Hegelian impulse to identify epochs of art however different the construction of these epochs are. Adorno's conception of autonomous modern musical art being 'founded' with Beethoven (why Beethoven is better than Bach) also parallels Heidegger's idea that the Greek temple founds a civilization. Both rely on a similar concept of a work, of an artwork, or work of art, even though Adorno, being better attuned to contemporary art than Heidegger, acknowledges the fragmentary nature of the most modern works, this fragmentariness is, for Adorno, nevertheless built into the concept of the modern artwork from Beethoven onwards. For both philosophers there is a time of understanding of an artwork, the life of an artwork. For Heidegger this is tied to the existence of an epoch, for Adorno it is tied to the time of interpretation and perishing. For both Adorno and Heidegger the historical time period of modernity can be interpreted as an epoch orientated to expectation. For both of them, a community of specialists keep the art alive, keep it in memory. Both of them employ the idea that the significance of an earlier artwork can best be appreciated at a later date in the present. For Heidegger it is only at a later date that the

epoch the significant work helps to found can be recognised. The recognition of the work becomes the recognition of the epoch.

At the end of the Technology essay Heidegger suggests that possibly ‘essential reflection’ and ‘decisive confrontation’ with technology ‘must happen in a realm’ that is both similar and dissimilar to it, for example, art. ‘But certainly only if reflection upon art, for its part, does not shut its eyes to the constellation of truth, concerning which we are *questioning*.’<sup>110</sup> It is a surprise to discover Heidegger’s ‘constellation of truth.’ The surprise is not that Heidegger’s constellation and Adorno’s constellation involve the use of the same word, it is that it seems that for both of them, and this may well be the deepest similarity, philosophy involves a form of questioning reflection. In Adorno’s case ideas and concepts are juxtaposed in a constellation and then critically reflected upon. In Heidegger’s approach a relentless questioning revolves around the virtually fixed constellation of Being, time, truth and disclosedness. Heidegger uses a set of apparently different, but for him clearly related, subject areas, such as Dasein, art, technology and poiesis in this questioning under his fixed constellation.

The parallels between Adorno and Heidegger are striking despite their obvious artistic, political and philosophical differences. Fundamentally they differ over their respective views on truth. For both Adorno and Heidegger truth is non-propositional. For Heidegger truth is a foundational revealing as exemplified in a great work of art that serves to found an historical epoch. Thus both the truth, the work and the epoch are only identifiable after the event. Whilst the work looks forward, it is only identified retrospectively. For Adorno by contrast the truth content of a work of art is a historically changing constellation of aesthetic elements as interpreted by philosophy. The truth content of a work of art is revealed, illusory as it is, by the external forms of interpretation, commentary and critique, but in an uncanny parallel to Heidegger this is always best done from the point of view of the present as retrospective understanding.

### Section Three: Antinomy and mimesis in the expectation of aesthetics

The two aspects of expectation examined so far in this chapter are clearly related for Adorno: first, the various conceptions of utopia, and second, the historical era of capitalism understood as opening with Beethoven for Adorno and as being inaugurated by Hölderlin for Heidegger. This final section will examine a third aspect of expectation concerned with the survival and expectation of aesthetics as embodied in the antinomic and mimetic relationship between philosophical aesthetics and art theory.

All these questions revolve around Adorno's interpretation of the world, what in chapter two I described as his ethical position. Adorno has certain 'prejudices' that a reader needs to be aware of when reading *Aesthetic Theory*. These prejudices are overwhelmingly coloured and shaped by Adorno's view of the negative totality that is late capitalism at work in the over-administered world. These prejudices also include Adorno and Horkheimer's concept of the dialectic of Enlightenment as fundamental, as well as the important idea of the non-identical that is always in danger of escaping conceptuality. These prejudices include a dependence on a negative form of philosophical thought, negative dialectics. This form of philosophy makes its philosophical interventions through constellations and models that are open to interpretation. The prejudices also include the idea of the autonomous artwork-monad as the negation of the administered world. In addition the slow change of art into increasingly negative forms produced a crisis for philosophical aesthetics. As far as art is concerned, these prejudices involve the idea that artworks are constructed in such a way, that they can be completed by interpretation at the level of philosophical critique.

