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**Adorno, Dada and the Philistine:  
The Immanent Negation of the Institution of Art**

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**PhD**

**Birkbeck,  
University of London**

## Declaration

The work presented in this thesis is my own.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Abstract

This thesis uses the figure of the philistine to stage a critical encounter between the aesthetic theory of Theodor Adorno and the anti-art of Dada. The introduction prepares for this argument by tracing the development of the concept of the philistine over time. In the first chapter, Adorno's aesthetic theory is delineated negatively, reconstructed on the basis of a wide-ranging survey of the references to the philistine in his work. His dialectical conception of this figure is pushed further, and brought to bear critically on his own blindneses, aporias and exclusions. The second chapter explores how these limitations are manifested in his flawed interpretation of Dada, advancing an alternative reading of the movement, with recourse to counterexamples of its creative practice. The third chapter deepens this interpretation through a series of case studies, in which the philistine acts as the symbolic representation of different versions of anti-art. These analyses extend the theorization of the philistine to complete the critique of Adorno. However, Dada is also critically evaluated according to the model of the philistine derived from him, conceptualized as the immanent negation of art, now amended slightly to the immanent negation of the institution of art. The conclusion reflects on the methodological implications of this argument, and considers the wider applicability of the revised aesthetic theory which has emerged from it. In this critical encounter, Adorno's and Dada's shared negativity is the point of convergence in which the opposed notions of aesthetic autonomy and the institutionality of art are mediated as extremes.

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**Adorno, Dada and the Philistine:  
The Immanent Negation of the Institution of Art**

[T]o dismiss anti-art as pretentious cabaret and humour would be as great an error as to celebrate it.

— Theodor Adorno, *Quasi una Fantasia* [1963]<sup>1</sup>

The dialectic is an amusing mechanism which guides us / in a banal kind of way / to the opinions we had in the first place.

— Tristan Tzara, *Dada Manifesto* [1918]<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Quasi Una Fantasia: Essays on Modern Music* [1963], trans. by Rodney Livingstone (London: Verso, 2002), p.314.

<sup>2</sup> Tristan Tzara, “Dada Manifesto” [1918], trans. by Ralph Manheim, in *The Dada Reader: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Dawn Ades (London: Tate Publishing, 2006), p.39.

## Introduction

This thesis uses the figure of the philistine to stage a critical encounter between two bodies of work which are not often thought of together, the aesthetic theory of Theodor Adorno, and the anti-art of Dada. Unfinished at the time of his death, Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* [1970] was assembled and published posthumously, the culmination of a lifetime of investigation into this topic, reprising many themes present since the start of his career in the late 1920s and early 1930s.<sup>3</sup> He wrote widely on music and literature, and to a lesser extent on visual art and other disciplines, in an array of essays and book-length studies, but he is remembered chiefly as an advocate for a particular brand of modernism, characterized by uncompromising formal complexity, and epitomized by the composer Arnold Schoenberg. Founded in Zurich in 1916, Dada was an avant-garde art movement which quickly established centres in Berlin, Cologne, Hannover, Paris and New York, as well as inspiring activity as far afield as the Low Countries, Eastern Europe and Japan, burning out in most of these locations by the mid-1920s. It was best known for its provocative rhetoric and absurdist stunts, though in recent years it has also been celebrated as an important precursor to the diversity of contemporary art, responsible for inaugurating or refining innovations including sound poetry and bruitist music, happenings and performance, collage and photomontage, and readymade sculpture. Adorno and Dada are then largely chronologically distinct entities, which might seem to have little in common, but which in fact converge in the negativity that in different ways they each bring to bear on culture, art and aesthetics. In what follows, I explore this shared attitude in relation to their respective versions of the figure of the philistine, a construct of aesthetic discourse which it defines itself against, and which therefore offers another negative perspective on that field.

The argument is structured around the mutual imbrication of Adorno, Dada and the philistine. In the first chapter, Adorno's aesthetic theory is elucidated through a wide-ranging survey of his references to the philistine, from

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<sup>3</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* [1970], ed. by Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, trans. by Robert Hullot-Kentor (New York, New York: Continuum, 2007). All references are to this edition except where otherwise stated.

which the main features of the former are derived negatively. Variants of “*Philister*” “*Spießbürger*” and “*Banause*” recur frequently in his work, close enough in meaning to designate a more or less unified concept, equivalent to the English “Philistine”. The philistine is supposed to function as the other of art, or as the ideal embodiment of everything the aesthetic subject is not, however there is some distance separating the critical potential he claims for them from the way they are actually manifested across his oeuvre. My contention is that his model of the philistine needs to be pushed further, fully realizing their promise as the immanent negation of art, before they are applied as a corrective to the blindnesses of his aesthetic theory, a preliminary assessment of which concludes this chapter. Next, I turn directly to Adorno and Dada. His fragmentary interpretation of the latter is reconstructed, and with recourse to counterexamples of its creative practice revealed to be limited in a number of respects. He places undue emphasis on the themes of alienating infantilism, subjective expression and anarchic destruction, neglecting the critical engagement with the institutionality of art which is central to my alternative reading. My aim is to build on the previous chapter in putting pressure on his aesthetic theory, by accentuating its potentially productive tension with Dadaist anti-art. The third chapter examines key moments in the history of the movement, in the light of its core objective of the destruction of art by artistic means, which finds expression in the pose of the philistine against philistinism. There is a focus on this paradoxical formulation, lending coherence to a complex figure with appetitive, insensitive and destructive aspects, which are evident in the different versions of the philistine mobilized by Dada. The German terms are also important for this transnational coalition, occasionally appearing in the titles of texts, paintings and sculptures, but it is as a symbolic representation of the anti-artistic orientation that the philistine is chiefly considered here. These reflections on that multifaceted construction – in combination with the conceptualization of the immanent negation of art, now amended slightly to the immanent negation of the institution of art – complete the critique of Adorno’s blindnesses.

For methodological reasons, I do not provide at the outset an overview of either Adorno or Dada. Instead, Adorno’s aesthetic theory emerges *ex negativo*, from close but critical readings of relevant passages in the primary texts, with the organizing principle of the philistine suggested by his insight that they might be

studied as a way into the problematic of culture, art and aesthetics. This undertaking is broadly consistent with his own method of immanent analysis, weaving together quotations in a sympathetic immersion in his aesthetic theory, which reconfigures its elements to form a new constellation. Similarly, Dadaist anti-art is brought in initially to supplement his inadequate account of the movement, then elaborated on its own terms, with sustained meditations on three examples. These case studies foreground the anti-artistic orientation, once again crystallized through the figure of the philistine, thereby connecting the specific investigations to the wider discussion. Ultimately, I posit an expanded aesthetic theory, which preserves the attention to the integral structuration of the artwork insisted on by Adorno, while incorporating into that formal complex the art-institutional dimension highlighted by Dada. My intention is to go beyond the blindnesses of the former, without lapsing into an error commonly prompted by the latter, that is, to abandon the focus on the internal structure of an artwork in favour of a description of the external structure of the institution of art. This would be to subordinate the artwork to extra-aesthetic imperatives, an illegitimate manoeuvre against which we have the bulwark of Adorno. However, where the art-institutional dimension is consciously manipulated as one aspect of the artwork among others, then perhaps it may be treated as part of the inner-aesthetic nexus in which meaning consists. Indeed, Dadaist anti-art might lead us to think that in certain instances a form of interpretation flexible enough to accommodate such a relationship is demanded by the object. Adorno and Dada, the main conceptual blocs making up the thesis, are dialectically mediated in the course of it, with their mutually transformative interpenetration proceeding on the basis of reciprocal negation. In this Introduction, I prepare for the argument summarized here, by sketching a brief history of the philistine, the theoretical component which by acting as a foil for both sides enables the critical encounter between Adorno and Dada.

## **A Brief History of the Philistine**

### **PREAMBLE**

Who is the philistine? This thesis describes them in gender-neutral terms, though in the past they have typically been cast in the masculine universal, and that historical designation should be understood as informing the present version of the concept. The philistine is not actually embodied, however they sometimes stand for immediate gratification in opposition to the deferral of pleasure, among the many positions they are taken to represent. They are at most a personification, the abstract bearer of a changing set of qualities, perhaps even a content-free cipher for different objects of derogation. They are founded on contradiction, fulfilling their main role as the other of art, while themselves being a product of aesthetic discourse. They are principally a discursive construct rather than an empirical entity, but the label has been applied to a range of social groups existing in reality, normally as a means of denigrating them. The philistine is identified variously with alien outsiders and the dominant culture, the uneducated rabble and the scholarly caste, the commercial bourgeoisie and the industrial proletariat. They are by definition excluded from the aesthetic sphere, and also a force destroying it from within, paradoxically its constitutive counterconcept and its immanent negation. They are likewise denied access to education, and implicated in its degeneration into rule-bound pedantry, both outside the university system and the hollowed out form of scholarship at its heart. They are the despised consumer of popular entertainment, and a vehicle for the avant-garde refusal of art and aesthetics, respectively an expression of elitist snobbery directed at the masses and the self-critique of the ruling class enacted by its dominated fraction. The philistine mindset encompasses diverse characteristics, but it is overwhelmingly narrow, superficial, inflexible, conservative and conformist. They are associated with a natural inclination towards violence, as well as the bloodlessness of a lack of passion, employed as police and soldiers and as artists and critics. They are motivated wholly by materialistic concerns, yet prone to empty moralism, at home in the trading house and at the pulpit. They are ruled by base desires, while being excessively constrained by convention, the condition of the general public and of an insular

clique. The philistine is simultaneously “masculine” and “feminine”, parochial and transnational, a reactionary and a visionary. All these features are added to the concept over time, and now coexist in an unstable amalgam, which has itself been subject to further theoretical elaboration. Building on previous overviews and genealogies by Estelle Morgan née McIlvenna, Dave Beech and John Roberts, and Esther Leslie, I here trace in broad outline the development of the philistine, ultimately focusing on the Anglophone context, but also covering the German prehistory of the term, which is of course especially pertinent to Adorno and Dada.<sup>4</sup> My brief history of the philistine highlights how this figure combines contraries, effects reversals, and models dynamic relations, all of which makes them a promising tool for a dialectical analysis.

### UNCIRCUMCISED PHILISTINES

The highpoint of philistinism, judging from its prevalence in printed sources, was probably the late nineteenth century, but the provenance of the word is ultimately ancient.<sup>5</sup> Etymologically, “Philistine” is a borrowing from the Latin “*Philistinus*” or “*Philisthim*”, derived from the Greek “*Philistieím*” and the Hebrew “*Pēlišṭīm*”.<sup>6</sup> Historically, the Philistines were one of the “Sea-Peoples”, who first appeared in the eastern Mediterranean, and subsequently settled on the

<sup>4</sup> McIlvenna/Morgan’s numerous articles on the philistine are referenced throughout this Introduction. For Beech and Roberts’ genealogy of the philistine, see: Dave Beech and John Roberts, “Tolerating Impurities: An Ontology, Genealogy and Defence of Philistinism” [1998], in *The Philistine Controversy*, ed. by Dave Beech and John Roberts (London: Verso, 2002), pp.134-143. For Leslie’s overview of the German philistine, see: Esther Leslie, “Philistines and Art Vandals Get Upset” [2002], in *The Philistine Controversy*, pp.201-204.

<sup>5</sup> “Philistine”, *Google Ngram Viewer*, [https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=Philistine&case\\_insensitive=on&year\\_start=1800&year\\_end=2015&corpus=15&smoothing=3&share=&direct\\_url=t4%3B%2CPhilistine%3B%2Cc0%3B%2Cs0%3B%3BPhilistine%3B%2Cc0%3B%3Bphilistine%3B%2Cc0%3B%3BP\\_HILISTINE%3B%2Cc0](https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=Philistine&case_insensitive=on&year_start=1800&year_end=2015&corpus=15&smoothing=3&share=&direct_url=t4%3B%2CPhilistine%3B%2Cc0%3B%2Cs0%3B%3BPhilistine%3B%2Cc0%3B%3Bphilistine%3B%2Cc0%3B%3BP_HILISTINE%3B%2Cc0) [accessed 21 October 2018]; “Philistines”, *Google Ngram Viewer*, [https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=Philistines&case\\_insensitive=on&year\\_start=1800&year\\_end=2008&corpus=15&smoothing=3&share=&direct\\_url=t4%3B%2CPhilistines%3B%2Cc0%3B%2Cs0%3B%3BPhilistines%3B%2Cc0%3B%3Bphilistines%3B%2Cc0](https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=Philistines&case_insensitive=on&year_start=1800&year_end=2008&corpus=15&smoothing=3&share=&direct_url=t4%3B%2CPhilistines%3B%2Cc0%3B%2Cs0%3B%3BPhilistines%3B%2Cc0%3B%3Bphilistines%3B%2Cc0) [accessed 21 October 2018]; “Philistinism”, *Google Ngram Viewer*, [https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=Philistinism&case\\_insensitive=on&year\\_start=1800&year\\_end=2008&corpus=15&smoothing=3&share=&direct\\_url=t4%3B%2CPhilistinism%3B%2Cc0%3B%2Cs0%3B%3BPhilistinism%3B%2Cc0%3B%3Bphilistinism%3B%2Cc0](https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=Philistinism&case_insensitive=on&year_start=1800&year_end=2008&corpus=15&smoothing=3&share=&direct_url=t4%3B%2CPhilistinism%3B%2Cc0%3B%2Cs0%3B%3BPhilistinism%3B%2Cc0%3B%3Bphilistinism%3B%2Cc0) [accessed 21 October 2018].

