Benjamin and Adorno on Art and Art Criticism

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Critique of Art

Thijs Lijster

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Acknowledgements

Der arme Schlucker, der mit leerem Magen über den Büchern sitzt, wird erst durch ein Werk, das die Menschen aufsehen läßt, zu erweisen haben, daß er etwas anderes ist als ein Müßiggganger.
– Walter Benjamin

Abbreviations

References to the writings of Walter Benjamin and Theodor W. Adorno are given first to the English translations (if available) and then to the German original. Where no English translation was available, translations are my own. With regard to the German original, roman numerals refer to Walter Benjamin (1974-1989) *Gesammelte Schriften* (*I-VII*), edited by R. Tiedemann and H. Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp); Arabic numbers refer to Theodor W. Adorno (1973-1986) *Gesammelte Schriften* (*1-20*), edited by G. Adorno, S. Buck-Morss, and R. Tiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp). For references to German texts not included in the *Gesammelte Schriften* and English translations, I have used the following abbreviations:

ANS   Theodor W. Adorno *Nachgelassene Schriften*, published
        by the Theodor W. Adorno Archiv. Frankfurt am Main:
        Suhrkamp.
ABB   Theodor W. Adorno and Walter Benjamin (1994)
        Briefwechsel 1928-1940, edited by H. Lonitz. Frankfurt
        am Main: Suhrkamp.
ABC   Theodor W. Adorno and Walter Benjamin (1999) *The
        Complete Correspondence 1928-1940*, translated by N.
        Walker. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.
AP   Walter Benjamin (1999) *The Arcades Project*, translated
        by H. Eiland and K. McLaughlin. Cambridge MA: The
        Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
AT   Theodor W. Adorno (1997) *Aesthetic Theory*, translated
        by R. Hullot-Kentor. London: Continuum.
BB   Walter Benjamin (1966) *Briefe* (*1-2*), edited by G.
        Scholem and Th. W. Adorno (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp).
CI   Theodor W. Adorno (1991) *The Culture Industry*, edited
        by J. M. Bernstein. New York: Routledge.
CM   Theodor W. Adorno (1998) *Critical Models*, translated
        by H. W. Pickford. New York: Columbia University Press.
CWB   Walter Benjamin (1994) *The Correspondence of Walter
        Benjamin*, translated by M. R. Jabobson and E. M.
        Jacobson. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
DE   Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer (2002)
        Dialectic of Enlightenment. Philosophical Fragments,
        translated by E. Jephcott. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

EM   Theodor W. Adorno (2002) *Essays on Music*, edited by R.
            Leppert. Berkeley: University of California Press.
HTS   Theodor W. Adorno (1993) *Hegel. Three Studies*, trans-
            lated by S. Weber Nicholsen Cambridge MA: MIT Press.
INH   Theodor W. Adorno (2006) 'The Idea of Natural
            History', translated by R. Hullot-Kentor. In: R. Hullot-
            Kentor (2006) *Things Beyond Resemblance. Collected
            Essays on Theodor W. Adorno*. New York: Columbia
            University Press. 252-269.
ISM   Theodor W. Adorno (1976) *Introduction to the Sociology
            of Music*, translated by E. B. Ashton. New York: Seabury Press.
ISW   Theodor W. Adorno (1971) *In Search of Wagner*, trans-
            lated by R. Livingstone. London: Verso.
M   Theodor W. Adorno (1992) *Mahler. A Musical Physiog-
            nomy*, translated by E. Jephcott. Chicago: University of
            Chicago Press.
MM   Theodor W. Adorno (1974) *Minima Moralia. Reflections
            on a Damaged Life*, translated by E. Jephcott. London: Verso.
ND   Theodor W. Adorno (1963) *Negative Dialectics*, trans-
            lated by E. B. Ashton. London: Continuum.
NL   Theodor W. Adorno (1991-92) *Notes to Literature* (*1-2*),
            translated by S. Weber Nicholsen. New York: Columbia
            University Press.
O   Walter Benjamin (1977) *The Origin of German Tragic
            Drama*, translated by J. Osborne. London: NLB.
P   Theodor W. Adorno (1981) *Prisms*, translated by S. and
            S. Weber. Cambridge MA: MIT Press.
PNM   Theodor W. Adorno (2006) *Philosophy of New Music*,
            translated by R. Hullot-Kentor. Minneapolis: University
            of Minnesota Press.
QF   Theodor W. Adorno (1992) *Quasi una Fantasia: Essays
            on Modern Music*, translated by R. Livingstone. London: Verso.
SW   Walter Benjamin (1996-2003), *Selected Writings* (*1-4*),
            edited by M. Jennings et al., translated by E. Jephcott
            et al. Cambridge MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard
            University Press.

Introduction: Critique of Art

Digressions, incontestably, are the sun-shine; – they are the life, the soul of reading; – take them out of this book, for instance; – you might as well take the book along with them.

– Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*

When, soon after the financial crisis of 2008, several European governments announced plans to cut budgets for art and culture, a heated public debate erupted. The opinion pages in newspapers, and blogs, overflowed with comments from all kinds of people – everyone from representatives of the cultural sector (such as curators, actors, critics and so on) to philosophers, and from politicians to 'the man in the street' – arguing for, or against, the need for art in society. All sorts of demonstrations were organized against the budget cuts, for instance in Italy, Hungary, and the Netherlands. Opponents of the cuts had it that art promotes civilization and solidarity, or brings us into contact with something higher, or with ourselves; that it is a mirror of society, or simply part of our tradition, and for all these reasons deserves government support. Cutting subsidies was considered to be nothing other than a one-way ticket to barbarism. Meanwhile, supporters of the cuts asked why taxpayers should support the extravagance or 'hobbies' of others, or should promote works of art that the general public considered incomprehensible, obscure, or downright banal. Atonal music and avant-garde works such as Duchamp's urinal often functioned as whipping-boys for their arguments.

What was most striking in this public discussion was how difficult it seemed to be to come up with decisive arguments about why art mattered. The autonomy of art, which was dearly won in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, now presented itself as a problem: artists and art enthusiasts seemed unable to provide a *raison d'être* for what, to them, was evidently valuable. Thus, they unwillingly confirmed the opening lines of Theodor W. Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* (1970): 'It is self-evident that nothing concerning art is self-evident anymore, not its inner life, not its relation to the world, not even its right to exist' (AT, 1; 7, 9). Adorno was pointing up a crisis in art and aesthetics – a crisis one might describe, following art theorist Jean-Marie Schaeffer, as a legitimation crisis.[1] In my view, this crisis has by no means ended since Adorno wrote *Aesthetic Theory*. If anything, it has gotten larger

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1   Schaeffer (2000), 3.

and larger, as the debate on subsidies shows. Ever since art emancipated itself from church and state, it has seemed to flail around without a function, while attempts by philosophers and the historical avant-gardes to provide it with a new one have failed. Artists, philosophers, critics and the public have often considered art's unbridled freedom a mixed blessing: the lack of guiding principles and the sense that 'anything goes' raise questions about the value, function and responsibility of art in society. This is precisely why the same question comes up again and again in the course of modernity: Why art?

It is this question around which the present study navigates, although I certainly do not claim to provide the reader with a definitive answer. This question of the function of, and the need for, art can be approached in many ways, but in my view it can never be merely an empirical question. Although sociological research into the actual function of art in people's lives is certainly of interest to me, I am primarily concerned here with the philosophical question of how this function *should* be considered. My guides in approaching this question are two German philosophers and critics from the early and middle twentieth century, Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) and Theodor W. Adorno (1903-1969). This book is largely an investigation into their work, and into the relations between them. Undoubtedly, their theories are among the most interesting and sophisticated in twentieth-century philosophy of art and art criticism. But, one may ask, why not choose others who, it could be argued, have equal status, such as Georg Lukács or Martin Heidegger, or later thinkers such as Roland Barthes or Jacques Derrida? There are several reasons. First, there are few philosophers who were more acutely aware of the shifts in the social function and significance of art in their time. The interaction between these thinkers – which is documented in their lively correspondence as well as in essays in which they respond to each other – ushers in some of the most crucial and fascinating discussions taking place at the crossroads of aesthetics and politics: on the relation between art and historical experience, between avant-garde art and mass culture, and between the intellectual and the public, to name but a few.