It is in the very form of this reflective critique, described in the first section of this chapter, that Adorno identifies a utopian moment, the aesthetic of theory. In addition this aspect of the play of language was identified in Adorno's conception of mimesis. Negative dialectics is a form of philosophy that takes its cue from also being the negative of the administered world. This is Adorno's hermeneutic circle, the interpretation of the world, of art, of philosophy and of history, are all related. Without that particular interpretation of the world the other positions could not be constructed in the forms they take. As was argued in chapter two, Adorno's interpretation of the world is both under-theorised and over-determined. Assessing the success or failure of *Aesthetic Theory* does not simply rest on accepting or rejecting Adorno's ethical political position and associated prejudices. It is true that without that ethical position the theory of the artwork and the theories of philosophy and history no longer possess the coherence provided by his Marxist belief. His theory of meaning is not based in Marxism, nor is his fundamental view concerning the interpretation of the artwork.

In this study philosophical analysis has revealed the structure of Adorno's theory of meaning in terms of midpoint, constellation and parataxis. Lacoue-Labarthe in his discussion of Heidegger's reading of Plato maintains that 'representation' is a form of mimesis. 'Mimesis is always from like to same. For such is the law of representation—or of (re)presentation

(*Vostellung* and *Darstellung*, here more than ever are dissociable):<sup>111</sup> Talking this view into consideration means that it is possible to interpret the paratactical reading of a constellation of concepts, the ‘representation’ of that constellation as a reading that is a form of mimesis. This puts mimesis at the heart of Adorno’s theory of meaning as a mimesis of understanding. The mimetic re-presentation, the reading, of a paratactical constellation is not fixed anymore than the interpretation of a work of art is fixed. This mode of looking at representation reveals a mimetic relationship between Adorno’s theory of the artwork and his conception of philosophical aesthetics. It has also revealed the aesthetic hidden in the very form of his reflective antinomical theory. For Adorno critique means attending to the work in the work’s own terms and to do this a subject has to immerse themselves mimetically in an intuitive manner to grasp the work of art in its own terms which are non-conceptual, fleeting and illusory. The task is to bring the work to completion in critique. In this sense the critique is a mimesis of the work, but it is also opposed to the work simply because it is other to the work. So the critique and the work also have an antinomical relationship. Critique has other demands or constraints put upon it because for Adorno it has to account for the work’s antinomical mimesis of the other of the administered world of late capitalism in which and against which in the most general terms the work was created and constructed. If a work does not fulfil this fundamental demand in comportment with Adorno’s beliefs then it sinks below the level of art and becomes merely a product of the culture industry. It is only by means of the absolute position of art, that the possibility that the world could be other than it is, is preserved. The other place where utopian hope is preserved lies in language. This is in the rhetoric of philosophical language, in the non-conceptuality buried in the conceptual, in the mimesis borne out of magic that is still a part of rationality and lies at the heart of his theory of the dialectic of Enlightenment. Critique itself then also holds the possibility, the potential, for pointing as does art, however illusory this may be, at the hope for utopia.

Adorno, as we saw in the preface, advised that in reading Kant or Hegel it was necessary to keep in mind the wider intentions of these two philosophers so as to be in a better position not to get lost in the minutiae of possibly conflicting detail. So what might Adorno’s wider intentions be with regards to *Aesthetic Theory*? In one sense it is his ‘third critique’, as *Negative Dialectics* is his ‘first critique’. It was well known he planned to write what would, on this suggested schema, have been his ‘second critique’ on moral philosophy.<sup>112</sup> In this desire to write an unsystematic system for the twentieth century can be seen the wider intentions as well as his close affinity to Kant. As in Kant the link between pure critique, as negative dialectics, and morality is the aesthetic, is art. In 1931 Adorno described philosophy as a text which has to be read as ‘incomplete, contradictory and fragmentary.’<sup>113</sup> This judgement on philosophy could well be extended to his last work *Aesthetic Theory*. It is certainly incomplete, it is certainly contradictory and it is undoubtedly fragmentary. *Aesthetic Theory* is a recent ‘memory’ of the philosophy of art. Over thirty years since its initial publication in Germany, over twenty years

since its initial translation into English and over ten years since its second translation into English, the 'Now Time' of *Aesthetic Theory* is to be simultaneously still in reception and already partially forgotten. This is the contemporary antinomy of *Aesthetic Theory*. What now seems valuable and relevant about *Aesthetic Theory* and what antiquated and best forgotten? Indeed this question leads to a wider question to which *Aesthetic Theory* is in my view the key and this concerns the antinomial and mimetic relationship of philosophical aesthetics as a contemporary discipline to the multiple disciplines of art-form theory.