<sup>6</sup> “Philistine”, *OED Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, June 2018), [www.oed.com/view/Entry/142435](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/142435) [accessed 7 June 2018].

southern coast of Palestine, establishing the land of Philistia.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, “Philistine” shares its Hebrew root with “Palestine”.<sup>8</sup> They were most active between the thirteenth and tenth centuries BC, and the earlier records of them are Egyptian, though they are known principally from the Bible, as indicated by the passage of the term through Hebrew, Greek and Latin.<sup>9</sup> In both sets of sources, the Philistines are generally depicted as a hostile and warlike tribe, in keeping with their status as enemies of the Egyptians and the Israelites.<sup>10</sup> In the Old Testament, Philistine–Israelite conflict, including an extended period of dominion over the latter by the former, provides a backdrop to key narratives, which are often violent: Samson is set upon and blinded by the Philistines; the Philistines slaughter the Israelites, and steal from them the Ark of the Covenant, before eventually being subdued by Samuel; Saul is beheaded and hung from a wall following his defeat by the Philistines; the Philistines are in the end decisively overcome, after many bloody battles with the Israelites, now under the leadership of David; Goliath is a Philistine, Delilah may be too.<sup>11</sup> Delilah’s status is disputed, as it is possible she merely collaborated with the Philistines, delivering them her lover Samson. Goliath’s propensity for violence, reinforced by the hyper-masculinity of his legendarily gigantic proportions, has arguably proven more influential in shaping the modern sense of the philistine than her traditionally “feminine” combination of sexuality and duplicity. In addition to these gendered markers, the non-Semitic Philistines’ cultural alienness is emphasized in the biblical account. They are at one point referred to as “sooth-sayers”, and repeatedly described as “uncircumcised Philistines”.<sup>12</sup> In current usage, “Philistine” still conveys something of the brutish outsider imagined here, especially when it is applied to art-smashing iconoclasts, who continue the

<sup>7</sup> Trude Dothan, *The Philistines and their Material Culture* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1982), p.1; KA Kitchen, “The Philistines”, in *Peoples of Old Testament Times* [1973], ed. by DJ Wiseman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), p.60.

<sup>8</sup> “Philistine”, *OED Online*; “Palestine”, *OED Online*, [www.oed.com/view/Entry/142435](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/142435) [accessed 7 June 2018].

<sup>9</sup> Dothan, *The Philistines and their Material Culture*, p.1.

<sup>10</sup> For an overview of the Egyptian sources, see: Dothan, *The Philistines and their Material Culture*, pp.13-21.

<sup>11</sup> *The Bible, Authorized King James Version with Apocrypha* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), Judges 16:21; 1 Samuel 4:2, 4:10-11, 7:13; 1 Samuel 31:9-10; 2 Samuel 5:20, 25, 8:1; 1 Samuel 17:4; Judges 16:4.

<sup>12</sup> *The Bible*, Isaiah 2:6; Judges 14:13; 1 Samuel 17:26, 17:36. For further acts of othering alluding to the Philistines’ non-practice of male circumcision, see: *The Bible*, 1 Samuel 18:25, 27; 2 Samuel 1:20, 3:14.

tradition of philistine destructiveness. However, the Philistines are not yet identified with the absence of an aesthetic sensibility, and in fact in the archaeological field they are associated with a distinctive form of decorated pottery.<sup>13</sup> At this stage, “Philistine” denotes the culturally other, rather than the other of culture. Its double-sidedness is however evident in retrospect, in the uncertainty over whether it was originally a name given to foreigners or a self-description, an ambiguous relationship to inside and outside which is characteristic of the philistine.<sup>14</sup>

#### THE PHILISTINES BE UPON THEE

The ambiguity of the term in part rests on its multiple applications. Over time, the Philistines lent their name to any fearsome adversary, especially the opponents of the word of God, which was represented by Samson.<sup>15</sup> The broader version of this figurative adaptation persists, usually deployed with humorous intent, according to the *OED*. It was previously redolent of debauchery and drunkenness as well, but these connotations are obsolete, as this sense has increasingly been subsumed under the most common meaning of “Philistine”.<sup>16</sup> Via the equivalent “*Philister*”, “Philistine” took on another of its secondary functions, as a derogatory expression for non-students or townspeople, in the context of German universities. This usage is historical, dating from seventeenth-century town and gown disputes, and invoked principally to refer to that milieu.<sup>17</sup> There is a frequently cited though probably apocryphal account of its origins, tracing it to fighting which resulted in the death of a student at the University of Jena in 1689. The funeral oration is supposed to have quoted from the Book of Judges, supplying a rallying cry for the disorder that followed with the line repeated by Delilah: “The Philistines be upon thee, Samson.”<sup>18</sup> It has been

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<sup>13</sup> Kitchen, “The Philistines”, p.61.

<sup>14</sup> “Philistine”, *OED Online*.

<sup>15</sup> Estelle Morgan, “Students and “Philistines””, *The Modern Language Review* 51.2 (1956): p.231.

<sup>16</sup> “Philistine”, *OED Online*.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>18</sup> “Philistine”, *Oxford English Living Dictionaries*, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/philistine> [accessed 7 June 2018]; Leslie, “Philistines and Art Vandals Get Upset”, p.201; Morgan, “Students and “Philistines””, p.232; *The Bible*, Judges 16:12, 14, 20.



suggested that the term was already in use among the local university population as a label for members of the public, but that this incident may have contributed to its spread beyond Jena.<sup>19</sup> Whatever the truth of the story, “*Philister*” entered the German student vocabulary as a class-based insult in the seventeenth century, denoting first the police and city-soldiers, then the citizenry at large, especially tradespeople and landlords.<sup>20</sup> This it did by way of analogy with biblical precursors, presumably playing on their status as an enemy, and their reputation for violence. It also epitomized a specific form of cultural otherness, based on exclusion from the university system, or a lack of education in general. With this act of othering, “*Philister*” moves closer to the main definition of “Philistine”, once again according to the *OED*: “An uneducated or unenlightened person; one perceived to be indifferent or hostile to art or culture, or whose interests and tastes are commonplace or material; a person who is not a connoisseur.”<sup>21</sup> The previous incarnations of the philistine fed into this formulation, conferring on it a pejorative charge and a class character, and providing the element of intellectual backwardness which is the complement to aesthetic incompetence. This set a pattern, as the term tends to retain the associations it accrues during its subsequent development, even where these appear to be divergent or contradictory.

#### A HOLLOW GUT

It was the literary movement Storm and Stress, and more broadly German Romanticism, which popularized the term “*Philister*”, bringing it nearer still to the modern sense of “Philistine”. They were also responsible for one of its first major reversals, departing from the established cohort of non-students or townspeople, and instead applying it to substandard scholars and conservative critics. Johann Gottfried Herder’s fables included some of the earliest examples of its admission into literary language, extending its usage beyond student slang,

<sup>19</sup> Morgan, “Students and “Philistines””, p.232.

<sup>20</sup> “*Philister*”, *Duden: das grosse Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache in zehn Bänden*, ed. by Günther Drosdowski (Mannheim: Dudenverlag, 1999); “*Philister*”, *Duden Etymologie: Herkunftswörterbuch der deutschen Sprache*, ed. by Günther Drosdowski (Mannheim: Dudenverlag, 2007); Morgan, “Students and “Philistines””, pp.231-232; Estelle McIlvenna, “The “Philistine” in “Sturm und Drang””, *The Modern Language Review* 33.1 (1938): p.31.

<sup>21</sup> “Philistine”, *OED Online*.

and beginning to broaden its scope.<sup>22</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe did much to promote and develop the concept, invoking it often in his letters, poems and other texts from the latter half of the eighteenth century onwards.<sup>23</sup> *The Sorrows of Young Werther* [1774] refers to “some philistine [*Philister*], some man of public rank”, who confronted with an interlocutor analogous to the artist, whose infatuation with a woman is beyond all reasonable limits, advises him to divide up his time between work and leisure, and to spend only what he can afford on presents for his sweetheart, a principle of moderation that would be fatal for true passion.<sup>24</sup> *Satyros* [1774] mentions a philistine who is practically minded and insensitive to the beauty of nature, prioritizing the potential financial reward of a successful crop above the effect of the spectacle of its growth on his imagination.<sup>25</sup> Collaborating with Friedrich Schiller on *Xenia* [1797] and *Votive Tablets* [1797], Goethe reiterates the themes of narrow-mindedness and compartmentalization, and the tendency for philistinism to impede artistic genius. The philistine is depicted as prosaic, shallow in perception and understanding, and lacking a sense of humour. There is a strong association with tradespeople and merchants, and an emphasis on the philistinism of the middle-class traits of materialism and moralism.<sup>26</sup> In *Tame Xenia* [1820-1827], Goethe continues this campaign against the philistine well into the nineteenth century. He charges them with emptiness and appetitiveness: “What is a philistine [*Philister*]? / A hollow gut, / Filled with fear and hope / That God will have mercy.”<sup>27</sup> These are key characteristics of the philistine, which contribute to the contemporary understanding of this figure, as does the identification with the emerging bourgeoisie, underlined by their shared habit of newspaper reading.<sup>28</sup> The most important shift was however towards a dearth of aesthetic feeling, which became the defining feature of philistinism. Goethe secured the position of the new art by rhetorically counterposing it to the philistine, a manoeuvre that

<sup>22</sup> McIlvenna, “The “Philistine” in “Sturm und Drang””, pp.32-33.

<sup>23</sup> Estelle Morgan, “Goethe and the Philistine”, *The Modern Language Review* 53.3 (1958): pp.374-375.

<sup>24</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *The Sorrows of Young Werther* [1774], trans. by Michael Hulse (London: Penguin, 1989), pp.32-33.

<sup>25</sup> McIlvenna, “The “Philistine” in “Sturm und Drang””, p.34.

<sup>26</sup> Morgan, “Goethe and the Philistine”, pp.374-378.

<sup>27</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, cited and discussed in Morgan, “Goethe and the Philistine”, p.378.

<sup>28</sup> Morgan, “Goethe and the Philistine”, pp. 378-379.

would be repeated many times. Writers from the same tradition took up the word and participated in the expansion of its meaning, among them Jakob Lenz, Novalis, Clemens Brentano, ETA Hoffmann and Joseph von Eichendorff.<sup>29</sup> Storm and Stress and German Romanticism thereby resituated philistinism squarely within aesthetic discourse.

#### LAND OF THE PHILISTINES

In nineteenth-century Germany, post-Romantic poets and thinkers invoked philistinism in the same way as their predecessors, and also broke new ground with the concept. Perhaps the most influential in this regard was Heinrich Heine, who arguably had a hand in the transmission of the German “*Philister*” into French as “*Philistin*” and into English as “Philistine”. Initially characterizing his native Germany as the “Land of the Philistines [*Philister*]”, by contrast with the potential represented by his adoptive France as the “Land of Freedom”, Heine was soon disappointed in the latter due to the consolidation of power by the bourgeoisie following the July Revolution of 1830, and the corresponding wave of anti-bourgeois sentiment which arose among his literary contemporaries there frequently found expression in the term “*Philistin*”.<sup>30</sup> He was an explicit point of reference for the early discourse on philistinism in Britain, as the subject of essays by Thomas Carlyle and Matthew Arnold, inspiring subsequent usage of the word “Philistine”.<sup>31</sup> His oeuvre contains a number of satirical portrayals of the philistine, of which one of the best known is “The Philistine [*Philister*] of Berlin” [1828-1829]. This short prose sketch, from a volume of travel writing, reflects his view that philistinism, notwithstanding the acknowledged existence of other national varieties, is quintessentially a German phenomenon. “The Philistine of Berlin” depicts a tavern bore, whose preferred topic of conversation is the weather, reinforcing the prosaism, superficiality and banality already

<sup>29</sup> McIlvenna, “The “Philistine” in “Sturm und Drang””, pp.37-38; Leslie, “Philistines and Art Vandals Get Upset”, pp.201-202; Estelle McIlvenna, “Heine and the “Philistine””, *German Life and Letters* 4.1 (1939): pp.56-57; Peter Bruning, “ETA Hoffmann and the Philistine”, *The German Quarterly* 28.2 (1955): p.111.

<sup>30</sup> Heinrich Heine, cited and discussed in Estelle Morgan, “Bourgeois and Philistine”, *The Modern Language Review* 57.1 (1962): pp.70-71.

<sup>31</sup> Morgan, “Bourgeois and Philistine”, pp.71-72.

established as familiar features of the philistine.<sup>32</sup> In many respects, Heine's body of work simply continues with the tradition of anti-philistinism developed by the German Romantics. His philistine is similarly narrow-minded, practical, mediocre, dull and humourless. They are likewise insensitive to the beauty of nature, lacking in intellectual curiosity, and without an appreciation for finer things. There is once again a strong association with the commercial bourgeoisie, in particular with wealthy tradespeople and merchants. Finally, Heine repeats the reversal whereby universities are themselves said to have become bastions of philistinism. What is distinctive about his account is the political dimension, with the philistine now identified as the enemy of progress.<sup>33</sup> We have seen evidence of this shift in the opposition he sets up between philistinism and freedom, even if the latter is a source of disillusionment for him. The dynamic of definition by negation is essentially the same, regardless of whether the content is political or aesthetic. Interestingly, Immanuel Kant is held up as an example of the philistine in his personal life, notwithstanding his profound influence on philosophical aesthetics.<sup>34</sup> As with the dialectic of art and its other, Heine's progressive orientation is delineated through its constitutive counterconcept, the backward-looking perspective of the philistine. This brings into focus the curious temporality of philistinism, which was first positioned as a hangover from the past, but which came to ride the wave of the future.

