

ART, ALIENATION AND MASS COMMUNICATION

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DECLARATION

This dissertation is the unaided work of the candidate.
No part of this dissertation has been or is to be
submitted for a degree in any other university.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'B Kotzen', is written over a horizontal line.

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Johannesburg 1982.

ABSTRACT

The dissertation investigates the relationship between art and society and discusses the influence of ideological factors in the creation of the artwork. Attention is therefore devoted to the problem of the autonomy or non-autonomy of art and to a discussion of methodologies pertinent to this question.

Consideration is given both to the intimate interaction between art and society in Prehistoric and western art executed before the Renaissance, and to the significance of the existence of functional aesthetic concepts in these societies. This is contrasted to the role of art following the rise and influence of capitalism during the Renaissance, with particular emphasis being placed on the growing schism between the artist and society, culminating in the alienated image of the Romantic artist.

The continuation of this trend in late 20th century art is discussed with reference to the hermetic mystification and unintelligibility of the works of many contemporary avant-garde artists. Further consideration is given to the elitist implications of modern western art, and to the avant-garde artist's insistence that his work is autonomous. This is placed in the context of evidence suggesting that while the artist is independent of, and alienated from the general public, he is nevertheless subject to control by the capitalist ideology presently dominant in the western world.

The need to adopt a methodology which recognizes the importance of external influences on the artist and his work is therefore stressed,

and investigated with particular reference to the Marxist theory of historical materialism and the consequent belief of Marxist aestheticians in the need to encourage an active integration of art with society. The development of art under the influence of Marxist interpretations of the function of the artwork is also dealt with in relation to the period following the 1917 revolution in Russia.

The relationship between art and society is also discussed with reference to the South African context. Particular emphasis is placed on the tendency for South African artists to avoid pertinent socio-political issues, as well as the fact that they seem to lack a unified identity. While this is ascribed to the rigidly enforced separation of different population groups, it is also suggested that a refusal to deal with social issues pertinent to the South African situation amounts to a compliance with the interests of the dominant ideology.

Since this ideology does not recognize basic human rights, active opposition to it is proposed. In the visual arts, the mass produced, socially relevant poster executed in an intelligible style is suggested as an appropriate medium for achieving this aim. The poster is further suggested as an alternative to the inaccessibility and incomprehensibility of contemporary avant-garde art, and is discussed in relation to the practical work executed in part fulfilment of the degree.

NOTES

1. The candidate recognizes that artists are not necessarily male by gender. However, 'he', 'his', and 'himself', rather than 'he/she', 'his/her' and 'himself/herself' is used in general reference to the artist to ensure the uninterrupted flow of the text.
2. The replies received to the questionnaire discussed in Appendix I have not been individually transcribed. The originals are, however, in the candidate's possession.
3. Reproductions of the practical work, and photographs documenting the locations in which they were put up, as well as responses to them from the general public, are to be found in Appendix II. Further documentation will be presented at the exhibition of the practical work to be held in the Studio Gallery, University of The Witwatersrand, February 1983.
4. Illustrations to the main text are identified by figure numbers. Documentation and illustrations of the practical work are identified by plate numbers.

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INTRODUCTION

One of the fundamental disagreements in the study of art centres around the problem of autonomy. While some artists, historians, critics and philosophers see art as an independent entity, devoid of any external influences, others argue that the products of society, including art, cannot be meaningfully separated from various determining factors. On the one hand art is seen as the embodiment of universal, eternal truths, on the other as a product of external forces which are forever changing and in a constant state of flux. This problem is further compounded by the fact that numerous historians and philosophers, while arguing that art must be seen in the context of historically determining factors, nevertheless also believe that it deals with concepts which ultimately transcend the particular historical moment.

Although Plato himself did not conceive of art as an 'intuitive vision of ultimate reality'⁽¹⁾ (Osborne, 1968, p. 87), it is with the rise of Neo-Platonism in the Renaissance that this concept comes to fruition. Continuing the trend, the 17th century Italian theorist, Bellori, gave a lecture in 1664 in which he spoke of the true artist as one who sees eternal truths which he then reveals to 'less favoured mortals'. (Osborne, 1968, p. 87).

The idea that art transcends the particular is also encountered during the 19th century in the writings of some philosophers. Especially

1. According to Plato, the senses cannot reflect the true nature of things. Works of visual art are therefore but a copy of a copy. (Osborne, 1968, p. 87).

interesting in this respect is the German philosopher, Schopenhauer, who conceived of the artist as a uniquely gifted individual whose art exists without 'concern for causal connections, utility or use'. (Osborne, 1968, p. 91). For him, the artist as creative genius shares his vision of universal truth with the rest of humanity.

In contrast to Schopenhauer, the German art historian, Wolfflin, set out to write an objective history of art, i.e. one devoid of personal value judgements. This, he believed, could be achieved through a concept of style as 'the expression of a certain way of seeing, thinking and feeling'. (Encyclopedia Britannica, Vol. 1, 1973, p. 222). But instead of evolving an objective methodology, his approach led him to make extensive formal analyses of works without a concomitant consideration of their content. Wolfflin's essentially formalist methodology ultimately led to extensive criticism of his major text, The Principles of Art History, first published in 1915. Nevertheless, he has had a profound influence on art historical research and art criticism during the 20th century.

In terms of formalist theories all possible external influences on the work of art are ignored and it is therefore seen as autonomous, i.e. as having an existence independent of 'our ordinary every day commerce with our environment'. (Osborne, 1968, p. 22). Osborne further notes that the formalist outlook involves

an assumption that the exercise of our perceptive powers ... needs no justification of an instrumental kind; it is worthwhile for its own sake and for the sake of the heightened awareness of the world which it brings. (Osborne, 1968, p. 22).

Although art historians and critics who tend to adopt this methodology cannot be said to form a coherent school of thought, a formalist approach to art has become extremely widespread during the 20th century and is of major importance in 20th century western aesthetics. (Osborne, 1968, pp. 22 - 24). It underlies the ideas of such eminent art historians and critics as Clive Bell, Herbert Read and Clement Greenberg. Bell, for example, sees function as irrelevant to the concept of fine art, and argues that 'beauty' is 'significant form'. (Albrecht. Albrecht, Barnett and Griff, eds. 1970, p. 18). According to him, the viewer (and presumably also the artist)

need bring ... nothing from life, no knowledge of its ideas and affairs, no familiarity with its emotions ... nothing but a sense of form and colour and a knowledge of three dimensional space. (Bell quoted by Albrecht. Albrecht, Barnett and Griff, eds. 1970, p. 18).

Encompassed within this concept of art as an autonomous or semi-autonomous entity, are the views of most sociologists, who see art either as a social institution of secondary importance or as having no importance at all. According to them, it does not constitute a 'real' institution as do the 'basic' institutions of economics and politics.⁽²⁾

Of central importance to the concept of autonomy is the idea of the artist as an individual genius, which originally gained currency

2. 'Social institutions are commonly defined by sociologists and other social scientists as the principle structures through which human activities are organized and established to serve basic human needs'. (Albrecht. Albrecht, Barnett and Griff, eds. 1970, p. 2).

during the Renaissance and which is widely held in the 20th century. As Herbert Read argues: 'The artist can cross [the] threshold into the subconscious world and bring back some knowledge of its meaning' (Lutchmansingh, 1974, p. 95), thereby becoming not a product of culture but a creator of culture. The artist's consequent freedom and lack of concern for basic social realities, entrenches the concept of art for art's sake as the philosophy for all creative activity.

This theory, which had its inception in the Romantic period and is generally regarded as central to the writings of the French art critic, Theophile Gautier, is founded on the idea that art is

justified by its own existence ... does not and should not serve any social purpose and ... has no reference to anything outside itself.
(Tax, Baxandall, ed. 1972, p. 22).

Thus the theory of art for art's sake allows for a concept of art as the unique expression of the individual, and is the basis for a formalist approach. In her article 'Culture is not neutral, Whom does it serve?' Meredith Tax argues that the adoption of art for art's sake is a response by the producers of art to a market which is mysterious and alienating to them. André Malraux, on the other hand, sees it as a welcome metamorphosis in which art becomes separated from its function, and thus has 'no other end than itself'. (Malraux quoted by Osborne, Osborne, 1968, p. 263).

Regardless of whether or not they are seen as positive developments, the idea of the artist and his art as autonomous, the elevation of

the artist to a status of genius, and the emphasis on art as universal truth, cannot be divorced from the historical context in which they emerged. It was not until the 18th century that the concept of 'fine art' came into being (Osborne, 1968, p. 150), a concept which involved the separation of art from craft and the subsequent development of autonomous laws for the 'fine arts'. With the inception of the academies of art and the breakdown of the guild system (which had served as a means of control over the artist and his product), the artist began to think of his position as elevated and only marginally restricted by parameters defined by the academies.

It is also with this development that the breakdown of a traditional system of patronage occurs. Whereas the artist had previously been accountable to a specific individual or institution, he now worked more or less independently. His schism furthered the notion of the artist as individual genius, free from all external restraints.

However, as has already been suggested, art was not always regarded by its public, nor was it always developed by the artist, as an autonomous entity. On the contrary, from its ritual foundations in the Palaeolithic age until the Renaissance, art was inextricably linked to the society in which it was created. But it is not until Marx formulated his theory of historical materialism, in which the artwork becomes a manifestation of various historically and socially determining factors, that this link is consciously recognised. In terms of Marxist theory, art is a product of the dialectic between man, his history, and the environment in which he finds himself. Thus, rather than seeing art as a mystical entity

or as the creation of genius, 'transcending existence, society and time' (Wolff, 1981, p. 1), Marx regards art as a social product and therefore as a complex construction of numerous 'real historical factors'. (Wolff, 1981, p. 1).

In keeping with Marx's concept of historical materialism, the Neo-Marxist historian, Ernst Fischer, argues that all art is conditioned by time, and represents humanity by virtue of the fact that it corresponds to the 'ideas and aspirations, needs and hopes of a particular historical situation'. (Fischer, 1978, p. 12). This concept can be taken one step further, for while art can be seen as a reflection of the prevailing social conditions, it is also partly determined by what the artist believes those conditions to be. In other words, either consciously or unconsciously, the artist often falsifies history. This falsification can take place on the level of content as well as form. As Miller points out with reference to McLuhan's statement: 'The medium is the message',

the medium exerts an effect over and above that which is carried in the message itself.
(Miller, 1971, p. 13).

The issues of historical determinism and the falsification of history, raises the problem of ideology in art. Defined as 'the manner of thinking characteristic of a class or individual [or the] ideas at the basis of some economic or political theory or system' (Concise Oxford Dictionary, 1964, p. 601), ideology is central to Marxist aesthetics and Marxist theory on the production of art. Undoubtedly, art is more generally regarded as a product of culture,

but Marxists argue that culture itself can be defined partly through ideology.⁽³⁾ In an interview of 1976, the contemporary artist, Hans Haacke, elucidated this principle when he stated that 'no system of values is exempt from ideology', and suggested that even his own statement about the importance of ideological considerations could not be divorced from an ideological framework.⁽⁴⁾ (Hans Haacke interviewed by Sheffield. Sheffield, 1976, p. 119).

According to Marx, Engels and Lenin the true artist 'approaches reality to capture its essential features, to reflect it'. (Vasquez, 1973, p. 28). This certainly does not mean that the artist deals with absolute truths and is therefore able to transcend ideological considerations, but rather that he comes to terms with concrete reality. The inevitability, and indeed necessity of dealing with reality is stressed by the Marxist aesthetician Plekhanov, who goes so far as to suggest that the greater the writer, the more he will subordinate his work to the nature of the times, thereby also reducing the possibility of personal residue. (Arvon, 1973, p.12).⁽⁵⁾ On the other hand, Lenin also maintained that although the artist cannot be separated from an ideological framework, his work exceeds 'ideological limitations to reveal the truth about reality'. (Lenin,

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3. 'Culture can be so defined as to include the particular characteristics of everything people in recognizable groups say, signal, do and make, as well as the values, perceptions, symbols, codes and assumptions which are the blueprints or templates for their behaviour'. (Schlemmer. Hare, Wiendieck and Von Broembsen eds. 1979, p. 45).
 4. Both the dissertation and the practical work for the present research are equally inseparable from a particular ideological framework. This issue will be discussed with reference to the candidate's practical work in the Conclusion.
 5. Plekhanov's observations on literature can obviously be extended to the visual arts.

Materialism and Emperico-Criticism, 1909, quoted by Vasquez.
Vasquez, 1973, p. 16).

While the artist is therefore ultimately expected to transcend falsifications of reality effected through ideology, the importance of ideological considerations to the art work can be seen to operate on many different levels. Particularly significant in this respect is the fact that the viewer, in addition to the artist, is conditioned by ideology. Furthermore, as John Berger suggests, individual art works and art works viewed in relation to one another confirm and re-affirm the ideological superstructure. This is especially apparent in the modern advertising image which offers a choice of products to the consumer yet reinforces a particular ideological system. (Berger, 1979, p. 131).

When speaking of ideology, it is important to realize that orthodox Marxists argue that all ideological systems, whether political, religious, cultural or philosophical, are determined by the prevailing economic conditions. This concept of an all-encompassing economic determinism would obviously also include the products of culture. Thus art and its mode of production is inseparable from the mode of production and its resultant class differentiation in society as a whole. At the same time, the economic base must also been seen as forming part of a complex dialectic which involves all social phenomena. Within this dialectic, historical factors not only affect one another, but also influence the assertive economic base.

Marxist philosophy thus differs radically from that of religious

Utopians, like Buchez and Pecquer, who see God as the dominant determining factor in history, as well as the philosophical systems of secular Utopians, like Saint-Simon and Fourier, who advocate human reason as the ultimate determining factor.

As regards the relationship of art to the economic base, Marxist aestheticians suggest that it generally serves the dominant ideology, i.e. the ideology of a class that a 'certain economic system has made the predominant power'. (Arvon, 1973, p. 25). This idea is, in fact, already prevalent in the writings of the first self-professed anarchist, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, who said of the art of his own time (the mid-19th century) that it was an instrument 'serving dubious pleasures' and in the hands of rulers who used it as a powerful means for oppressing the ruled'. (Raphael, 1980, p. 38). Similarly, Meredith Tax argues that since it is impossible to divorce any product of human labour from its conditions of production and reception, culture always serves someone's interests. 'Culture', she states, 'is not neutral'. (Tax, Baxandall, ed. 1972, p.15).

In Marxist terms, art is thus seen as maintaining the status quo, as serving the interests of a dominant ideology through which the function and the content of the art work is usually determined and controlled. This fact is also recognized by some art historians who certainly cannot be described as Marxist. Kenneth Clark, for instance, states that art as ideology often confirms and upholds a system of belief and is consciously used in the maintenance of that system.⁽⁶⁾

6. Clark perceives this in the theocratic art of Egypt and sees the Parthenon as the embodiment of Greek philosophy. (Clark, Albrecht, Barnett and Griff, eds. 1970, p. 636).

Marxists also argue that the divisions and stratifications evident in western capitalist societies, resulting from the mode of production, must lead to alienation. In these societies, they maintain, the object of production (which would include the art work), has a monetary or exchange value but little or no use value, i.e. it does not satisfy a particular human need. (Vasquez, 1973, p. 89). This leads to an uncertain relationship between the worker, the product and the consumer, and therefore ultimately also to a society alienated from itself.

The problem of alienation in the context of the fine arts is rather more complex than this, and manifests itself in several different ways. In the first instance, the artist working in a western capitalist society is alienated from that society in that what he produces is no more than another commodity on the open market. This is reinforced by the fact that he is not in control of his market, for it is usually in the hands of art dealers and art critics. Secondly, consequent to the hermeticism and unintelligibility, and the apparent lack of social content of much contemporary western art, the alienation between artist and viewer is further increased.

A final problem encountered in the debate between those who insist that art is an autonomous entity, and those who argue that it is ultimately linked to society, are the theoreticians who try to bring these two views together. Vasquez, for instance, maintains that although the artist is historically conditioned and influenced by class ideologies, 'class ideologies come and go but true art persists'. (Vasquez, 1973, p. 25). In keeping with this belief, he argues that Plekhanov's analysis of the relationship between art

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and society is incomplete because it does not realize the 'necessity for analysing the artistic merits of the work of art as well as situating it in the social dimension'. (Vasquez, 1973, p. 13).

Vasquez, in fact, believes that art ultimately has its own internal coherence and laws, for he states that 'the work of art outgrows the socio-historical ground which gave it birth'. (Vasquez, 1973, p. 24).

Equally significant to this problem of autonomy versus social relevance are the writings of Herbert Read. For while he asserted the independence of art from any social restraints in his early works, Read finally came to the conclusion that the artist is influenced, consciously or unconsciously, by his own environment and beliefs. He also suggested that although 'great artists are by definition unique individuals', originality and individuality should not take precedence in the artist's work, since this would make it unintelligible to the public. (Egbert, 1967, p. 129).

Read's recognition of the need to temper originality in order to preserve intelligibility is not, however, generally heeded by modern avant-garde artists, who constantly re-affirm the concept of the artist as individual genius and of art as an autonomous entity. As a result of this, the relationship of the avant-garde to society is an essentially negative one, and as Poggioli suggests, avant-garde art can therefore be seen as 'an indirect expression of the human and social conditions which ... created this schism in the structure of culture'. (Poggioli, Albrecht, Barnett and Griff, eds. 1970, p. 699). He further argues that

by transgressing the norms of society, by proclaiming itself to be anti-democratic and anti-bourgeois, avant-garde art does not realize that it pays involuntary homage to democratic middle-class society. (Poggioli. Albrecht, Barnett and Griff, eds. 1970, p. 669).

Similarly, the Neo-Marxist aesthetician, Herbert Marcuse, suggests that the dialectic between the avant-garde and society eventually leads to the absorption of the radical into the established. In other words, all 'fringe' ideologies are sanctioned by the dominant ideology of which they eventually become a part. Thus, ironically, there is no truly radical, revolutionary art. Given this situation, Marcuse believes that if art is to remain revolutionary, a new relevant language of communication must be found. (Marcuse. Baxandall, ed. 1972, p.57).