### **Expectation in Kant and Hegel**

Ever since the time of Kant art has had an horizon of expectation built in as part of its conceptualisation. Kant's treatment of genius in *The Critique of Judgement* is a good indication of this. 'Genius is the talent that gives the rule to art'.<sup>114</sup> This is a prospective form of mimesis, it could be called a mimesis of expectation. Kant uses this to ground his ideas about art in the reality of social life as opposed to nature, though the idea of a genius is humanity acting *as if* it were a force of nature. Kant expects artists to 'imitate' the example of the genius. Such a prospective view on the creation of new art would also include a canon of prohibitions, of things it is no longer acceptable to do. All this has a prospective aspect that is mirrored in three areas. In Kant's understanding of 'predictive history' as a predictive history of art. In the area of morality in the hope for happiness and a good outcome. And finally in his critical philosophy itself which implicitly claims to 'give the rule' to philosophical doctrine.

If the topic of a form of expectation was implicit in Kant another form of expectation involving an end was made explicit by Hegel. This is Hegel's theory that the end of art as the highest possible spiritual experience has already happened by the then, present day Romantic era. Art would still continue but not as the 'the highest mode in which truth fashions an existence for itself.'<sup>115</sup> So it is clear that art has continued, does continue and will continue under the banner of what Hegel calls 'the *'after'* of art.'

Thus the *'after'* of art consists in the fact that there dwells in the spirit the need to satisfy itself solely in its own inner self as the true form for art to take. Art in its beginning still leaves over something mysterious, a secret foreboding and a secret longing, because its creations have not completely set forth their full content for imaginative vision. But if the perfect content has been perfectly revealed in artistic shapes, then the more far-seeing spirit rejects this objective manifestation and turns back into its inner self. This is the case in our own time. We may well hope that art will always rise higher and come to perfection, but the form of art has ceased to be the supreme need of the spirit.<sup>116</sup>

Hegel's *'after'* of art includes the art of his present. For Hegel, Beethoven seems to be unimportant indeed he never mentions the leading contemporary composer of his day in his *Lectures on Fine Art*.<sup>117</sup> The *'after'* must refer to all art that follows the point when art ceased to be 'the supreme mode of our knowledge of the Absolute.'<sup>118</sup> This theory appears to leave

open the possibility of a form of repetition, a repeat of art's perfection under the Greeks, about which we can only 'hope.' This is not just a hope that art will continue in the future but that it is once again capable of coming to 'perfection' not as an art which is 'the supreme need of the spirit' but for itself within its own sphere as art. The supreme knowledge for Hegel is of course philosophy. Adorno is a Hegelian to the extent that for him truth is only available through the medium of philosophical thought.

### **The Draft Introduction to *Aesthetic Theory***

Whilst the whole of *Aesthetic Theory* is in some sense about the expectations of art and aesthetics, one section in particular, the 'Draft Introduction' is wholly concerned with philosophical aesthetics, with both its history, in Kant and Hegel in particular, and with the survival and expectations of aesthetics. The 'Draft Introduction' to *Aesthetic Theory* is an extended meditation on the state and possibility of philosophical aesthetics. Whilst I accept that this draft would have been re-written it seems to me extremely unlikely that all reference to the state and possibility of aesthetics would have been removed. In one sense this introduction is too discursive and not as dialectically structured as the main sections of *Aesthetic Theory* and on this ground alone would have been re-written, it reads like a lecture. Aesthetics is after all what *Aesthetic Theory* is about, it is the central subject of the book, the impossibility and yet necessity of theory in relation to art.