#### PHILISTINE CULTURE

Key to this transformation was another important figure in the history of the philistine from nineteenth-century Germany, Friedrich Nietzsche. An admirer of Heine, Nietzsche pushed further his notion of the philistine as the enemy of progress, making them symptomatic and symbolic of a general regression. The vehicle for this broad social critique was an inherently paradoxical formulation, the "*Bildungsphilister*". In the posthumously published *Ecce Homo: How to Become What You Are* [1908], Nietzsche claims to have coined this term, which

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<sup>32</sup> Heinrich Heine, "The Philistine of Berlin" [1828-1829], trans. by Charles Godfrey Leland, in *The Library of the World's Best Literature* [1917], <https://www.bartleby.com/library/prose/2520.html> [accessed 7 October 2018]; McIlvenna, "Heine and the "Philistine"", p.63.

<sup>33</sup> Morgan, "Bourgeois and Philistine", p.70; McIlvenna, "Heine and the "Philistine"", pp.56-60.

<sup>34</sup> McIlvenna, "Heine and the "Philistine"", p.61.

is usually translated as educated or cultivated philistine.<sup>35</sup> He is referring back to the earliest of his *Untimely Meditations* [1873-1876], “David Strauss, the Confessor and the Writer” [1873]. In this polemical text, Nietzsche targets a middlebrow philosopher who had achieved some critical and popular success, taking him to be emblematic of the new subspecies of philistine. The latter is supposed to function as the immanent negation of the sphere of culture, lodging within it and establishing there what is dubbed a “philistine culture [*Philister-Kultur*]”.<sup>36</sup> By collapsing the distinction between culture and its opposite in this way, Nietzsche conveys his sense that philistinism has become generalized and hegemonic. He emphasizes the distance between the common conception of the philistine and his variant, who has occupied the position formerly held by their antitheses the “son of the muses” and the “man of culture”.<sup>37</sup> The set of traits attributed to the cultivated philistine is however largely conventional, including a strong association with the German character. They are described as narrow-minded and compartmentalizing, without any intellectual curiosity, understanding or taste. They are also said to be conservative, complacent and cowardly. They are once again identified as an impediment to artistic genius, siding with reality against creativity.<sup>38</sup> Their class identity is bourgeois, specifically engaged in “business”, but the philistine culture that they propagate appeals to the “repellent need for entertainment characteristic of the exhausted worker”.<sup>39</sup> This last observation anticipates the shift from middle-class to working-class philistinism, and the related idea of elite resistance to it, which developed in the course of the twentieth century, but has its roots in the student slang of the seventeenth century. In addition, Nietzsche repeats the inversion of the uneducated philistine into their scholarly equivalent, which had been pioneered by the German Romantics.<sup>40</sup> He likewise continues the practice of using philistinism as a foil to articulate his sense of a true culture, if we read this essay in conjunction with subsequent *Untimely Meditations*, and their laudatory

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<sup>35</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo: How to Become What You Are* [1908], trans. by Duncan Large (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p.51.

<sup>36</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, “David Strauss, the Confessor and the Writer” [1873], in *Untimely Meditations* [1873-1876], ed. by Daniel Breazeale, trans. by RJ Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.7, p.25, p.37, p.39.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p.7.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p.7-11, pp.21-22, p.29, p.33, pp.37-38.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p.11, p.35.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.37-38.

treatment of Arnold Schopenhauer and Richard Wagner.<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, Nietzsche's intervention was original and influential, in that he styled the cultivated philistine as a visionary, and generalized their condition from that of a particular group to society as a whole.<sup>42</sup>

### RESISTANCE TO LIGHT

The philistine was imported into the Anglophone world by the writers alluded to above in relation to Heine: Carlyle and Arnold. In eighteenth-century Britain, "Philistine" had denoted any fearsome adversary, but it was transformed during the Victorian era through its contact with the German "*Philister*". In his essays on German literature including Goethe and Heine, Carlyle was the first to draw attention to this word, without finding a satisfactory equivalent for the concept in English.<sup>43</sup> Disputing with Carlyle, Arnold sought to underline the continuity between Goethe and Heine, identifying as central to the work of the latter a "life-and-death struggle with Philistinism".<sup>44</sup> *Heinrich Heine* [1863] makes the case that philistinism is in fact particularly applicable to the English: "Perhaps we have not the word because we have so much of the thing."<sup>45</sup> By the time of Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy: An Essay in Political and Social Criticism* [1869], and certainly with the subsequent addition of the "Preface" [1875], "Philistine" had been established as an independent term in the British context, without having to rely directly on the authority of either Goethe or Heine.<sup>46</sup> This book promulgates an ideal of culture, defined as an inward endeavour striving towards a harmonious and general perfection, to which is opposed philistine insensitivity to "sweetness and light": "*Philistine* gives the notion of something particularly stiff-necked and perverse in the resistance to light and its children[.]"<sup>47</sup> "Hebraizing" and "Hellenizing" instincts are said to be

<sup>41</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, "Schopenhauer as Educator" [1874], in *Untimely Meditations*, pp.127-194; Friedrich Nietzsche, "Richard Wagner in Bayreuth" [1876], in *Untimely Meditations*, pp.197-254.

<sup>42</sup> Nietzsche, "David Strauss, the Confessor and the Writer", p.16.

<sup>43</sup> Morgan, "Bourgeois and Philistine", p.71; McIlvenna, "Heine and the "Philistine"", p.56.

<sup>44</sup> Matthew Arnold, *Heinrich Heine* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Frederick Leyboldt, 1863), pp.4-6, p.12.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p.12.

<sup>46</sup> Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy: An Essay in Political and Social Criticism* [1869], ed. by J Dover Wilson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948), pp.100-101.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p.6, p.11, pp.53-54, pp.101-102.

in a state of imbalance in contemporary society, with undue weight given to the former, which is aligned with the philistine in an inversion of their Gentile status in the Bible.<sup>48</sup> For this alleged bias in favour of the Hebrew qualities of correct conduct and obedience to the law, which he sees as to the detriment of the Hellenic pursuit of knowledge, Arnold blames the rise of the industrial bourgeoisie, given the title of “Philistines”, while the aristocracy is labelled “Barbarians”, and the proletariat is dubbed the “Populace”.<sup>49</sup> *Culture and Anarchy* claims that the middle class is represented by the “commercial member of Parliament” and the “fanatical Protestant Dissenter”.<sup>50</sup> In politics, Parliamentary Liberalism is the natural home of the philistine. In religion, they usually belong to Dissenting and Nonconformist sects.<sup>51</sup> The philistine is in thrall to machinery, mechanical in their adherence to routine and convention, and narrowly and vulgarly materialistic in their values. Their outlook is provincial, with a limited, one-sided and inflexible mindset, which tends towards fundamentalism and fanaticism. They have a typically bourgeois preoccupation with money, and with quantitative growth as good in itself, as well as a corresponding interest in increasing the population, and an excessive emphasis on physical health.<sup>52</sup> *Culture and Anarchy* casts the net wider, to take in historical characters, highlighting the “coarseness and lack of spiritual delicacy” of the “Philistine of genius” Martin Luther, and the contradictory “craving for forbidden fruit” and “craving for legality” of the “crowned Philistine” Henry VIII.<sup>53</sup> The USA as a whole is also charged with philistinism, as a country overwhelmingly dominated by its middle class.<sup>54</sup> Building on the development of the concept by Goethe and Heine, adapting it to the cultural specificities of nineteenth-century Britain, Arnold further refines the class identity of the philistine, updating it from the earlier association with tradespeople and merchants to cover prosperous industrialists, who are presented as a hegemonic force in a similar way to the “*Bildungphilister*”. The barbarians and the populace are both to some extent assimilated into the ranks of the philistines, and he is also

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p.20, p.138.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p.20, p.61, p.102, p.105, pp.131-132.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., pp.100-101.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p.14.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p.6, p.12, p.14, pp.49-52, pp.100-101, p.107, p.179, pp.189-190.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p.30, p.181.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., pp.19-20.

quite clear about his own class position, in a rare instance of self-identification with this figure: “I myself am properly a Philistine.”<sup>55</sup> The Anglophone tradition of philistinism inaugurated here also adopted the manoeuvre of constructing a positive vision of culture on the basis of its negation.

### BLIND PHILISTINES

Working with this inheritance, British artists and critics in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries mobilized the philistine in order to articulate their ideal of culture. Alongside Arnold, John Ruskin and William Morris railed against the philistinism of an emerging modernity.<sup>56</sup> These Victorians held to the value of creative activity as in some way socially useful, but that principle fell away with the development of the programmatic aestheticism they influenced. The insistence on the autonomous status of art, and on the aesthetic as a specialized realm of experience, were concretized with reference to a definitional other, the figure of the philistine. Indeed, the slogan of *l'art pour l'art* was probably taken from Théophile Gautier, who had himself been a prominent critic of the “*Philistin*” in France.<sup>57</sup> In Britain, Oscar Wilde was the most recognizable representative of the movement, promoting an appreciation of beauty wholly independent of morality, and the belief that art should serve as a model for life rather than be a faithful copy of it. This was counterposed to the outlook of the philistine, whose insensitivity to the aesthetic, and subordination of it to other imperatives, were already well established.<sup>58</sup> *De Profundis* [1905] underlines the allegiance of the philistine to society, once again drawing on a familiar set of associations, including a blindness that would become constitutive: “He is the Philistine who upholds and aids the heavy, cumbrous, blind, mechanical forces of Society[.]”<sup>59</sup> There was an implicit gendering of the philistine as “masculine”, by contrast with the quasi-feminized aesthete, a pose central to aestheticism. The transition to modernism was a site of struggle in which accusations of philistinism continued to be a resource, for

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., pp.51-52, p.61, p.65, p.101, pp.104-106.

<sup>56</sup> Beech and Roberts, “Tolerating Impurities”, pp.136-137.

<sup>57</sup> Morgan, “Bourgeois and Philistine”, pp.70-71.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p.72.

<sup>59</sup> Oscar Wilde, *De Profundis* [1905], in *Plays, Prose Writings and Poems* [1930] (London: David Campbell, 1981), p.626.



example in the high-profile dispute over the didactic function of realist art between JA Spender and DS MacColl, where the former looked back to Ruskin, while the latter anticipated the New Criticism.<sup>60</sup> In their theory of the mode of perception appropriate to modern art, the New Critics Clive Bell and Roger Fry prioritized close attention to pure form, as distinct from moral and technical judgements, naturalizing this perspective as a special quality inscribed in individuals, in turn suggesting a philistine afflicted by a fundamental incapacity akin to blindness. This fed into the social chauvinism of the modernist elite, who styled themselves as the defenders of the aesthetic in the face of universal philistinism, in this regard also taking something from Nietzsche. The context for this institutionalized snobbery was the rise of mass society, which brought with it a shift from an understanding of the philistine as a bourgeois phenomenon, to a situation in which they were primarily identified with the industrial proletariat, a partial return to the origins of the term as a class-based insult directed at uneducated townspeople.<sup>61</sup> Virginia Woolf is a borderline case, highly attuned to the philistinism of her own class, while sharing in its aversion to the vulgarity of the masses.<sup>62</sup> The appetitive aspect of philistinism was increasingly emphasized, through the expression of disgust at the consumption of mass-produced entertainment like cinema and radio, setting up an opposition between the deferral of pleasure in modernist art and the immediate gratification of the culture industry. There was a related reversal in the gendering of the philistine, with the machismo of modernist asceticism set against the dominant attitude to mass culture, which was denigrated as passively “feminine”.<sup>63</sup> The first half of the twentieth century therefore saw another significant transformation of the philistine, one bound up with the increasing importance accorded to aesthetic autonomy by aestheticism and modernism.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Kate Flint, “The “Philistine” and the New Art Critic: JA Spender and DS MacColl’s Debate of 1893”, *Victorian Periodicals Review* 21.1 (1939): p.3.

<sup>61</sup> Beech and Roberts, “Tolerating Impurities”, pp.139-142.

<sup>62</sup> Mary C Madden, “Virginia Woolf and the Persistent Question of Class: The Protean Nature of Class and Self” (PhD thesis, University of South Florida, 2006), *Graduate Theses and Dissertations*, <https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/etd/2612/> [accessed 26 April 2019], p.80-83, p.109, p.118.

<sup>63</sup> Noël Burch, “The Sadeian Aesthetic: A Critical View” [2002], in *The Philistine Controversy*, p.193.

<sup>64</sup> For a longer view of the historical development of aesthetic autonomy, which ultimately affirms those autonomizing strategies in contemporary art that actively counteract nostalgia for the modernist conception of it associated with Adorno, see: Kerstin Stakemeier, “(Not) More

## REVENGE OF THE PHILISTINES

We ought to avoid speaking too glibly of the institutionalization of modernism, given that its leading proponents were consciously engaged in institution building from the outset, though it is true to say that its status shifted from that of an emerging to a consecrated avant-garde as the twentieth century progressed. This involved a paradox, as the principle of aesthetic autonomy was instrumentalized, promoted as a platitude by the same mechanisms of cultural production in opposition to which it originally had been developed. The philistine likewise rose in prominence, but with their critical content hollowed out, no longer mobilized in support of an insurgent movement, instead used to defend an aesthetic regime now established as the official form of high art within the internal hierarchy of the culture industry. This is apparent in the observations of the mainstream modernist Vladimir Nabakov, who writes in his post-war essay “Philistines and Philistinism” [1981]: “A philistine is a full-grown person whose interests are of a material and commonplace nature, and whose mentality is formed of the stock ideas and conventional ideals of his or her group and time.”<sup>65</sup> His definition is itself conventional, despite the nod to gender neutrality, and he adds to it other familiar features, such as conformism, pretentiousness and vulgarity, as well as an association with advertising and with commodity culture more generally. The philistine is thus deployed to shore up the position of high art, in an account which is essentially conservative, subtracting from the concept any of its class politics, even understanding the bourgeoisie as a cultural rather than an economic category.<sup>66</sup> This depoliticizing tendency is also evident in the work of Hilton Kramer, long-time art critic at *The New York Times*, who explicitly thematizes the institutionalization of modernism in his collection of essays *The Revenge of the Philistines: Art and Culture 1972-1984* [1985]: “No sooner had modernism completed its difficult and much-contested passage into the mainstream of cultural life than it found itself under fire again. Only this time the attack upon it did not come from its traditional enemies among the

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Autonomy”, in Kerstin Stakemeier and Marina Vishmidt, *Reproducing Autonomy: Work, Money, Crisis & Contemporary Art* (London: Mute Books, 2016), pp.8-28.