CHAPTER ONE

SECTION ONE : FUNCTION AND AESTHETICS IN PRE-RENAISSANCE ART

A meaningful understanding of the interaction between the 20th century artist and his audience is ultimately dependent on a knowledge of the changing role of the artist in society as well as the changing concept of aesthetics. Although it can be defined very briefly as 'the theoretical study of the arts and related types of behaviour and experience' (Encyclopedia Britannica, Vol. 1, 1973, p. 221)⁽¹⁾, it is important to realize that the theory of aesthetics has never been static. Indeed, it has witnessed endless shifts in meaning and has therefore always been a highly polemical field of study. As Stolnitz notes, aesthetics (like all philosophy), is 'a process not an end product, an enquiry not an almanac'. (Stolnitz, 1965, p. 1).

A study of aesthetic concepts in the context of the visual arts involves numerous complex issues which are nevertheless also central to a consideration of the role of the artist in society. Amongst the most notable of these are the problems of the definition of art, the function of art, the relationship between form and content in the art work, and the relationship of art to society. Although often discussed in isolation, these issues are interlinked and ultimately inseparable from one another. They all form part of the dialectic out of which art is constituted in different historical periods.

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1. The term 'aesthetics' is attributed to Alexander Baumgarten (1714 - 62), the author of a book entitled Aesthetica. (Encyclopedia Britannica, Vol. 1, 1973, p. 224).

The danger of divorcing the definition and concept of art from the function of art is demonstrated by the fact that art as human artifact (in contrast to natural phenomena) is a product of conscious labour regardless of whether the art work is believed to be intuitively derived or deliberately and systematically created. Although not needed for the vital functions of life, the work of art usually did have an important role in historical societies. As Osborne points out: 'By and large all works of art were made for a use'. (Osborne, 1970, p. 25).

In the context of a philosophical and theoretical definition of art, the function of the art work is not always easy to determine. The views of philosophers writing on art through the centuries have ranged from believing that art is autotelic, i.e. that it has no purpose beyond itself, to seeing its function as specifically social. But even though many agree in principle that the function of art cannot be divorced from society, their interpretations of this social role of art is often complex and varied.

In his article, Art as an Institution, Albrecht states that the concept of aesthetics is universal and can be traced as far back as the Stone Age. (Albrecht, Albrecht, Barnett and Griff, eds. 1970, pp. 15 - 16). While this observation is probably valid, it must be qualified, for it has already been posited that the concept of aesthetics cannot be divorced from the particular historical moment in which it is formulated.

Reconstruction of possible intention in the creation of art in the Paleolithic age suggests that the work of art originally had its

foundation in magic, ritual and cult (Benjamin, 1979, p. 225), which

implies an active influence of [man] on the world around him without the mediation of mechanically and causally understandable actions (Encyclopedia of World Art, Vol. 9, 1972, p. 371)

and the reaffirmation of magical power through repetition, i.e. ritual.⁽²⁾

For Paleolithic man, art was a means of objectifying nature.(Fig.1).

It was through this objectification, and subsequent humanization, that he found a means to relate to the 'alien and terrible power which he could not integrate'.(Vasquez, 1973, p. 78).

Vasquez also states that an 'aesthetic sense' of nature only emerged when man could see his essential powers confirmed in it, by 'integrating it into his world as humanized nature'. (Vasquez, 1973, p. 78).⁽³⁾ Natural phenomena, he argues, become 'aesthetic' only when they acquire a social and human significance. (Vasquez, 1973, p. 79). Aesthetic value is therefore not a property or quality inherent to the objects found in nature, 'but rather something they acquire in human society by virtue of the social existence of man as a creative being'.(Vasquez, 1973, p. 92). In his attempt to overcome nature by objectifying it, i.e. by depicting it,

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2. The concept of art as magic is undoubtedly at the root of all ritual and religious art, i.e. art operating within an organised magical framework. As will be discussed more fully in Chapter Two, magic and ritual also form the basis for much 20th century art, but with one important difference. Whereas art as magic functioned as an extension of society in the Paleolithic age, the artist as magician in modern western societies paradoxically gives expression to the schism which has taken place between him and his audience.
 3. Read sees Paleolithic art not only as an expression of man's duel with nature, but also regards each image as an aesthetic expression in its own right.(Baynes, 1975, p. 65).

prehistoric man thus created objects which we now regard as having aesthetic value.

It is unlikely that prehistoric man was actually concerned with aesthetics. It is, however, conceivable that the form of the objects he created was directly and intimately connected to its content and function. In other words, the tendency to naturalism in the depiction of animals served to enhance the Paleolithic hunter's chances of capturing game following ceremonies in which the painted or carved images were ritually hunted and killed.

As in prehistoric societies, the 'artist' (and his 'art') are inseparable from their social function in non-literate, i.e. so-called 'primitive' or tribal societies. Whether ritual object, fetish or an embellished utilitarian artifact, art generally has a specifically utilitarian function in these societies, for it is invariably linked to myth, religion, ritual and social organization. Nevertheless, it would seem that in these societies objects can only fulfil their designated function if they conform to certain 'aesthetic' norms,⁽⁴⁾ otherwise they would probably be discarded.

The artist working in this context is 'not expected to importune society with his own private affairs'. Indeed, his own personality is seen as irrelevant to the creative process for he is judged

4. A similar situation is apparent in ancient Egypt for a beautiful monument was called MENEKH, i.e. an efficient work. (Duvignaud, 1972, p. 73).

only by his ability to echo and reflect common experience, the great events and ideas of his people The artist's task is ... to solve for them the riddle of essential relationships between man and nature and man and society.
(Fischer, 1978, p. 41).

Among contemporary aestheticians there are some who advocate that the tendency for different and particular art styles to manifest themselves in different societies is indicative of the direct and vital link between the work and the society in which it was created. Duvignaud, for instance, believes that the Pharaonic, theocratic society of Egypt finds expression in a hieratic style vacillating between 'cruel majesty' and 'divine serenity'. (Duvignaud, 1972, p. 104). With the obvious exception of works executed during the reign of Amenhotep IV, this is especially apparent in the painted and sculpted images of successive Egyptian rulers, for while they are characterized by an emotionless rigidity, their very lack of expression gives them a certain quality of serenity. (Fig. 2). In contrast to this, he argues that patriarchal societies move away from mythological beliefs to human themes. In an attempt to socialize cosmic forces, such societies create 'heroic characters who embody possibilities for man of exercising his authority over society and the natural world'. (Duvignaud, 1972, p. 106). It could therefore be said that in ancient Egypt the human king aspired to the divine (Fig. 2), whereas in patriarchal ancient Greece the divine is made to seem more human. (Fig. 3).

In his book, The Sociology of Art, Duvignaud also posits that since life became concentrated in the city in ancient Greece, the

resultant increase in social density led to a concomitant increase in the importance of communication. (Duvignaud, 1972, p. 114). The rise of the city has further significance as an expression of man's ability to conquer or at least stand up to nature. Whereas man in prehistory saw nature as the ultimate power, man in the Greek city state recognized himself as a potent force, with the result that he was now able to devote much more energy to self-evaluation and to an ever-increasing portrayal of self, i.e. man, in the arts.

In the History of Western Philosophy, Bertrand Russell takes this argument one step further for he maintains that just as ancient Greek art can be seen as a reflection of the society for which it was produced, so Greek philosophy up to Aristotle basically expresses a mentality appropriate to the city state. (Russell, 1961, p. 751).

The concept of creativity in art, i.e. the concept of production and the idea of expression by a uniquely gifted individual, is absent from Greek philosophy. Broadly speaking, philosophers such as Plato (c. 428 - 348 B.C.E.) and Aristotle (b. 384 B.C.E.) subordinate the theory of art to a theory of manufacture 'based on the twin ideas of function and technique'. Thus the 'competent artisan must of necessity know the "good" which is the end or object of his craft'. (Osborne, 1970, p. 34). In the Republic Plato writes that

the virtue and beauty and rightness of every manufactured article, living creature, and action is assessed only in relation to the purpose for which it was made or naturally produced. (Osborne, 1970, p. 34).

For Plato the work of art and its value is therefore determined by the nature of its function, its purpose, and to what extent that purpose is achieved. In his dialogue, Hippias Major, he actually defines Beauty as 'effectiveness for some good purpose'. (Osborne, 1970, p. 27).

Aesthetics, then, (even though the concept had not yet been formulated), involves the notion that form and function are inseparable from one another, and that the form an object takes in fact enhances its function. Greek artistic theory thus has much in common with modern Marxist aesthetics partly because of its essentially sociological approach to art but also because of its consequent assessment of artistic value in terms of the contribution made by art to society. (5)

This, and other ideas central to artistic production in ancient Greece, is further elucidated in Plato's philosophy of 'art' which is characterized by four main themes. Firstly, Plato conceives of art as 'TECHNE' or the ability of 'knowing and making' (Hofstadter and Kuhns, eds. 1976, p. 4), i.e. of knowing the function or the purpose of the art work and the most appropriate way of executing it. The artist must therefore know the nature of measure which is basic to all the arts. 'Measure for Plato embraces the principles of the good and the beautiful, and in our terms the principle of

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5. Osborne sees poetry and the other arts as the most important influence in 'moulding the life of the individual and the structure of society in ancient Greece'. (Osborne, 1970, p. 31). Greek epics, poetry, theatre, music and sculpture were all intimately linked to the philosophy, religion and education of ancient Greek society.

taste as well'. (Hofstadter and Kuhns, eds. 1976, p. 4). Plato's second theme concerns the imitation of (ultimate) reality, an essentially idealistic notion, given the fact that he felt that the artist may not grasp or know this reality and thus present only an appearance of nature. Nevertheless, art must be 'true imitation' (EIKASTIKE) and not 'false imitation' (PHANTASTIKE). Thirdly, while art must imitate nature, it encompasses a dimension that cannot be reduced to 'TECHNE', namely inspiration or divine assistance which Plato calls 'poetic madness'. Finally, there are four types of madness: prophetic, initiatory, poetic and erotic. 'Such madness relates men to the gods and to the beauty of the eternal realm they inhabit'. (Hofstadter and Kuhns, eds. 1976, p. 4). This concept of 'madness' is now interpreted as intuition and is by and large regarded as central to creativity in 20th century western art.

In the Republic, Plato further stresses that artistic values are subordinate to moral principles and that unless art promotes wisdom, courage and temperance, it is not acceptable. While believing that (for better or worse) a work of art has some influence on its audience, he nevertheless condemns art that is false and that 'misleads and corrupts'. (Ross, 1981, p. 45).

Although Aristotle also defines art as 'TECHNE' and as 'the capacity to make or do something with a correct understanding of the principle involved' (Osborne quoting Aristotle. Osborne, 1970, p. 37), he does not agree that art must be subordinated to moral principles. Like Plato, however, he believes that art has

a function beyond itself, and that it is 'not pursued for its own sake'. (Osborne, 1970, p. 39).

Despite the fact that the two philosophers are in accordance on the fundamental issue of function, they nevertheless disagree on the value of the arts. Plato believed that some of the arts, e.g. tragedy, are misleading to the seeker of truth because it feeds the passions. (Hofstadter and Kuhns, eds. 1976, p. 79). In other words, it falsifies truth. Aristotle, on the other hand, regarded all art forms as valuable and beneficial instruments of education. He further argued that art is a form of catharsis, 'an innocuous outlet for pent up emotions which are denied their full natural outlet in the conditions of social life'. (Osborne, 1970, p. 142).

Plato's and Aristotle's concepts of art, as well as their views on the role of the artist in society, seem to have remained essentially unchanged during the Middle Ages. There is, for instance, little evidence to suggest that medieval art was valued for purely aesthetic reasons and apparently no notion of fine art (as opposed to craft) during this period. (Encyclopedia Britannica, Vol. 1, 1973, p. 225). As Osborne observes: 'Works of art were discussed in relation to the uses which they could be made to serve' (Osborne, 1970, p. 132) and there was therefore no concept of art for art's sake.⁽⁶⁾

6. This is also apparent in Byzantine art. As Michelis notes: 'Byzantine art, especially Byzantine painting, was not only a religious but a didactic art'. (Osborne quoting P.A. Michelis. Osborne, 1970, p. 136).

SECTION TWO : RENAISSANCE TO ROMANTICISM: THE RISE OF INDIVIDUALISM

Despite the fact that the names of many ancient Greek sculptors are known, artists were regarded as a class of craftsmen and did not hold a high place in the social scale during this period. It was not until the Renaissance that a significant shift away from the concept of the artist as artisan took place and his social status increased.

It has been suggested that this change in status can be attributed partly to the new emphasis on perspective, mathematical theories, proportion and historical and classical learning which had the effect of giving prominence to the philosophical (and theoretical) content of the visual arts. Consequently, the artist came to be seen - and also saw himself - as a kind of scholar or scientist. (Osborne, 1970, pp. 43 - 44). This change must, however, be seen in a broader perspective. As Lévi-Strauss suggests, while Renaissance painting was 'perhaps an instrument of knowledge ... it was also an instrument of possession'. (Lévi-Strauss quoted by Berger. Berger, 1979, p. 86).

That art became an instrument of possession can be related to a 'major change in the market relations' and the subsequent change 'primarily from religious to secular patronage' (Bensman and Gerver. Albrecht, Barnett and Griff, eds. 1970, p. 662), which is generally ascribed to the rise of the merchant classes. The attitude of these new, wealthy classes - the seafaring traders and the landed gentry - had the further effect of encouraging a greater emphasis on individualization. Fischer suggests that the very

success of these first capitalists hinged on 'individual skill, determination, mobility, cleverness and luck' (Fisher, 1978, p. 43) and that objects as objects lost their utility value and became nothing more than exchange value. Whether metal, linen or spice the object itself was thus of secondary importance. Consequently, its utilitarian value became abstracted and 'the most abstract form of property', i.e. money, became the essence of things. (Fischer, 1978, p. 43).

Inevitably, the emphasis on 'individual skill' and 'cleverness' in the accumulation of capital spread to the arts. The artist working during the Renaissance still belonged to a guild which could impose some constraints on his work, and the content (if not the form) of his work was still dictated by his patron, be it the church, the State or a private person. Nevertheless, it was above all the artist's individuality that was now nourished and encouraged. Thus he became an independent personality, a genius whose talent was felt to be God-given, in fact a demi-god with an 'inborn and uniquely individual creative force'. (Hauser quoted by Wolff. Wolff, 1981, p. 26).

The most important consequence of private patronage was the gradual elimination of the public and social role of art. The privately-owned easel painting (unlike the more usually publically displayed frescoes of both the Middle Ages and the Renaissance) obviously no longer addressed a large audience. And when, for example, sculpture was placed in a public space, it often acted more as a symbol of the patron's power than as an expression of widely held beliefs

or attitudes. This can be said of both Donatello's and Michelangelo's treatment of David under Medici patronage, for David was apparently a symbol of Medici power and benign government in Florence during the 15th and 16th centuries. (Von Einem, 1959, p. 29). ⁽⁷⁾ However, the art of the Renaissance was still largely integrated into the life of Renaissance man 'for artistic creation continued to be considered as spiritual production'. (Vasquez, 1973, p. 175).

On the other hand, the concept of Renaissance man itself was very limited. As Bertrand Russell points out, the Renaissance was by no means a popular movement. Rather, 'it was a movement of a small number of scholars and artists, encouraged by liberal patrons, especially the Medici and the humanist popes'. (Russell, 1961, p. 448).

In return for the support of this secular and clerical aristocracy, the artist gave tangible visual evidence of the patron's power on this earth. As Duvignaud points out, free city states often became tyrannies with the result that art turned away from richness of communication to put itself in the service of power. (Duvignaud, 1972, p. 114).

Like ancient Greece, Renaissance Italy was organized into city states. Beyond this superficial similarity, both Renaissance art

7. A similar propagandist intent is apparent in much Baroque art, especially religious works created under the influence of the Counter-Reformation. But even when executed as consciously popular propagandist images for the Catholic Church, such works still served to uphold the primacy of a particular patron. This is often the case with Bernini's sculptures executed for the Barberini family, e.g. the Baldicchino. (Hibbard, 1978, p.79).

and philosophy owed an enormous debt to that of the ancient Greek world. The search for the ideal in Renaissance art and aesthetics was undoubtedly influenced by (and perpetuated) some of the ideas put forward by Greek philosophers like Plato and Aristotle. The idea that art and poetry must 'imitate nature' and that they must pursue 'a moral purpose of social amelioration' (Osborne, 1970, p. 146), i.e. that they must act for the betterment of man, as well as the idea that the goal of the arts is Beauty - 'an objective property ... consisting in order, harmony, proportion and propriety' (Osborne, 1970, p. 146) - can all be attributed to the importance of Greek thought for the Renaissance.

In contrast to the Renaissance, which found sanction in the thought and art of the ancient world, Fischer suggests that the Romantic movement of the late 18th and early 19th centuries was a

petty bourgeois revolt against the classicism of the nobility, against rules and standards, against aristocratic form, and against a content from which all "common" issues were excluded.
(Fischer, 1975, p. 53).

It was during this period that the philosophy of art for art's sake, with its emphasis on the autonomy of art and the necessity of self-expression, first gained prominence. Thus the Romantic artist who expresses his own feelings and emotions instead of acting as a mirror to external reality, becomes the first artist-genius of the modern age. And if Romantic art is a mirror, 'it is a mirror which reflects its maker' (Osborne, 1970, p. 197) as creative, imaginative seer. Indeed, the Romantic artist is no longer a person merely

inspired by God but God-like in his creative powers.