Second, I believe that their work contains certain elements that have been forgotten, neglected or perhaps been too quickly dismissed in contemporary art theory. They emphasize the utopian, emancipatory and critical potential of art – that is, the ability of the work of art to break through, at least momentarily, the mythic veil that capitalism has cast over society. The work of art, they argue, allows us to view history and society in a different light. It is, in their view, nothing less than a bearer of truth. This truth, however, is accessible only through art criticism. The art critic can thus be said, as Benjamin puts it, to 'complete' the work of art. These

ideas, which were central to Benjamin's and Adorno's work – art as a form of (social) critique, art as a bearer of truth, and art criticism as a condition for disclosing this truth – are not the kinds of idea that are particularly *en vogue* today.[2] I deem them crucial, however, to the belief that works of art have something to say to us.

This already points to the subtitle of the present book. It can be read in three ways, each referring to a separate aspect. In the first place, a 'critique of art' can be read in the Kantian sense, namely as an investigation into the boundaries of what art can say or do. In my view, these boundaries are socially and historically determined. That also means that I regard the question that is traditionally central to aesthetics, namely 'What is Art?', as secondary to the question of what art does, that is, of how it functions in the world and why it is important. Here I should mention that, when I speak of art, I have in mind not just the visual arts but also literature and music, which play a prominent part in the writings of Benjamin and Adorno.

The second way in which the subtitle can be read already betrays my hypothesis regarding art's function. As I will argue, art can and should be conceived of as social critique. In arguing this, I am not primarily addressing artists, or urging them to produce so-called 'committed' art and criticize social or political structures. Rather, I want to address theorists of art, and to argue that art should be *interpreted* as critique and should be *granted* the social and historical significance it still deserves.

This is not to say, of course, that theorists should ascribe meanings to works of art in any way they please. As I will argue, by putting itself in a reciprocal and transformative relation to the singular work of art, art criticism can function as an 'interpreter' of that work of art and as a 'medium' between it and society. And this brings me to the third meaning of the subtitle. 'Critique of art' refers not only to art criticizing, but also to art that is criticized, namely by art criticism. The German word *Kritik* can mean both philosophical and social critique, as well as literary and art criticism. Although some theorists argue that these two meanings have nothing in common aside from their etymological root, I will argue that, at least for Benjamin and Adorno, they are inseparably connected. The 'critique of art' depends on art criticism, and hence art criticism is also a form of critique.

The first objective of this study, then, is to shed new light on the work of Benjamin and Adorno, and the relations between their work. To be sure, much has already been written about the famous 'Benjamin-Adorno

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2   Nevertheless, in recent years the idea of politically committed art has enjoyed something of a renaissance. I will come back to this point in the conclusion.

dispute' or 'debate'. Their differences of opinion about the utopian potential of mass culture, for instance, are textbook knowledge and are part of every introduction to cultural or media theory. However, despite the familiarity of this discussion, and arguably even because it has turned into something of a caricature of itself, the precise details of their relationship have hardly been explored. Although their correspondence is elaborately discussed by Susan Buck-Morss and Richard Wolin, for instance, neither of them takes into account Adorno's post-war writings, most notably *Aesthetic Theory*.[3] Smaller studies have explored and compared their views on specific subjects, such as philosophical form, photography, and surrealism.[4] A systematic comparison between these two philosophers, however, has yet to be written. The present study will not be able to fill this void completely, since it is primarily concerned with Benjamin's and Adorno's views on aesthetics and art criticism. More specifically, I will discuss how they address three problems: the 'end of art', the problem of the relation between art and history, and the problem of the relation between art and criticism. Although my investigation will also lead me to their philosophies of history and theories of experience, other domains which would deserve further research fall outside the scope of this book, such as their philosophies of language and their moral philosophy.

The literature on Benjamin and Adorno has focused primarily on the differences between them – their so-called 'controversy' or 'dispute'. They are often set off one against the other, as the representatives of two opposite sides in a debate on mass culture versus elite culture, the one mounting a 'rescuing' critique, the other an ideology critique (Habermas), or a discontinuous as opposed to a teleological (Hegelian) view of history. Furthermore, there is a certain tendency, as Michael Steinberg has observed, to see their relationship as similar to that between Mozart and Salieri, in the sense that Adorno is considered to be the stubborn theoretician fettering the tragic brilliance of Benjamin.[5]

Now, obviously, the differences between these philosophers are considerable, and in the following chapters I will provide a detailed discussion of

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3   Buck-Morss (1977), Wolin (1994), Chapter 6.

4   See Weber Nicholsen (1999), Chapters 4 and 5, and Wolin (1997). Some other studies, essays and volumes in which aspects of their thinking are compared are Kaiser (1974), Chapter 1 of Hanssen (1998), Hullot-Kentor (2006) and several of the contributions in Ross (2015).

5   Pensky (1993), 227 (Pensky refers to an unpublished manuscript by Steinberg). In an even more striking simile, Giorgio Agamben compares Adorno to a witch who turns the 'prince of history' into a frog with the 'magic wand of dialectical historicism', while Benjamin is the fair maiden kissing the frog and thus bringing the prince back to life. See Agamben (1993), 133. I will discuss Agamben's view of the Benjamin-Adorno dispute in Chapter 3.

them. However, in focusing on these differences and disputes, many theorists have tended to overlook the considerable similarities between their theories, thus failing to appreciate the close collaboration and 'philosophical friendship' they themselves spoke of in their letters. In this study, I will regard the relationship between Benjamin and Adorno less as a 'dispute', and more in terms of this philosophical friendship and the mutual influence it entailed. Moreover, Benjamin's influence did not end with his untimely death in 1940. I agree with Britta Scholze's argument that Benjamin, more than any other philosopher, is explicitly or implicitly present in each and every one of Adorno's writings.[6]

In my attempt to bring them closer to one another, I will read the one through the other. This means that, even when they are not explicitly referring to each other, using the same philosophical terminology, or conversing with each other, one can still conceive of their texts as addressing the same problems.[7] These problems are the ones I have referred to above, and they define the structure of this book. The first chapter, 'Autonomy and Critique', is a historical and sociological prelude to the philosophical problem that is my main concern: that of the function of, and the need for, art in society. I will provide a short 'genealogy' of the autonomy of both art practices and theory, starting with the genesis of the discourse on autonomy in the eighteenth century. Using examples of nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century art that Benjamin and Adorno also addressed, this chapter also functions as a historical contextualization of their aesthetic theories (although I do not explicitly discuss those theories here).

The second chapter, 'Ends of Art', is concerned with the most famous of Adorno's and Benjamin's 'disputes', about the latter's essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility' (1936). That essay, I will show, does not stand on its own, but draws on many themes in his early work, most notably from his book on German Baroque drama. Taking into account the context of Benjamin's work-of-art essay, I will argue that his 'dispute' with Adorno is not essentially about mass culture, but rather about the 'end of art'. I thus investigate how the idea of the end, or 'liquidation', of art, as both philosophers sometimes call it, functions in their works. The end of art can mean two things for both: first, the immanent dissolution

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6   Scholze (2000), 33. Benjamin himself once said to his cousin Egon Wissing that 'Adorno was my only disciple'. See Eiland and Jennings (2014), 359.

7   I am aware that such a 'homogenizing' way of reading is out of step with the times, especially considering the theoretical reflections on 'oeuvre' and 'authorship' by theorists such as Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida. Nevertheless, I believe it to be a fruitful strategy for reconsidering and rereading certain texts by Benjamin and Adorno.

of the semblance of the work of art and, second, the proliferation of the aesthetic brought about by technological reproduction. Their debate on the work-of-art essay ultimately comes down to the way they perceive the relation between these two 'versions' of the end of art.