<sup>65</sup> Vladimir Nabakov, “Philistines and Philistinism”, in *Lectures on Russian Literature* [1981], ed. by Fredson Bowers (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1982), p.309.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.309-312.

philistines, who by now had either been won over to its cause or effectively silenced by modernism's overwhelming success."<sup>67</sup> The attack in fact originated within the sphere of high art, with the critiques mounted by an insurgent postmodernism, against which he makes the case for the continuing relevance and lasting value of modernism, a backward-looking perspective that arguably has something philistine about it.<sup>68</sup> It is also worth mentioning the avant-garde artists who strategically adopted the persona of the philistine, the most obvious examples from the twentieth century being Marcel Duchamp, Andy Warhol and the Young British Artists (YBAs). They all embodied this figure, whether by affecting indifference to the distinction between art and non-art, embracing the imagery and indeed the production methods of the culture industry, or unleashing the destructive energies of iconoclasm and bodily pleasure. There are other currents in the history of art which connect to these aspects of an insurgent philistinism, including the channelling of iconoclasm in the auto-destructive practice pioneered by Gustav Metzger, and the exploration of bodily pleasure in experiments with pornography by Carolee Schneemann. The tradition of the avant-gardist philistine could be traced back as far as the late nineteenth century and the little magazine *The Philistine: A Periodical of Protest*, as well as being extended into twenty-first-century literature with flarf poets like Nada Gordon, Sharon Mesmer and Gary Sullivan, and the conceptual writing associated with Kenneth Goldsmith, Craig Dworkin and Vanessa Place.<sup>69</sup> I return to that longer view in the Conclusion, but the main focus of my thesis is the refusal of art and aesthetics enacted through the performative philistinism of the Dadaists.

#### THE PHILISTINE CONTROVERSY

At regular junctures, I draw on the so-called "philistine controversy" of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. This was a series of debates centred on the figure of the philistine, at first fought out principally in art journals like *everything*, *Third Text* and *Art Monthly*, then increasingly in the

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<sup>67</sup> Hilton Kramer, *The Revenge of the Philistines: Art and Culture 1972-1984* [1985] (London: Secker and Warburg, 1986), p.xii.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p.xii, p.11.

<sup>69</sup> For an account of *The Philistine*, see: Bruce A White, *Elbert Hubbard's The Philistine: A Periodical of Protest (1895-1915): A Major American "Little Magazine"* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1989).

pages of *New Left Review*, and finally in the collection of essays *The Philistine Controversy* [2002]. Roberts' "'Mad For It!' Bank and the New British Art" [1996], subsequently expanded and retitled "'Mad For It!' Philistinism, the Everyday and the New British Art" [1996], inaugurated the first phase of the philistine controversy, in the context of widespread contention over the aesthetic and political value of the YBAs. He positively identifies some of this group with philistine attitudes, practices and modes of attention, defending their deployment of the rhetoric and iconography of mass culture.<sup>70</sup> His intervention sparked bad-tempered disputes with critics of this phenomenon, most notably Julian Stallabrass and Stewart Home.<sup>71</sup> Beech and Roberts' "Spectres of the Aesthetic" [1996] broadens the scope of the philistine controversy, with a critique of the renewed interest of the philosophical left in the intersection of ethics and aesthetics, in an argument over the contested legacy of Adorno. They take aim at what they dub the new aestheticism, accusing its representatives of constructing a transcendental ethics on the basis of a theory of art from which cultural contestation and bodily pleasure are excluded.<sup>72</sup> Jay Bernstein and Andrew Bowie responded in exchanges often characterized by mutual misunderstanding, and there was also an alternative model of the philistine put forward by Malcolm Bull in "The Ecstasy of Philistinism" [1996].<sup>73</sup> In the final phase of the philistine controversy, Beech and Roberts defended and extended their concept of the philistine, and brought together a number of contributions by different writers in *The Philistine Controversy*. This volume minimizes the original discussion about

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<sup>70</sup> John Roberts, "'Mad For It!' Bank and the New British Art", *everything* 18 (1996): <http://bak.spc.org/everything/e/hard/text/roberts1.html> [accessed 10 October 2018]; John Roberts, "'Mad For It!' Philistinism, the Everyday and the New British Art", *Third Text* 10.35 (1996): pp.29-42.

<sup>71</sup> See: Julian Stallabrass, "Phoney War", *Art Monthly* 206 (1997): pp.15-16; Julian Stallabrass, *High Art Lite: The Rise and Fall of Young British Art* [1999] (London: Verso, 2006), pp.119-124; Stewart Home, "The Art of Chauvinism in Britain and France", *everything* 19 (1996): <http://bak.spc.org/everything/e/hard/text/shome.html> [accessed 10 October 2018]; Stewart Home, "From Arse to Arsehole: John Roberts and the Spectres of Philistinism" [1997], <https://www.stewarthomesociety.org/4arse.html> [accessed 10 October 2018]; John Roberts, "Home Truths", *everything* 20 (1996): <http://bak.spc.org/everything/e/hard/text/roberts2.html> [accessed 10 October 2018].

<sup>72</sup> Dave Beech and John Roberts, "Spectres of the Aesthetic" [1996], in *The Philistine Controversy*, pp.13-47.

<sup>73</sup> Jay Bernstein, "Against Voluptuous Bodies: Of Satiation Without Happiness" [1997], in *The Philistine Controversy*, pp.103-124; Andrew Bowie, "Confessions of a 'New Aesthete': A Response to the 'New Philistines'" [1997], in *The Philistine Controversy*, pp.73-102; Andrew Bowie, "Another Third Way?" [2002], in *The Philistine Controversy*, pp.161-171; Malcolm Bull, "The Ecstasy of Philistinism" [1996], in *The Philistine Controversy*, pp.48-72.

contemporary art in favour of a focus on philosophical questions, overlooking Stallabrass and Home, but giving space to Bernstein and Bowie. It contains a critical assessment of the arguments involving the latter pair by Gail Day, as well as further elaborations of philistinism by Leslie, Noël Burch and Malcolm Quinn.<sup>74</sup> Beech and Bull have continued to make use of the figure of the philistine in their more recent work, and others have taken up the topic, whether or not they explicitly connect their endeavours to that background.<sup>75</sup> These theoretical manoeuvres involve a recovery of the critical potential of philistinism, which is construed as a means to probe the gaps and closures of art and aesthetics, in a sense building on the previous interventions of the anti-artists.

### RESONANCES

In the twenty-first century, “Philistine” and other related terms appear to occupy a less prominent place in discourse generally, having seemingly become somewhat outmoded, perhaps on account of the elitism associated with the word.<sup>76</sup> This despite the fact that the associated dynamics of elitism and anti-elitism, conflicts ostensibly premised on cultural identity, differences of taste, and levels of educational attainment, have in recent years experienced a resurgence globally, with key examples including the rapid rise to hegemony of Narendra Modi in India, the campaign and presidency of Donald Trump in the USA, and elements of the vote for Brexit in the UK. There are echoes of the debates over philistinism in Modi’s plebeian public persona and appeals to chauvinism as contrasted with the patrician cosmopolitanism historically associated with the leadership of the Congress Party; in the use of the label “deplorables” to describe Trump’s supporters by his Democratic opponent Hilary

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<sup>74</sup> Leslie, “Philistines and Art Vandals Get Upset”, pp.201-227; Burch, “The Sadeian Aesthetic”, pp.175-200; Gail Day, “When Art Works Crack(le)” [2002], in *The Philistine Controversy*, pp.228-254; Malcolm Quinn, “The Legions of the Blind: The Philistine and Cultural Studies” [2002], in *The Philistine Controversy*, pp.255-271.

<sup>75</sup> See: Dave Beech, *Art and Value: Art’s Economic Exceptionalism in Classical, Neoclassical and Marxist Economics* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), pp.369-370; Malcolm Bull, *Anti-Nietzsche* (London: Verso, 2011), pp.1-26; Mark Hutchinson, “Just Give Me the Truth: A Philistine’s Guide to Public Art” [2007], <http://www.markhutchinson.org/writing/writing%20truth.html> [accessed 10 October 2018]; Keston Sutherland, *Stupefaction: A Radical Anatomy of Phantoms* (London: Seagull Books, 2011), pp.114-120.

<sup>76</sup> “Philistine”, *Google Ngram Viewer*; “Philistines”, *Google Ngram Viewer*; “Philistinism”, *Google Ngram Viewer*.

Clinton; and in the denigration of experts by the pro-Brexit Conservative Michael Gove.<sup>77</sup> It is not the purpose of my thesis to engage with these contemporary resonances directly, but rather to draw on the full historical and theoretical inheritance summarized above, the successive modifications and transformations of the concept over time, which are intimately intertwined with the evolution of culture. There is further justification for returning to this topic, in that it was especially salient when my main subjects were active, and the treatment of it in their work may therefore be a fruitful area to explore. Dada emerged in the wake of the late nineteenth-century highpoint of philistinism, appropriating and redeploying that discursive construct in the service of an anti-artistic project, reacting against the elevation of aesthetic autonomy by aestheticism and modernism. Adorno was writing in the context of the popularization of philistinism by a culture industry that was fully fledged by around the middle of the twentieth century, exploiting the critical potential latent in the derogation while recognizing its unjust social basis. My investigation is informed by the theorization of the philistine developed towards the end of that century and at the beginning of the next, initially coinciding with the moment of insurgent philistinism represented by the YBAs. These three scenes in art history, roughly corresponding to the periodization of the historical avant-garde, the neo-avant-garde and the post-avant-garde, are brought together here on the basis of that shared attitude. This brief history of the philistine has emphasized the exceptional mobility of the term, its application to a wide variety of groups and individuals, and its tendency to traverse antitheses and turn into its opposite, making it a suitable vehicle for a dialectical analysis, which must be attuned to fluidity, polyvalence and contradiction. The negative definition of culture, art and aesthetics, with reference to the philistine, is also well adapted to my method, in which this figure is mobilized to disclose the limits of the aesthetic sphere. For all these reasons, I believe that this is a suitable moment and occasion to revisit the problematic of philistinism.

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<sup>77</sup> Achin Vanaik, "India's Two Hegemonies", *New Left Review* 2.112 (2018): p.29, pp.35-36, pp.39-42; "Hillary Clinton Calls Many Trump Backers 'Deplorables', and GOP Pounces", *The New York Times*, 10 September 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/11/us/politics/hillary-clinton-basket-of-deplorables.html> [accessed 29 October 2018]; "Britain Has Had Enough of Experts, Says Gove", *Financial Times*, 3 June 2016, <https://www.ft.com/content/3be49734-29cb-11e6-83e4-abc22d5d108c> [accessed 29 October 2018].

## Adorno's Philistine: The Dialectic of Art and its Other

This chapter presents the results of an extensive survey of the references to the figure of the philistine in the work of Adorno, for the most part read in translation into English, cross-referenced against the original German.<sup>1</sup> The scope of this exercise covers nearly all the collections of essays and book-length studies published during his lifetime, as well as a wide selection of important standalone articles and posthumous texts. There are a range of German equivalents for “Philistine”, including variants of “*Philister*”, “*Spießbürger*” and “*Banause*”. As with the English term, “*Philister*” was derived from the Greek “*Philistieím*” and the Hebrew “*Pělišťím*”, referring to a non-Semitic people from the southern coast of Palestine, whose members feature as enemies of the Israelites in the Old Testament. It first entered into modern usage in the seventeenth century, in the context of town and gown disputes, acquiring the connotations of unacademic and intellectually limited. The term is also linked to petit-bourgeois narrow-mindedness in the *Duden*.<sup>2</sup> “*Spießbürger*” and its contraction “*Spießer*” originated in the tenth century, to describe the citizens of towns (“*Bürger*”), who defended themselves with spears (“*Spieße*”). Their alleged persistence with this outmoded weaponry, after the invention of the rifle, led to the broadening of the terms to designate any parochial and backward-looking mentality, once again in the student vocabulary of the seventeenth century. “*Spießbürger*” and “*Spießer*” also carry connotations of conservatism and narrow-mindedness, according to the *Duden*.<sup>3</sup> Although his oeuvre includes many instances of “*Philister*”, “*Spießbürger*” and “*Spießer*”, Adorno overwhelmingly prefers “*Banause*”, derived from the Greek “*Bánausos*”. This was a term for the artisan class, denied access to education and culture, during

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<sup>1</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften in zwanzig Bänden*, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann, with the assistance of Gretel Adorno, Susan Buck-Morss, Klaus Schultz (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970-1986); Theodor Adorno, *Nachgelassene Schriften*, ed. by Theodor W Adorno Archive (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1993-). All cross-references to these volumes are given in square brackets in short-form, e.g. “GS7” or “NaSl:2”.

<sup>2</sup> “*Philister*”, *Duden*; “*Philister*”, *Duden Etymologie*.