This view is anticipated in the writings of Kant (1724 - 1804) who argued the case for the artist as genius and his art as a product of that genius. (Diffey, 1979, p. 18). Genius, he maintained, is the natural endowment or innate mental aptitude which 'gives the rule to art'. (Osborne, 1970, p. 195). It therefore becomes the source of aesthetic ideas which must be incorporated into the art work so that these ideas can be revealed to the viewer.

(Hofstadter and Kuhns, eds. 1976, p. 279). Kant also maintained that 'originality must be the prime property' of the fine arts. (Osborne, 1970, p. 195).

In keeping with this stress on individuality, originality and genius, Kant believed that Beauty cannot be judged in terms of purpose or function. Steinkraus has therefore suggested that he can be seen as the 'leading historical proponent of Formalism' (Steinkraus, 1974, p. 49), which is understandable in view of the growing emphasis on art for art's sake in the period immediately following his death in 1804.⁽⁸⁾

Where Kant actually speaks of function he equates it with Beauty, for he argues that the true artist must produce an object within the parameters of his own art (be it architecture, painting or sculpture) 'which will at the same time be beautiful'. (Hofstadter and Kuhns, eds. 1976, p. 279). In fact, the role of the artist

8. For definitions of 'formalism' and 'art for art's sake' see the Introduction.

is ultimately to 'fulfil the generic aesthetic purpose of satisfying taste' through his particular art form. (Hofstadter and Kuhns, eds. 1976, p. 279).

Another important factor in the changing role of the artist and his art during the 19th century was the division of the visual arts into 'fine art' and 'applied art' categories, first realized during the 18th century. (See Introduction, p. 5). Before this time, no distinction was made between the 'high arts' - which Clark sees as being concerned with the actual image - and the 'lesser arts' - which he defines as 'ornament'. The image, he says, was made 'because events or the object' were important, whereas ornamentation served to enrich the significance of such events or objects. (Clark, Albrecht, Barnett and Griff, eds. 1970, p. 635). With the gradual disintegration of the union between the fine and useful or functional arts during the 18th and early 19th centuries, the schism between the viewer and the artist (who no longer saw himself as an artisan working within society), thus became increasingly apparent.

A further important issue is the tendency for many prominent 18th and 19th century philosophers including Hegel (1770 - 1881) and Schopenhauer (1788 - 1860), to see art as a means through which truth could be presented and revealed. Hegel, for instance, equated truth with the Idea and argued that art 'aims essentially at beauty which is one way in which truth is expressed'. (Hofstadter and Kuhns, eds. 1976, pp. 379 - 38). For Schopenhauer, the artist becomes the 'possessor of the Idea', which he then

communicates to others, and art becomes the highest form of human consciousness 'where mind finally realizes itself'. (Hofstadter and Kuhns, eds. 1976, p. 447).

For many philosophers writing during the Romantic era, art was often also an extension of religious, mystical and spiritual truths. Thus Schlegel (1767 - 1845) stated that art was a 'visible appearance of God's kingdom on earth' (Osborne, 1970, p. 173), while Nietzsche spoke of art as a road to salvation. (Encyclopedia Britannica, Vol. 1, 1973, p. 230). He also saw it as an interpretation and the re-enactment of life so that 'from the meaningless flux of experience a meaningful whole, ordered world would emerge'. (Hofstadter and Kuhns, eds. 1976, p. 496).

It is partly through the metaphysical and esoteric concepts of these philosophers that the artist as individual genius found sanction, and that the Romantic artist was therefore able to ignore the society in which he worked. Consequently, his art lost its social dimension and became, instead, a protest against bourgeois values and hence also an expression of alienation from society. (Poggioli. Albrecht, Barnett and Griff, eds. 1970, p. 672).

This problem is discussed at some length by Culley in her thesis, Artists' Life-Styles in 19th Century France and England: The Dandy, The Bohemian and The Realist. Arguing that the 19th century artist's declaration of independence from society was more than a creation of the writings of contemporary philosophers, she points out that the disappointment of democratic aspirations following the 1830

... had a profound effect on the visual arts, and that this ... found expression in the lifestyle of artists. (Culley, ... 1975, p. 27). Thus the Romantic artist often became a Bohemian ... to voice his defiance to society. In other words, ... began to live 'non-conforming and unconventional' ... (Culley, 1975, p. 7), and often depicted themselves as ... individuals. (Fig. 4).

Culley further notes that according to Baudelaire - who was ... of the prevalence of this trend when he wrote his essays and ... reviews during the mid-19th century - the most characteristic ... against the dictates of prevailing conditions manifested ... itself in a cult of the self, 'a narcissistic concern with achieving ... perfection and refinement in all things pertaining to one's own ... person'. (Culley, 1975, p. 14). This cult, Baudelaire argued, ... found its most characteristic contemporary expression in the art ... and attitude of the dandy which (for him) was synonymous with the ... and work of Delacroix. (Culley, 1975, p. 28).

In The Painter of Modern Life, Baudelaire underlined the socio- ... context of dandyism as follows:

Dandyism appears above all in periods of transition, when democracy is not yet all-powerful, and aristocracy is only just beginning to totter and fall. In the disorder of these times, certain men who are socially, politically and financially ill at ease, but are all rich in native energy, may conceive the idea of establishing a new kind of aristocracy, all the more difficult to shatter as it will be based on the most precious, the most enduring

faculties, and on the divine gifts which work and money are unable to bestow. (Baudelaire, 1964, p. 28).

It was also during the 19th century that the academies, which had claimed the right to

teach, assess and regulate the affairs of the fine arts, were found to be an intolerable infringement on the rights of the individual. (Bell, Lipset and Lowenthal, eds. 1961, p. 39)

This eventually led to a situation where many artists (including several of the Impressionists) refused to study in the academies, exhibited their works independently, and sold them through newly established art dealers.

The 19th century emphasis on individualism, and the contemporary move away from the academies to a market controlled by art dealers, thus inevitably led to the avant-garde artist and his product becoming alienated from 19th century society. The work of art was now another commodity on the open market, and since its content was no longer monitored by a patron, the public now found itself confronted by an art which it could not understand. The avant-garde had become an artistic force.

CHAPTER TWO

20TH CENTURY WESTERN ART AND CAPITALISM

The American Abstract Expressionist artist, De Kooning, once said that 'nothing is positive about art except that it is a word'. (De Kooning quoted by Wollheim. Wollheim, 1980, p. 9). Using this statement as a basis for extrapolation, Wollheim argues that 'nothing is positive about art except that it is a concept'. (Wollheim, 1980, p. 9). In effect, both his and De Kooning's statements suggest an extension of the definition and concept of art to a point beyond enquiry and investigation. To understand the development of this attitude - which has become increasingly common in the present century - one must consider the context in which western art has evolved, particularly in the present century.

It has been suggested that it is impossible to arrive at a definition of art in any historical period without referring to its function, its purpose, and the relation which it has to a particular society. This premise does not automatically discount the contention of some theoreticians that art is an autonomous entity, or imply that all theoreticians see the vital function of art as communication. In fact, while many 19th and 20th century sociologists and psychologists generally argue that art plays a significant role in society, they see that role solely in terms of its apparent ability to release social tensions, a contention which can be traced as far back as Aristotle. (See Chapter One, p. 21).

Like most sociologists, Albrecht argues that art is a social institution. (See Introduction, p. 3). But he qualifies this observation by stating that it is an institution of a minority culture which 'functions for stability and change in a complex, pluralistic society'. Art, he maintains, can act for the stability of society by 'balancing emotional against instrumental needs or by releasing tensions'. (Albrecht. Albrecht, Barnett and Griff, eds. 1970, p. 14).

In keeping with this contention that art has an essentially cathartic purpose, several sociologists (as well as some contemporary art critics), speak of art as expressing 'vast continuums of space and imaginative release' (Cork, 1979, p. 13) and feel that it can act as a corrective to the psychological strains of work, in which respect it may 'require exaggeration to balance successfully the one-sidedness of [such] instrumental roles'. (Parsons and Shils referred to by Albrecht. Albrecht, Barnett and Griff, eds. 1970, p. 10). The primary function of art is thus to operate as a kind of 'safety-valve' for society.

Related to this interpretation of the role of art is Spencer's contention that art is the aesthetic development of unused extra energy. (Barnett. Albrecht, Barnett and Griff, eds. 1970, p.622). And this, he believes, is the reason for aesthetic emotion.

Combining his theory of art as a manifestation of surplus energy with the idea that it is essentially a kind of recreation or

play,⁽¹⁾ Spencer argues that art was originally the development of 'leisure-time' activities yielding enjoyment apart from use. He goes on to say that these activities 'eventually ... assumed the quality of beauty'. (Barnett. Albrecht, Barnett and Griff, eds. 1970, p. 622).

Not all sociologists agree with Spencer's theories of surplus energy and play. Sumner and Keller, for example, refer to art as 'self-gratification' rather than recreation, and argue that this is one of three basic human needs, the other two being 'self-maintenance' or survival and 'self-perpetuation' or procreation. (Albrecht. Albrecht, Barnett and Griff, eds. 1970, p. 9).

Despite such minor differences of interpretation most sociologists ultimately conclude that artistic production and work or labour are at opposite ends of the scale of human activity. Although undoubtedly of relevance to the present discussion, this belief in an irreconcilable schism between art and labour is particularly significant in a consideration of Marxist aesthetics, and will therefore be dealt with more fully at a later stage.

Recent sociological interpretations of art, especially with regard to the separation of art from work, raises the controversial problem of the autonomy and function of the art work. As Chiari points out, many contemporary western aestheticians argue that art 'is not a means to an end : it is its own finality'. (Chiari,

1. This analogy between art and play is also drawn by other sociologists and philosophers, among them Herzler, Schleiermacher, Schiller and Vischer.

1977, p. 24). (2)

This attitude, which is usually founded on a belief in the individual genius of an artist who has no obligations to society, informs the ideas of several prominent early 20th century art historians, among them Clive Bell, who goes so far as to suggest that 'art is above morals'. (Bell quoted by Eckman. Eckman, 1970, p. 356).

The ideas of Bell and his close contemporaries, Roger Fry and Herbert Read, are not unique. They find an almost immediate precedent in the attitude of members of the English Aesthetic Movement of the late 19th century. Oscar Wilde, whose links with this movement is widely acknowledged (Culley, 1975, p. 86), possibly spoke for many of its members when he claimed that art is completely divorced from morality and can only be judged in terms of its ability to give pleasure. 'An ethical sympathy in the artist', he once said, 'is an unpardonable mannerism of style'. (Wilde quoted by Steinkraus. Steinkraus, 1974, p. 174).

Conversely, while arguing that art is above morals, Bell nevertheless maintains that 'all art is moral because ... works of art are immediate means to good'. (Bell quoted by Eckman. Eckman, 1970, p. 356). In terms of his essentially formalist approach this statement is perhaps understandable. But its ultimate inaccuracy is demonstrated in that a formalist methodology necessarily excludes a consideration of content and function in the work of art, allowing

2. Both Wölfflin and Benedetto Croce similarly see art as a purely cognitive activity. (Duvignaud, 1972, p. 36).

only for an appreciation of form, which therefore becomes an aesthetic and intellectual end in itself.⁽³⁾

Problematic though Bell's ideas may be, they are both reinforced by the observations of other aestheticians and philosophers, and extended by those who believe that art has become so autonomous that it no longer needs an audience. In this regard one can cite the American philosopher, George Santayana, who argues that the essence of art is 'pleasure objectified'. Works of art, he says, are independent of moral and other issues and only 'acquire aesthetic value because of our pleasure in them'. (Steinkraus, 1974, p. 45). Another theorist, Chiari, maintains that 'the creative artist ... does not require an audience in order to express his talent or genius'. (Chiari 1977, p. 8). The latter contention finds some support in the writings of the art historian, William Tucker, who believes that 'the making and appreciation of sculpture is a fundamentally private activity'. Any audience, he maintains, merely 'gives breadth and air to the private vision' of the sculptor. (Tucker. Brighton and Morris, eds. 1977, p. 57).⁽⁴⁾

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3. Although Bell states that formalists are not against content, he does say that the representational element is actually irrelevant in a consideration of the art work. (Lyas, 1973, p. 378). Given this contention, it is difficult to imagine how he would approach the art produced by inmates of Nazi Concentration camps during the Second World War as a document of the atrocities perpetrated by the Third Reich. These images have now been collected and published by J. Blatter and S. Mitton in a book entitled Art of the Holocaust.
 4. Although Tucker refers specifically to sculpture - his special field of interest - his contention presumably extends to the other visual arts.

Evidently, therefore, 20th century art historians and theoreticians who argue that art is an autonomous entity generally concentrate on the art object as pure form, which furthers the notion of the artist as separated from society so that his work remains untouched by the day to day realities of life.

In 1937, Meyer Schapiro reacted against the methodology of contemporary formalists by arguing that abstract art, far from being an art of pure form was 'a rebellion against the materialism of modern society'. (Schapiro, 1978, p. 204). Abstract artists, he maintained, were concerned with spiritual as well as stylistic matters, a contention which is supported by more recent research into the work of early 20th century painters like Kandinsky, Malevich and Mondrian. Kuspit, for example, points out that these artists consciously protested 'against the superficial view of man as being determined by social rules and political orders rather than by ontological spontaneity, i.e. the spiritual in nature'. (Kuspit, 1970, p. 431).

Many of the critics and art historians against whom Schapiro was reacting also equate art with spiritual or metaphysical concepts, but for somewhat different reasons. Read, for instance, maintains that art is 'related to the structure of the universe' (Read quoted by Lutchmansingh. Lutchmansingh, 1974, p. 7) and argues that the artist is a kind of prophet who leads man into the uncertain future. If we refuse to follow where he leads us, 'we are without courage, without freedom, without passion and joy'. (Read quoted by Rothschild. Rothschild, 1973, p.v). A very similar attitude

is expressed by Jaques Maritain, who believes that the artist is 'one who sees more deeply than other men and who discloses ... the real spiritual radiances which others cannot discern'. (Maritain quoted by Steinkraus. Steinkraus, 1974, p. 51). It is, however, ironic that while an art historian like Read raises the status of the artist to the level of prophet or seer, he concludes that the apparent inability of ordinary people to comprehend modern art is a result of 'a confined vision or a narrow range of sensibilities' for which the artist cannot be held responsible. (Read quoted by Rothschild. Rothschild, 1973, p.v.).⁽⁵⁾

More recent formalists - Greenberg is especially significant in this regard - have continued to argue that abstract art has a multi-faceted spiritual nature despite the fact that contemporary non-representational paintings of artists like Morris Louis, Helen Frankenthaler and Kenneth Noland ignore the original intentions of non-objectivity. As Kuspit points out, their works are no longer a

protest against rigidification of the concept and meaning of art, and against academic codification of style, in a word, against totalitarianism in art. [Rather, they have become] another spiritless convention full of technical bravado, ... ultimately one more formality with rigid, academically approved laws of its own. (Kuspit, 1970, pp. 435 - 436).

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5. It should, however, be noted that Read constantly contradicts himself. He has, at times, suggested that originality must not take precedence over intelligibility in the artist's work. (See Introduction, p. 11).

In his book, The Savage Mind, Lévi-Strauss extends Kuspit's argument and also provides a plausible explanation for the development of non-objective art to its present academic form. Abstract art, he maintains, is characterized by two important features. Firstly, it rejects the idea that art is made for a purpose, and secondly, execution becomes the 'pretext or occasion of the picture'. Hence the style of a work is also its subject matter. This results in a paradoxical situation, for as Lévi-Strauss points out, non-objective paintings ultimately become 'realistic imitations of non-existent models'. He therefore concludes that abstraction is

a school of academic painting in which the artist strives to represent the manner in which he would execute his pictures if he were to paint one. (Lévi-Strauss, 1974, pp. 29 - 30).

In the final analysis, the freedom that apologists talk of in abstract art is, as John Berger suggests, no more than a 'freedom of the desert island'. (Berger quoted by Barnett. Barnett, University of Cape Town, 1979, p. 66). According to Berger, the artist who forsakes his society, and humanity as his subject matter, is also forsaken by humanity and his society. Finding himself without an audience, the artist's freedom thus becomes a freedom of constraint, and his work ceases to have any value other than an exchange or monetary value. In other words, art loses its social function and its meaning is therefore 'no longer in what it uniquely says but what it uniquely is'.⁽⁶⁾ (Berger, 1979, p. 21).

6. All products made by man have a purpose or function and are social objects by virtue of this function. Ross, however, sees a distinction between utilitarian objects and works of art, arguing that the latter are sovereign but not separate from society. (Ross, 1981, p. 145).

But since art is a deliberate and purposeful creation by man, it is, by extension, also a social phenomenon. (See Chapter One, p. 14). And for it to work as a social phenomenon 'it must reflect the times and conditions that give rise to it'. (Papanek, 1978, p. 25).⁽⁷⁾ This contention, which obviously negates the standpoint of formalist writers, is widely held. Morawski, for example, states that because the art work is a socio-cultural phenomenon, 'the sociological aspect is inextricable from the substance of its overall structure'. (Morawski. Baxandall, ed. 1972, p. 365). Similarly, Vasquez argues that art is necessarily social, firstly because it is the 'unique creation of a socially conditioned individual', and secondly because 'it satisfies both the creator's and the consumer's need for expression'. (Vasquez, 1973, p. 234).

The latter statement raises the problem of expression in art. The art historian, Benedetto Croce (1866 - 1952), regarded aesthetics as the science of intuition, and argued that to 'intuit is to express; and nothing else then to express'. (Croce quoted by Steinkraus. Steinkraus, 1974, p. 52). Rothschild similarly maintains that 'selection and decision must be intuitive' in artistic expression. (Rothschild, 1973, p. 4). Like Croce, and indeed many 20th century formalists, he also believes that intuition and expression are vital to artistic creation.