The 'Draft Introduction' opens with the idea that 'The concept of philosophical aesthetics has an antiquated quality.'<sup>119</sup> Adorno then quotes a long critical comment about the current state of aesthetics by Ivo Frenzel which in turn contains a quotation from Moritz Geiger. Adorno states that whilst this critical account of aesthetics 'well describes the situation, it does not sufficiently explain it.'<sup>120</sup> As far as Adorno is concerned the 'reason for the obsolescence of aesthetics is that it scarcely ever confronts itself with its object.'<sup>121</sup> In other words philosophical aesthetics must start from the experience of the artwork and not from some universal concepts which are brought to bear on it. Adorno argues that it is 'the unconscious consciousness in the midst of the work itself'<sup>122</sup> that is important. This is about mimesis. It is what Adorno calls the mimetic comportment of the subject who experiences the artwork. It is only in the experience of the work that truth will be found. 'All aesthetic questions terminate in those of the truth content of artworks: Is the spirit that a work objectively bears in its specific form true?' Aesthetics has nothing to do with bourgeois pleasure in art. 'For most people aesthetics is superfluous.'<sup>123</sup> The 'flagging interest in aesthetics'<sup>124</sup> is indeed to do with the apparent obsolescence of aesthetics but has much more to do with the continued existence of art. For Adorno philosophical aesthetics seems to 'silently ... imply the possibility of art. This position has become uncertain.'<sup>125</sup> This is because of the existence of anti-art which is described here as 'art that holds fast to its concept and refuses consumption.' In other words, art that is autonomous, totally negative and yet still claims to be art. Art that 'seeks refuge in its own

negation.<sup>126</sup> Art that negates its own concept as art effectively freezes out philosophical aesthetics if all that aesthetics can offer is theories derived from other forms of art in the form of false universals. Such art cannot provide reflection upon itself, for this it needs a reflective philosophical aesthetics which for Adorno 'is demanded by the development of artworks.' This reflection is carried out by 'commentary and critique' that have in turn to be 'honed to aesthetics. The truth content of an artwork requires philosophy.' This cannot be achieved by the simple employment of existing 'conventional' aesthetic categories. Such conventional categories need to be 'elucidated' and subjected to 'concrete dissolution'. This is 'the only remaining form aesthetics can take.'<sup>127</sup> Philosophical aesthetics is also partly dependent on the 'critical self-awareness of the artist' who must 'embody reflection' within the artwork so it 'no longer remains external and foreign to it; this would be the role of aesthetics today.'<sup>128</sup> Adorno thinks that aesthetics can only be conceived of as 'dialectical aesthetics.' This is because philosophical aesthetics has to keep up with philosophy just as it has to keep up with art. Contemporary philosophy for Adorno has no option in the present state of the world to be anything other than dialectical. 'Aesthetics must no more lag behind art than behind philosophy.'<sup>129</sup> This means that aesthetics must follow the exemplar in philosophy of *Negative Dialectics*. Adorno conceives of modern art as the negative contrary to the administered world in the form of spirit. 'Only as spirit is art the opposite of empirical reality, which becomes the determinate negation of the existing world order.'<sup>130</sup> The spirit, and hence the truth, of any artwork can only be discovered by philosophy, by philosophical aesthetics. 'The determination of the spirit in artworks is the highest task of aesthetics.' Above all Adorno reminds his readers, 'Aesthetic theory...has as its arena the experience of the aesthetic object.'<sup>131</sup> Only by total immersion in the experience of an artwork is a true form of understanding going to be achieved. 'Artworks are understood only when their experience is brought to the level of distinguishing between true and not true.'<sup>132</sup> The truth content of artworks is their 'cognitive constitution' they are in effect 'a form of knowledge' however incomprehensible they may appear to be. 'The task of a philosophy of art is not so much to explain away the element of incomprehensibility...but rather to understand the incomprehensibility itself.'<sup>133</sup> There was a time in the nineteenth century, according to Adorno, when art and science shared the same *ratio* or rationale. For example Seurat used what he thought were the latest scientific theories about how colour vision worked.

Whereas in the history of art scientific theories tend to wither away, without them artistic practices would no more have developed than, inversely, these theorems can adequately explain such practices. This has consequences for reception: It is inadequate if it is less reflexive than the object it receives. Not knowing what one sees or hears bestows no privileged direct relation to works but instead makes their perception impossible.<sup>134</sup>

Knowledge and interpretation are essential components for any attempt to understand the incomprehensible. If an incomprehensible work is not just baffling but is meant to be not

understandable, then what one is left with, as Adorno realised, is trying to understand why something cannot be understood. The prime example of what cannot be understood for Adorno is the world. The world should not be as it is. The only set of explanations that make any sense of why the world is as it is are those derived from the theories of Marx. That works of art are incomprehensible in an almost incomprehensible world means that they point, for Adorno, to a possibly different future world. In this way the negativity of such artworks encapsulates a utopian expectation.