After having concluded in Chapter 2 that art still has a historical role to play, I will investigate how Benjamin and Adorno regard the relation between art and history in the third chapter, 'Experience, History, and Art'. They conceive of the work of art as a repository of experience: the way in which people perceive and interact with their world and with one another is recorded in works of art. Art, in other words, is a medium of experience. However, since experience is, in their view, subject to historical change, works of art are also a form of 'unconscious historiography', as Adorno puts it. They even argue that modernist art should be understood as expressing the experience of the impossibility of experience in modernity. This impossibility of experience is caused by an alienation and a reification of consciousness, which also affect our conception of history itself. Much has been written about Benjamin's critique of the concept of historical 'progress', but Adorno is still often considered an inverted Hegelian who regards history as an unstoppable process of decline. As we will see, however, his philosophy of history draws heavily from Benjamin's, and a fresh reading of it may also shed new light on his philosophy of *art* history – most notably, his notorious theory of the 'tendency of the musical material'.

In the fourth chapter, 'The Art of Critique', I will show that, according to both Benjamin and Adorno, art criticism is essential both for the ontological existence of works of art and for our experience of them. Both philosophers conceive of works of art as essentially unfinished and fragmentary, and hold that the objective of art criticism is to 'complete' the work. This implies that, even though art still has social and historical significance, it can have this significance only if it is interpreted and criticized. I will point to the similarities and differences between their concepts of criticism, which I will illustrate through a close reading of their texts on Goethe and Mahler.

In each chapter, I will discuss Benjamin and Adorno side by side. Thus, the book is structured somewhat like a fugue, in which a subject is stated and then counter-stated in a dialogic and contrapuntal way, enhancing and contributing to its progressive development. Any discussion of the writings of these thinkers themselves demands an almost musical structuring, as it were, with the same themes and lines recurring in different registers. All their philosophical concepts are linked to each other, and often have a slightly different meaning, depending on the contexts in which they occur. Benjamin once wrote in a letter that he had 'never been able to do research and think

in any sense other than [...] a theological one, namely, in accord with the Talmudic teaching about the forty-nine levels of meaning in every passage of Torah' (CWB, 372; BB 2, 524). Benjamin's writings, like those of Adorno, demand an almost Talmudic way of reading and interpreting, in which every concept changes according to the passages they are compared with or the problems they are confronted with. And, though I try to do justice to the aesthetic side of their works, any presentation of Benjamin's and Adorno's ideas will inevitably tend to obscure the literary and essayistic aspects of those works, necessarily treating them as content taken out of their form.

Again, in emphasising the close affinity between Benjamin's and Adorno's theories, I do not mean to obscure their differences. I will discuss these at the end of each chapter, as well as in the conclusion to this book. There is a 'distance, however close' between the two philosophers, as Shierry Weber Nicholsen puts it in reference to Benjamin's definition of the aura – that is, differences so subtle that they themselves sometimes overlook them.[8] Only by putting our finger on these differences, can we recognize the full extent to which their theories overlap. But, as I have suggested above, my attempts to bring Benjamin and Adorno closer are borne not merely of historical interest. There are strategic reasons, too, to reread their work. These reasons comprise the second overall objective of my study: to show that Benjamin's and Adorno's theories, taken together despite the differences between them, could contribute to contemporary debates taking place at the crossroads of aesthetics and politics. I like to think of this strategic reading in terms of a metaphor of Plato, from his dialogue *Phaedrus*, where he compares the human soul to a charioteer who is driving a chariot. The chariot is being pulled along by two winged horses, which are, however, quite different in temperament, and sometimes wish to go in opposite directions. Benjamin and Adorno too, have their differences, of course, in terms of both opinions and their character, and their work often goes in opposite directions. At the moment, however, I think it is of greater importance to investigate to what extent their thoughts move in the same overall direction.

In his *Arcades Project*, Benjamin writes: 'The events surrounding the historian, and in which he himself takes part, will underlie his presentation in the form of a text written in invisible ink' (AP, 476; V/1, 595). In other words, the phenomena the historian writes about, and the way they write about them, are influenced by the time in which they live. That is certainly the case for the present study. I have done my research on Benjamin's and Adorno's work, not out of pure historical interest, but based on the

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8   Weber Nicholsen (1999), 222.

assumption that their theories are still topical. However, I will be of more service to the reader than the Benjaminian historian by making visible the inscription of the present. This is why I have included, between the main chapters, which are historical and exegetical, three smaller essays. I have called these excursuses, because they digress from the straight path that an academic study would standardly be expected to take. In each excursus, the issue I have just discussed in the preceding chapter is transferred to our own time and examined in light of more-recent debates.

In the first excursus, I will show how the 'end of art' debate reocurred at the end of the twentieth century, after a whole series of end-of... debates that came along with postmodernism. I will discuss how it has been conceived of by several authors, most famously Arthur Danto and Gianni Vattimo. Both of these thinkers, however, neglect crucial aspects of the 'end of art' discussion in Benjamin's and Adorno's work. This allows them to conceive of the end of art as an accomplished fact, instead of a historical chance, as the latter do. But this also means that they cannot account for the *need* for art in people's lives, and for our society – surely a crucial matter. The second excursus starts from a problem with which we find ourselves confronted at the end of the third chapter: how the artwork relates to history. I will discuss the most notorious historical answer to this question: the base-superstructure model. Although this model has been rightfully criticized, especially the dogmatic variants of it, I look at whether there may still be something to it. By using Benjamin's and Adorno's 'monadology', which I discuss in the third chapter, I attempt to combine historical materialism with what psychoanalytic theory calls the 'parallax view'. The third excursus, finally, deals with an altogether different problem, the role of the intellectual, and most notably that of the art critic. Recently, there has been much debate about the 'crisis' of, or the death or disappearance of, criticism caused by democratization and the loss of aesthetic standards. Drawing on Benjamin's and Adorno's views on art criticism, which I discuss in the fourth chapter, I will argue that the art critic still has an important public role to play in contemporary society.

The excursuses are written in a style somewhat different from that of the main chapters, and are more experimental, adventurous and specu-lative than they are. They are just first attempts, in the way of hints, to make Benjamin's and Adorno's thoughts fruitful for certain contemporary debates. Juxtaposing past and present, academic form with essay, and his-torical exegesis with experiment, I follow Benjamin's observation, 'method is digression' (O, 28; I/1, 208). However, I will leave it up to the reader to determine which parts constitute the *real* digression.

1.   Autonomy and Critique

I! I who called myself a seer or an angel, exempt from all morality, I am restored to the earth, with a duty to seek, and rugged reality to embrace! Peasant!

– Arthur Rimbaud, *A Season in Hell*

1.1   Introduction

11 April 1727: At about half past one in the afternoon, in the town of Leipzig, people gather in the Church of Saint Thomas for Good Friday vespers. It is not the first time they have been to church today: this morning they have already been to the Lutheran Mass. It is quiet in the city: the town gates are closed for the day, and iron chains keep traffic away from around the Church.

The people take their seats, and the service starts with the singing of the hymn *Da Jesus an dem Kreuze stund*. The church organ and the orchestra then strike up a beautiful but sad piece, in which two four-part choirs sing of mourning and despair: *Kommt, ihr Töchter, helft mir klagen*. Suddenly, from above the altar, a third choir of boy sopranos answers with the hopeful and comforting sound of a familiar hymn: *O Lamm Gottes, unschuldig*. After this choral opening, the story of the Passion according to Saint Matthew is told. It has been set to music by the local cantor, Johann Sebastian Bach, who has been providing the community of Leipzig with new religious music every week for over five years. The churchgoers know the biblical texts and the chorales by heart. The other texts, written by Picander (the pen name of Christian Friedrich Henrici, the postmaster general), consist of reflections on the Gospel written from the perspective of the community of believers. Both Bach's music and Picander's libretto seek to remind the congregation that the suffering of Christ does not lie in the distant past but is happening here and now, in the heart of every individual believer. Between the two parts of the Passion, the minister gives a sermon that lasts about an hour. After the second part, when the last notes of the final chorus have slowly died away, the congregation keeps its solemn silence. The motet *Ecce quomodo moritur* by Jacob Handl is performed, followed by the offertory and the benediction. Finally, after the singing of the hymn *Nun danket alle Gott*, the service draws to a close. It is getting dark outside, and the people go back home to have a light meal. They will come back to the church yet again later in the evening.