<sup>3</sup> “*Spießbürger*”, *Duden*; “*Spießer*”, *Duden*; “*Spießbürger*”, *Duden Etymologie*; Leslie, “Philistines and Art Vandals Get Upset”, p.201.

the age of antiquity. It was adapted to denote intellectual and aesthetic incompetence, as well as a lack of depth and a failure to appreciate finer things, in nineteenth-century Germany.<sup>4</sup> Its adjectival form is sometimes translated as “Banausic”, so that the figure of the philistine drops out of sight in English. Conversely, “Philistine” is introduced illegitimately by translators on a number of occasions, and the most egregious of these instances have been excluded from my survey.<sup>5</sup> Derived from the Greek “*Ámousía*” (“Without the Muses”), “*Amusie*” – meaning unmusical, art-alien or the absence of an aesthetic sensibility – appears in a few of the passages quoted below, despite not being an exact analogue for “Philistine”.<sup>6</sup> We sometimes encounter other related but distinct terms, such as “*Unmusikalische*” (“Unmusical”) and “*Kunstfremde*” (“Art-alien”). Throughout, I adopt the practice of specifying the original word in square brackets, and noting its particular associations where these are relevant, but my primary focus remains the content of the concept, rather than questions of translation.

### The Immanent Negation of Art

As set out in the Introduction, Beech and Roberts’ “Spectres of the Aesthetic” inaugurated the main phase of the philistine controversy, which was conducted chiefly in *New Left Review*, a journal historically associated with the Anglophone transmission of Adorno. There they explain the emergence of the new aestheticism with reference to a number of causal factors, of which the most

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<sup>4</sup> “*Banause*”, *Duden*; “*Banause*”, *Duden Etymologie*.

<sup>5</sup> See: Theodor Adorno, “Extorted Reconciliation: On Georg Lukács’ *Realism in our Time*” [1958], in *Notes to Literature, Volume 1*, trans. by Shierry Weber Nicholsen (New York, New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p.235 [*GS11*, p.273]; Theodor Adorno, *Sound Figures* [1959], trans. by Rodney Livingstone (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1999), p.177 [*GS16*, p.206]; Theodor Adorno, “Ernst Bloch’s *Spuren*: On the Revised Edition of 1959” [1960], in *Notes to Literature, Volume 1*, p.203 [*GS11*, p.236]; Theodor Adorno, “Engagement” [1962], trans. by Francis McDonagh, in *Aesthetics and Politics*, ed. by New Left Books (London: Verso, 2007), p.193 [*GS11*, p.428]; Theodor Adorno, “Stefan George” [1967], in *Notes to Literature, Volume 2*, trans. by Shierry Weber Nicholsen (New York, New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), p.185 [*GS11*, pp.529-530]; Theodor Adorno, “Charmed Language: On the Poetry of Rudolf Borchardt” [1967], in *Notes to Literature, Volume 2*, p.198 [*GS11*, p.542].

<sup>6</sup> “*Amusie*”, *Duden*; “*Amusie*”, *Harrap’s Standard German and English Dictionary*, ed. by Trevor Jones (London: Harrap, 1963); Stephen Halliwell, “*Amousia*: Living Without the Muses”, in *Aesthetic Value in Classical Antiquity*, ed. by Ineke Sluiter and Ralph M Rosen (Leiden: Brill, 2012), p.17.



certain is said to be the first publication in English of *Aesthetic Theory*, in the now superseded translation by Christian Lenhart of 1984. Beech and Roberts contend that the influence of this text has been problematic, with the key category of aesthetic autonomy misconstrued as entailing isolation and non-partisanship, whereas aesthetic form is immanently permeated by the social, for Adorno. According to “Spectres of the Aesthetic”, Bernstein and Bowie seek to reclaim aesthetics from the right, but they are also reacting against a perceived reduction of the artistic to the social in structuralist Marxism, feminist theory and postcolonial studies. It is in opposition to their model of aesthetic autonomy, which allegedly denies the social character of art, that the figure of the philistine is mobilized by Beech and Roberts. The philistine controversy is in this way situated within the context of the contemporary reception of Adorno, and in particular *Aesthetic Theory*.<sup>7</sup>

In addition to attempting to recover his work from interpretations that sever the link between his social theory and his philosophical aesthetics, Beech and Roberts advance their own critique of Adorno. The main thrust of it is that the concept of philistinism, as it is deployed in his writing, remains undertheorized. They aim to correct the supposed one-sidedness in his representation of the dialectic of art and its other, through the incorporation into aesthetic theory of the “truth-claims of the philistine”:

Adorno draws together the love of art and the *ressentiment* of the philistine without proposing the resolution of their conflict by expressing this rivalry as a wound on the body of art. But his dialectic is not the dialectic of art and its other, it is merely the dialectic of art inscribed by its other. Adorno assimilates the moment of philistinism to art; he does not assimilate the moment of art to philistinism. Therefore, Adorno underestimates the critical potential of philistinism by failing to allow voluptuous pleasures and inexpert forms of attention to distract art from its intellectual duties.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Beech and Roberts, “Spectres of the Aesthetic”, pp.13-47.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.43-44.

“Spectres of the Aesthetic” proposes placing greater emphasis on those moments in his work when he explicitly affirms the critical potential of philistinism, citing as an example his admission that “the philistine [*Philister*] is not completely wrong to sneer at art” in *Aesthetic Theory*.<sup>9</sup> Robert Hullot-Kentor, whose standard translation of the text came out a year after this article in 1997, renders the same passage as follows, given here in full: “Ridiculousness is the residue of the mimetic in art, the price of its self-enclosure. In his condemnation of this element, the philistine [*Philister*] always has an ignominious measure of justification.”<sup>10</sup> I will return to this quotation later in the chapter.

Bull’s “The Ecstasy of Philistinism”, subsequently repurposed for his book *Anti-Nietzsche* [2011], was originally framed as an intervention in the philistine controversy, also published in *New Left Review*. The fact that the philistine, though often invoked rhetorically as an object of abuse, is not a type with which people tend to identify willingly, indicates that it occupies a specific position in relation to positive value, according to Bull. He elaborates this claim through a speculative history of negation, encompassing the successive phases of atheism, anarchism and nihilism. His hypothesis is that each of these first emerged as the imaginary other of the dominant discourse, before a series of transpositions took place, in which what began as an abstract negation was made concrete and progressively legitimized, before finally instituting its own form of positive value. In the case of atheism this was the state, for anarchism it was morality, and for nihilism it was beauty. The next stage in the sequence is supposed to be philistinism, which as with previous forerunners of positive value is now delineated mainly through the language of its detractors, as a discursive construct which does not yet correspond to an empirical reality. Bull champions the philistine as the means by which the aesthetic might be eliminated, merging the conceptions of them found in Nietzsche and Arnold, and mapping that composite figure onto the reconstruction of the myth of Odysseus by Adorno and Max Horkheimer in *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments* [1944].<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p.43.

<sup>10</sup> Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p.158 [GS7, p.181].

<sup>11</sup> Bull, “The Ecstasy of Philistinism”, pp.48-72; Bull, *Anti-Nietzsche*, pp.1–26. For an alternative reading of the same scene from *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, which also reflects on the function

“The Ecstasy of Philistinism” develops a radically different version of the dialectic of art and its other to “Spectres of the Aesthetic”. However, Bull takes as his starting point another moment in which the critical potential of philistinism is explicitly affirmed by Adorno in *Aesthetic Theory*. Like Beech and Roberts, Bull quotes from the only translation available at the time of his original article:

Believing that philistinism was not mere vulgarity but “the antithesis par excellence of aesthetic behaviour”, Adorno expressed interest in studying the phenomenon as a *via negativa* to the aesthetic. But the project remained unrealized, and although he frequently made dismissive or insulting remarks about philistines, Adorno never bothered to investigate what, if anything, philistinism might be. In this respect, his attitude was characteristic of the discourse against philistinism that had been in circulation since the nineteenth century. But in his unfulfilled desire to study the philistine, Adorno opened the way to a revaluation of that tradition, for upon closer examination the philistine proves to be a figure of greater historical and intellectual importance than Adorno imagined.<sup>12</sup>

Hullot-Kentor’s expanded version of the embedded quotation at the beginning of this passage reads: “The counterconcept to aesthetic comportment is, quite simply, the concept of the philistine [*Banausischen*], which often overlaps with the vulgar [*Vulgäre*] yet remains distinct from it by its indifference or hatred, whereas vulgarity [*Vulgärität*] greedily smacks its lips.”<sup>13</sup> I will also return to this quotation later in the chapter.

In “Spectres of the Aesthetic”, Beech and Roberts present a version of the dialectic of art and its other which gives a central role to the philistine: “[T]he concept of the philistine is peculiarly well placed, as the definitional other of art and aesthetics, to bring to bear on art and aesthetics the cost of their exclusions, blindnesses and anxieties. Indeed it could be said the philistine is *the* spectre of

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of philistinism for Adorno, see: Fredric Jameson, *Late Marxism: Adorno, or: The Persistence of the Dialectic* [1990] (London: Verso, 2007), pp.123-154.

<sup>12</sup> Bull, “The Ecstasy of Philistinism”, p.48.

<sup>13</sup> Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p.314 [GS7, p.357].

art and aesthetics.”<sup>14</sup> The philistine is both discursive and empirical, as the ideal representation of what art and aesthetics are not, embodying the derogations and delegitimizations through which their boundaries are secured in reality. The practices excluded from the aesthetic sphere return to haunt it in the spectre of the philistine: “As an empirical and discursive construction, philistinism has a dialectical identity which shifts and slides along the edges of what is established as proper aesthetic behaviour. Consequently, values, categories and forms of attention once described as philistine can become incorporated into artistic and aesthetic practices through intellectual and practical struggle, but this will not diminish philistinism, only redraw the lines of demarcation.”<sup>15</sup> The figures of the voluptuous and the partisan, respectively associated with bodily pleasure and cultural contestation, are subsumed into the concept of philistinism. The philistine then exerts pressure on art and aesthetics, reconstituting their autonomy in a continuous cycle of exclusion, assimilation and transformation: “[T]he autonomy of art and aesthetics is understood as perpetually rewriting their borders against the voluptuous and practical demands of the philistine.”<sup>16</sup> In their version of the dialectic of art and its other, Beech and Roberts position the philistine as internal to the aesthetic sphere, and ultimately productive of new forms of aesthetic value.

In “The Ecstasy of Philistinism”, Bull differentiates his version of the dialectic of art and its other from that contained in “Spectres of the Aesthetic”: “Art is not [...] assimilated to philistinism but annihilated by it, and although the resulting void may yet contain some positive value, that value need not be aesthetic.”<sup>17</sup> With regard to Adorno, Beech and Roberts are said to do no more than invert his theory of art, substituting the philistine for the avant-garde. Bull insists that the philistine should be imagined as destructive, rather than deconstructive:

Imagining philistinism as the deconstructive, rather than the destructive negation of the aesthetic bestows on philistinism a role that Adorno gave to art itself – negating the negation within the discourse of the aesthetic.

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<sup>14</sup> Beech and Roberts, “Spectres of the Aesthetic”, p.45.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p.45.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p.47.

<sup>17</sup> Bull, “The Ecstasy of Philistinism”, p.72.

So rather than offering an alternative to Adorno's dialectic, Beech and Roberts are therefore taking up a position that is already implicit within it. [...] For Adorno, as for his critics, the dialectic of art and its other involves not the destruction of art but its continuation in other forms.<sup>18</sup>

By contrast, Bull's philistine negates aesthetic value as such, replacing it with a new form of positive value, as yet unspecified. This dialectic is imagined as an external force acting on art, and indeed its externality is what guarantees its negativity: "[A] way of seeing art that stands outside the discourse it negates and so promises not just an end to aesthetic ideology, but a liberation from art itself."<sup>19</sup> According to Bull, Beech and Roberts misconstrue the dialectic as a medium through which art operates, instead of a process to which it is subject.

In their follow-up essay in *New Left Review* "Tolerating Impurities: An Ontology, Genealogy and Defence of Philistinism" [1998], Beech and Roberts confirm that their concept of the philistine is immanent to art and aesthetics: "[O]ur critique of the new aestheticism and our concept of the philistine are internal to the philosophy of aesthetics and the criticism and practice of art."<sup>20</sup> They distance themselves from Bull: "[W]e take our distance from Malcolm Bull's essay, "The Ecstasy of Philistinism", because for him the philistine is merely the name given to the imagined agency of art's formal negation, that is, a concept which is no more than a counter-factual token given form by utopian longing. Our philistine, on the other hand, is emphatically relational, remaining deeply entangled in the alienated conditions of art's production and reception."<sup>21</sup> They also maintain that the complete destruction of the aesthetic would be a disavowal of the relationality on which philistinism is predicated. "The Philistine and the Logic of Negation" [2002], their final joint essay on the topic, recapitulates this model of the dialectic of art and its other, and reaffirms its debt to Adorno: "If our theory of the philistine has explanatory power [...] it rests on

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p.71.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p.72.

<sup>20</sup> Beech and Roberts, "Tolerating Impurities", p.126.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p.126.

the recovery of the emancipatory negation at the heart of Adorno's philistine as the spectre of art and aesthetics."<sup>22</sup>

Beech and Roberts' philistine is immanent to art and aesthetics, and in the end only transformative of them. Bull's philistine effects their complete negation, but does so from a position external to them. The first of these versions of the dialectic of art and its other conceptualizes the philistine as an immanent non-negation, and the second as a non-immanent negation. Adorno's philistine is already a sublation of these positions, as the immanent negation of art and aesthetics. This is not explicitly set out in his work, but instead emerges from his treatment of the double-sided concept of philistinism. He deploys the term to secure the borders of art and aesthetics, while at the same time disclosing their investment in exploitation and domination. This manoeuvre underlines the role of art as a privileged site of resistance, where the possibility of truth is inextricable from elitism, according to Adorno. However, Beech and Roberts are correct in identifying definite limits to the incorporation of the truth-claims of the philistine in his work. Likewise, Bull is right to point to a resistance on his part to following through with the destruction of art. As this chapter will demonstrate, Adorno's philistine embodies the promise of the immanent negation of art and aesthetics, but still requires further theoretical development if that critical potential is to be realized.