The immersion in the experience of a work of art is, for Adorno, multifaceted. He gives as an example a Beethoven symphony where it is not just a question of being able to appreciate and understand ‘the purely musical course.’ The listener also has to be aware of wider aspects of significance such as being able to hear ‘the echo of the French Revolution’ in the music. Philosophical aesthetics must be able to do justice to the music of Beethoven by being aware of its historical setting as well as experiencing the music in the twentieth century. ‘Not experience alone but only thought that is fully saturated with experience is equal to the phenomenon.’ The aesthetician must bring to the work ‘true consciousness of the external world’ because only such consciousness ‘participates in the work’s immanent coherence.’<sup>135</sup> Truth inheres not just in the internal construction of the work but also in the social dimension as well and both are required for aesthetic theory to understand the spirit of the work and hence identify its truth content. Both the artistic and the social dimensions are, as in the case of Beethoven, historical. ‘History is immanent to the truth content of aesthetics.’<sup>136</sup> Aesthetics also has to be able to deal with aspects of art that are ‘radically temporal.’ Beethoven is used again in another example concerning the short temporal nature of certain figures in his music. The example from the sonata *Les Adieux* concerns ‘an evanescently fleeting association’ reminiscent of the sound of ‘horses hooves.’ This quickly passing evocation of trotting horses is just as important for Adorno as other aspects of the music. ‘Only a philosophy that could grasp such micrological figures in its innermost construction of the aesthetic whole would make good on what it promises.’ Whilst it is critically important for Adorno that aesthetic reflection must immerse itself in the particularity of an artwork nevertheless ‘second reflection ... moves in a medium removed from artworks.’<sup>137</sup> In an important sense this is a central antinomy of Adorno’s philosophical aesthetics – that it must be able through interpretation commentary and critique to immerse itself fully in the structure of an artwork entirely within the terms of that artwork and yet retain its external theoretical structures.

For Adorno all artworks are historically located in three senses. In terms of the social aspects they encapsulate, in terms of the particularity of their form and structure and in terms of the external theoretical philosophical aesthetics and art theory of their time. All these three aspects are, Adorno seems to believe, encapsulated in the artwork. ‘It is in the dimension of history that the individual aesthetic object and its concept communicate. History is inherent to aesthetic theory. Its categories are radically historical.’ It is precisely the practical and



theoretical problems that surround art ‘the problem nexuses’ that point to the future expectation of art. These problems ‘lead to what art has yet to become and that in which aesthetics would ultimately have its object.’<sup>138</sup> To merely interpret artworks without taking the wider philosophical view embodied in negative dialectics would be to fail to reach the truth of art. The ‘Draft Introduction’ ends with the idea I examined in the previous chapter that the latest works should be used to interpret the work of the past. As this commentary has demonstrated the ‘Draft Introduction’ to *Aesthetic Theory* does encapsulate the central aspects of Adorno’s theory of art in respect of the expectation of philosophical aesthetics.

### **The expectations of art and theory**

The very title *Aesthetic Theory* stages both an antinomy and points to a mimetic relationship. In chapter one I suggested the title could be read as an antinomical paratactical title. By this I meant that the two concepts, aesthetic and theory, oscillate between themselves as un-resolvable opposites, hence the ambiguity in the title many commentators had noticed. However, at that stage in this investigation, I had not appreciated that as a mini constellation in paratactical tension the two words also had a mimetic relationship for Adorno. The mimesis by theory of art and the converse by art of theory. This is both a mimesis of the other, in that the two realms of aesthetic and theory are separate, and a mimesis of the same, because art depends on theory to complete it. This is an antinomy because the two forms of mimesis, mimesis of the same and mimesis of the other are contradictory and resolution is held open. Theory is a mimesis of the non-conceptual experience of the work of art, in broad terms traditionally known as aesthetics and more commonly nowadays thought of as art theory. Where aesthetics ends and where art theory begins is a deeply ambiguous arena. In a sense *Aesthetic Theory* is the ‘after’ (in Hegel’s terms) of philosophical aesthetics. It is primarily a book about aesthetics. *Aesthetic Theory* does not contain any detailed examinations of works of art that demonstrate Adorno’s reflective philosophical aesthetics at work. It is a dialectical and antinomical survey of the concepts of philosophical aesthetics written from the point of view of Adorno’s own theory of the artwork. It is constructed as a dislocated, deconstructed fragmented system. This is precisely why it is so difficult to follow. It is not meant to be followed but to force the readers to think for themselves about the problems that are introduced. Antinomical negative dialectics is not meant to be coherent, it is meant to be deconstructive. The coherence comes from Adorno’s own theory of the artwork which is mirrored by both his conception of philosophy and his conception of history. These in turn are, for Adorno, the only forms that art, philosophy and history can take under the conditions of late capitalism.