Wednesday, 11 March 1829: The *beau monde* of Berlin gathers in the afternoon at the *Singakademie* at Unter den Linden to attend a concert by the talented young conductor Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy. It is the event of the year, if not of the decade. It has been the talk of the town for weeks, and all the newspapers and journals have announced and written about it. The work to be performed this afternoon is, as a prominent critic has called it, 'the greatest work of our greatest master, the greatest and holiest musical work of all peoples, the great *Passion* music of Matthew the Evangelist by Johann Sebastian Bach'. It has not been performed since Bach's death, almost 80 years ago. Over a thousand people enter the concert hall, among them royalty, nobility, and intellectuals such as the philosophers Hegel, Schleiermacher, and Humboldt, and the poet Heinrich Heine. Another thousand have to be turned away. On stage are an orchestra, a choir of over 150 singers (more than 6 times the combined size of the choirs that performed in the Church of Saint Thomas in 1727), and the most famous and celebrated soloists of the Royal Opera House. Mendelssohn has been practicing with them for weeks. He has changed the score to accommodate the use of modern instruments, and has cut ten arias, seven choruses and a few chorales to bring the performance down to the standard length of a concert: about two hours.

The audience knows the story of Christ's suffering, of course, but it has no understanding of the Passion tradition. Once the music starts, they marvel at the beauty and intensity of this forgotten piece. The concert is a resounding success, according to both the audience and the critics (with the exception of Heine, who said he had come out ahead because he had paid a guilder but had got a thaler's worth of boredom from the experience). The critic Ludwig Rellstab calls it 'an artistic event of the highest importance'; another critic says it presages 'a new and higher period of music'. That evening, a festive dinner is held in honour of Mendelssohn and Bach. In the months to follow, the Saint Matthew Passion is performed again in Berlin and Frankfurt.[1]

One piece of music, two very different performances. What has changed in the hundred years or so that lie between them? All the specific differences – the size and placement of the orchestra and of the audience, the ceremony and the etiquette, the setting, the ambience, and even the different days of the week on which the performance take place – actually boil down to one key difference: in the first case, people are attending a

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1   For these reconstructions, I have used the following sources: Applegate (2005), Boyd (2000), Stiller (1970) and Wolff (2000).

religious service; in the second, a concert. In the first, the music is fully embedded in the liturgy, and is thus performed and experienced as such. Those in attendance are not an audience but a congregation. In the second case, people come to hear Bach's music, and this music is enjoyed for its own sake. To put it more strongly: in the second case we are dealing with a work of art, in the specific sense that I will elaborate below, whereas in the first case we are not.

According to Karol Berger, one sin endemic to the philosophy of art is to speak of art ahistorically.[2] We tend to conceptualize and analyse art without realizing that the concept is only about two hundred and fifty years old. Of course, everyone is aware of, and recognizes, the ways works of art have changed throughout history, but what we tend to neglect are the shifts in the very concept of art and the different ways in which this concept has functioned in different eras. We speak of art and beauty in general terms, in the tradition of Kant, who in his *Critique of Judgment* (1790) mentions hardly any specific artists or works of art and neglects art history altogether. The silent premise behind this sin is that we can have a concept of art that covers *all* art from *all* periods, from ancient Greek vases and Christian icons to modern paintings, and from Palestrina's masses to Mahler's symphonies.

The first philosophers to point out the importance of art history for theorizing the concept of art were nineteenth-century German philosophers such as Herder, Schlegel, Schelling, and Hegel. Although Hegel still employed a general definition of artistic beauty as 'the sensuous semblance of the idea', he acknowledged that the nature of the ideas expressed and the way in which they are expressed differ across periods and cultures.[3] Art, in Hegel's view, is the expression of the way cultures look at themselves. Hence, he considered art history an essential part of the 'science of art', as he described it in the prologue to his *Lectures on Aesthetics* (1835). Moreover, Hegel argued that art has a specific historical function, which makes it a necessary element of spiritual life during a certain phase in world history, though it will become more or less superfluous later on.[4]

The lesson to be learned from Hegel and the Romantics is that our concept of art today differs as much from, say, Aristotle's as does our concept of 'movement' from his, primarily because both the objects we are referring to and the concepts we are using have different functions at different times.

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2   Berger (2002), 109.
3   Hegel (1970), I, 151.
4   This is, of course, the famous thesis of the 'end of art', upon which I will elaborate below.

Greek temples or vases, for instance, were in their own time not considered works of art, at least not in our sense of the word. The same goes for an early-Christian icon, a madrigal from the Middle Ages, or an African mask.[5] When these objects were created, their social function differed radically from the function they have today, or that contemporary art has. We should subscribe to the dictum of Fredric Jameson: 'Always historicize!' Jameson calls it the one absolute and 'transhistorical' imperative.[6] This applies especially to such a hybrid, contested concept such as 'art'.

The concept of art, as we know it, is not self-evident; the social function of art has changed over the years and is changing still. A genealogy of art will neither validate nor dismiss the present concept and social function of art, because unveiling the historical process behind a phenomenon is an argument neither for nor against it. However, by locating certain shifts in the social function of art and pinpointing the specific historical conditions that have informed them, we can gain a better understanding of the social function of art in our time. Of course, my interest is not purely historical: I aim to continue what Benjamin calls a 'telescoping of the past through the present' (AP, 471; V/1, 588), by which he meant that our image of the past is as much determined by the present as our understanding of the present is determined by the past.

As many theorists have argued, the most important shifts in the concept and function of art took place at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries, when art became 'autonomous'.[7] The autonomy of art is of course a difficult and multi-faceted concept. It can refer to many things, such as the autonomy of the *concept* of art, the autonomy of the *aesthetic experience* or *judgment*, the autonomy of art as an *institution*, the autonomy of the *artist*, and the autonomy of the *work* of art. One could tell a story about each of these distinct autonomies, but in my view it is more interesting to show how they have arisen and how each has influenced the others.

The idea of the autonomy of art is traditionally opposed to the idea that art has a moral or political function. This chapter also discusses the idea of

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5   As André Malraux famously wrote: 'The Middle Ages were as unaware of what we mean by the word 'art' as were Greece and Egypt, who had no word for it. For this concept to come into being, works of art needed to be isolated from their functions. What common link existed between a 'Venus' which *was* Venus, a crucifix which *was* Christ crucified, and a bust? But three 'statues' can be linked together' (Malraux (1978), 158).

6   Jameson (1981), 9.

7   See, for instance, Bürger (1984), Schmidt (1989), Bell-Villada (1996), Berger (2002), and Woodmansee (1994).

art as critique, of so-called 'committed' art. Historically, these two ways of viewing art and artistic life – as autonomous or as critically engaged – have been alternately dominant, sometimes coexisting peacefully, but often diametrically opposed to each other. Art was either said to be, in Oscar Wilde's famous words, 'quite useless', or held to be, in a Marxist phrase of disputed origin, 'not a mirror held up to reality, but a hammer with which to shape it.' As we will see, however, the relation between these two different viewpoints is somewhat more complex than this apparently simple either/or would seem to suggest.

I will start by discussing the birth of the concept of autonomy in eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century aesthetics, most notably in the work of Kant and Schiller. Their theories mark the beginning of the idea of autonomous art, and have been a constant inspiration for the different 'art for art's sake' movements throughout history. Simultaneously, however, their theories form the basis for modern thinking about a critical or moral function of art. Historical, social and economic conditions help explain how Kant's and Schiller's theories found such a large audience. In the second part of this chapter, I will sketch the way in which the notion of 'art for art's sake' found its way into nineteenth-century artistic life. Kant and Schiller's ideas resonated among artists who found themselves caught between a situation of courtly or clerical patronage on the one hand, and the new free market on the other. Through a discussion of literary life in Paris that focuses primarily on Charles Baudelaire, and of musical life in Vienna, focusing on Mozart and Beethoven, we will see how the artistic market changed the position of the artist, and how both theorists and the public conceived of art and the artist. In the third part of this chapter, I will pinpoint the shifts in the concept of art during the early twentieth century, again in Paris and Vienna, by discussing the Surrealist movement and the work of the composer Arnold Schoenberg.