"Spectres of the Aesthetic" and "The Ecstasy of Philistinism" both seek to work through Adorno's allegedly undeveloped insight that the philistine is the counterconcept to aesthetic comportment. The assumptions behind this shared objective require further interrogation. How undertheorized is the concept of philistinism in Adorno? Is it accurate to state that "Adorno assimilates the moment of philistinism to art; he does not assimilate the moment of art to philistinism"? Likewise: "[A]lthough he frequently made dismissive or insulting remarks about philistines, Adorno never bothered to investigate what, if anything, philistinism might be"? There are undoubtedly examples of apparently straightforward dismissive or insulting remarks about philistines in his work, which draw on established associations of cultural backwardness and aesthetic

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<sup>22</sup> Dave Beech and John Roberts, "The Philistine and the Logic of Negation" [2002], in *The Philistine Controversy*, p.273.

incompetence.<sup>23</sup> These seemingly one-dimensional references to philistinism are however much less frequent than asserted by Bull. Conversely, Beech and Roberts could have chosen from a number of other occasions when the critical potential of philistinism is explicitly affirmed, or the perspective of the enemies of advanced art is partially admitted.<sup>24</sup> In any case, Bull is wrong to treat the pejorative tenor of individual statements as unreflexively conventional, and as such incompatible with the desire to study philistinism as a *via negativa* to the aesthetic. Similarly, Beech and Roberts are mistaken in their call to focus on those passages which heavily accent the moment of truth in philistinism, at least if this entails considering the term in isolation from its other applications. If we are to realize the critical potential identified above, Adorno's derogatory comments about philistines must be read in conjunction with the instances in which he makes use of the concept to negate the ideological aspects of culture, art and aesthetics.

## Culture

### PURE CULTURE AND POPULAR CULTURE

What is Adorno's model of the field of culture, at the point in his career when he pays most attention to this topic, that is, during and immediately following the period of exile occasioned by the rise of the Nazis and WW2, the most famous product of which is *Dialectic of Enlightenment*? He often describes it as comprising two antagonistic but interdependent realms, sometimes referred to as the domains of pure culture and popular culture. The former encompasses the bourgeois art which is officially sanctioned as well as the radical art of the

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<sup>23</sup> See: Theodor Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music* [1949], trans. by Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), pp.181-182 [GS12, p.93], p.192 [GS12, p.181]; Theodor Adorno, "Bach Defended Against his Devotees" [1951], in *Prisms* [1955], trans. by Samuel Weber and Shierry Weber (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1983), p.137 [GS10.1, p.141]; Theodor Adorno, "Music, Language, and Composition" [1956], trans. by Susan H Gillespie, in *Essays on Music*, ed. by Richard Leppert (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2002), p.122 [GS16, p.659]; Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p.276 [GS7, p.314].

<sup>24</sup> See: Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life* [1951], trans. by Edmund Jephcott (London: Verso, 2005), p.218 [GS4, p.247]; Adorno, *Sound Figures*, p.29 [GS16, p.40]; Adorno, "Music, Language, and Composition", pp.119 [GS16, p.656]; Theodor Adorno, "Difficulties" [1964], trans. by Susan H Gillespie, in *Essays on Music*, p.657 [GS17, p.269]; Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p.375 [GS7, p.436].

avant-garde, while the latter extends from surviving folk forms to mass-produced entertainment. This dichotomy is roughly equivalent to those between high and low art, serious and light art, autonomous and commercial art, and so on. In each case an elevated aesthetic, which is the preserve of the ruling class, is set against the cultural products preferred by the masses. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno and Horkheimer map out the class dynamics of this internally conflicted field in a passage from the chapter “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception”:

The purity of bourgeois art, hypostatized as a realm of freedom contrasting to material praxis, was bought from the outset with the exclusion of the lower class; and art keeps faith with the cause of that class, the true universal, precisely by freeing itself from the purposes of the false. Serious art has denied itself to those for whom the hardship and oppression of life make a mockery of seriousness and who must be glad to use the time not spent at the production line in being simply carried along. Light art has accompanied autonomous art as its shadow. It is the social bad conscience of serious art. The truth which the latter could not apprehend because of its social premises gives the former an appearance of objective justification. The split between them is itself the truth: it expresses at least the negativity of the culture which is the sum of both spheres.<sup>25</sup>

Adorno and Horkheimer suggest that the independence of the sphere of pure culture is premised on the unjust organization of society, as its artworks are only accessible to those with the economic means, leisure time and aesthetic competence to appreciate them, forms of class privilege which enable a critical perspective, but which also block the ability to see the whole truth of this situation. That the sphere of popular culture is instead oriented towards the exploited and oppressed does not confer on it any special insight though, as it merely provides them with distraction and relaxation, compensatory pleasures

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<sup>25</sup> Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments* [1944], ed. by Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. by Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2002), pp.107-108. All references are to this edition except where otherwise stated.



which might seem justified given the conditions of their lives, but which ultimately serve the maintenance of the status quo. There is undoubtedly a correspondence between light art as the shadow of autonomous art and the philistine as the counterconcept to aesthetic comportment, but in my view these categories should not simply be conflated. The opposition of pure culture and popular culture is related to but distinct from the dialectic of art and its other, as demonstrated below.

For the most part, Adorno depicts the philistine as bourgeois, in keeping with eighteenth- and nineteenth-century characterizations of this figure, however at times he does associate them with the masses, which was the dominant approach by the middle of the twentieth century, as summarized in the Introduction. Etymologically, “*Banause*” is derived from a derogatory expression for the artisan class in Ancient Greece, and he directly connects it to that classical context in “Cultural Criticism and Society” [1951]. He argues in this essay that the realm of pure culture, dependent on the labour of others for its aesthetic autonomy, is nevertheless the sole position from which an alternative to the given order might be articulated, through its ambivalent embodiment of the idea of freedom. The figure of the philistine is admitted only negatively, as the implicit obverse of anti-philistinism:

The anti-philistinism [*Antibanausie*] of Athens was both the most arrogant contempt of the man who need not soil his hands for the man from whose work he lives, and the preservation of an image of existence beyond the constraint which underlies all work. In projecting its own uneasy conscience onto its victims as their “baseness”, such an attitude also accuses that which they endure: the subjugation of men to the prevailing form in which their lives are reproduced.<sup>26</sup>

The guilt of the ruling class is said to motivate its defensive attribution of philistinism to the adherents of the realm of popular culture, who lack the educational and cultural capital to understand the productions of pure culture. Adorno’s characteristic technique of casting light on the present through an

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<sup>26</sup> Theodor Adorno, “Cultural Criticism and Society” [1951], in *Prisms*, pp.26-27 [*GS10.1*, p.20].

excursus into the distant past is repeated in “Culture and Administration” [1960], which also alludes to the roots of the term “*Banause*”: “The scent of philistinism [*Banausischen*] which clings to administration is of the same type – and not only philologically – as the odium attached to low, useful, and, in the final analysis, physical labour by antiquity.”<sup>27</sup>

In “Cultural Criticism and Society”, Plato and Aristotle are identified as representatives of power, who are discomfited by the notion of pure culture, and instead adopt a pragmatic approach to the role of art in society. Adorno differentiates the cultural criticism practiced by the modern bourgeoisie from these philosophers on the basis of that pragmatism, while the anti-philistinism directed at the lower class is said to intensify with the development of an industrial proletariat:

Modern bourgeois cultural criticism has, of course, been too prudent to follow them [Plato and Aristotle] openly in this respect. But such criticism secretly finds a source of comfort in the divorce between “high” and “popular” culture, art and entertainment, knowledge and non-committal *Weltanschauung*. Its anti-philistinism [*antibanausischer*] exceeds that of the Athenian upper class to the extent that the proletariat is more dangerous than the slaves. The modern notion of a pure, autonomous culture indicates that the antagonism has become irreconcilable.<sup>28</sup>

He again emphasizes the contempt of the ruling class for physical work, and the irreconcilable antagonism referred to here is based on the division of intellectual and manual labour, in which culture itself is supposed to originate.<sup>29</sup> His use of the concept of philistinism is dialectical, adopting it as a means to invalidate the sphere of popular culture, while remaining conscious of its complicity with exploitation and domination, and allowing its critical force to rebound on the

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<sup>27</sup> Theodor Adorno, “Culture and Administration” [1960], trans. by Wes Blomster, in *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, ed. by Jay Bernstein (London: Routledge, 2001), p.115 [GS8, p.130].

<sup>28</sup> Adorno, “Cultural Criticism and Society”, p.27 [GS10.1, p.21].

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p.26.

sphere of pure culture. This dual movement is consistent with his belief that truth cannot be expressed positively within the false whole of contemporary society.

Adorno does concede that there may be moments of truth in low forms like the circus, but in his opinion their critical potential is lost with their incorporation into the culture industry.<sup>30</sup> This is an integrated system for the exchange of standardized cultural commodities, which as it develops wholly subsumes the realm of popular culture, and brings about a concomitant deterioration of the realm of pure culture. The examples cited so far may associate the former domain with philistinism, but it is worth noting that they do so only indirectly, in reporting that this label is applied to the lower class by the ruling class. Similarly, “Perennial Fashion – Jazz” [1953] does not call the audience of mass-produced entertainment philistine, but rather those sections of the intelligentsia which act as cheerleaders for the culture industry:

Among the symptoms of the disintegration of culture and education, not the least is the fact that the distinction between autonomous “high” and commercial “light” art, however questionable it may be, is neither critically reflected nor even noticed any more. And now that certain culturally defeatist intellectuals have pitted the latter against the former, the philistine [*banausischen*] champions of the culture industry can even take pride in the conviction that they are marching in the vanguard of the *Zeitgeist*. The organization of culture into “levels” such as the first, second and third programmes, patterned after low, middle and highbrow, is reprehensible. But it cannot be overcome simply by the lowbrow sects declaring themselves to be highbrow.<sup>31</sup>

Adorno here reflects on the breakdown in the distinction between pure culture and popular culture, which is accelerated by the collaboration of a faction of the former, as when he refers to the expert engaging in “philistine [*banausisches*] collusion” in *Quasi una Fantasia: Essays on Modern Music* [1963].<sup>32</sup> The previous stratification of culture is described as “questionable” and

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<sup>30</sup> Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p.108, p.114.

<sup>31</sup> Theodor Adorno, “Perennial Fashion – Jazz” [1953], in *Prisms*, p.127 [*GS10.1*, p.130].

<sup>32</sup> Adorno, *Quasi una Fantasia*, p.72 [*GS16*, p.316].

“reprehensible”, but it at least had the advantage of making visible its dependence on a similarly hierarchical class structure. The unjust organization of society on which the field was always based has not been overcome, and so the pseudo-democratization of culture really involves the subordination of the “autonomous” to the “commercial”. According to *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: “What is new [...] is that the irreconcilable elements of culture, art and amusement, have been subjected equally to the concept of purpose and thus brought under a single false denominator: the totality of the culture industry.”<sup>33</sup> In what follows, I focus on this phenomenon in relation to the problematic of philistinism, before turning to the specific type of the cultivated philistine, and their confrontation with advanced art.

### THE CULTURE INDUSTRY

It is worth stressing that in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno and Horkheimer never describe the audience of mass-produced entertainment as philistine, contrary to what might be expected, given their reputation for elitism. Translator Edmund Jephcott records just one instance of the term in the whole book, which does in fact occur in the chapter on the culture industry, but is not aimed directly at the consumers: “The resurrection of *Hans Sonnenstöer*, the enemy of bourgeois philistines [*spießergeindlichen*], in Germany, and the smug cosiness of *Life with Father* have one and the same meaning.”<sup>34</sup> John Cumming’s earlier version of the text excises this sole reference to philistinism, choosing to translate the original “*Spießergeindlichen*” as “Anti-bourgeois”.<sup>35</sup> As indicated by the presence of the middle-class “*Bürger*” in “*Spießbürger*”, the “*Spieß*” is conventionally associated with the bourgeoisie, and this class content becomes visible in the slippage between the translations. In his wider body of work, Adorno tends to depict the philistine as bourgeois, regardless of the etymology of “*Banause*”. Proletarians are only charged with philistinism when they attempt to appropriate the cultural heritage for themselves, as in this passage from *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life* [1951], a book mostly written during

<sup>33</sup> Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p.108.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p.120 [GS3, p.172].

<sup>35</sup> Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* [1944], trans. by John Cumming (London: Verso, 2008), p.149 [GS3, p.172].

the same period of exile as *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: “[Their] philistinism [*Banausie*] [...] lies less in their incomprehension of culture than in the alacrity with which they accept it at face value, identify with it and in so doing, of course, reverse its meaning.”<sup>36</sup> The class content of the concept is never entirely fixed, but instead shifts according to the context in which it is deployed. He even suggests that the philistine as a class-bound category, identified with a specific stratum of society, is superseded under advanced capitalism, as such distinctions are obscured by the increasing convergence between the subjective worldviews, though not the objective interests, of the different levels. According to *Minima Moralia*: “The perpetuation of the real difference between upper and lower strata is assisted by the progressive disappearance of differences in the mode of consciousness between the two.”<sup>37</sup> This perhaps forms part of the reason why the philistine, as a discursive construct approximating a particular mode of consciousness, is not a more prominent figure in his polemics against the culture industry.