For Adorno the chronological history of autonomous art is a sequence of negation. This sequence of negation can be understood as I suggested in chapter three as a negative mimesis that drives the expectation of new work. Adorno’s phrase ‘Every work is the mortal enemy of the other’<sup>139</sup> neatly encapsulates the germ of the idea of a form of end of art understood as the

negation of one work by the next in the historical sequence of modern artworks. It also holds the concept of the uniqueness of each work of art as central to the idea of art. This is a temporal dialectical sequence that only goes one way in its classic formulation. This is the essence of the theoretical system of the concept of art in modernism.

In parallel to this sequence of artworks runs the sequence of theories about art. Kant, Schelling, Hegel, Beaudelaire, Croce, Lukács, Benjamin and Heidegger are all part of a sequence of theories of the philosophy of art, of philosophical aesthetics. This sequence can, in parallel with the sequence of works of art, be understood as mimetic as one theory negates and or builds on the previous one. I suggest Adorno thinks that each of these theorists, in line with the artwork sequence, is best understood from the standpoint of the present. For Adorno any work or theory in the sequence can only be fully understood and appreciated from the standpoint of the present which is effectively the end, albeit temporally, of the sequence. In Hegel the end of art is a mode of understanding, whereas for Heidegger, the end of art occurs as one epoch replaces another, but the new epoch can only be understood, can only be identified from a later position, the present. *Aesthetic Theory* is itself located at a temporary end in the present time of the late 1960s in which it was created. Just as Adorno claims works of art of the past can best, and perhaps only, be understood and appreciated from the standpoint of the present, so for him the sequence of philosophical accounts of art known generally as philosophical aesthetics can be best understood from the standpoint of the present reality of an antinomial negative dialectics. It is a paradoxical form of de-historisation of the history of aesthetics.

Adorno argued in his late essay, 'Art and The Arts',<sup>140</sup> that the distinctions between art forms were breaking down in the late 1960s. In the visual arts for example the old pivotal distinction between painting and sculpture had started to dissolve early in the twentieth century and had been almost entirely eroded during the 1950s and the 1960s as new practices were invented and as other hitherto separate practices were included as visual art. Art in all forms has continued the trend that was already visible to Adorno in the 1960s of diversification into multi-faceted practices right across the sphere of art so that in no one sector is there a dominant genre. What is dominant is diversity. The multi-face is the face of art and has become the fate of art. The being of art has morphed into the endlessly new ever-same in multiplicity. Critique has also, of necessity, morphed into a multiplicity of art form discourses. It is difficult enough to decide what fits under the cover title of visual culture let alone to discern any central theorisation that could claim to encompass the multiplicity of practices encompassed by that label. The same is true in other sectors of art.

One could also argue that during the same historical period the distinction between theoretical forms was also breaking down. This breakdown between theoretical forms is visible in *Aesthetic Theory* which is undoubtedly an interdisciplinary text drawing on a wide range of sources. As discussed in chapter one, Adorno draws on concepts and theories from many

different disciplines under the wide framework of a Marxist point of view. Philosophical aesthetics is of course only one part of the wider discourse on art. This wider discourse enlarged itself considerably during the twentieth century as new disciplines developed based on academic studies of linguistics, literature, cultural studies and the wider history of ideas. New discourses emerged such as hermeneutics. Older art form disciplines such as the history of art and musicology were in many ways informed by the far older theories of philosophical aesthetics. The identification of disciplines, of inter-disciplinarity or trans or multi-disciplinarity is possible only from the perspective from which these identifications were made. A good example is Adorno's philosophy of music.