7. Although Papanek speaks specifically about industrial design, the same criteria are relevant for the visual arts.

It must, however, be noted that regardless of whether it is discussed from a formalist or functionalist viewpoint, and regardless of whether it is seen as a spiritual attribute or as conditioned by social and ideological factors, intuition is only relevant in the creation of the work of art if it does not falsify reality and is intelligible to the viewer. As Proudhon points out, art is 'the natural and specific expression of freedom'. (Proudhon quoted by Raphael. Raphael, 1980, p. 10). But this freedom, he argues, is only valid within specific boundaries which are determined by the artist's willingness to subordinate his intuition to what he calls the concepts of justice and truth. (Raphael, 1980, p. 10).

If it is to have validity both for the artist and for society, artistic expression must therefore remain a 'highly conscious, rational process ... not at all a state of intoxicated inspiration'. (Fischer, 1978, p. 9). Or, as Berenson maintains, it cannot be 'reckless, freakish, fantastic' because its role is to 'console and ennoble and transport us from the work-a-day world to realms of heightened happiness'. (Berenson, 1950, p. 32).⁽⁸⁾

Many aestheticians, including Marxist aestheticians, argue further that if art is seen as a social phenomenon, its role must be defined in terms of communication, morality, and the physical and spiritual growth of mankind. In reaction to the repudiation of the social role of art by those who evolved the concept of art

8. Obviously Berenson does not, however, argue for a social role in art.

the art's sake during the early 19th century, Proudhon suggested that the actual form of the art work is secondary to its role as stimulation for 'our moral sensibilities [and] our feelings of dignity and refinement'. (Proudhon quoted by Raphael. Raphael, 1980, p. 6). Proudhon goes on to say that art which 'does not exist for the purpose of improving society ... exists for its destruction' (Proudhon quoted by Raphael. Raphael, 1980, p. 37), and further suggests that 'hieroglyphics, erotic figures, or useless images of spirituality' can hardly serve as a means for physical and moral improvement. (Proudhon quoted by Raphael. Raphael, 1980, p. 11). (9)

Proudhon's belief in the artist's moral responsibility to society is reiterated by Papanek who feels that any design must be on the 'side of social good'. (Papanek, 1978, p. 53). The ultimate role of industrial design is, he maintains, to 'transfer man's environment ... and by extension man himself'. (Papanek, 1978, p. 32). Although worded differently, Vasquez's contention that the essential aim of art is to 'widen and enrich the human territory' (Vasquez, 1973, p. 115) undoubtedly gives expression to the same sentiment.

Whether this enrichment is to be achieved through form or through relevant anthropomorphic content is one of the central issues

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7. Proudhon's interpretation of the role of art is echoed in the ideas of later writers who also had affiliations with the anarchist movement. Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910), for instance, spoke of art as a means to promote 'human brotherhood' and 'transmit religious perception'. (Steinkraus, 1974, p. 53).

which separates the proponents of formalism from those who argue against a formalist methodology. In their rejection of a relevant social content, the former argue that form itself can alter man's perception and even act as a catalyst for social change. Questionable though this contention may be, it finds support in the writings of Roger Fry, and above all, in those of Herbert Read. While Fry believes that content is not directly relevant to pictorial appreciation (Todd, 1981, p. 307), Read's insistence on the concept of individual genius leads him to suggest that the means of communication, i.e. the form of the art work, is primary. Indeed, he condemns art which has, as he puts it, become 'the handmaid of religion or morality or social ideology', and feels that it is regrettable that 'men will forget that in art it is only the mode that matters'. (Read, 1937, p. 204). As with most of Read's observations this statement is, however, problematic. For while he argues that the rise of capitalism has led to a degradation of art (Read, 1937, p. 266), Read never points out that it is precisely under the influence of capitalism that form has taken precedence over content in the art work.

As Fischer argues in The Necessity of Art, the champions of capitalism tend to overlook content and to emphasize form 'although it were the essential thing, indeed the only thing worthy of attention'. This, he argues, has

affected a large section of the intelligentsia in the capitalist world and has brought into being the phenomenon of "formalism" in the sphere of the arts ... a phenomenon typical of a social form no longer in keeping with its times.... (Fischer, 1963, p. 130).

Also significant in this context are the ideas of the neo-Marxist aesthetician, Herbert Marcuse, who rejects the views of orthodox Marxist theoreticians by adopting an essentially formalist methodology. In keeping with other Marxists he still argues that art has political potential, but unlike them, he believes that this potential lies in the form, not the content of the art work. He qualifies his observation by saying that the work of art is authentic and true

not by virtue of its content (i.e. the
"correct" representation of social conditions)
nor by its "pure" form, but by the content
having become form. (Marcuse, 1979, p. 8).

But since he also believes that all revolutionary art forms are ultimately absorbed by the dominant ideology, Marcuse finally suggests that an entirely new language of communication must be found. (Marcuse. Baxandall, ed. 1972, p. 57).

Marcuse, as well as orthodox formalists, thus refuse to accept the fact that the content of a work cannot be separated from its form and its function. Proudhon, on the other hand, argues that form and content are inextricably linked and can therefore never be looked at in isolation. For him: 'the objective content also has form, and the subjective forms have content'. (Raphael, 1980, p. 42). He goes on to suggest that form and content are in constant interaction and that 'they are gradually perfected' (Raphael, 1980, p. 42) through this dialectical process.

The views of the Russian revolutionary poet, Mayakovsky, are not

unlike those of Proudhon. Arguing that poetry must be seen as a manufacturing or technical process rather than as an end in itself, Mayakovsky maintains that this process makes 'the poetic work fit for use'. (Mayakovsky quoted by Wolff. Wolff, 1981, p. 13). (10)

The observations of these writers are certainly not isolated expressions of a functionalist aesthetic. Many art historians, artists, and especially architects have argued (as Kenneth Clark does) that 'form is [only] alive when it is functional'. (Clark. Albrecht, Barnett and Griff, eds. 1970, p. 648). Indeed, the phrase 'form follows function' (Osborne quoting Sullivan. Osborne, 1970, p. 51) was originally coined in 1901 by the American architect, Louis Sullivan, and popularized by his pupil, Frank Lloyd Wright, who insisted that form and function should be seen as one. (Osborne, 1970, p. 51).

These, and other so-called functionalists of the early 20th century 'saw no fundamental distinction between the fine and useful arts' and believed

that if a thing is made to function well,
if its construction is well suited to the
job it has to do, then that thing will be
beautiful. (Osborne, 1970, p. 46).

Undoubtedly, the functionalist architects often maintained that

10. Mayakovsky is, of course, referring specifically to poetry but his observations are equally valid for other art forms.

the visual arts, especially painting, should be subordinated to, and enhance architecture. In other words, they did not simply argue for a communication of relevant social issues in painting and sculpture but spoke, instead, of the total work of art (Gesamtkunstwerk) in which the visual arts were to form part of a complete strategy for social change and development. (Fig. 5).

According to Morawski, all forms of art, whether objective or non-objective, fine or applied, autonomous or non-autonomous are embraced by a common function, that of communication or what he calls 'the informative one'. (Morawski, 1974, p. 309). This contention finds support in the views of prominent figures from a wide variety of disciplines including art, sociology and social anthropology. Lévi-Strauss, for instance, maintains that 'the process of artistic creation ... consists in trying to communicate' (Lévi-Strauss, 1974, p. 27), while Duvignaud argues that art is 'deliberate communication' (Duvignaud, 1972, p. 144), and Diego Rivera goes so far as to suggest that art has an advantage as a means of communication because it speaks 'a language that can easily be understood'. (Rivera. Shapiro, ed. 1973, p. 57).

Morawski takes this argument one step further by suggesting that the art work becomes a collaboration between the artist and his audience. 'Every art work', he states, 'not so much is as happens'. (Morawski. Baxandall, ed. 1972, p. 367). In other words, communication is effected through a meaningful dialectic between the artist and his audience. The latter contention is particularly

significant insofar as it stands in direct opposition to the views of formalists like William Tucker who insist that art is a fundamentally private activity. (See Chapter Two, p. 35).

But while many theorists agree that the fundamental role of art lies in communication (i.e. with the obvious exception of certain formalists), McLuhan points out that 'any attempt at communication ... from one mind to another entails simplifications and distortions'. (Miller, 1971, p. 8). Thus all forms of communication or language, including visual language, operate on the level of symbol and can never be a true translation of ideas.⁽¹¹⁾

In art, further distortions and simplifications are effected through ideology. Indeed, in many instances, the work of art reflects a complex of interacting ideologies. This has led Hadjinicolaou to describe aesthetic effect as the 'mirroring between an artist's visual ideology and the ideology of the viewer'. (Fuller, 1980, p. 20). Fernandez also points out that aesthetic preferences are either a response to social structure or, conversely, social structure 'is to some extent the expression of aesthetic preference'. (Fernandez, d'Azevedo, ed. 1975, p. 357).

Fernandez's observation is allied to the Marxist concept of a

11. A recognition of the importance of this problem is certainly not new for, as has already been pointed out, Plato never conceived of art as being an accurate reflection of ultimate truth or reality.

dialectic interaction or movement which will be discussed more fully at a later stage. But regardless of any methodological preferences, it is essential to realize that the form as well as the content and function of art cannot be divorced from ideological influence.

A further issue of considerable importance is the fact that the dominant ideology within a society usually has the greatest control over art. Thus when Carl Popper argues that 'observation is always selective' (Popper quoted by Miller. Miller, 1971, p. 18), it would certainly not be inaccurate to qualify his statement by pointing out that a process of selection is never arbitrary or objective. On the contrary, it often reflects the interests, and works to the advantage of the dominant ideology or ruling class. As Kenneth Clark points out, all images illustrate or confirm a system of belief held by an 'elite' and are very often consciously employed 'in maintaining that system'. (Clark. Albrecht, Barnett and Griff, eds. 1970, p. 636).

With specific reference to 20th century western society, Papanek argues that the tendency to be selective leads the bourgeois consumer to place an emphasis on form rather than content. His interest is therefore primarily in the actual appearance of things. (Papanek, 1978, p. 154). Fischer also points out that when an interest in form is primary it can be seen as 'a typical reaction of every ruling class when its position is threatened'. (Fischer, 1978, p. 131).

In keeping with this contention, Diego Rivera argues that those who believe that 'propaganda ruins art' and who therefore advocate an art of pure form are victims of 'bourgeois prejudice'. Bourgeois society, he maintains, does not want any ideals in art 'because its own ideals cannot any longer serve as artistic inspiration'. (Rivera. Shapiro, ed. 1973, p. 64). The South African artist, Gavin Young, similarly argues that artists who insist that art is neutral are blind to the fact that their works carry, 'in concealed form, a bourgeois political attitude'. (Young. University of Cape Town, 1979, p. 43). While both artists are evidently sensitive to the fact that art can never be neutral, neither actually goes so far as to point out that all art is a form of propaganda. This is valid both for art forms which systematically and consciously advance a particular point of view and for those which mirror ideas not consciously formulated.

Under capitalism, which is dominated by a stress on individual control of capital for the accumulation of profits (i.e. more capital), art simply becomes another commodity on the open market.⁽¹²⁾ Thus, instead of working to order from a client, the artist works 'for an unknown buyer' (Fischer, 1978, p. 49), a

12. Williams states that the essence of capitalism lies in the fact that the basic means of production is privately rather than collectively owned. Decisions about production are therefore in the hands of a group occupying a minority position in society who are not responsible to the majority for their actions (Williams, 1980, p. 186). For a discussion of the origins of this development and its influence on art see Chapter One.

situation which inevitably leads to alienation between him and his audience.

Furthermore, whereas the importance of art previously lay in what it communicated, under capitalism its significance lies in the fact that it is a unique object 'with a price on its head'. (Cork, 1979, p. 14). As a direct consequence of this, the work of art loses its use value and its exchange value thus becomes dominant. In other words, art becomes an 'expression of abstract labour' which makes its exchange in the market place possible. (Vasquez, 1973, p. 90).⁽¹³⁾ And like all other commodities, it is therefore also subject to the fluctuations of supply and demand.

Given this situation, one could argue, as Marx does, that 'capitalist production is hostile to certain branches of production ... In particular, art and poetry'. (Marx quoted by Vasquez, Vasquez, 1973, p. 102). Moreover, Marx contrasts the capitalist accentuation on 'quantity and exchange value' with the emphasis on 'quality and use value' in classical antiquity. (Egbert, 1967, p. 20).

The capitalist stress on art as a form of investment, as a commercial rather than a social commodity, also means that art often becomes elitist, i.e. it is created for the wealthy few rather than for the majority of society. Certainly, artists have

13. As was suggested in Chapter One, this trend is already evident in the Renaissance. It has, however, become much more marked with the increasing growth of capitalism in subsequent centuries.

not always accepted this state of affairs willingly. For as Fischer points out, the concept of art for art's sake actually arose

from the artist's determination not to produce commodities in a world where everything is a saleable commodity. (Fischer, 1978, p. 70).

It is therefore all the more ironic that this particular movement was little more than a symptom, indeed a confirmation, of the capitalist principle of production for its own sake.

The influence of capitalism can be held partly responsible for further ironic developments in later 20th century art. For although the rise of capitalism initially led to what Fischer refers to as an enormous range of expressive, original works, capitalism has since become stagnant. As a result of this, the only function left to art is that of embellishing the private life of the capitalist, while at the same time serving as a good investment. (Fischer, 1978, p. 51).

Given its primary function as private property in modern western societies, the role of art - particularly within public museums as they have evolved over the last century - has become increasingly confused, and whether the work of art is a social object or a commercial commodity is therefore no longer clear. Raphael refers to this development as a 'confused connection between idealism and business' (Raphael, 1980, p. 85), while Vasquez points out that the 'principle of private property' cannot be

reconciled with the 'social function of art' since the latter (in a contrast to the former) exists as an 'inter-connection between the artist and his public'. (Vasquez, 1973, p. 238).

In the final analysis, the freedom which art is supposed to have within a capitalist system is nothing but a well constructed myth. With art being subject to the exigencies of the market and the artist ultimately controlled by the 'tastes, preferences, ideas and aesthetic notions of those who influence the market ... the creative potential and individuality of the artist' (Vasquez, 1973, p. 84) is stifled. Yet in spite of this, the art market itself is largely based on the fact that individuality and originality have a high commercial value under capitalism.

The paradoxical nature of this situation, the control of art by capital, and the consequent uncertainty of the artist's role within society are all symptomatic of an alienated relationship between him and his audience. As Tax points out, the artist sends his product into an unknown market where, to the consumer who has no knowledge or understanding of its creation, it appears as if by magic. (Tax. Baxandall, ed. 1972, p. 23). The division and sometimes even hostility between the artist and the general public is further expressed in the separation of artistic labour from ordinary labour which 'leads to the concentration of creative talent in a few individuals' (Vasquez, 1973, p. 284) who are seen as outsiders precisely because their work is exclusive and essentially unique.

The concept of alienation was first formulated by the French philosopher, Jean Jacques Rousseau, and later developed by Hegel and Marx.⁽¹⁴⁾ In his 1884 Manuscripts Marx argues that 'the economic foundation of the capitalist social order is the main cause of alienation'. He goes on to list what he considers to be the three basic stages in this process:

the alienation of the product, the
alienation of the production process
and the alienation of the human species
essence (Morawski, ed. 1974, p. 327),

all of which have already been mentioned briefly as relevant to a discussion of the visual arts. Considered together, they enable one to formulate a relatively coherent picture of the problems experienced by artists working under capitalism. In the first instance, the artist is alienated from his product because he does not know why or for whom he is producing it. This situation is exacerbated by the fact that he no longer has an intimate relationship with his materials: paint comes in ready-to-use tubes, steel is forged and moulded by mechanical presses, etc., etc. Finally, the consumer is also alienated both from the art object and its producer partly because the content of the art work is unintelligible to the uninitiated (usually a direct consequence of the artist ignoring the social role of art), and partly because works of art are now quite often about process,

14. Marx defines alienation as the feeling of futility and isolation which the individual experiences when he realizes that he is completely estranged from society, which has lost awareness of the human condition and of its own historical mission. (Poggioli, Albrecht, Barnett, Griff, eds. 1970, pp. 671 - 672).

which tends to mystify rather than clarify their meaning for the general public.

As mentioned above, Marx attributed the process of alienation to the economic foundation of capitalism. More specifically, he felt that the growth of industrialization had led to the estrangement of labour from production (Osborne, 1970, p. 281), i.e. labour and creativity became irreconcilable opposites. Whereas all other forms of labour are in fact looked upon as work, artistic production is discussed in terms of creativity. Thus the arts assumes an elevated position within society.

Within a capitalist system, labour is undoubtedly always problematic for 'instead of affirming himself, man loses himself in it and alienates his essence'. (Vasquez, 1973, p. 82). In other words, labour becomes a process of dehumanization since man is no longer able to recognize himself 'in the products of his labour, in his activity or in himself'. (Vasquez, 1973, p. 55). Furthermore, with capital gain and accumulation serving as the basis for all activity, 'qualitative values' are reduced to 'quantitative abstractions' (Rader, 1967, p. 141), i.e. everything (including man himself) begins to assume an abstract monetary value from which art has certainly not escaped.

In fact, the function and content of art has become increasingly abstracted and dehumanized under capitalism. This is, of course, partly attributable to the fact that art has lost all social relevance through an almost total emphasis on form, and according

to Papanek, through a preoccupation with space, 'the transcendence of space, the multiplication of space, the division and negation of space'. (Papanek, 1978, p. 43). He goes on to say that this concern with space must actually be seen as denying man and society for 'it is ... devoid of man as though mankind did not exist'. (Papanek, 1978, p. 43).

This may seem contradictory, particularly since capitalism is often linked with democratic systems of government. It must, however, be remembered that while both capitalism and democracy are apparently concerned with furthering individual freedom and growth (Rothschild, 1973, p. 10), individualism tends to affirm exclusivity, for it leads to the creation of elite groups rather than communal integration.