The choice of Paris and Vienna is by no means arbitrary. These cities, each in their own way, have been crucial for the thought of the protagonists in this study. Walter Benjamin visited Paris many times before living there, in exile, from 1933 until his death in 1940. The Surrealist movement, based in Paris, had a decisive influence on his thinking, while the city, as well as its famous inhabitant Baudelaire, was the primary research subject of his last years. Adorno spent several years in Vienna, taking classes in musical composition with Alban Berg and studying piano with Eduard Steuermann, both of whom were disciples of Arnold Schoenberg. Adorno wrote books on Beethoven, Mahler, Schoenberg, and Berg, and for many years the music of the Second Viennese School was the epitome, for him, of autonomous

art. Hence, although I do not refer directly to Benjamin and Adorno in this chapter, they will already figure in the background.

1.2   The birth of autonomy

The eighteenth century saw the birth of our modern concept of art. In the Middle Ages, and up until the end of the seventeenth century, the various disciplines of what we would today call art fell into two categories: the *artes mechanicae* and the *artes liberales*. Painting and sculpture belonged to the former, together with the other crafts and applied arts. The seven liberal arts, which actually also comprised what we today call sciences, were further divided into two categories, each with its own subcategories: three sciences of the word, *grammatica, retorica* and *dialectica*, and four of the number: *aritmetica*, *geometria, astronomia* and *musica*. Crafts, arts, and sciences were thus classified quite differently from how they are classified today.[8]

In the course of the seventeenth century, this order was gradually replaced by a separation between arts and sciences on the one hand, and the new distinction between applied (or mechanical) arts and 'fine' arts on the other. An important step towards a *concept* of art (as distinguished from the plural 'arts') was an essay by the Abbé Charles Batteux, *The Fine Arts Reduced to a Single Principle* (1746). As the title indicates, Batteux subsumed the different arts – music, poetry, painting, sculpture and dance – under 'fine arts', based on the principle that they give pleasure without having an external purpose.[9]

Following Batteux, a number of German philosophers reflected on the concept of art, and sought to separate and free it from any external purpose it might serve. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, in his *Laocoön* (1766), writes:

> I should like the name of 'works of art' to be reserved for those alone in which the artist could show himself actually as artist, in which beauty has been his first and last object. All the rest, in which too evident traces of religious ritual appear, are unworthy of the name, because Art here has not wrought on her own account, but has been an auxiliary of religion, looking in the material representations which she made of it more to the significant than to the beautiful.[10]

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8   Heinich (1996a), 12.
9   Woodmansee (1994), 13.
10   Lessing in Bernstein (ed., 2003), 64-65.

Karl Philipp Moritz published two important texts, *Attempt at a Unification of All the Fine Arts and Sciences Under the Concept of That Which is Perfect in Itself* (1785) and *On the Artistic Imitation of the Beautiful* (1788), in which he ascribed intrinsic value to the fine arts. Moritz characterized works of art as 'self-sufficient totalities' and linked beauty to uselessness:

> For the concept of the useless, insofar as it has no end, no purpose outside itself for which it exists, is the closest and most willing to connect up to the concept of the beautiful insofar as the beautiful does not *need* an end, a purpose for existing, except itself, but finds its whole worth, the end of its existence, within itself.[11]

Three decades earlier, Alexander Baumgarten had published the two volumes of his *Aesthetica* (1750–58), in which he first uses the term 'aesthetics' in its modern meaning. 'Aesthetics' was up until then known as the science of perception. This is the sense in which we can find the term in the work of Descartes and still in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781). With Baumgarten, aesthetics becomes the name of the philosophical discipline specifically concerned with the beautiful.[12] The notion of an autonomous domain of art was slowly but surely developing in the minds of late-eighteenth-century philosophers, of whom Immanuel Kant was undoubtedly the most important.

The work of Kant marks a turning point and a true 'Copernican revolution' in many branches of philosophy – and his writing on aesthetics was no exception. His *Critique of Judgment* is a key text of modern aesthetics, introducing or systematically elaborating such notions as 'disinterestedness', 'purposiveness without a purpose', 'genius', and the 'sublime' – concepts that have been central to aesthetics ever since. But we should not be mistaken about Kant's project. Although it is often read this way, the *Critique of Judgment* is primarily concerned, not with the question: What is art? but with the transcendental question: How is an aesthetic judgment possible? I will not discuss how Kant attempts to answer this question. What is most important for now is that, in order to answer it, he distinguishes aesthetic judgments from judgments both on the agreeable (for instance, 'This meal tastes nice') and on the good ('This deed is good'). Both kinds of judgment, he holds, are

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11   Moritz in Bernstein (ed., 2003), 136.
12   It is worth noting that, for Baumgarten, as for Kant, aesthetics is concerned with both the beauty of nature and the beauty of art, and that both hold the latter to be inferior to the former. The aesthetic theories of Schelling and Hegel reverse this hierarchy for the first time.

connected with a certain interest (one either desires the object or wants the deed to happen), while aesthetic judgment is 'devoid of all interest'.[13]

Moreover, Kant argues that aesthetic judgments, in contrast to moral judgments, are based, not on a concept of what the beautiful object is, but on a feeling. Nevertheless, and precisely because of their 'disinterestedness', aesthetic judgments make a claim to universality. Because no individual interests are involved in my judgment, there is no reason why everybody should not share it, even if I am unable to give arguments in support of it. The feeling of the beautiful, according to Kant, is grounded in the 'free play' of the cognitive faculties intuition and understanding, which everyone shares – hence his definition of beauty as 'what, without a concept, is liked universally'.[14] Kant's other famous characterization of beauty as 'purposiveness without purpose' is derived from this. Certain objects are held to be beautiful because they seem fit to fulfil their purpose in nature or society. Kant calls these 'accessory' or 'adherent' beauties, and mentions humans, horses and buildings as examples. But a judgment that objects possess true and 'free' beauty is made without our knowing their actual purpose, even if their sheer form forces us to presuppose such a purpose.[15]

Although Kant was, as we will see, often thought of as one of the founding fathers of the idea of 'art for art's sake', this was never his intention and is far from what he writes. He makes clear that, although the aesthetic judgment should arise autonomously, that implies neither that an interest cannot be attached to it afterwards, nor that a beautiful object could not have an external purpose.[16] Towards the end of part one of the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant even connects beauty explicitly to morality: 'Now I maintain that the beautiful is the symbol of the morally good.'[17] Kant argues that, while moral considerations should play no part in deciding whether an object is beautiful, beauty can indeed play a part in people's moral education.

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13   Kant (1987), 211:53. Here and in subsequent references, the page number in the Akademie edition appears before the colon; that in Pluhar's translation of the *Critique of Judgment,* after it.

14   Ibidem, 219:64.

15   Ibidem, § 16 (229-231: 76-78).

16   In § 41 of the *Critique of Judgment* he writes: 'That a judgment of taste by which we declare something to be beautiful must not have an interest *as its determining basis* has been established sufficiently above. But it does not follow from this that, after the judgment has been made as a pure aesthetic one, an interest cannot be connected with it' (Kant [1987], 296: 163).

17   Kant (1987), 353: 228. This passage has puzzled many scholars, and is still a point of much debate. However, that debate falls outside the scope of this chapter. See Allison (2001), Chapters 10 and 11, for an in-depth discussion of the relation between disinterestedness and morality.