Adorno was an influential musicologist as well as a sociologist and philosopher. His texts on music are musicology, but because they are informed and shaped by his philosophical position they are at the same time, from his point of view, interventions into philosophical aesthetics. Adorno was consciously writing a philosophy of music immersed in the detail of the music and yet at the same time is formed in its expression by his philosophical position of negative dialectics. The musicological texts are only a form of philosophical aesthetics because they are constructed in accordance with a theory that originates in Adorno's own philosophical theoretical position. Without that antinomial–dialectical approach these texts on music would be interventions into musicology, of interest primarily to musicians and musicologists but of no particular interest to philosophers. There is, however, an Adornian antinomy here that undercuts the interdisciplinary nature of these texts. At any level of musical detail and expertise, Adorno's texts on music cannot really be understood or judged except by a musicologist who has also, ideally, become fully acquainted with Adorno's philosophical and sociological position. So in a sense, a musicologist such as Max Paddison, who has carried out such wider studies, is in a better position to criticise Adorno's texts on music than is a philosophical theoretician not trained in musicology. Without a detailed background in musicology a philosopher has to remain silent at the level of musical detail. This is one of the disciplinary dilemmas facing any philosophically trained commentator on Adorno's texts about music. It is also a dilemma that confronts any writer of philosophical aesthetics in the present day who comments in detail on any art form. It is clear from the historical record that what Adorno had to say about music was extremely influential and respected by many contemporary composers and musicologists of his time. But, as he clearly realised, the further a discussion about the details of any artwork moves, in terms of expertise, it becomes an increasingly specialist activity. This is the interdisciplinary nature of the cross-over between philosophical aesthetics and art form theory. Essentially art form theory discourses are related to philosophical aesthetics historically, but operate as separate discourses in their own right which nevertheless still reference philosophical aesthetics. This leads to the overall question of the meaningful survival of philosophical aesthetics as a discipline theorising about any art forms in the present day. One obvious way of distinguishing between aesthetics and art theory in the present, is the pragmatic one of noting that those

theoreticians trained in the tradition of philosophy and philosophical aesthetics are more likely to use the word aesthetics to describe their interventions into art theory. As I noted in the first chapter, Hegel, in his discussion of the unsatisfactory use of the word aesthetics pointed out it was a 'mere name' and that as it had an established, albeit contradictory, usage it might as well go on being used, as it has been and most probably will.

How is philosophic aesthetics to be recognised in the present day? How can it be distinguished from art theory? Is it just that it is written by philosophers keeping a tradition alive? Is there any real difference anymore and why might it matter? Philosophical aesthetics cannot simply be recognised as theory about art for this takes many forms. Art historians theorize about art, psychologists have a sector concerned with the psychology of art, literary theorists write about literary texts, music theorists write about music and sonic art, film theorists write about film, and the same is true for animation, dance, theatre, visual art, jazz, rock, pop, television, radio, and all the variations on these forms, the cross-over forms and the multi-dimensional multi-disciplinary events, happenings, installations, social, political and environmental activist arts and cyber-culture. All of these arenas have theoretical expertise, knowledge, agreed rankings, re-valuations and each of these arenas has many forms recognisable under the familiar tags of traditional and avant-garde. Each of these arenas has sets of audiences for different sectors within the arena. All of these art-form theorisations could be simply called aesthetics as a very wide general name. But, in such an expanded field philosophical aesthetics would be as difficult to identify as it is now. The historical marker that philosophy bears would be an identifier. As I pointed out in chapter one, modern European philosophy is an ancient study that constantly refers back to theorisations that are hundreds, and often thousands of years old. This distinguishes philosophy from sociology, psychology and anthropology for example. It distinguishes philosophy from virtually every other discipline. Philosophers still make use of theories from the Bronze Age in their reference to ideas from the era of the pre-Socratic philosophers. This continual referencing back is an important distinguishing factor and is the marker for philosophical aesthetics as well. Philosophical aesthetics can most easily be recognised by its relationship to earlier texts that lie within the same field. This has the obvious danger of making philosophical aesthetics simply an historically orientated study, a self-contained discourse that comments on itself. That *Aesthetic Theory* is now a part of that historically orientated discourse is both ironic and inevitable. It is ironic because one of the central themes of the book is Adorno's insistence on the particularity of the artwork. Artworks, for Adorno, are not judged by external norms but make their own norms visible to interpretation. Inevitable, because the central antinomy that runs through *Aesthetic Theory* is between the particularity of any interpretative response to an artwork and the fact that such a response cannot but help make use of the heritage of concepts and language of traditional philosophical aesthetics. Adorno famously accused Kant and Hegel of writing major philosophical aesthetics 'without knowing anything about art' but the reverse is also

ironically true that knowing a great deal of detail and having experience of any particular artwork form means nowadays that the resulting text will be art-form theory as opposed to philosophical aesthetics. This again raises the question that seems to be implicit in *Aesthetic Theory* as to whether traditional philosophical aesthetics is redundant as anything other than a historical study. One dead end would be to try and argue that philosophical aesthetics should be understood as a higher level set of theorisations on art and art theory. This would be as unreasonable as philosophy trying to claim intellectual hegemony over sociology and psychology for example. Even though such disciplines can be shown to have emerged historically from philosophy, they are no longer a part of philosophy. Such disciplines have developed their own theoretical reflections on their multiple activities and are now independent of philosophy.