In its contempt for mass produced articles and mass consumption - which are, after all, potential means for breaking down social and class distinctions - the capitalist elite tends to use contemporary art to further its own exclusivity. As Glaser points out, the nouveau riche have taken over the role of the clerical classes and the aristocracy in supporting artists, partly because they wish to effect a 'connection with the societal well springs of so much art of the past'. (Glaser in Preface to Baynes. Baynes, 1975, p. 5).

The power of this new elite cannot be underestimated, for not only does it control capitalist production (and therefore what society consumes), but it undoubtedly also controls artistic

production, a point which has already been discussed with reference to the false sense of freedom which the contemporary non-objective artist often has. For instead of being an expression of freedom, abstraction re-inforces the exclusivity of the position of the wealthy buyer through its tendency to adopt an hermetic, and indeed, often unintelligible content. Through its emphasis on individuality and esotericism, avant-garde art thus inevitably serves the interests of the ruling classes or dominant ideology.

While the connection between the artist and the exclusive buyer is by no means new - art has always been 'made for a minority by a minority' (Clark. Albrecht, Barnett and Griff, eds. 1970, p. 650) - Clark nevertheless argues that during the past 100 years the values in art have been created by so small a minority and have become so divorced from the sources of life that one can no longer refer to an artistic elite. Rather, one must speak of a 'priesthood' preserving its mysteries from 'the profanation of an all-conquering materialism'. (Clark. Albrecht, Barnett and Griff, eds. 1970, p. 650).

Paradoxically, the capitalist who buys art tries to break from his materialistic existence through his support of art forms which are ostensibly concerned with spiritual issues. This situation becomes even more ludicrous when one considers that he himself is actually responsible for the fact that art has lost its spiritual function and is now little more than a commodity or material possession.

But while the elite which supports art may have pretensions to spirituality, its concern ultimately remains with elevating its own status. As Read points out, it tends to 'demand symbols of its position ... above all those which reflect its pomp and glory'. (Read, 1939, p. 144). Thus 20th century western art has shifted away from being an art for 'man in general' to serving 'a special class of men who may not be better but who are evidently different'. (Ortega y Gasset, 1968, p. 8).

In part, the difference between the capitalist elite and the ordinary public is expressed in terms of 'high', i.e. exclusive, and 'low', i.e. popular forms of culture. In most art forms this difference manifests itself in the form and content as well as the function of the art work, and is manipulated by the dominant ideology to maintain the status quo. In other words, most forms of painting, sculpture and limited edition graphic works - the so-called 'high' or fine arts - are the exclusive domain of the capitalist elite, whereas popular art forms such as advertising images, posters and Hollywood-type 'movies' etc. are created by the dominant ideology for mass consumption. (Clark. Albrecht, Barnett and Griff, eds. 1970, p. 636 and p. 646).

The exclusivity of 'high' art is ensured through an emphasis on individuality and the uniqueness of the art object, as well as through its incomprehensibility to the general public. This unintelligibility, which is effected through a mystification of content or meaning, 'divides the public into two classes ... those who understand and those who do not'. (Ortega y Gasset,

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1968, p. 6).

According to Rothschild, the history of individualism in 19th and 20th century art follows a tendency from what he calls 'naturalistic individualism (Impressionism)' towards 'subjective individualism (Expressionism)' and 'hence toward unintelligibility'.

(Rothschild, 1973, p. 16). One could argue that the move from Expressionism to Abstraction represents a further important step in the direction of greater individualism and unintelligibility in the art work. Thus the progressive elimination of anthropocentrism in art can be linked to an emphasis on the uniqueness of the artist.

Extending his discussion on this subject, Rothschild argues that a stress on individualism has led to a growth in 'courage, strength, initiative, heroism, leadership and self-respect'. (Rothschild, 1973, p. 9). But he then goes on to say that individualism ultimately has a negative effect for it gives rise to 'pretense and vanity and conceit', qualities which serve to 'disguise a social chaos in which war, misery, poverty, deceit, exploitation, deprecation and charlatanism' (Rothschild, 1973, p. 20) are rampant.

Although Ortega y Gasset does not project as pessimistic an image of the effects of individualism, he certainly recognizes the importance of its influence on art. While suggesting, firstly, that the unintelligibility of modern art creates a kind of class division, he argues further that the 'new art is an artistic art'

for it can only be understood by those who have an education in the field. (Ortega y Gasset, 1968, p. 12). It is, moreover, a self-interested and inward-looking or introverted art, i.e. one which defines and redefines its own parameters rather than turning to society for its content.

On the one hand, the artist's preoccupation with self and with artistic problems thus serves to extend the schism between him and the general public, while on the other, it belies his own elitist attitude which has led him to believe that his dreams and anxieties are a significant source of inspiration in art.

Precisely because it needs a sophisticated knowledge and has therefore become 'inaccessible and incomprehensible to those who have not acquired the aesthetic standards of appreciation' (Bensman and Gerver. Albrecht, Barnett and Griff, eds. 1970, p. 661), contemporary art humiliates the uninitiated viewer and finally leaves him indignant. As Ortega y Gasset points out, if the viewer understands the work of art at which he is looking, it will not leave him indignant, even if he does not like it. 'But when his dislike is due to his failure to understand, he feels humiliated'. (Ortega y Gasset, 1968, p. 6). This situation ensures that the status quo, the division between the initiated and uninitiated, is maintained. For

with the new art ... which is the art of a privileged aristocracy of finer senses ... the average citizen is compelled to realize he is the average citizen, a creature incapable of receiving the sacraments of art. (Ortega y Gasset, 1968, p. 6).

Cork similarly suggests that 'reasonable men and women' are willing to 'acknowledge the importance of the arts' but feel alienated by the 'extremism, incomprehensibility and exclusiveness of contemporary visual art'. (Cork, 1979, p. 87). They either feel that they are being excluded from a 'secret game' (Cork, 1979, p. 87) or else that contemporary art is a 'worthless hoax'. (Cork, 1979, p. 56). Thus 'instead of giving insight' into the world (Todd, 1981, p. 305), contemporary western art mystifies, confuses and distorts the reality of social relations.

As has already been mentioned, it could also be argued that since the hermeticism of much modern art provides the bourgeois world with a means to evade social decisions with a reasonably clear conscience (Fischer, 1978, p. 95), contemporary western art cannot be divorced from ideological considerations. Berger in fact suggests that mystification enables a privileged minority to justify its ruling position (Fuller, 1980, p. 5), while Fischer sees it as a consequence and expression of man's alienation. (Fischer, 1978, p. 95).

This alienation of art from society is further attributable to the mystification of the theory and practice of art. In Art, An Enemy of the People, Taylor insists that a tendency to mystification and an avoidance of reality in both art and philosophy turns these branches of knowledge into 'enemies of the masses'. He therefore argues that the masses should retaliate by arming themselves against art. (Taylor, 1978, p. 2).

Diego Rivera does not suggest as radical a solution to the problem of mystification, but like Taylor, he maintains that it is the 'mysterious character of art which makes it aloof and inaccessible to the masses'. (Rivera. Shapiro, ed. 1973, p. 56).

The mysterious nature of art is not, however, the only factor determining its inaccessibility to the general public. For although they are intended to encourage a wide appreciation of art, public museums and art galleries often prove to be very hostile environments. In his book, Ways of Seeing, Berger provides evidence that art galleries are visited primarily by those with a privileged education, and that the majority of people of all social classes identify museums and galleries with churches and libraries, i.e. with institutions that are generally mysterious and imposing. (Berger, 1979, p. 24). Given the fact that art galleries are often silent environments in which the viewer is apparently required to meditate on the art object, this reaction is, of course, understandable. It could also be pointed out that museums tend to create an atmosphere of sterility so that they often give an impression of clinical cleanliness akin to that of a hospital, and seem to demand the same degree of deathly silence and decorum.

Apart from the fact that it seems to have become an 'elitist preserve of aesthetic snobbery' (Cork, 1979, p. 20), the museum also tends to give credibility and sanction to the art work. Thus regardless of what it may (or more often may not communicate) the

fact that it has been placed in the museum environment implies that the work of art must necessarily be valuable.

The museum's exploitation of its own hallowed position, its tendency to exhibit works in which the artist himself is often both the creator and the product, and the general acceptance that the two together are an invincible and unquestionable authority on art, encourages the glorification of the 'present social systems and its priorities'. (Berger, 1979, p. 24). In other words, the museum is primarily a voice for the dominant ideology, certainly not a mirror of the real world.

In a paper delivered at the Sixth International Congress of Aesthetics at Uppsala, it was pointed out that the museum has failed to educate the majority of people in art. (Dorfles, G. Uppsala University, 1972, p. 307). Furthermore, although a museum like the 'Museo de Solidoridad Chile' claimed that it was set up for the Chilean people, 'for the factory worker, the miner and the peasant' to consider as part of his heritage, and saw to it that sections of the collection were 'perpetually on the move, so as to reach the whole country', Kunzle argues that the true museum of the people is on the streets. (Kunzle, Millon and Nochlin, eds. 1980, p. 362). Indeed, if the ordinary person is to appreciate and understand art, it must become part of his daily existence, a natural extension of his life. Precisely because it is accessible to the majority of people, the mass communications media could become the means to impart such an easily accessible, as well as intelligible and socially relevant art form.

As things stand at the moment, modern art is undoubtedly unpopular, 'in fact anti-popular', and in its present form it will 'always have the masses against it'. (Ortega y Gasset, 1968, p. 5). Thus despite the fact that sociologists argue that art is a social institution, it has become thoroughly anti-social in its tendency to advance the schism between 'high' and 'low' culture. Furthermore, the gradual adoption of an increasingly abstract formal vocabulary, which has led to the dehumanization of art, means that it has ultimately become a thing of no real consequence. (Ortega y Gasset. Holland and Ulanov, eds. 1972. p. 35).

Undoubtedly, the artist is in a position to alter this situation, but unfortunately he is generally 'too independent to contemplate immolation, [i.e. sacrifice] to society'. (Bell. Lipset and Lowenthal, eds. 1961, p. 402). In addition to his desire to protect his independence and individuality, there is also the fact that he is mainly concerned with conducting a 'specialized dialogue' between himself and other initiates (Cork, 1979, p.80), and with giving vent to his own emotions, usually 'at the expense of the spectator and/or consumer'. (Papanek, 1978, p. 41). With such interests dominating his activities, the artist is unlikely to become a meaningful social force.

Ironically, many contemporary art movements actually claim to be socially relevant, but as with Minimal art, their social protest is exhibited 'mainly on the level of form'. (Poggioli. Albrecht, Barnett and Griff, eds. 1970, p. 685). In other words, protest

is often registered negatively through a complete rejection of the social reality. This tendency is recognized by Malraux who argues that the modern abstract artist is protesting against the cosmopolitanism and universalism of contemporary culture 'where photographic reproduction has made all artistic creations accessible to all'. (Poggioli. Albrecht, Barnett and Griff, eds. 1970, p. 680-681). It is for essentially the same reasons that Poggioli argues that the main function of abstraction is to register protest against bourgeois taste. (Poggioli. Albrecht and Griff, eds. 1970, p. 680).

Significantly, although large-scale technological advances in fields relevant to art - the camera, mass communications media like film and television and automated lithographic reproduction - could be exploited in an attempt to reach an ever-increasing audience, contemporary artists often try to avoid or escape the reality of mechanization. Some see the machine as a threat to their individuality and therefore ignore all technological advances in an attempt to perpetuate the romantic myth of a unique, original and superiorly crafted object. Others, like Rauschenberg (Fig. 6) and Warhol (Fig. 7) look upon the machine as useful content and have therefore often used mass communication techniques as well as images and objects of popular culture in their works. This has lead Read to come to the erroneous conclusion that Pop Art destroys the 'boundaries between art and the image of mass-communication'. (Read, 1967, p. 34). For since the Pop artist's work is a unique, original object in spite of the

is often registered negatively through a complete rejection of the social reality. This tendency is recognized by Malraux who argues that the modern abstract artist is protesting against the cosmopolitanism and universalism of contemporary culture 'where photographic reproduction has made all artistic creations accessible to all'. (Poggioli. Albrecht, Barnett and Griff, eds. 1970, p. 680-681). It is for essentially the same reasons that Poggioli argues that the main function of abstraction is to register protest against bourgeois taste. (Poggioli. Albrecht and Griff, eds. 1970, p. 680).

Significantly, although large-scale technological advances in fields relevant to art - the camera, mass communications media like film and television, and automated lithographic reproduction - could be exploited in an attempt to reach an ever-increasing audience, contemporary artists often try to avoid or escape the reality of mechanization. Some see the machine as a threat to their individuality and therefore ignore all technological advances in an attempt to perpetuate the romantic myth of a unique, original and superiorly crafted object. Others, like Rauschenberg (Fig. 6) and Warhol (Fig. 7) look upon the machine as useful content and have therefore often used mass communication techniques as well as images and objects of popular culture in their works. This has lead Read to come to the erroneous conclusion that Pop Art destroys the 'boundaries between art and the image of mass-communication'. (Read, 1967, p. 34). For since the Pop artist's work is a unique, original object in spite of the

techniques he has used and the final appearance of his product, it remains incompatible with mass produced images originating in fields like advertising and television.⁽¹⁵⁾

Many early 20th century art movements, including Constructivism, Dada and Surrealism, were concerned both with social issues (which led them to ally themselves to radical political organisations), and with coming to terms with contemporary technological advances - of which the Dadaist photomontage is a good example.(Fig. 8). But their effectiveness was often reduced through an insistence on an esoteric and hermetic orientation which ultimately made them inaccessible and unintelligible to the general public. Although probably not entirely valid in a consideration of Constructivism and Dada, this is certainly true for the Surrealist movement.

If art is to be accessible to all, both its form and its content must be relevant and intelligible, and its location must be suitable. This does not mean that the publically placed sculpture is necessarily accessible to the ordinary viewer, for its location is certainly no guarantee against an exclusive content and the projection of personal rather than public values (as is often true of Minimal sculpture and Land Art).

15. Although copies of works by Pop artists are now easily accessible through modern printing techniques, it should be noted that neither these, nor posters and prints of e.g. Leonardo's very popular Mona Lisa, can ever be equated with the extremely valuable, signed and - in the case of printed works - numbered editions which separates these from reproductions.

For art to be relevant to the society in which it is created, it also has to take cognisance of the economic, political and social conditions of that society. In the present state of monopoly capitalism, mass production and mass consumerism it is therefore anomalous to produce art works that are neither widely accessible and comprehensible, nor produced on a large scale. As Berger points out: 'Authenticity is an obsolete category in an era of mass production'. (Fuller, 1980, p. 11). In accordance with this sentiment Diego Rivera also argues that in a highly developed technological society the technological advances available to the artist must be used in the creation of his art work. (Rivera. Shapiro, ed. 1973, p. 58).

But in the absence of his willingness to do so, the artist has been forced to relinquish the primacy of his role and his art to the advertising media, and advertisements have therefore become the new official art works of the modern capitalist society. This development finds expression in the fact that advertisements are 'what "we" put up on "our" streets and use to fill up to half of "our" newspapers and magazines'. (Williams, 1980, p.184).

Obviously, the actual content as opposed to the form of contemporary advertising serves to uphold and reinforce the values of the dominant capitalist elite and can therefore hardly be used as a basis for a new art. Papanek in fact argues that advertisements have an extremely negative effect on the general public because they persuade people to buy things 'they don't need with money they don't have, in order to impress others who don't care'.

(Papanek, 1978, p. 9). They also tend to distort and mystify reality by depicting people as they think they behave and not as they actually behave. (Goffman, 1979, p. vii).

This is not, however, why advertising and other mass communications media like film and television are seen as a threat by those who want to maintain the status quo in art. To them, the danger of the mass media to art actually lies in the fact that they

produce no exceptions ... no masterpieces, no works of genius ... [and] never exalt anyone or make them aware of anything but 'trivial potentialities'. (Fuller, 1980, p. 22).

Fuller also points out that with advertising the 'artist's style is eliminated since the image is corporately conceived [and] mechanically executed'. Consequently, it ultimately lacks 'any stamp of individuality'. (Fuller, 1980, p. 21).

The idea that the mass media art forms and advertising present some kind of threat to art is a direct outcome of elitist prejudice which can be attributed partly to a recognition by the avant-garde artist that he does not have control over all forms of visual communication. But while the artist generally regards the mass communication forms as non-artistic and utilitarian, the fact remains that they have an enormous impact on people. Not all of this is necessarily beneficial, but it is important to realize that the many

shortcomings and ill effects attributed to the mass media arise not from their

nature but from the use we [and those in control] make of them. (Dorfles. Uppsala University, 1972, p. 309).

Contrary to common sentiment, mass communication forms are not necessarily a threat to art. Once this is recognized and accepted, the artist will be in a position to become part of the mass media rather than make superficial use of mass communications techniques in his works. Given the potential for clarity and immediacy of communication in these forms, he will of course also be in a position to reach a much wider audience than he does at present.⁽¹⁶⁾ Thus, if the artist wants to escape the technological enslavement and alienation of modern society, he will have to re-humanize man's relationship to the machine which (up to the present) has led to man becoming 'a mere appendage, thus aestheticising our relationship to the machine through a new sense of ritual'. (Dorfles, G. Uppsala University. 1972, p. 307).

Undoubtedly, it is the lack of relevant ritual that differentiates 20th century western art from the mass communication art forms. For while the objects and images of the mass media form a part of the rituals of everyday life - this despite the fact that they are manipulated and controlled by the dominant capitalist ideology - the same cannot be said for modern art. As with art in non-literate societies, the newspapers, magazines, television programmes, films, comic books and advertisements of contemporary

16. This was one of the major considerations in the candidate's practical work.

western society confirm and give expression to the socio-political, cultural and also economic life of the society.