Kant does not make any pronouncements on the autonomy of the practice of art, or the social status of the artist. He argues that *judgments* of the beautiful should be autonomous, in the sense that, in order for a judgment to be purely about taste, it should be disconnected from subjective interests, moral concerns or truth claims. The popularity Kant's theories came to enjoy among artists is mostly because of the mediation of the romantic playwright and philosopher Friedrich Schiller, who complemented Kant's aesthetic theory with anthropology and social critique. In *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1795), a collection of letters to his patron, the Duke of Augustenburg, Schiller describes human beings as torn in two by conflicting forces, which he calls the sensuous and the formal impulses.[18] In ancient Greece, Schiller argues, these were still in harmony, but in modern society, people's individual development becomes one-sided and distorted. Their impulses constantly strive for domination, and when either of the two gets the upper hand, people turn into either wild animals or heartless intellectuals. As long as they are not able to achieve harmony between these impulses, people have no individual freedom, and without this they are not ready for political freedom. In Schiller's view, the reign of terror following the French Revolution was a clear illustrative example of this inability and this lack of readiness.

Harmony between the two impulses can be achieved, according to Schiller, only through a third impulse, which results from the interplay of the first two: the impulse to play.[19] Schiller writes: 'For, to declare it once and for all, Man plays only when he is in the full sense of the word a man, and *he is wholly Man only when he is playing.*'[20] The expression of this impulse to play, according to Schiller, is art, and it is therefore only through art that people can be educated and become truly free.

It seems that Schiller has formulated a clear purpose for art: to educate people, thus bringing about political freedom. And yet he rejects any notion of functional or instrumental art, as he makes clear in his second letter, where he criticizes the way modern society treats its poets:

> But today Necessity is master, and bends a degraded humanity beneath its tyrannous yoke. *Utility* is the great idol of the age, to which all powers must do service and all talents swear allegiance. In these clumsy scales

18 Schiller (1954), 64-67. These two impulses can be considered as anthropological translations of the two Kantian domains, necessity and moral law.
19 Ibidem, 74.
20 Ibidem, 80 (italics in the original).

the spiritual service of Art has no weight; deprived of all encouragement, she flees from the noisy mart of our century.[21]

Schiller condemns his age and society, in which, he says, everything must have a function or serve a purpose. This attitude, he argues, results in a general hostility towards art and artists, who serve no purpose and have no function. He writes:

> We must therefore acknowledge those people to be entirely right who declare the Beautiful, and the mood into which it transports our spirit, to be wholly indifferent and sterile in relation to *knowledge* and *mental outlook*. They are entirely right; for Beauty gives no individual result whatever, either for the intellect or for the will; it realizes no individual purpose, helps us to perform no individual duty, and is, in a word, equally incapable of establishing the character and clearing the mind.[22]

In the spirit of Lessing, Moritz and Kant, but more forcefully and emphatically than they do, Schiller formulates here the idea and *ideal* of an art that exists for no outside purpose, an art that exists only for its own sake and is, indeed, quite useless.

In the work of both Kant and Schiller, we are confronted with the peculiar combination of two ideas about art: as the object of a 'pure' aesthetic experience and as a means of moral or political education. Many scholars have had difficulties reconciling these two seemingly contradictory notions. Siegfried Schmidt argues that Kant's and Schiller's concept of autonomy lays the groundwork for the 'depoliticization' (*Entpolitisierung*) of art.[23] Likewise, Martha Woodmansee holds that Schiller, in arguing for the autonomy of art, betrays his original project of emancipation and propagates 'the kind of freedom to dream that is the consolation of the subjects of even the most repressive regimes.'[24] These remarks neglect, in my view, the dialectical character of Schiller's theory, according to which art can be politically meaningful only by refraining from an immediate political function.[25] Nevertheless, Schmidt and Woodmansee do ask why Schiller would stress

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21   Schiller (1954), 26 (italics in the original).
22   Ibidem, 101 (italics in the original).
23   Schmidt (1989), 369.
24   Woodmansee (1994), 59.
25   As Peter Bürger writes, 'Schiller attempts to show that it is on the very basis of its autonomy, its not being tied to immediate ends, that art can fulfill a task that cannot be fulfilled in any other way: the furtherance of humanity' (Bürger 1984, 44).

the autonomy of art in his time, and investigate, by way of an answer, the economic and social-historical conditions that can give rise to the autonomy of art (or, in Schiller's case, of literature).

Many factors contribute to the autonomy of the 'social system' of literature, as well as to the genesis of the idea of autonomous art, in the eighteenth century: the professionalization of the author, the development of copyright laws, technological improvements in printing and in the paper industry, the change in the status of the artist from craftsman to 'genius', and, most importantly, the rise and growth of a literate middle class, which in turn led to an enormous increase in the demand for literary works.[26] Towards the end of the century, nearly 25 percent of the German population was literate – twice as high as it had been a few decades earlier.[27] Some German critics expressed their worries about this 'reading mania'. A series of journal articles in 1789 and 1790 discussed the 'causes of the contemporary ubiquitous ink-slinging [*Vielschreiberei*] in Germany.'[28]

These developments made it possible for German men of letters to live by the pen, especially because patronage was less common in Germany than it was in France and England. The provincial German nobility, scattered over small city-states and principalities and relatively impoverished after the Thirty Years' War, was generally not that interested in art, and where it was, it preferred French art.[29] As Norbert Elias argues in *The Civilizing Process*, the German literary movement of the second half of the eighteenth century was also a social movement that contrasted what it saw as the 'cold reason' and empty rituals of the aristocracy with the true and honest culture of the middle class. The movement's ideal of *Kultur* was opposed to aristocratic *Zivilisation*.[30] According to these writers, the French idea of civilization primarily promoted norms of public behaviour in matters of politics, morals, religion, taste, and so on, and was thus, in their view, superficial, hypocritical and false. They held that culture, by contrast, had nothing to do with behavioural norms and was a matter of honesty and virtue: it concerned one's inner being, and one's deepest emotions and convictions. It was in this ideal of culture, voiced most prominently by Goethe's Werther, that the German middle class invented itself.

26 Schmidt (1989), 286.
27 Woodmansee (1994), 25.
28 Schmidt (1989), 292.
29 Schmidt notes, for instance, that Wieland was first noticed in Germany once his novels had been translated into French (Schmidt [1989], 288n).
30 See Elias (1978), especially 1–35.

The new generation of writers thus readily embraced the possibility of writing for a middle-class audience. Woodmansee takes the literary career of Schiller as an example of this generation. In a piece he wrote for a periodical and that was published in 1784, Schiller boldly declared:

> The public is now everything to me, my school, my sovereign, my trusted friend. I now belong to it alone. I shall place myself before this and no other tribunal. It alone do I fear and respect. Something grand comes over me at the prospect of wearing no other throne than the human spirit.[31]

Schiller's enthusiasm for the free literary market did not last long, however. While his play *The Robbers* (1781) was a great public success, the audience responded coolly to his later works. Theatre managers preferred other playwrights, who could finish a play within a few weeks, to Schiller, who took more than three years to write *Don Carlos* (1787), for instance. A few years after his paean to the public, Schiller began to realize that there might be a larger reading audience available, but that it was not necessarily interested in his plays or in the work of other esteemed poets such as Wieland and Goethe. Instead, the public wanted to read what he called 'mindless, tasteless, and pernicious novels, dramatized stories, so-called journals for the ladies and the like.'[32] When in 1791 the Danish Duke of Augustenburg offered the impoverished poet a patronage, he jumped at it. And in 1799, fifteen years after he had declared his love for the public, he wrote a letter to his friend Goethe, saying that 'the only possible relationship to the public is war.'[33]

What does the case of Schiller tell us? First, it shows that he, Lessing, Moritz and Kant produced their philosophical theories on the autonomy of art and of individual works of art against the backdrop of the actual development of an autonomous sphere of art in society. The autonomy of art was, in other words, not just a philosophical theorem or a discourse, but also a social fact. Second, it shows us that the relation of artists towards this newly won freedom was, to say the least, ambivalent. On the one hand, the decline of patronage by the Church and the state was welcomed as a kind of liberation. On the other hand, the new market in which artists were forced to operate brought new constraints with it. This ambivalence would become even more apparent in the two cases I will discuss in the following section.