*Aesthetic Theory* does seem to imply that a large scale philosophical treatment of art – an ‘aesthetics’ – of a 1960s now would be impossible to write, if indeed it was ever possible. This is surely Adorno’s central message in *Aesthetic Theory*. That a discursive generic aesthetics is an impossible project. This is largely because of the increase in the numbers of disciplines forced on theoreticians by the continual growth of new media in the arts. In this sense then, philosophical aesthetics as a discipline dealing with contemporary art in all its forms has come to an end. This study of *Aesthetic Theory* leads me to suggest two judgements on *Aesthetic Theory*. First, that a large scale comprehensive treatment of philosophical aesthetics for the present day is an impossible task. The second judgement is that philosophical aesthetics has no expectations as a discourse that can or should theorise about the multi-forms of art that now exist. Philosophical aesthetics continues as an historical study.

As far as the first judgement is concerned it is clear that Adorno understood aesthetics to be inherently dialectical and radically temporal. There is a sense in which the entire history of aesthetics is encapsulated within *Aesthetic Theory* from Plato to Lukács and Benjamin and on to Adorno himself. This history is inevitably contradictory. Competing theories are set in dialectical opposition to each other not so that some grand synthesis can emerge from the conflict but that so the nature of the conflict itself can be examined. This conflict being inherently dialectical and antinomical is for Adorno not resolvable. There can be no one overall aesthetic ‘theory’ other than Adorno’s own theory of the artwork. This central idea as we have seen is a development of the Jena romantic idea that artworks are in a sense completed by reflective theory, by interpretation. It is the radically incomprehensible works of 1960s art that bring this central assumption to a crisis point for Adorno.

The second judgement on philosophical aesthetics implies that the expectation of philosophical aesthetics is now limited to its memory, limited to looking back. A great deal of philosophical aesthetics as practised today in academic circles is precisely an examination of aspects of the memory of philosophical aesthetics, it is a looking back, an industry of re-evaluations of theories from the short history of philosophical aesthetics. This is an archaeology

of philosophical aesthetics. As long as there is a memory of philosophical aesthetics that is found interesting enough to re-examine then the expectation of philosophical aesthetics is of a growing field of historical studies. The present of *Aesthetic Theory* is to be a part of its own interpretative history as a portion of the wider texts that go to make up the academic industry known as Adorno studies. In 1969, the original present of *Aesthetic Theory*, the unfinished text existed only as a private project of its author. Forty years later it is a public project with a rich history of interpretations. In this sense the present of *Aesthetic Theory* is then defined as a temporary end point in this growing phenomenon.

As far as art theory is concerned there is an enormous corpus of texts spanning a range of disciplines, musicology, philosophy, cultural studies, art theory, psychology, sociology and literary studies. Many texts in these interrelated theoretical forms claim *Aesthetic Theory* as relevant, in the same way as they might claim Kant or Hegel or Croce are relevant. This claim of relevance often consists of a theoretical mimesis of *Aesthetic Theory*. Many texts in art theory make reference to Adorno's ideas and theoretical positions. This is precisely because the field is the same. There is a sense in which *Aesthetic Theory* stages an antinomial relationship between philosophical aesthetics and art theory. There is a mimetic relationship between philosophical aesthetics and art form theory. Both imitate and have borrowed from each other and both in turn have a mimetic relationship to art. And yet *Aesthetic Theory* carries off the trick, the illusion of being both a major text in the field of aesthetics and the harbinger of the possible end of aesthetics. On the one hand, *Aesthetic Theory* signals the end of philosophical aesthetics as anything other than an historical study, and on the other hand it is still an attempt to theorise about contemporary art. Art-form theory cannot be synthesised into a whole aesthetics. But, and this is perhaps the central antinomy of *Aesthetic Theory*, in creating this text Adorno has left us an aesthetics. It gives an account of art, shows its relation to society, its structure, shows how its mimetic non-conceptual intuitive critique becomes conceptual critique in pursuit of truth. In other words Adorno has done what I suggested he implicitly claimed was no longer possible.

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