In the 20th century western context the artist has been stripped of power. No longer a leader of men, he finds himself on the outer fringe of society, but constantly tries to reaffirm his former control by turning to pseudo-ritual, magic and Shamanism. In other words, by setting himself up as a magician or sorcerer, he hopes to recapture the influence and control which the artist-magician had in prehistoric and still has in traditional non-literate societies. Artists like Acconci, Beuys and Oppenheim thus create 'magic circles' in which they emerge as priests, saints or martyrs who become the conscience and give vent to the guilt of society. (17)

But their art remains an expression of 'a negative cultural relationship'. (Poggioli. Albrecht, Barnett and Griff, eds. 1970, p. 670). Instead of addressing themselves to the realities of contemporary society, they create an esoteric and hermetic context for their activities. Thus they are no more than an elitist sub-culture, and as Poggioli suggests, the artist who insists on setting himself apart from society in this way 'has no right to protest that [he] is not treated like a wild flower when [he] is a hothouse flower'. (Poggioli. Albrecht, Barnett and Griff, eds. 1970, p. 579).

17. This discussion on Shamanism and ritual in avant-garde art is indebted to Neville Dubow. (Dubow. University of Cape Town, 1979, p. 116).

According to Proudhon, the public has a right to declare its preferences in art as well as the right to reject those which it feels are irrelevant. It is for society, he says, to

give orders; it is for the artist to obey. For if you have rejected my inspiration in your art; if you have tried to impose your own imagination on mine, then I despise your art for all its wonders; I say no to it. (Proudhon quoted by Raphael. Raphael, 1980, p. 11).

Cork expresses much the same sentiment when he writes that avant-garde artists should 'no longer see themselves in romantic opposition to the society they inhabit'. (Cork, 1979, p. 89). Rather, they should forge 'a language and a subject matter of demonstrable relevance to the people who view their art' and without becoming

uncritical servants of their society, artists have once again to play a part in reflecting, diagnosing and so far as they are able changing the condition of 20th century existence. (Cork, 1979, p. 89).

If art is to regain its use value and rekindle a vital and healthy relationship with society, it will have to convince the general public that it serves 'to confirm their beliefs, to inform them about matters of lasting importance and to make the invisible visible'. (Clark. Albrecht, Barnett and Griff, eds. 1970, p.638). Only then will it regain some of its former power and become a significant force. At present, it is obviously not 'seen as dangerous, nor as a threat' (Dubow. University of Cape Town, 1979, p. 117) because its primary role is to serve as an exclusive plaything or investment for the rich.

CHAPTER THREE

ART, SOCIALISM AND MARXIST AESTHETICS

Marxist aesthetics has its basis in Hegelian aesthetics. Thus the Hegelian dialectic between Beauty and Truth, i.e. between form and content, is also fundamental to Marxist aesthetics. (Arvon, 1973, p. 42). However, whereas Hegel argues that perfection is achieved through the unity of form and content (Arvon, 1973, p. 41) - content being a reflection of the Idea or spiritual truth - Marx 'transforms the Idea into a social entity'. (Arvon, 1973, p. 113). He therefore also maintains that the Hegelian concept of spiritual truth must be replaced by the idea of a social reality. (Arvon, 1973, p. 42).

According to Hegel it is through work that man 'produces and creates himself' (Vasquez, 1973, p. 52), while art provides him with the means to achieve 'self-affirmation or self-consciousness' and to 'answer the need of humans to externalize themselves', i.e. to make a human impression on external things. (Vasquez, 1973, p. 57).

Marx's attitude to work as well as art differs from that of Hegel in certain fundamental respects. As regards work, he points out that Hegel only discusses its role in giving form to things and in forming man. In other words, Hegel considers only the positive aspects of work, whereas Marx argues that work can be negative since it is 'based on private property and alienated

labour'. (Vasquez, 1973, p. 52). Furthermore, while Hegel maintains that 'the only kind of work ... [is] the work of the spirit, or of man as a spiritual being' (Vasquez, 1973, p. 53), Marx demystifies Hegelian idealism by rejecting the transcendental and metaphysical character of Hegel's Idea. (Vasquez, 1973, p.59).

He effects a similar break with Hegel in his concept of aesthetics, for in contrast to the Hegelian implication that 'art is made by man but not for him', Marx emphasizes the anthropocentric nature of art and aesthetics 'by relating them to concrete, real and historical human beings and their practical and material activity'. (Vasquez, 1973, p. 57). For him, therefore, art is an 'advanced stage of humanizing nature'. He also argues that the essence of humanity lies in creative work, while that of art is to satisfy a specific 'human need' which goes beyond survival and procreation. (Vasquez, 1973, p. 59). Thus art is one of many needs created by man in the course of his social development. (Vasquez, 1973, p.60).

According to Arvon, Marxist aesthetics is almost impossible to understand because it has been subjected to extremely varied interpretations. (Arvon, 1973, p. 24). Orthodox Marxists do, however, seem to share some fundamental ideas, for they generally argue that the products of man (including art) must be seen as social phenomena which are all bound by a complex dialectic involving economic, political, sociological, historical and environmental factors. In other words, like all other products of society, art cannot be separated from the Marxist concept of historical materialism.

Given its attempt to consider and co-ordinate the many complex and sometimes contradictory factors influencing the products of man, it is often argued that Marxist aesthetics has had some share in the 'devaluation of subjectivity' in the study of art. (Marcuse, 1979, p. 6 . Yet many western aestheticians feel that this assumption is essentially false and that Marxist aesthetics actually involves an approach to art which is no less subjective than their own. This, they maintain, is particularly evident in the tendency for Marxist aestheticians to concentrate on content rather than form in the consideration of the art work. It is, however, important to realize that western aestheticians are able to reach this conclusion only through a refusal to acknowledge both the depth and scope of analysis made possible by an historical materialist method.

In terms of their belief in the fundamental necessity of a dialectical approach to the history of man and his products, Marxist aestheticians never reject or discard information which may further our understanding of art. Rather, they tend to assess the importance of this information relative to other factors which may have played a role in determining or influencing the artist's approach, whether it be social, political, economic, historical or cultural.

In essence, Marxist aesthetics is therefore quite undogmatic, and can be contrasted with the Neo-Platonic view that art is 'based on ideal principles considered to be valid universally and for all time'. (Egbert, 1970, p. 106).

Nevertheless, western art critics tend to insist that Marxist aesthetics is, on the contrary, based on a totally inflexible methodology. While this involves a palpably false evaluation of Marx's own writings, it is evidently founded on the fact that Stalin and his successors shifted away from an orthodox Marxist approach and adopted an 'increasingly dogmatic, sectarian and class subjectivist method in aesthetic theory and artistic practice'. (Vasquez, 1973, p. 19).

Before Stalin's rise to prominence, the attitude to art of those leading the Russian Revolution was certainly not characterized by a similar inflexibility. While Lenin maintained that art must have an ideological content and play a didactic role within society, he

opposed any tendency of any group of artists towards a monopoly of artistic activity and refused to commit the revolutionary government to any official position on art, leaving the road open for artistic experimentation. (Vasquez, 1973, p. 17).

This observation finds support in a letter from Lenin to Gorky in which Lenin insisted that the artist must have the freedom to 'extract from any philosophy many things that are useful to him, even though that ideology may be idealistic'. (Lenin quoted by Arvon. Arvon, 1973, p. 34). On the other hand, Lenin's views sometimes come very close to the Neo-Platonic notion of universality for he also argued that 'great artists exceed ideological limitations to reveal the truth about reality'. (Vasquez, 1973, pp. 15-16).

The complexity and often contradictory nature of Lenin's views on art is further illustrated by the fact that he saw art as a semi-autonomous entity, arguing that 'objective reality exists independently of the human consciousness that reflects it'. (Lenin quoted by Arvon. Arvon, 1973, p. 49). The artist, he further maintained, has the right to express himself without subjecting his product to a 'mechanical egalitarianism and a domination of the minority by the majority'. (Lenin quoted by Arvon. Arvon, 1973, p. 16). The latter statement, which comes from Lenin's Concerning Art and Culture, can be seen as an extension of his belief that there should be no monopoly of artistic activity by a single group of artists. In a further passage from the same source, Lenin states that

greater scope must undoubtedly be allowed
for personal initiative, individual
inclination, thought and fantasy, form
and content

in the creation of the art work. (Lenin quoted by Vasquez. Vasquez, 1973, p. 14).

Trotsky similarly argues that art is a semi-autonomous entity which cannot be 'judged, accepted, or rejected [only] on the basis of Marxist principles'. (Arvon, 1973, p. 18). He does, however, qualify this statement when he writes that 'only Marxism can explain why and how a certain orientation has arisen in art in any given historical period'. (Trotsky quoted by Arvon. Arvon, 1973, p. 67). In keeping with these views, he maintains that the works of the Russian Formalist writers are valid insofar as they extend our understanding of literature, but lose credi-

bility by ultimately reducing their works to a style of expression.⁽¹⁾ (Arvon, 1973, p. 67).

In contrast to this reductive process, Trotsky urged artists to extend the vitality and dynamism of the revolution into art, regardless of the fact that their works might well be 'unexpected' and lack a specific proletarian direction. (Arvon, 1973, p. 17). Significantly, he was particularly enthusiastic about the Futurist experiments into movement and space and about the consciously social architectural programme developed by Gropius in the context of the Bauhaus. But throughout his writings, he constantly cautions against dogmatic prescription, and reacted forcibly when attempts were made to suggest that Soviet art of the immediate post-Revolutionary period was monitored and controlled by the state.

It is not true [he maintained] that in our society we regard only art whose theme is the worker as new and revolutionary, and the belief that we force poets willy-nilly to write about nothing but factory chimneys or a revolt against capitalism is absurd. (Trotsky quoted by Vasquez. Vasquez, 1973, p. 18).

Given such early attempts to discredit those who claimed that art had been forced into an inflexible mould under Soviet rule, it is all the more ironic that it was ultimately controlled by a specific demand for Socialist Realism under Stalin and subsequent Stalinist regimes.

1. Trotsky's observations are presumably equally applicable to the visual arts.

As has been stated, Marx himself held that in art - as in all other fields - progress is governed by the Hegelian dialectic (Egbert, 1970, p. 101). This pre-supposes that everything, including 'subject and object, knower and the thing known' are in a continual process of mutual adaptation'. (Russel, 1961, p. 749). Marx shows this dialectic interaction as involving an organic progress towards the classless society, in contrast to the secular Utopians of the 19th century who argued that the progress towards greater egalitarianism would be linear. (Egbert, 1967, p. 24). For Marx, therefore - as, indeed, also for Proudhon - 'everything depends on everything else and all things are linked in solidarity with one another'. (Proudhon quoted by Raphael. Raphael, 1980, p. 7). But whereas orthodox Marxist aestheticians argue that the artist 'must understand and make use of his knowledge of past art' (Egbert, 1970, p. 103) because that past is an integral part of man's historical development, Proudhon feels that this is backward looking and 'unfruitful, a mere means of fleeing reality'. (Raphael, 1980, p. 53). This difference between Marx's and Proudhon's attitudes to history helps to elucidate both Lenin's and Stalin's responses to works of art executed in post-Revolutionary Russia. For, believing as Marx did that tradition is one of the 'inescapable determinants of art and other aspects of life', they could not accept art which appeared to reject the past completely. (Egbert, 1970, p. 103).

In terms of the Marxist dialectic in which everything is in constant flux, development is not necessarily consistent for all spheres of human activity. Thus one can never determine the

prospects for art in any given society 'because artistic development will not necessarily accord with changes in the social condition of man'. (Vasquez, 1973, p. 101).

In keeping with this interpretation of historical development, Marx adopted Hegel's concepts of 'thesis', 'anti-thesis' and 'synthesis'. In Marxist aesthetics, 'thesis' is translated as the 'dynamic unity' of form and content. But since contradictions must inevitably reside within this dynamic unity a counter-tendency or 'antithesis' will develop, with the ensuing struggle between the two resolving itself in a 'synthesis'. (Egbert, 1970, p. 98).

Given his belief in an eventual classless society, Marx maintained that 'bourgeois capitalism and its art' could be seen as the thesis, in reaction to which there would be a 'dictatorship of the proletariat with its art', while the 'classless society with its art' would constitute synthesis and 'therefore would produce the finest artistic results of all'. (Egbert, 1970, p. 98).

A central aspect of the historical materialist doctrine developed by Marx, and adopted by later aestheticians influenced by his writings, is the idea that man's identity is determined by the fact that he is a social being, and therefore that all human products - including art - must be seen in terms of man's relationship to society. In contrast to Kant whose only concern was with 'the isolated individual', Marxist aestheticians thus endeavour 'to take into account the participation of creative individuals in the common effort of mankind' to perfect the world. (Arvon, 1973, p.27). Ultimately, therefore, their concern is with society as a whole

rather than with man as an individual. As Egbert points out, Marx undoubtedly considered the individual 'to be subordinate to society' for he argued that 'the social organism is more than the sum of its individual parts'. (Egbert, 1967, pp. 22-23). Given this emphasis on defining man's identity in terms of society, it is not surprising that Marxist aestheticians are against individualistic self-expression and generally deride the philosophy of art for art's sake. Instead, they usually urge the artist to devote 'his art and himself to social action' toward the eventual attainment of the classless society. (Egbert, 1967, pp. 22-23).

This attitude finds expression in Lenin's contention that

art belongs to the people. It must have its deepest roots in the broad masses of the workers. It must be understood and loved by them. (Lenin quoted by Egbert. Egbert, 1967, p. 58).

According to him, the tendency towards abstraction evident in Russian art of the period immediately before and after the October Revolution was too individualistic and socially undisciplined to be acceptable. Artists who adopted an abstract formal vocabulary, he argued, were 'specialists' who alienated themselves from the masses and arrogantly assumed the right to

speak in the name of the working class and [take] advantage of the turmoil of the revolution to present as novelties their petty-bourgeois ideas. (Egbert, 1967, p. 58).

Believing, moreover, that these artists - as well as those

associated with the avant-garde European art movements on which Russian abstraction was founded - were far too willing to divorce themselves from history and the doctrine of historical materialism, Lenin finally maintained: 'I cannot value the works of Expressionism, Futurism, Cubism and the other isms as the highest expressions of artistic genius'. Evidently, however, his response was not entirely determined by a belief in the necessity for the artist to establish and maintain an awareness of history, for he concluded the above statement by saying that he neither understood nor found pleasure in the works of artists associated with these movements. (Egbert, 1967, p. 57).

Undoubtedly, Marxist aestheticians would relate such an inability to understand and appreciate the work of art to a lack of social and historical awareness on the part of the artist. As Raphael points out, Marx himself believed that

only an autochthonous mythology could serve as a step towards art, i.e. a mythology originating in the same soil, the same people, the same cultural background, the same economic order. (Raphael, 1980, p. 89).

For a mythological system or artistic tradition to be relevant, it must therefore be a 'product of the people' and not a purely private or personal activity. (Raphael, 1980, p. 89). This observation must, however, be qualified, for most Marxist aestheticians would certainly not equate the idea of an art for the people with a national or localized artistic tradition. On the contrary, they argue that aesthetics should ideally be a universal field and

consequently maintain that national movements in art are unacceptable partly because they are often dogmatic and sectarian. (Vasquez, 1973, p. 22).

Egbert and Vasquez, both of whom have looked at the problem of the relationship between art and society, and more particularly at the implications of Marxist aesthetics, have concluded that art can never be defined entirely in terms of a specific social dimension. Egbert's reasons for this contention stem from the fact that he believes that works of art are not only 'products of a given social environment but also unique products of exceptional individuals'. (Egbert, 1967, p. 3). While evidently agreeing in principle with what he has to say, Vasquez nevertheless also feels that the autonomy of the art work 'exists only by, in, and through its social conditioning'. (Vasquez, 1973, p.98). He further maintains that 'there is no such thing as "art for art's sake"... only art by and for man' (Vasquez, 1973, p. 44), and suggests that even though man is not always the direct object of artistic representation, all objects which are represented artistically ultimately reflect a certain relationship to mankind. (Vasquez, 1973, p. 30). Thus regardless of whether or not they agree on the question of autonomy in art, Marxist aestheticians always return to a basic belief in the fact that reality is 'primarily a social reality'. (Egbert, 1967, p. 17). Orthodox Marxists go one step further for they maintain that this social reality must, in turn, be seen as a product of the prevailing economic conditions. (Egbert, 1967, p. 17).

However, contrary to what western critics generally maintain, Marxist aestheticians never argue that art is determined by economics alone. As Osborne points out, Marx's viewpoint undoubtedly 'fell short of a complete economic determinism' for he believed that the cultural superstructure and not only the economic base can be said to play an important role in determining social relations. (Osborne, 1970, p. 28).

Engels believed that this superstructure, which Marxists equate with political, judicial, philosophical, religious and literary institutions, has a dynamic relationship both to the economic base and to itself, thereby ensuring that a complex dialectic will always be in progress. Thus 'the economic situation is not the cause, it is not the sole agent' dominating all other factors, nor do these other factors forming the superstructure of society have a 'merely passive effect; rather there is a reciprocal effect....' (Arvor, 1973, pp. 25-26).

Arvon further suggests that it is possible to draw an analogy between the relationship which form has to content in the work of art and the relationship of the economic base to the ideological superstructure in Marxist theory. Just as the 'superstructure is surordinate to the economic base', he writes, 'so is form subordinated to content, but like ideology it has some autonomy'. (Arvon, 1973, p. 41).

As regards the relationship between art and the doctrine of a dialectical interaction, Marxist aestheticians further maintain

that the constantly changing principles of design and composition in painting (as well as other visual art forms) are influenced by the changing modes of economic production in a particular society, time and place. (Egbert, 1970, p. 105). At the same time, Marx was well aware of the fact that

cultural production is not necessarily proportionate to economic development and that progress in one does not mean progress in the other. (Rader, 1967, p. 238).

This recognition that development is not always uniform for all spheres of human activity, and that it certainly does not necessarily parallel economic changes within society, helps to explain why Marx refused to regard works of art as economic commodities except under the influence of capitalism. With capitalism, he argued

all the so-called higher forms of labour - intellectual, artistic etc. - ... having lost their former sacredness ... are admired for what they will fetch rather than their quality as art. (Egbert, 1967, pp. 19-20).