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31   Quoted in Woodmansee (1994), 41.
32   Ibidem, 29.
33   Ibidem, 29. See also Schmidt (1989), 306–307.

1.3 The artist in the marketplace

In the preceding section, I touched on the relation between shifts in philosophical theories on the autonomy of art and shifts in the social situation of the artist. In this section, I will elaborate on the changes in the social situation of art and artists by discussing literary life in nineteenth-century Paris and musical life in Vienna. This is not to suggest that this period in the artistic life of Paris or Vienna marks the 'beginning' of autonomous art or artists – speaking of 'beginnings' or 'first times' in history is always precarious. The social situation of art depends on geographical borders and on the art form. One could argue, for instance, that seventeenth-century Dutch Realism marks the beginning of autonomous painting.[34] In France, on the other hand, the institutional power of the *Académie* makes it hard to speak meaningfully of autonomous painting before the *Salon des refusés* (1863, the birthplace of impressionism) and the *Salon des indépendants* (1884).[35] Moreover, there are many kinds of artist-patron relationship along a continuum from control by the Church or the state at one end and, at the other, a completely free market, and this often makes it difficult to establish how 'autonomous' an artist actually is or was.[36]

And yet, nineteenth-century literary life in Paris and musical life in Vienna saw important shifts in the social situation of art and the artist. Paris was the cradle of artistic 'bohemia' – the city where the notion of *l'art pour l'art* had its most enthusiastic proponents. It was the centre of literary innovation, of new literary styles and genres, and the home of such influential poets and writers as Balzac, Hugo, and Baudelaire. Benjamin referred to Paris as the 'capital of the nineteenth century', the place where 'modern life' itself was invented.

Vienna around 1800 became the musical capital of Europe and kept this position throughout the nineteenth century. Its rich court and nobility were keenly interested in music, and attracted many composers who wanted to make a living there. It was the home of what we now call the 'First Viennese School', whose importance cannot be overestimated.[37] In Vienna, as

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34 See Alpers (1988). As Alpers argues, this autonomy does not only concern the free bourgeois market, but also the introduction of scenes from everyday life in painting, as contrasted with Biblical, mythological, or courtly scenes.

35 See Boime (1970) and Heinich (1996a), 35. Note that these examples only concern the Western world. Some scholars have argued that, during the Song Dynasty (960-1368), China had a free market of works of art (Hamilton (2007), 185).

36 See Williams (1995), especially Chapters 2 and 3.

37 The name 'First Viennese School', referring to Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Joseph Haydn and Ludwig van Beethoven (and sometimes also Franz Schubert) has been given in retrospect,

I will show, not only did the character of music itself change, but also the appreciation and social position of the composer and of music as an art form.

1.3.1   Literary life in Paris

> Baudelaire knew the true situation of the man of letters: he goes
> to the marketplace as a flâneur, supposedly to take a look at it
> but in reality to find a buyer.
> – Walter Benjamin, 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire'[38]

Nowhere was the rise of the middle class felt more deeply than in France. The revolution of 1789 and the proclamation of the First Republic in 1791 marked the end of the absolute power of the *Ancien Régime*. In the course of the nineteenth century the 'third estate' or bourgeoisie became the dominant class, politically as well as culturally. This shift in the structure of society has a tremendous impact on the arts, which up until then could count on the nobility for protection. In the *Ancien Régime*, the patronage of artists was considered a status symbol. The Sun King, Louis XIV, supported a variety of artists (for instance Racine and Corneille), who received royal honours and lodging in Versailles. Contrary to what is often thought, patronage did not necessarily entail subordination. These artists often had considerable freedom to produce as they pleased. That said, to a certain extent they had to take into account the tastes of their patron, and this taste was generally theirs as well, since it reflected what was traditionally considered to be good art. César Graña writes:

> What made aristocratic literature 'aristocratic' was not any one subject
> or aesthetic. It was rather the capacity of this literature to reflect a milieu
> which, by putting intellectual craftsmanship under the protection of
> traditional power, allowed the perpetuation of certain concerns of taste
> and imagination.[39]

This protection by patrons, along with the standards of taste patron and artist shared, starts to change once the bourgeoisie seized power. While

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and only after the rise of the 'Second Viennese School' (whose best-known members are Arnold Schoenberg, Alban Berg and Anton Webern). The first 'School', however, was never a school in the sense of the second, which had a common project and teacher (Schoenberg).

38   SW 4, 17; I/2, 536.

39   Graña (1964), 38. There is also an aristocratic *theory* of art, namely the (Platonic) idea that art allows us to see things as they truly are. A discussion of this theory, however, falls outside the scope of this chapter (but see Heinich (1996a)).

Napoleon still protected some artists (most notably the painter Jacques-Louis David), the installation of the so-called July Monarchy after the revolution of 1830 ushered in difficult times for the artists. The popular and liberal *roi bourgeois* Louis-Philippe was not that interested in art. He wanted to be the 'King of the French' rather than the 'King of France' – a people's king, in other words – and he considered art an exorbitant luxury that would only obstruct this goal.[40]

The dwindling level of aristocratic patronage meant that artists had to look for new ways to make a living, and for new audiences. They fund them in the ever-growing crowd of new middle-class readers: an anonymous patronage of the market. As Jerrold Seigel writes: 'For artists and writers, the basic change is as easily summarized as it was often noticed: patronage gave way to the market.'[41] The collapse of the *Ancien Régime* caused major changes in the production, distribution, and reception of literature. During Louis XVI's reign, only 36 printing houses were allowed in France. Books were luxury products, purchased almost exclusively by the aristocracy. The number of copies hardly ever exceeded a thousand, and only bibles and almanacs were printed and sold on a larger scale. Of course, industrialization contributed to the increase in production. While the traditional wooden hand press could print about 250 sheets per hour, by 1834 the iron, steam-driven mechanical press could manage 3,600 sheets per hour.[42] Technological, economic and demographic factors turned publishing into an industry. In 1814, 3,000 new titles appeared; 50 years later this number had increased to almost 14,000.[43]

Newspapers, too, became increasingly popular. In Paris alone, the number of daily newspapers grew from 11 in 1811 to 26 in 1846.[44] During the first decades of the nineteenth century, however, newspapers were sold only by subscription, and were not generally affordable. In 1836, Emile de Girardin, publisher of the newspaper *La Presse*, started a trend by lowering the price of a subscription from 80 to 40 francs, drawing the rest of his income from advertisements. Other publishers soon followed, and in France as a whole the number of subscriptions grew from 47,000 in 1824 to 70,000 in 1836 and to 200,000 in 1846 (SW 4, 13; I/2, 528).

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40   See Boime (1970) and Seigel (1986), 13.
41   Seigel (1986) 13. Seigel focuses primarily on the social status of writers. For the case of painting see also White and White (1965).
42   Bell-Villada (1996), 42.
43   Allen (1991), 33.
44   Graña (1964), 32.

The impact that these changes had on literary life in Paris can hardly be overestimated.[45] The publishing industry and the newspapers created a market for literature, and most notably for the *roman feuilleton*. The *feuilleton* is a kind of cultural supplement, containing gossip, criticism, fashion news, and short stories, which are often inspired by the news of the day. Around the middle of the nineteenth-century, newspapers started publishing novels, too – a short section every day, often containing a cliffhanger at the end. Full of incident and adventure, these serial novels attracted new subscribers to the newspapers, and the *roman feuilleton* became extremely popular. Eugène Sue, for instance, writer of the serial novel *The Mysteries of Paris* (1842-1843), received a letter from a friend saying:

> Your work is everywhere – on the worker's bench, on the merchant's counter, on the little lady's divan, on the shop-girl's table, on the officeworker's and magistrate's desk. I am sure that of the entire population in Paris, only those people who cannot read do not know of your work.[46]

The writer and critic Théophile Gautier wrote that even the illiterate would buy Sue's novel and have it read to them, and that the sick would delay their deaths in order to finish it.