Writing in English, Adorno refers to philistinism in connection with the culture industry slightly more often in *Current of Music: Elements of a Radio Theory* [2006], a posthumously published analysis of radio listening also drafted while he was in the USA, working under Paul Lazarsfeld on the Princeton Radio Research Project. In a taxonomy of gestures of opposition to the “ubiquity-standardization” inherent in the medium, Adorno comments on the action of emphatically switching off the set:

The author has observed that people switch off their radios with a sort of wild joy, just as if they were shouting, “I shut his mouth for him!” This gesture of opposition is the most fruitless of all. It creates the illusion of might and power, but it really means only that the rebel is withdrawing from contact with the very public events he believes he is altering. Of course they really go on without taking any notice of him. It is a more modern form of the attitude of the philistine, talking politics in his tavern, pounding the table with his fist, shouting “It can’t go on like this any longer!” and ordering another glass of beer. As soon as the listener, the

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<sup>36</sup> Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p.53 [GS4, p.59].

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p.187.

man who says proudly “I just can’t stand this stuff any longer”, triumphs over ubiquity-standardization and changes the phenomenon, he loses his apparent power because the phenomenon ceases to exist and he is left alone.<sup>38</sup>

This philistine is more likely petit-bourgeois than bourgeois, perhaps even a peasant. The label is not directly applied to the radio listener, who is merely described as exhibiting, in an updated form, an attitude characteristic of the outmoded archetype of the drunken philistine, recalling the obsolete connotations of the English word mentioned in the Introduction. This is not the only time he refers to this variant of the philistine in his oeuvre.<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, Adorno generally presents the philistine as a member of the dominant rather than the dominated classes.

Elsewhere in *Current of Music*, Adorno suggests that philistinism has been near-universalized: “The mistaken idea of democracy, which makes it imperative for most people to conform to philistine cultural standards, finds musical refuge in the readiness of the audience to be taken in by the cult of an already achieved success promoted by plugging.”<sup>40</sup> The universalization of philistinism is effected through the transmission of its cultural standards to the masses, for example via the “benevolently patronizing statements” of the *NBC Music Appreciation Hour*:

“Yet, in early times, much music was produced whose artistic perfection compares favorably with that of the great works of recent years.” Though there were no skyscrapers in Bach’s time, his music was, after all, not so bad. The complement of this idea is, of course, that any contemporary composer who actually dares to write skyscraper music – as it were – is an intellectual ultra-modernist. These gaucheries are characteristic of the thinking of the musical Babbitt. We cannot here discuss the results of this sort of instruction upon the *Hour*’s actual listeners. We can only say that

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<sup>38</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Current of Music: Elements of a Radio Theory* [2006], ed. by Robert Hullot-Kentor (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), p.113.

<sup>39</sup> See: Theodor Adorno, “Expression and Artistic Truthfulness: Toward a Critique of Recent Literature” [1920], in *Notes on Literature, Volume 2*, p.259 [GS11, p.611].

<sup>40</sup> Adorno, *Current of Music*, p.292.

if such philistinism crops up in the thinking of the musically-educated, then how can we hope that the musically-unaware will become better educated than their teachers?<sup>41</sup>

The same section of the book also contains this passage, which analyses such popular instruction in terms of its accompanying pedagogical material, charging it with pandering to universal philistinism by suggesting that music ought to be equally intelligible to all: “This would mean that the inauguration of the line of least resistance as the ultimate quality of music and philistine self-satisfaction and ignorance would be the judge of its aesthetic value.”<sup>42</sup> The universalization of philistinism further accounts for its near-invisibility in the texts on the culture industry, as the absolute dominance of philistine cultural standards means that their personification by one social type among others is no longer appropriate.

The German-language texts contain partial exceptions to this tendency, including those already cited from “Cultural Criticism and Society” and “Perennial Fashion – Jazz”. In another passage from the second of these essays, Adorno diagnoses the castration anxiety underlying the terminology of long- and short-haired musicians, playing on the biblical provenance of the word “*Philister*”, by alluding to the “uncircumcised Philistines” who set upon Samson in Judges: “In jazz, the Philistines [*Philister*] standing over Samson are permanently transfigured. In truth, the Philistines [*Philister*]. The castration symbolism, deeply buried in the practices of jazz and cut off from consciousness through the institutionalization of perennial sameness, is for that very reason probably all the more potent.”<sup>43</sup> “A Title” [1952] uses the term to describe the eponymous antihero of Heinrich Mann’s *Professor Unrat* [1905], detailing how the critical force of the book is neutralized by the film adaptation *The Blue Angel* [1930]: “Pure delight in the carefully dished out sex appeal leads people to overlook the fact that the committee removed every social barb and turned the philistine devil [*Spießerdämon*] into a figure of sentimental comedy.”<sup>44</sup> “Prologue to Television” [1953] dismisses the public service value that the institutions of the culture industry claim to provide, quoting Goethe: “Our

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p.210.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p.194.

<sup>43</sup> Adorno, “Perennial Fashion – Jazz”, p.130 [*GS10.1*, p.134]; *The Bible*, Judges 14:3.

<sup>44</sup> Theodor Adorno, “A Title” [1952], in *Notes to Literature, Volume 2*, p.301 [*GS11*, p.656].

participation in public affairs is mostly only philistinism [*Philistere*].”<sup>45</sup> There is also a passing reference to the contemporary “deluge of philistinism [*Banausie*]”, presumably synonymous with mass-produced entertainment, in *Aesthetic Theory*.<sup>46</sup> These examples are however rare, and in most cases it is not the masses themselves who are called philistine, but rather the cultural standards forced upon them, which they in turn demand. Notwithstanding this mutually reinforcing dynamic, Adorno regards the ruling class, which retains control of the apparatuses of the culture industry, as chiefly responsible for spreading the traditionally bourgeois condition of philistinism among the proletariat, insofar as that process can still be discerned given the increasing convergence of their modes of consciousness, itself exacerbated by the standardization of cultural products.

#### THE CULTIVATED PHILISTINE

By contrast with the relative scarcity of references to the philistinism of the masses in his writings on the culture industry, Adorno regularly invokes the unambiguously bourgeois figure of the “*Bildungsphilister*”, a subspecies of the philistine covered in the Introduction. The cultivated philistine, variously translated as the cultural philistine, the cultured philistine or the educated philistine, appears in a number of different guises across his oeuvre, for example as a source of received ideas and stock vocabulary in “The Essay as Form” [1958]; as a supporter of the position that technical mastery of traditional skills equates to aesthetic importance in *Sound Figures* [1959]; and as a poseur who derives social status from their conspicuous consumption of artworks in *Aesthetic Theory*.<sup>47</sup> He has a penchant for combining contraries in compound words, coining such paradoxical formulations as “noble philistinism [*Edelbanausie*]” and “philistine wisdom [*Spießbürger-weisheit*]”.<sup>48</sup> As we have

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<sup>45</sup> Theodor Adorno, “Prologue to Television” [1953], in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. by Henry W Pickford (New York, New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p.56 [GS10.2, p.516].

<sup>46</sup> Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, pp.375-376 [GS7, p.437].

<sup>47</sup> Theodor Adorno, “The Essay as Form” [1958], in *Notes to Literature, Volume I*, p.6 [GS11, p.12]; Adorno, *Sound Figures*, p.150 [GS16, p.176]; Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, pp.344-345 [GS7, p.395].

<sup>48</sup> Theodor Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity* [1964], trans. by Knut Tarnowski and Frederic Will (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), p.57 [GS6, p.451]; Theodor Adorno, *Negative*



seen, “*Bildungsphilister*” was originally devised by Nietzsche, to illustrate how the idea of culture had turned into its opposite and become hegemonic in nineteenth-century Germany. “David Strauss, the Confessor and the Writer” describes a universal philistinism imposed from above, which arguably anticipates the accounts of the culture industry in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and *Current of Music*. Adorno explicitly takes up the figure of the cultivated philistine, and they also serve as an implicit model for his sense of philistinism more generally, not least in terms of their class identity. Like Nietzsche, Adorno sometimes situates the philistine within the community of scholars, inverting the historical usage of the term derived from town and gown disputes, as when he highlights the “philistine [*philiströser*] zeal” of “German academicians” in “Spengler After the Decline” [1941].<sup>49</sup> Their versions of the philistine overlap on a number of other points as well, including narrow-mindedness, compartmentalization, conservatism, complacency and cowardice, intellectual and aesthetic incompetence, and a commitment to the primacy of reality.

These traits are however so prevalent in the wider discourse on philistinism that they do not necessarily indicate a direct link between the two philosophers. The connection becomes evident in texts such as Adorno’s “On the Crisis of Literary Criticism” [1952], which praises Nietzsche: “[W]hen Nietzsche exposed the language of the cultured philistine [*Bildungsphilisters*], [...he was] participating in objective spirit.”<sup>50</sup> The insight that is acknowledged here requires updating in the light of changed circumstances, according to Adorno. *Minima Moralia* details how the cultivated philistine has been transformed over time:

Just as in Nietzsche’s day educated philistines [*Bildungsphilister*] believed in progress, the unfaltering elevation of the masses and the greatest possible happiness for the greatest possible number, so today they believe, without quite knowing it themselves, in the opposite, the revocation of 1789, the incorrigibility of human nature, the anthropological impossibility of happiness – in other words, that the

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*Dialectics* [1966], trans. by EB Ashton (New York, New York: Continuum, 2005), p.371 [*GS6*, p.364].

<sup>49</sup> Theodor Adorno, “Spengler After the Decline” [1941], in *Prisms*, p.54 [*GS10.1*, p.48].

<sup>50</sup> Theodor Adorno, “On the Crisis of Literary Criticism” [1952], in *Notes to Literature, Volume 2*, p.307 [*GS11*, p.664].

workers are too well-off. The profound insights of the day before yesterday have been reduced to the ultimate in banality.<sup>51</sup>

This reversal is for him indicative of the barbarism of his own era, which outstrips that described by Nietzsche. As early as “The Sociology of Knowledge and its Consciousness” [1937], Adorno makes the case that the cultivated philistine, as conceived by his forerunner, has been historically superseded: “The cultural philistine [*Bildungsphilister*] has long ceased to be the man of progress, the figure with which Nietzsche identified David Friedrich Strauss.”<sup>52</sup> This represents another fluctuation in the temporal orientation of the philistine, who is both a reactionary and a visionary, nostalgic for an idealized past, and the harbinger of a dystopian future, in Adorno as in Nietzsche.

If WW2 was the central historical event of the period when Adorno focused most intensively on questions of culture, then this context is also relevant to his reading of Nietzsche. In the section of *Minima Moralia* “A word for morality”, Adorno comments obliquely on the Nazis’ appropriation of Nietzsche’s philosophy: “Amoralism, with which Nietzsche chastised the old untruth, is itself now subject to the verdict of history.”<sup>53</sup> The formulation of the cultivated philistine fuses the apparent opposites of culture and philistinism into a single entity, a theoretical manoeuvre comparable to the strategy of amoralism insofar as both attempt to transcend the horizon of accepted meanings, defamiliarizing our mystified understanding of society: “Nietzsche [...] turned the mask of evil upon the normal world, to teach the norm to fear its own perversity.”<sup>54</sup> The Nazis crudely distorted his amoralism, mobilizing the concept of master-morality to justify their brutality, according to “A word for morality”:

The implied meaning of the master-morality, that he who wants to live must fend for himself, has [...] become a still more miserable lie than it was when a nineteenth-century piece of pulpit-wisdom. If in Germany the common citizen has proved himself a blond beast, this has nothing to do

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<sup>51</sup> Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p.188 [GS4, p.212].

<sup>52</sup> Theodor Adorno, “The Sociology of Knowledge and its Consciousness” [1937], in *Prisms*, p.39 [GS10.1, p.34].

<sup>53</sup> Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p.96.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p.97.

with national peculiarities, but with the fact that blond bestiality itself, social rapine, has become in face of manifest abundance the attitude of the backwoodsman, the deluded philistine [*Philisters*], that same “hard-done-by” mentality which the master-morality was invented to combat. If Cesare Borgia were resurrected today, he would look like David Friedrich Strauss and his name would be Adolf Hitler.<sup>55</sup>

Adorno argues that with the rationalization and expansion of the production process it should now technically be possible to satisfy all material needs, however the fully administered society remains directed towards irrational ends, based as it is on the principle of exchange for its own sake. The Nazis’ brutality is justified by a narrative of the survival of the fittest against a backdrop of supposed economic scarcity, an untenable position in the light of these changed conditions of existence, which makes that attitude appear philistine. It is the evolution of advanced capitalism which is the ultimate ground of the philistinism identified here, incidentally associated with backwardness, credulity and resentment. This process of historical development, which is more widespread than just its extreme manifestation in the form of fascism, includes the extension of the culture industry to the point where it incorporates advanced art.

#### THE CONFRONTATION WITH ADVANCED ART

Let us now return to the distinction between the philistine and the vulgarian, proposed by Adorno in *Aesthetic Theory*, and cited by Bull in “The Ecstasy of Philistinism”: “The counterconcept to aesthetic comportment is, quite simply, the concept of the philistine [*Banausischen*], which often overlaps with the vulgar [*Vulgäre*] yet remains distinct from it by its indifference or hatred, whereas vulgarity [*Vulgäritat*] greedily smacks its lips.”<sup>56</sup> The philistine, usually depicted as bourgeois, is indifferent or hateful towards art, disqualifying altogether the possibility of aesthetic experience. The vulgarian, more readily identified with the masses, by contrast approaches the artwork as a consumer, engaging in a degraded form of aesthetic experience. It is therefore the philistine,

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., pp.96-97 [*GS4*, p.107].