Marx thus believed that an emphasis on the exchange rather than the use value of works of art could be seen as an apt reflection of a society dominated by a capitalist economy and by a particular mode of production, political organization and class structure.

But while Marxists maintain that works of art cannot be considered as commodities (except under capitalism), they generally argue that art and labour are closely related. Unlike Aristotle and

Hegel, both of whom spoke of man as a rational animal, Marx regarded man as a 'productive, labouring animal', and believed that it is the inevitability of this labour which enables him to humanize not only himself but also his environment. (Rader, 1967, p. 238).

However, where there is a division of labour man loses contact with his immediate environment and thus becomes alienated from it. Under capitalism, this division evidently extends to artistic production, firstly because art is no longer seen as a form of labour, and secondly, because it has witnessed a growing schism between mind and hand, project and execution, goal and realization. (Vasquez, 1973, p. 67). A further consequence of the division of labour under capitalism is the tendency towards increasing specialization which in art has led to the 'concentration of artistic talent in certain individuals, and its ... suppression in the broad masses of the people'. (Marx and Engels quoted by Egbert. Egbert, 1970, p. 100). In contrast to this development, Marxist aestheticians believe that within the ideal environment of the future classless society art and labour will cease to be divided and will, in fact, share the essence of creativity. (Vasquez, 1973, p. 63).

A further aspect of Marxist theory is the idea that social classes are essential vehicles of the dialectical interaction which leads to change within society. (Russell, 1961, p. 753). Since Marxist aestheticians generally argue that 'all art is class propaganda for good or bad' (Egbert, 1970, p. 108), this stress on the importance

of class structure is undoubtedly also fundamental to a consideration of art.

As has already been noted, Marx believed that the ideas of the ruling class are always dominant within any given society, and consequently that any art created within a particular context will undoubtedly reflect the ideology of those in power. (Vasquez, 1973, p. 84). On the other hand, Marx also believed that great works of literature - and this would presumably apply to the visual arts as well - 'are never cast in the partisan mould of a single class', for

they express the relationships of various classes within a society as a whole, enabling their authors to rise above their class bias in a manner of speaking. (Arvon, 1973, p. 32).

In other words, Marx felt that while an artist obviously cannot be divorced from his own social background, in some instances he has the ability to 'become aware of the dialectic of history' and therefore reveal the 'real dynamic forces underlying social evolution' in an objective manner. (Arvon, 1973, p. 32). According to him the novels of the 19th century French writer, Balzac, typify this potential for the artist to transcend his own class. In his novels, Marx argued, Balzac succeeded in depicting the relationship between various classes in a realistic way, and this despite the fact that he himself had grown up in a comparatively privileged environment. (Arvon, 1973, p. 33).

The undeniable importance for Marx of a realistic and objective analysis of the social and historical conditions of man raises the problem of what he referred to as 'false consciousness', which he believed to be the outcome of a system where labour is divided. According to him, a division of labour inevitably leads to a division of 'material and mental' processes so that man's awareness of and insight into reality becomes narrow and subjective. (Arvon, 1973, p. 32). Evidently, Marx admired Balzac precisely because he was able to circumvent this problem and give an accurate portrayal of society as a whole, not just a fragment seen from a partisan point of view.

In Marxist aesthetics the idea of 'false consciousness' is also significant to the relationship between form and content in the art work, primarily because Marx believed that since content must always be the expression of 'truth', the artist's only scope for freedom and originality lies in the actual form which his work might take. This tendency to subordinate form to content - in fact, to reject a formalist approach as meaningless - has often led to Marxist aestheticians being criticized because their emphasis on content is seen as no more than a means to ensure that art will play a party political and hence propagandist role. Such criticism is certainly not entirely groundless, for Lenin once actually said that the 'cause of literature must become part of the general cause of the proletariat ...' and condemned literary activities that did not further the efforts of the Party. (Arvon, 1973,

pp. 14 - 15). (2)

It must, however, be remembered that Marxist aestheticians - and indeed, many other critics and art historians - believe that all art, whether consciously or unconsciously, is invariably propagandist. In totalitarian states such as the U.S.S.R. and Cuba, art is carefully controlled to ensure that it actually conforms to party political ideals. This attitude finds expression in Fidel Castro's observation that art is either for the revolution or against it. (Castro. Baxandall, ed. 1972, p. 276), as well as in his contention that the 'government has the right to review and censor the media that so influence the people'. (Castro. Baxandall, ed. 1972, p. 282).

In 1938, Andre Breton and Diego Rivera made a joint statement in which they said that they believed 'that the supreme task of art in our epoch is to take part actively and consciously in the preparation of the revolution'. (Breton and Rivera quoted by Egbert. Egbert, 1967, p. 104). Evidently they were both convinced that art could actually be used as a weapon for social change. Not all Marxists would agree with this contention, for at least some of them believe that art is a distraction in the class struggle and that the good Marxist should devote himself solely to political

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2. This statement, made by Lenin in 1905, was later refuted by his wife who maintained that Lenin had only intended his words to be a guideline for 'party publications and not creative works of literature'. (Arvon, 1973, p. 15). Given Lenin's generally inconsistent attitude to art, it is impossible to determine the validity of her assessment of his views.

and economic activities in his efforts to bring about the classless society more rapidly. (Egbert, 1970, p. 104). In other words, some Marxists actually feel that art can play no meaningful role in changing the human condition.

Of this attitude, art has certainly not been eliminated in countries purporting to be Marxist. On the contrary, the governments of these countries tend to manipulate both art and the mass media in the way Fidel Castro believes they should be manipulated, i.e. to further the philosophy of the Party. (Kiralyfalvi, 1981, p. 236). Apart from the fact that this subordination of art to specific social requirements in 'socialist' countries is an extremely simplistic way of attempting to enlighten the people (Fischer, 1978, p. 219), it ultimately leads to a state of alienation between the artist and his audience. As Poggioli points out, far from being the 'natural result of public consensus', i.e. a true expression of mass sentiment, Soviet art is nothing more than what he calls a 'bureaucratization' of culture. (Poggioli. Albrecht, 1970, ed. Griff, eds. 1970, pp. 682 - 683).

The actual reality is therefore very far from the ideal, a fact which is quite ironic when one considers that during the 1920's Lenin contrasted what he felt was the genuine freedom of artists working in a socialist context to the 'mere show of freedom enjoyed by bourgeois writers in a moneyed and corrupt world'. (Arvon, 1973, pp. 15 - 16). These writers, he argued at the time, were no more than prostitutes (Arvon, 1973, p. 16), presumably because

they observed the will of those who paid them instead of depicting the world around them accurately and objectively. In contrast to this, he felt that artists working in socialist countries were in a position to 'participate in the life of the masses' (Egbert, 1970, p. 100) and 'restore man's creative work to its proper place'. (Lenin quoted by Arvon. Arvon, 1973, p. 16). Lenin did not, however, believe that since the bourgeois world was corrupt, bourgeois culture would have to be rejected out of hand. In fact, he maintained that the creation of a proletarian culture could not be effected without assistance being taken of 'the culture that capitalism had left'. Capitalist culture, he said, 'must be carefully preserved [for] it is on this basis that socialism must be built'. (Arvon, 1973, p. 58).

A further significant factor in Marxist aesthetics is the fact that while emphasis is placed on relevant content, function and utility, this is not done to the exclusion of aesthetic considerations. Indeed, the creation of a completely aesthetic, harmonious relationship between man, society and the environment is often cited as the ideal to which not only the artist but also the rest of society must aspire. This sentiment finds expression in Robert Tucker's contention that man will become social by dwelling 'in aesthetic communion with the humanly produced world around him' (Tucker quoted by Rader. Rader, 1967, p. 243). According to Marx such a reintegration of man with his work, his fellow man and the natural as well as humanly created environment would only be achieved in the second and advanced stage of

socialism, i.e. the era of the classless or communist society. In this future Utopia, he argued, art would cease to be exclusive or elitist since all men would be artists. The artist would, moreover, no longer be

confined by the local and national seclusion which ensues solely from the division of labour, nor [would] the individual [be] confined to one specific art In a communist society, there are no painters, but at most men who, among other things, also paint. (Marx and Engels quoted by Egbert Egbert, 1970, p. 100).

In the absence of such a communist or classless Utopia, Marxist aestheticians tend to argue for an art that is real, truthful, social and above all didactic. Undoubtedly, this partly accounts for the official adoption of Socialist Realism in many so-called socialist countries.

In the U.S.S.R., the concept of Socialist Realism was conceived in 1932 (Baxandall, Baxandall, ed. 1972, pp. 241 - 242) and adopted as the official doctrine for the arts in 1934. (Arvon, 1973, p. 34). Realism had, however, been central to Russian art from the mid-19th century onwards. As early as 1853 the Russian Realist writer, Chernyshevski (1828 - 1889), argued that art was man's means of contact with life and therefore suggested that

a work of art must contain as little of the abstract as possible; everything in it must be ... expressed concretely in living scenes and individual images. (Chernyshevski quoted by Hilton, Hilton, Milon and Noehlin, eds. 1980, p. 110).

Both this idea of truth to life and that of bringing together 'the representational and the symbolic' (Hilton, Millon and Noehlin, eds, 1980, p. 125) were fundamental to Russian Realist painting from the 1860's through to the 1880's. Members of the Realist movement thus tended to paint images based on topical subjects and figures, i.e. images that were both intelligible and within the experience of the society they addressed. Many of their works were, in fact, political statements for they often dealt with agitators and prisoners, some of whom were even symbolically depicted as prophets or messiahs. (Fig. 9).

The most important realist group, known as the Wanderers, also adopted the goal of actually bringing art to the people by organising travelling exhibitions to the provinces (Hilton, Millon and Noehlin, eds. p. 109), an ideal which could arguably be cited as a source for the Agit-Prop trains of the immediate post-Revolutionary period. (Fig. 13). Like the works of the Wanderers, the boldly painted scenes on the sides of these trains were intended to reach the general public through an intelligible and socially relevant subject matter.

However, there was no clearly defined Party line on the arts immediately following the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, probably because neither Marx nor Lenin had ever formulated a detailed philosophy of literature and the visual arts. (Egbert, 1967, p. 31). In the initial post-Revolutionary period there was therefore considerable conflict between those who advocated that,

regardless of content, avant-garde art alone could represent and express the Revolution because it, too, had broken with the past, and those who maintained that content remained the most important aspect of art.

Still others felt that the adoption of new techniques could be seen as a truly revolutionary act in itself. Some of the latter artists, who are usually loosely classified as Constructivists, placed considerable stress on functionality in their use of these new techniques and materials, and argued that all 'art should be as functional as the machine'. (Egbert, 1967, p. 52). This functionality, they believed, could be achieved by the artist devoting his energies to working in the field of applied art, i.e. to becoming an artist-engineer or industrial designer. (Fig. 11). In contrast to this Productivist wing of the Constructivist movement which was led by Rodchenko, his wife Stepanova and the Vesnin brothers, several other Constructivists - most of whom were sculptors - rejected all content in art and simply developed a new formal vocabulary based on modern materials. (Fig. 12). This trend was initiated by the brothers Gabo and Pevsner and continued by the Stenberg brothers after the Pevsners' departure from the U.S.S.R. in 1920-21.

Both the latter artists, who can be classified as formalists, as well as the Productivists, were eventually rejected under Stalin's rule firstly because they seemed to disregard the past and hence also the necessity of a dialectic development towards the classless

society, and secondly, because the avant-garde nature of their works meant that the proletariat was not able to understand them. (Egbert, 1967, pp. 52-53).

During the initial post-Revolutionary period decisions concerning the visual arts were so unsystematic that further problems were encountered in determining the importance of peasant and other regional art forms as well as the artistic traditions of western culture for that of the new revolutionary State. (Egbert, 1967, pp. 52-53). This situation became increasingly apparent during the 1920's, for by 1924 a sharp schism had developed between one faction which was led by Sukharin, and another which was led by Trotsky. Unlike Sukharin, the latter group maintained that the Revolution should be international rather than regional and therefore that national styles in art were basically unacceptable. (Egbert, 1967, p. 62).

As has already been mentioned, Trotsky in fact approved of the new styles and techniques of the Futurists because he believed that they expressed the 'dynamism of the Revolution' (Egbert, 1967, p. 64) and presumably also because of the international scope which the movement had achieved by the 1920's. Furthermore, he was one of the very few important members of the Communist Party who approved of Tatlin's Monument to the Third International (Fig. 13) because of its revolutionary use of new materials, and was particularly sympathetic to the development of a functionalist architecture - the International Style of the 1920's - for which the Bauhaus had been partly responsible.

This, together with Trotsky's belief that while art 'should serve social ends' it 'should not be judged by its social usefulness but by its own laws, the laws of art' (Egbert, 1967, p. 64), helps to count for the attacks launched against him by Stalin and his followers. It is, however, difficult to understand why Trotsky should have been branded as a formalist 'encouraging art that is abstract, mechanical and experimental for its own sake' (Egbert, 1967, p. 65) when he approved of the consciously social programme of the Bauhaus and not just the experimental techniques of Tatlin and the Futurists. As Egbert states, it is equally paradoxical that while Trotsky was regarded as a leftist because of the apparent importance he gave to form, as also for his tendency to allow art an autonomous identity, his views on art are almost synonymous with theorists generally associated with the political right. Like these theorists, who tend to serve the interests of bourgeois culture, he was accused of effecting a separation between form and social content. (Egbert, 1967, p. 65).

The Stalinist attacks on Trotsky for his so-called leftist tendencies were certainly not unique. An equally emphatic condemnation of the right was to find expression in accusations against Bukharin. Maintaining that his philosophy was 'mechanistic', the Stalinists claimed that Bukharin believed that

the laws of history of social development
[acted] automatically so that progress
towards the classless society [would
also be] automatic. (Egbert, 1967,
p. 66).

This, they felt, was a denial of the 'Party as the leading agent in bringing about the ... triumph of communism.' (Egbert, 1967, p. 67).

By 1929 Stalin had begun to attack all art which could be considered mechanistic and was therefore also unwilling to accept some seemingly conservative academic artists for what he called their photo-realism, i.e. their 'mechanically literal reproductions of nature' which, he maintained, meant that their works were unacceptably passive in their observation of life. (Egbert, 1967, p. 69). It was to counter this mechanistic trend that he adopted Socialist Realism, with its demand that the artist execute truthful and historically concrete representations of reality, as the official doctrine for the arts. (Fig. 14). In a statute issued by the Congress, the artist was urged 'to contribute to the ideological transformation and the education of the workers in the spirit of Socialism'. (Arvon, 1973, p. 86). This statement led the Russian novelist, Fadayev, to conclude that the ultimate pre-condition for Socialist Realism was that the artist follow a Marxist-Leninist ideology, but he added that the new official art could only be transcuted into genuine art through talent, experience and professional skill. (Baxandall. Baxandall, ed. 1972, p. 341).

By 1936 this dogmatic attitude was further extended by the Central Committee on Art which attempted to ensure a far more careful control of the ideology of artists by laying down specific rules for content. A direct consequence of the entrenchment of Socialist Realism through the actions of this committee was the establishment

of fixed models which, as Vasquez notes, turned the new official art form 'into a normative aesthetic incompatible with Marxist principles ...' (Vasquez, 1973, p. 20) and which ultimately led Stalin to criticize folk art as regional and un-Russian. (Egbert, 1967, p. 81).

Following Stalin's death in 1953, the Revisionists questioned the Party's right to control the arts, and even advocated a certain amount of freedom for the artist. (Fig. 15). But both painting and sculpture continued to be dominated by a stress on social content. (Baxandall. Baxandall, ed. 1972, p. 243). The apparent freedom of the art at under Khrushchev's rule thus differed little from that of the artist working in Cuba. As Castro once stated, the artist is free provided that what he does is within and not against the revolution. (Castro, Baxandall, ed. 1972, p. 276).

CHAPTER FOUR

ART AND ITS SOCIAL RELEVANCE WITHIN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

Many artists, critics and art historians working in South Africa have posed the question of whether one can speak of a truly indigenous art form. In the recent past, conferences have been devoted to this problem, among them the 1979 conference entitled 'The State of Art in South Africa' held in Cape Town, and the mid-1982 'Culture and Resistance' conference held in Gaborone, Botswana, which dealt with the present position and future potential of South African art.

To the two part question: 'Is there a South African art or is it still to happen?', which was posed at the 1979 Cape Town conference, the South African artist, Andrew Verster, replied that no art in South Africa can be considered truly indigenous, nor would there be a peculiarly South African art in the foreseeable future 'unless there is a major change in [South Africa's] situation'. (Verster, University of Cape Town, 1979, p. 21). He then suggested that the reasons for this absence of an indigenous art form stemmed from the 'divided structure of our society'. (Verster, University of Cape Town, 1979, p. 21).

While many contemporary South African artists may agree with Verster's conclusion, it could be argued that the schisms within South African society and culture are highly significant to the kind of art produced in our society. In other words, a peculiarly South African art does exist, but not one which gives expression to the values and

beliefs of the entire country. On the contrary, South African art mirrors the plural or multiple identity of our society, which is upheld through the legal infrastructure of apartheid, i.e. separate development. If one accepts that art cannot be divorced from its particular social context, such a conclusion is inescapable.

Another speaker at the Cape Town conference, Joyce Ozynski, agrees with this contention. Unlike Verster, she argues that a South African art does exist:

A distinctive body of works of art which is different from the art of any other country ... but there is no national culture. (Ozynski, University of Cape Town, 1979, p.31).