Consequently, the financial situation of many serial novelists was strong. Sue, for instance, received an advance of a 100,000 francs for *The Mysteries of Paris*. Newspapers paid well, sometimes up to 2 francs per line (which explains why long dialogues were introduced), so business was booming for productive authors such as Sue, George Sand and Alexandre Dumas.[47] The publishers usually got value for their money: after the newspaper *Le Constitionell* contracted Sue, circulation increased from 3,000 to 40,000, while *Le Siècle* gained 100,000 subscribers by publishing one of Dumas's novels.[48] Literature had become big business.

The democratization and commodification of literature were accompanied by utopian visions and exalted declarations reminiscent of Schiller's

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45   The most vivid illustration of the impact of journalism on literary life remains Honoré de Balzac's *Lost Illusions* (1837-1843). Its protagonist is a provincial and naïve adolescent who travels to Paris in order to become a famous novelist, but soon falls prey to the world of journalism and the publishing industry.

46   Quoted in Allen (1991), 55.

47   Of Dumas, writer of famous serial novels such as *The Three Musketeers* and *The Count of Monte Cristo*, it was rumoured that he owed his productivity to an army of poor writers he kept locked in his basement (I/2, 532 and Allen (1991), 35).

48   Graña (1964), 34.

In 1832 the magazine *L'Artiste* published the following statement:

> Today the artist is placed in the middle of society as a whole, he takes inspiration from the desires and sufferings of everyone, he speaks to all, he cries for all; he is no longer a retainer but a part of the people; he expects to be paid only for his work and the free products of his genius. His social position has therefore become more moral, more independent, more able to favour the progress of art.[49]

On this view, in other words, the public would from now on decide the author's fate. It soon became clear, however, that the market was not kind to everybody, and many writers found themselves unable to profit from it. For every success story of a Sue or a Dumas, there were plenty of starving artists in literary bohemia, centred in the Latin Quarter of Paris and famously portrayed by Henry Murger in his *Scenes from the Bohemian Life* (1845-46). Bohemia, which according to Murger was the 'short road to the morgue', might be considered the first subculture in modernity. The literary market caused, in the words of Pierre Bourdieu, 'the inflow of a substantial population of young people without fortunes, issuing from the middle or popular classes of the capital and especially the provinces, who come to Paris trying for careers as writers and artists.'[50] In his classic study *Bohemian Paris* (1986), Jerrold Seigel characterizes this artistic reserve army as both a part of and an antipode to the bourgeoisie. The bohemians shared the bourgeois values of freedom, equality, and fraternity, but considered newly emerging forms of exploitation and alienation to be a sign of the bourgeoisie's betrayal of these values. The bohemian lifestyle, which involved, among other things, a romanticization and dramatization of social and economic maladies (poverty, crime, and prostitution), was the expression of the ambivalence lying at the very heart of the bourgeois.[51]

Surely not every poet was condemned to bohemia. Some, such as Stendhal and Flaubert, lived off an inheritance, while others, such as the Parnassian poets, were supported by a niche market of aristocrats and upper-class bourgeois, whom they meet in literary circles and salons. Nevertheless, it is evident that high literary quality was in itself no guarantee of popular success. There was no longer a self-evident common tradition and shared

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49   Quoted in Seigel (1986), 15.
50   Bourdieu (1996), 54.
51   Seigel (1986), especially Chapter 1.

taste between author and public. More often their interests even ran counter
to one another. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the literary
elite considered popular success, in the words of the poet Leconte de Lisle,
'the mark of intellectual inferiority'.[52]

In this milieu, the theories of Moritz, Kant, and Schiller found fertile
ground. Émigrés such as Madame de Staël and Benjamin Constant intro-
duced their theories to the French public. Their reports, however, were
based on hearsay rather than on close scrutiny. Kant's *Critique of Judgment*,
which was not translated into French until 1846, was therefore reduced to a
set of phrases.[53] Nevertheless, this misunderstanding of German aesthetics
spawned the most important doctrine of nineteenth-century French litera-
ture, namely that of *l'art pour l'art* (art for art's sake). Théophile Gautier's
preface to *Mademoiselle Maupin* (1835) is often considered to be a manifesto
for this doctrine. He writes:

> The useless alone is truly beautiful; everything useful is ugly, since it
> is the expression of a need, and man's needs are, like his pitiful, infirm
> nature, ignoble and disgusting. – The most useful place in the house is
> the latrines.[54]

The idea that an artwork is produced with no other goal than art itself
appealed to many a poet, especially to those disillusioned by the market, or
by the failed revolution of 1848. Authors such as Flaubert, Leconte de Lisle,
and later Verlaine, Rimbaud and Mallarmé, distanced themselves both
from literature reflecting bourgeois values and from so called 'socialist'
art, which, taking its cue from Hugo, portrayed the suffering of the lower
classes.[55] Despite their vast differences, these writers shared a contempt for
public taste and for any external purpose the work of art was supposed to
serve, whether this was commercial or political or propounded bourgeois
morality. By the 1870s, the doctrine of art for art's sake was so well known
that Flaubert could include it in his *Dictionary of Accepted Ideas*: 'Artists.
All charlatans. Praise their disinterestedness.'[56]

Apart from the idea of disinterestedness, the Romantic notion of the
'genius' dominated the self-image of the nineteenth-century artist. While,

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52   Quoted in Bourdieu (1996), 83.
53   See Bell-Villada (1996), 35-36.
54   Gautier in: Harrison and Wood (eds., 1992), 99.
55   Bourdieu (1996), 71.
56   Flaubert (1954), 16.

roughly stated, the criterion for quality had lain in the extent to which the rules of good taste were followed, a new paradigm emerged in which the greatness of the artist was expressed rather by the extent to which they broke the rules. The 'new', the 'strange', the 'original', and the 'abnormal' become the new artistic values.[57] The image of the artist, including the image that artists had of themselves, entered the 'regime of singularity', as Heinich calls it.[58] The notion of artistic genius reflected artists' ambivalence towards the public. On the one hand they regarded themselves as spokespersons for the truth, and therefore as representatives of 'real' humanity. They believed that through their art they pointed the way – they were part of the *avant-garde* of society.[59] However, their message often went unheard and they were not recognized as the prophets they thought themselves to be. Consequently, the genius felt alienated from the crowd – an unsung hero. This alienation was expressed, for instance, in Baudelaire's poem 'The Albatross'. The albatross in this poem becomes an allegory for the poet, gracefully floating through the sky, but moving clumsily on deck when sailors catch it:

> The Poet is a kinsman in the clouds
> Who scoffs at archers, loves a stormy day;
> But on the ground, among the hooting crowds,
> He cannot walk, his wings are in the way.[60]

The poet and critic Charles Baudelaire epitomized the poet's ambivalence in nineteenth-century France. All the contradictions of the era were combined in his person and in his work: revolutionary and proponent of pure art who both praised and scorned the bourgeoisie, he was a poet of classic beauty and profane vulgarity, an unwilling bohemian and a wannabe dandy.

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57   See Laermans (2009), 132-133.
58   Heinich (1996a), Chapter 3. For painting, the definitive shift from academism to singularity is marked by Van Gogh, as Heinich argues in her case study: 'The new Vangoghian paradigm quite literally embodies a series of shifts in artistic value, from work to man, from normality to abnormality, from conformity to rarity, from success to incomprehension, and, finally, from (spatialized) present to (temporalized) posterity. These are, in sum, the principal characteristics of the order of singularity in which the art world is henceforth ensconced' (Heinich (1996b), 146).
59   The utopian socialist Claude Henri de Saint-Simon first uses the military term *avant-garde* in connection to artists: 'It is we, the artists, who will serve you as an avant-garde: the power of the arts is in fact most immediate and most rapid: when we wish to spread new ideas among men, we inscribe them on marble and canvas' (Quoted in Egbert (1970), 121).
60   Baudelaire (1993), 17.