Both the minority government presently in power, and the news media controlled by it, often refer to South Africa as a capitalist democracy. Although the health services, transportation etc. are undoubtedly organized along quasi-socialist lines, it would certainly not be inaccurate to argue that South Africa is dominated by a capitalist system. However, the South African constitution is by no means democratic. This political reality - as opposed to the myth of a separate but equal society perpetuated by the present government - together with the capitalist economy and emphasis on a plural, multi-racial and multi-ethnic South Africa, forms the basis of, and is therefore inseparable from the cultural products of our society. Thus, apart from the adverse effects which capitalism often has on art, i.e. its tendency to encourage a division of labour, elitism and alienation, all of which are pertinent to the

South African situation, the art produced in South Africa is also subject to the influence of ideological and political factors.

According to Kinloch, South Africa is dominated by a 'class-caste system' (Kinloch, 1972, p. 43) which has its origins in an economic differentiation between the various population groups. (Kinloch, 1972, p. 72). At its most basic level, this economically determined class structure is evident in the schism between black and white South Africans, but it is also apparent in the struggle for economic and political control between the Afrikaans and English-speaking population groups. To this must be added further determining influences such as culture, religion and history. In other words, the social and historical factors forming what Marx called the superstructure of society, and which he believed always interacted with the economic base to ensure the perpetuation of a dynamic dialectic within any given social situation.

While these issues are complex, their probable significance to the execution of cultural products, including art, must nevertheless be acknowledged. Also significant is the incompatibility of the concept of society with that of plurality. For while the former means more than one in number, denoting division and differences, *sos* as Kinloch points out, means 'a group together'. (Kinloch, 1972, p. 85). Regardless of how incorrect this juxtaposition of a multiplicity of cultures with the idea of a single society may be, it is nevertheless precisely because differences and divisions have been cultivated within South Africa that the whites - and more especially, the Afrikaners - have succeeded in maintaining

economic and political control. As Schlemmer notes: '... the strength of group identity among Afrikaners is ... a function of economic and political interests'. (Schlemmer. Hare, Wiendieck and Von Broembsen, eds. 1979, p. 51). Thus within the South African context, barriers are artificially maintained between the various population groups by stressing cultural differences, and a splintering of society into relatively small and powerless sub-groups is consequently ensured in the face of Afrikaner unity and white control.

Inevitably, these artificially created and maintained barriers, which extend beyond the cultural sphere to encompass political and economic activities as well, has led to the establishment of rigid boundaries on the nature of social behaviour and social change (Kinloch, 1972, p. 85), and hence also on social products such as art. Given this situation, it would be inaccurate to speak of the nature of art in South Africa in terms of 'internationalism', 'provincialism', and 'ethnicity'. (Watson. N.U.S.A.S., 1979, p.27). As Watson argues, while the issues of outside influences, of losing contact with avant-garde developments elsewhere, and of cultivating ethnicity are constantly discussed with reference to South African art, they remain more or less irrelevant to the local situation. For 'it is the nature of the State ... which bears ultimate responsibility for the nature of art' in this country. (Watson. N.U.S.A.S., 1979, p. 27). In other words, the needs of the dominant ideology is much more significant to a consideration of the development of locally executed art works than any outside factors. And since this ideology is founded on a belief that divisions within

society must be stringently maintained, the art produced in South Africa is characterized by extremely marked cultural differences. Black artists working indigenously thus execute works which generally differ enormously from those created by whites, and even within these broad categories substantial differences between the art of smaller sub-groups are evident. Whether the South African artist likes to admit it or not, his art ultimately gives expression to the divided structure of our society.

While numerous South African artists recognize the importance of their relationship to society, there are many more who believe that art has an autonomous identity. They generally refuse to acknowledge that it is often a form of propaganda and that it usually reinforces the interests of the dominant ideology. (See Clark, Albrecht, Barnett and Griff, eds. 1970, pp. 635 - 650).

As will be demonstrated, this tendency to stress the autonomy of art is more common among South African painters and sculptors than among poets, novelists and playwrights. The development of this situation can, in part, be ascribed to the dependence of music and literature on active audience involvement, i.e. a direct communication with, and participation on the part of society, while painting and sculpture are generally restricted to a museum environment. Moreover, unlike most painters and sculptors, musicians and playwrights tend to depend on widespread public patronage for

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1. It should be noted here that there is a vast difference between a consciously cultivated ethnicity stemming from the artist's pride in his own heritage, and the imposition of a cultural identity from without to ensure the division of one population group from another.

the survival of their art forms. They are therefore generally encouraged to deal with issues that are relevant and intelligible to many South Africans, in fact, to ensure that art remains a means of communication in the broadest possible sense.

In the visual arts, the emphasis on pluralism, and the consequent general lack of a unified identity seems to have led South African artists to conclude that a truly representative indigenous art cannot be achieved. (Coetzee. Herber, ed. 1979, p. 20). South African painters and sculptors thus tend to conceive of their identity as determined by universal criteria or, more correctly, by links to western Europe and the U.S.A. Hence they express little or nothing about the reality of their immediate environment.

In keeping with this tendency to avoid or ignore pertinent social issues, many South African artists, among them Christo Coetzee, are also in favour of the romantic notion that artists tend to work according to their intuitions. At the same time, Coetzee maintains that they can act as a mirror to, and are therefore not divorced from society. (Coetzee. Herber, ed. 1979, p. 18). Taken together, these statements are highly significant for they suggest an unresolved attitude to the role of the artist and his art, which seems to be quite common among painters and sculptors working in this country.

Although evidencing some contradictions, Coetzee's views on art are nevertheless not as clearly oriented to a belief in the autonomy of the artist and his works as are those of Bill Ainslee. According

to him, the artist's primary challenge is to define the limits of art. He also maintains that art need not 'serve any orthodoxy ... religious ... state or commercial orthodoxy' and can therefore be freed from all ideological ties. (Ainslee. Herber, ed. 1979, p. 105).

This attitude is taken to an extreme by Judith Mason, who categorically denies the significance of all external influences to her work. In a recent interview she said: 'I'm not interested in being a white artist in South Africa, or a woman artist in South Africa'. (Mason. Herber, ed. 1979, p. 76). Thus Mason not only refuses to accept that her environment may have an important influence on her work, but actually goes so far as to negate her own fundamental identity as a white South African woman.

Mason's contention regarding her own identity is symptomatic of an attitude that has become widespread among English-speaking, as well as several Afrikaans-speaking South Africans who question the validity of an exclusive group identity, for they tend to deny their links with South Africa. Since the cultures of the indigenous black population is generally inaccessible to them due to enforced separation between whites and blacks, and since they have not developed a truly distinctive culture of their own, these South Africans tend to cling desperately to their cultural links with Europe and the U.S.A. In painting and sculpture, this finds expression in a tendency to emulate contemporary European and American trends.

In contrast to this aspiration to an autonomous artistic identity

and an affiliation with contemporary art movements abroad⁽²⁾ there are several, mainly Afrikaans-speaking painters and sculptors who are not alienated from their social situation, and who therefore produce works which often give conscious support to the ideological aspirations of the Afrikaners.⁽³⁾

This tradition seems to have been established by Anton Van Wouw, initially in relatively simple but monumental realist images of prominent Afrikaner figures like Paul Kruger, but ultimately also in public monuments erected to the memory of Afrikaner men and women who made a meaningful, if often anonymous contribution to the establishment of the Afrikaner's group identity. The sculptures for the Women's Monument near Bloemfontein, which Van Wouw executed in 1914 in remembrance of those who died in concentration camps during the Anglo-Boer War, are some of the first works created in this genre. (Fig. 16). The more contemporary works of an artist like Coert Steynberg serve to continue and confirm this trend.

Any art conforming to a particular view of the social conditions of man is nevertheless generally regarded with considerable scepticism by the majority of South African artists. Like their European and American counterparts, most South African artists thus reject the idea of creating works which give conscious and direct expression to their attitude to specific socio-political issues, in the apparent belief that this will necessarily lead to an infringement on their

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2. This is discussed more fully with reference to a questionnaire sent to seventy South African artists in February, 1982. See Appendix I.
 3. A similar integration is usually evident in traditional or tribal African art. This observation is probably also valid in a consideration of the traditional arts of South African tribes, but must await definite confirmation. Apart from the research presently being conducted on the traditional figurative carvings of the Shona and Venda by A.E. Nettleton, and on the paintings and beadwork of the Ndebele by E. Schneider, hardly any research has thus far been undertaken in this field.

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creative freedom and talent.

In keeping with this attitude, the South African composer, Peter Klatzow, argues that

too much emphasis is laid on ... whether art is African or not African or even South African. A nationalist art, in one sense, is a narrow art. (Klatzow. Herber, ed. 1979, p. 82).

His attempt to separate art from its immediate social reality finds support in Wilma Stockenström's contention that it would be 'narrow' for the artist to commit himself to social comment. (Stockenström. Herber, ed. 1979, p. 44), as well as in Neville Dubow's rejection of the idea that the artist should work against his natural instincts in the cause of social commitment. According to him, this would lead to 'artistically hollow' statements. (Dubow. University of Cape Town, 1979, p. 122).

However, Dubow and others who have broached this subject omit to comment on the incredibly forcefully maintained State ideology in South Africa. In view of this situation, any artist who does not actively resist ideological pressure gives support to the dominant ideology, even if this support is usually only indirect and not consciously intended.⁽⁴⁾ It is therefore all the more important to produce works of art which will counterbalance - if not actually counteract - the images produced by artists who give either direct or indirect support to the dominant ideology.

Since one of the central postulates of the present dissertation is

4. The importance of this issue is discussed by Tax, who argues that 'in our times, to refrain from mentioning genocide, racism, cultural schizophrenia, sexual exploitation and the systematic starvation of entire populations is itself a political act'. (Tax. Baxandall, ed. 1972, p. 16).

that works of art either consciously or unconsciously give expression to the social environment in which the artist finds himself, it has also been suggested that if he denies the influence of this environment on his works, he will become alienated from his audience, and create a false impression of reality in the images he creates. Undoubtedly, such falsifications are often encouraged by the dominant ideology to ensure the maintenance of existing conditions through an avoidance of pressing social issues.

If the artist is to avoid falsification and subordination to an ideology which he does not wish to support, his work has to involve a conscious exploration of his environment.⁽⁵⁾ The importance of this has been stressed by the writer, Adam Small, who believes that the artist's work must reflect the realities of a specific time and place. (Small. Herber, ed. 1979, p. 101). The validity of his contention is further demonstrated, as well as extended by Robert Medley's apt comparison between food and ideas:

Ideas, like food, are transportable.
[But] like food they don't always travel well and are often best consumed on the spot where grown. (Medley. Brighton and Morris, eds. 1977, p. 130).

In other words, the ideas informing works of art will have far greater relevance to the society in which they are created than to an audience unfamiliar with the environmental factors influencing the artist.

This attitude is upheld by many South African writers, playwrights, actors and poets. Ampie Coetzee, for instance, argues that

5. The term environment is used in the widest possible sense, i.e. in reference to the social, political, economic and cultural realities with which the artist comes into daily contact.

literature, like theatre, is a social act and therefore cannot be divorced from its social context. 'Literature and theatre' he states 'have to comment and take note of the society....I'm saying I don't think we can afford an elite kind of literature.' (Coetzee, Herber, ed. 1979, p. 119). André Brink similarly argues that writing is a social act: 'Essentially one writes for the audience one knows, all the people one lives with, that one shares things with'. Brink further states that if his writing is to have any relevance, 'it must be tied to my specific society'. (Brink, Herber, ed. 1979, p. 10). The director-actor Benjy Francis, extends this argument, and acknowledges the most fundamental reality for any South African artist when he states that

I cannot run away from the fact that I'm a child of apartheid: I'm a child of South Africa. And whatever I say seems to have, or should definitely have, some colour of that experience. (Francis. Herber, ed. 1979, p. 158).

But if art is to reflect the social reality of the artist and be relevant to the audience it addresses, one is still posed with the problem of what can be defined as 'relevant' communication. Although obviously not unique to South African society, the controversy centring around this issue is demonstrated by the answers received to a questionnaire sent out to a number of South African artists. (See Appendix I). It is also an issue which preoccupied the playwright Bertolt Brecht, who posed the problem of which 'truths' were actually worth telling. As he sarcastically noted: 'It is not untrue that chairs have seats and that rain falls downward'.

But these, he pointed out, are trivial truths, and those who represent them 'are like painters adorning the walls of sinking ships with a still life'. (Brecht quoted by Tax. Tax. Baxandall, ed. 1972, p. 17).

Meredith Tax uses this statement as a basis for her attack on critics who accept trivia in the name of art. Mimicking what she believes is a widespread attitude among contemporary critics, she writes that

a poet's job is to do his thing
Naturally he will write about what is
important or central to him, personally,
and who am I to interfere with another
man's system of values?'. (Tax.
Baxandall, ed. 1972, pp. 16 -17).

As Tax implies, if a system of values is trivial, if the artist is oblivious to the larger issues within his environment, he denies his own potential as a thinking and feeling human being concerned with relevant anthropomorphic communication. Her contention finds support in Diego Rivera's belief that

the social struggle is the richest, the
most intense and the most plastic
subject which an artist can choose.
Therefore, one who is born to be an
artist can certainly not be insensible
to such developments. (Rivera.
Shapiro, ed. 1973, p. 55).

Despite the fact that the works of artists such as Goldberg and Stopforth are informed by a consciously demonstrated awareness of

social realities in South Africa, Goldberg does not believe that art can play any significant role in the struggle for political liberation. (Goldberg. University of Cape Town, 1979, p. 126). Evidently, Paul Stopforth would agree with this contention, for although he regards his work as being essentially anthropomorphic and political in content, he does not believe that it is important for it to be seen by a mass audience. (Fig. 17). Whether it becomes visible to twenty or thirty or a hundred people, is, he maintains, not the issue. He further argues that the act of communication is

peripheral to the actual making of the work The fact that I deal with this kind of imagery [i.e. political subjects] is an attempt to try and exorcise this constant worrying or scab-picking'. (Stopforth.[i.e. political ed. 1979, p. 54).

For Stopforth, therefore, dealing with issues which are highly pertinent to the society in which he lives is above all a personal cathartic process.

Significantly, his interpretation of his position relative to his own work has the further effect of negating the primary function of art, i.e. communication, and gives expression to an elitist attitude through his stated indifference to the general public. At the mid-1982 'Culture and Resistance Symposium' held in Gaborone, Botswana, the importance of ensuring the contrary, i.e. of upholding the role of art as communication to a mass audience, was stressed in an anonymously quoted statement :

If a ... play is relevant to our situation of conflict and if it is sympathetic to the masses, it will still serve no serious purpose if it is staged in the wrong place.
(Art and Conflict in South Africa. Culture and Resistance Symposium, Gaborone, 1982, p. 3).

Given the fact that Stopforth deals with highly emotive political issues like death in detention and detention without trial, a concern with communicating this content to a wide audience, and not just the relatively few people who frequent South African commercial galleries, would involve a small but highly significant shift in emphasis.

In contrast to his works, those of black artists working for a white market are often ineffectual and quite sentimental. In an apparent attempt to appease their white audience, these artists generally uphold the myth of the black man as naive and picturesque. (Fig. 18). Although much of this art, which is now usually referred to as 'township art', is typically anthropomorphic in content, the tendency for black artists to sentimentalize social situations and to produce stereotypical images of their own population groups finally leaves their works without any real meaning. As Ozyński points out: 'Ultimately, the black artist has to remove the sting from his story, in order to render it innocuous for his audience.' (Ozyński. University of Cape Town, 1979, p. 35).

Apart from the control of 'township art' by a white market, it should also be noted that the art of black cultures is traditionally

three-dimensional rather than two-dimensional, and that the objects originally carved by black artists were inseparable from the rituals, myths and religions of their own societies. Given this situation, it is understandable that the two-dimensional images executed by many black South African artists are ineffectual and socially irrelevant. On this basis, a further significant distinction can be drawn between contemporary black theatre, poetry, music and literature, and the visual arts. For while the former have their basis in oral traditions, and like these traditions,

...I strive to communicate socially relevant issues to a black audience, the visual arts have shifted out of their traditional three-dimensional medium and away from their traditional black audience.

According to Andrew Verster, black and white South African artists are generally 'technically proficient', but in spite of this their works 'can be discounted as irrelevant and out of touch with contemporary South African reality'. (Verster. University of Cape Town, 1979, p. 21). Cecil Skotnes similarly argues that 'western political and cultural domination' in South Africa has led to 'a universal art form quite detached from the present social and political trends'. (Skotnes. University of Cape Town, 1979, p. 17). While these observations are not inaccurate, it could be argued that all works of art produced in South Africa give expression to an essentially unique social situation.

Apart from the obvious control which the State has over the erection of public buildings, sculpture and monuments, there is also

the more unobtrusive images of those who look upon themselves as independent artists. Among these there are many white South African painters, including Sumner, Pierneef and Pretorius (Fig. 19) who have devoted their energies to landscape painting and to the depiction of the indigenous people of southern Africa, but whose works could ultimately be said to reflect the white man as master and colonist. As such, their paintings are an extension of the topographical works executed in the first wave of British colonial expansion in South Africa by artists like Baines and Daniell. (Fig. 20). These images, it could be argued, celebrate the white man's ownership and conquest of the land as well as its people.⁽⁶⁾ As Ozynski points out, the stereotypical depiction of people in early topographical paintings as well as in many contemporary South African works, serves 'to actively reinforce the idea of white superiority', and this, together with the treatment of the landscape itself, tends to 'mystify ... actual social and economic relations' (Ozynski. University of Cape Town, 1979, p. 32). Ozynski further argues that a stereotyping of the black man 'transforms the subject into a spectacle for the benevolent, paternalistic white viewer' and prevents the participants from evolving active social relationships. (Ozynski. University of Cape Town, 1979, p. 32).

6. Studies on the history of landscape painting in which the authors concentrate on the social relations depicted in them are relatively new, but have become increasingly common in the past decade. Particularly significant for the development of this methodology is Barrell's The Dark Side of the Landscape which considers attitudes to the rural poor reflected in the works of Gainsborough, Morland and Constable. See also L. Bell's article on colonial art which is listed in the Bibliography.

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