<sup>56</sup> Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p.314 [*GS7*, p.357].

rather than the vulgarian, who better represents the absolute negation of the aesthetic. Adorno acknowledges that the concepts of the philistine and the vulgarian overlap, and indeed the distinction between them is not rigorously demarcated throughout the book. The metaphorical conceit of eating the artwork, associated with the vulgarian through the characteristic gesture of lip-smacking, is occasionally extended to the philistine, for example the repeated condemnation of the expression “a feast for the ears”, and this defence of Kant’s principle of the disinterested judgement of beauty: “Kant was the first to achieve the insight, never since forgotten, that aesthetic comportment is free from immediate desire; he snatched art away from that avaricious philistinism [*Banausie*] that always wants to touch it and taste it.”<sup>57</sup> Adorno nevertheless insists on the distinction between the philistine and the vulgarian, including its class component. The passage quoted at the outset of this paragraph continues: “Socially implicated in the guilt of those who lay claim to aesthetic nobility, the philistine’s [*Banausen*] disdain grants intellectual labour an immediately higher rank than manual labour.”<sup>58</sup> The philistine comes from the same social milieu as the connoisseur, and like them participates in the exclusion of the lower class from the aesthetic sphere, which is based on the foundational opposition of physical and mental labour. Adorno’s version of the dialectic of art and its other can be distinguished from the division of the field of culture into the realms of pure culture and popular culture, because it is principally an intra-bourgeois conflict, fought out between different fractions of the ruling class.

His model of advanced art, which for him constitutes the only opportunity for an artistic response adequate to the historical situation, is situated within what once would have been recognized as the sphere of pure culture, a domain belonging to the bourgeoisie. He holds that the truth content potentially contained in these artworks, which is bound up with their elitism, is also extremely precarious, given the increasing pressure exerted on aesthetic autonomy by the culture industry. This reflects what he takes to be the progressively attenuated possibilities for resistance under advanced capitalism, the extent of which is registered in his updated version of the cultivated philistine. In a section headed “Addressee unknown”, *Minima Moralia* stages a

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p.12 [GS7, p.23], p.15 [GS7, p.27.], pp.127-128 [GS7, p.150].

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p.314 [GS7, p.358].

confrontation between this figure and a representative piece of radical art, in which its critical force is negated by the claims of the bourgeois spectator not to understand it and to get nothing out of it:

Cultivated philistines [*Kultivierte Banausen*] are in the habit of requiring that a work of art “give” them something. They no longer take umbrage at works that are radical, but fall back on the shamelessly modest assertion that they do not understand. This eliminates even opposition, their last negative relationship to truth, and the offending object is smilingly catalogued among its kind, consumer commodities that can be chosen or refused without even having to take responsibility for doing so. One is just too stupid, too old-fashioned, one simply can’t keep up, and the more one belittles oneself the more one can be sure of swelling the mighty unison of the *vox inhumana populi*, the judging power of the petrified *Zeitgeist*. Incomprehensibility, that benefits no-one, from being an inflammatory crime becomes pitiable folly. Together with the barb one deflects the temptation. That one must be given something, apparently the postulate of substantiality and fullness, cuts both off and impoverishes giving.<sup>59</sup>

Dropping the Nietzschean term “*Bildungsphilister*”, Adorno here characterizes the cultivated philistine as demanding something from the artwork, in his view an attitude that is anathema to its autonomous status. The critical force of advanced art is contained and neutralized by a disingenuous display of false modesty, which acts as a cover for their strategies of disinvestment, as they say they find it incomprehensible, and therefore refuse to engage with it. This process contributes to the commodification of the artwork, reinforcing bourgeois self-preservation by suppressing a truth content which might have challenged the given order. There was limited scope to articulate an alternative in any case, but even the slim possibility of doing so represented by advanced art is now cancelled, as illustrated by “Addressee unknown”.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, pp.216-217 [*GS4*, p.245].

<sup>60</sup> For an extended analysis of this passage, including a focus on the figure of the philistine, see: Sutherland, *Stupefaction*, pp.114-120.

This emblematic scene is not an isolated occurrence in Adorno's oeuvre. As part of a series of sketches of listeners in *Current of Music*, he presents an extended description of the erudite or informed type, which is suggestive of the cultivated philistine, and includes the following observation: "Generally this type is lost when faced with essentially new music. Then he always professes that he "does not understand it", wishing therewith to confirm his understanding of genuine music."<sup>61</sup> The claim not to understand new music – for Adorno the exemplar of advanced art – is designed to delegitimize it, emphasizing its deviation from established aesthetic norms, in order to secure the status of the speaker as an arbiter of them. In *Philosophy of New Music* [1949], he points to the same pretensions to connoisseurship among critics of his favoured composer Schoenberg: "The cultured listeners almost seem to be the worst: those who promptly respond to Schoenberg's music with "I don't understand that" – a statement whose modesty rationalizes rage as connoisseurship [*Kennerschaft*]."<sup>62</sup> This bogus gesture of self-deprecation in fact indicts the alleged incomprehensibility of advanced art, from a position of elevated indifference. In a passage from his essay "Toward an Understanding of Schoenberg" [1955], in which he dubs Schoenberg's opponents "Philistine [*Banause*]", Adorno charts the different phases through which hostility to his music has moved: "[T]here was the era of the scandal, during which all worthy citizens were united in the observation that "that is not music" – a remark that still betrays a closer connection than "I don't understand that", which is now *de rigueur*."<sup>63</sup> The critical force of advanced art is countered more effectively by a glib profession of incomprehension than it is by the angry denial that it is art at all, because in the latter case its confrontational content is at least acknowledged, argues Adorno. There are also other examples of the philistine requiring that the artwork give them something, a strategy of disinvestment serving the interests of bourgeois self-preservation, to which we will return later in this chapter.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Adorno, *Current of Music*, p.312.

<sup>62</sup> Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, p.13 [GS12, p.19].

<sup>63</sup> Theodor Adorno, "Toward an Understanding of Schoenberg" [1955], trans. by Susan H Gillespie, in *Essays on Music*, p.628 [GS18, p.429].

<sup>64</sup> See: Theodor Adorno, "On Wilhelm Lehmann's "Bemerkungen zur Kunst des Gedichts"" [1974], in *Notes to Literature, Volume 2*, p.310 [GS11, p.666]; Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p.23 [GS7, p.33], p.345 [GS7, p.396].

“Addressee unknown” dramatizes the negation of advanced art, a theoretical manoeuvre complemented by the qualified affirmation of philistinism in the next section of *Minima Moralia*, “*Consecutio temporum*”. Here, Adorno acknowledges the ageing of the avant-garde, which is no longer an insurgent force: “The modern has really become unmodern.”<sup>65</sup> He incidentally provides us with a little more detail about his preferred brand of modernism, noting that while it “cannot be reduced to abstract form”, it is nevertheless compelled to “turn its back on conventional surface coherence, the appearance of harmony, the order corroborated merely by replication”.<sup>66</sup> “*Consecutio temporum*” retrospectively concedes a moment of truth to the philistine who always dismissed such formal innovation as technical regression, as with the development of a fully administered society advanced art itself comes to assume characteristics associated with philistinism like “provincialism” and “backwardness”:

The stalwarts of the Fascist fighting leagues, thundering fulsomely against Futurism, saw more clearly in their rage than did the Moscow censors who placed Cubism on the Index because, in its private impropriety, it failed to measure up to the spirit of the collective age, or the brazen theatre critics who find a play by Strindberg or Wedekind *passé* but a piece of underground reportage up-to-date. All the same, their blasé philistinism [*Banausie*] utters an appalling truth: that the procession of total society which would like to force its organization on all expression, is in fact leaving behind the power which opposes what Lindbergh’s wife called the wave of the future, that is, the critical construction of being. This is not merely outlawed by a corrupt public opinion, but the prevailing absurdity affects its very substance. The might of what is, constraining the mind to follow its example, is so overwhelming that even the unassimilated expression of protest assumes in face of it a home-spun, aimless, inexperienced quality reminiscent of

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<sup>65</sup> Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p.218.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p.218.

the provincialism that once so prophetically suspected modernism of backwardness.<sup>67</sup>

With this reference to Anne Morrow Lindbergh's *The Wave of the Future: A Confession of Faith* [1940], a short tract arguing the inevitability of totalitarianism gaining the ascendancy and urging an accommodation between the USA and Germany, Adorno points to the continuity he perceives between the fully administered society in liberal democracies and under the dictatorial rule of the Nazis.<sup>68</sup> The progress implied by the titular image really represents a general regression, and the capacity for critical thought, which alone could resist it, is increasingly circumscribed with the development of advanced capitalism, in particular the phenomenon of the culture industry. He spells out the consequences for advanced art, suggesting that the avant-gardist has been converted into a backwoodsman, while the future belongs to the conformist, both postures associated with philistinism: "This *quid pro quo* of progress and reaction makes orientation in contemporary art almost as difficult as in politics, and furthermore paralyzes production itself, where anyone who clings to extreme intentions is made to feel like a backwoodsman, while the conformist no longer lingers bashfully in arbours, literary or horticultural, but hurtles forward, rocket-powered, into the pluperfect."<sup>69</sup>

In the next part of this chapter, Adorno's model of advanced art will be explicated in greater detail, but for now it is sufficient to note that he further complicates the temporal dimension of philistinism.<sup>70</sup> He asserts that the modern has become unmodern, and the avant-gardist a backwoodsman, just as the philistine is recast as a visionary riding the wave of the future. This interplay of progress and regression might put us in mind of the dialectic of enlightenment itself, in which increasing rationalization, predicated on the domination of nature, is bound up with a reversion to mythology, which in any case already anticipated

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., pp.218-219 [GS4, p.247].

<sup>68</sup> Anne Morrow Lindbergh, *The Wave of the Future: A Confession of Faith* (San Diego, California: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1940).

<sup>69</sup> Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p.219.

<sup>70</sup> The next part of this chapter is based on an expanded version of an article: Paul Ingram, "Adorno's Philistine: The Dialectic of Art and its Other", *Historical Materialism* (forthcoming, available online as an advance article at <https://brill.com/view/journals/hima/aop/article-10.1163-1569206X-00001735.xml> [accessed 29 July 2019]).



it. The erosion of the distinction between pure culture and popular culture, as both are subsumed by the culture industry, is part of this historical process, in which the material basis of class antagonism is further entrenched even as its modes of consciousness increasingly converge. It has the effect of neutralizing advanced art, in Adorno's estimation the only sector of the field of culture with the capacity for resisting the given order. He concedes no such critical potential to the mass-produced entertainment of the culture industry, as he does for certain forms of popular culture. His assumption is that the realm of pure culture, insofar as it is still clearly delimited, is the central arena for the struggle with philistinism. The confrontation between the cultivated philistine and advanced art is staged as an intra-bourgeois conflict, from which the masses are excluded. He accordingly places greater emphasis on the philistine than he does on the vulgarian in his account of the dialectic of art and its other. In terms of temporality, I would argue that the recognition of a moment of truth in the backward-looking perspective of the philistine logically implies a corresponding moment of falsity in the progressive orientation of advanced art.<sup>71</sup>

## Art

### ADVANCED ART AND ITS CRITICS

In his oeuvre, Adorno frequently opposes the figure of the philistine to his preferred model of advanced art. He defends this brand of modernism against the critics who accuse it of incomprehensibility, which at times he attributes to their inability to understand it, as when he sides with Schoenberg in "On the Current Relationship Between Philosophy and Music" [1953]: "It is impossible to untangle the nonsense of all these statements, concocted from a mixture of pharisaism, philistinism [*Banausie*], incompetence and resentment."<sup>72</sup> He most often has recourse to terminology of this sort when talking about music, but it occurs in the context of literature as well, for example in "On Lyric Poetry and Society" [1957]:

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<sup>71</sup> For this point, I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer at *Historical Materialism*.

<sup>72</sup> Theodor Adorno, "On the Current Relationship Between Philosophy and Music" [1953], in *Night Music: Essays on Music 1928-1962*, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann, trans. by Wieland Hoban (London: Seagull Books, 2009), pp.452-453 [*GS18*, p.164].

As the contradiction between poetic and communicative language reached an extreme, lyric poetry became a game in which one goes for broke; not, as philistine [*banausische*] opinion would have it, because it had become incomprehensible but because in acquiring self-consciousness as a literary language, in striving for an absolute objectivity unrestricted by any considerations of communication, language both distances itself from the objectivity of spirit, of living language, and substitutes a poetic event for a language that is no longer present.<sup>73</sup>

*Sound Figures* contains a passage in which he differentiates between music and literature on the basis of the level of philistinism among critics in each field: “There is scarcely a philistine [*Banause*] still alive who would dare to praise a writer for his scintillating style; but in music the intellectual manners that resist such mental stereotypes have yet to be acquired by critics[.]”<sup>74</sup> These quotations might be numbered among his dismissive or insulting remarks about philistines, but by virtue of their indirect relation to it they can also contribute to an exposition of his model of advanced art.

The alleged incomprehensibility of advanced art is taken by critics to consist in its extreme abstraction, but this aspect of it is ultimately mimetic, according to Adorno in “Commitment” [1962]: “[T]he avant-garde abstractness to which the philistine [*Spießbürger*] objects and which has nothing to do with the abstractness of concepts and ideas is a reflection of the abstractness of the objective law governing society.”<sup>75</sup> There is a similar argument in “Titles” [1962]: “[T]he phenomenal world itself is in the process of becoming as abstract as the principle holding it together internally has long been. That should help to explain why today art in all its genres must be something the philistines [*Philister*] respond to with the cry of “abstract”: to escape the curse that, under the domination of abstract exchange value, has fallen on the concrete, which

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<sup>73</sup> Theodor Adorno, “On Lyric Poetry and Society” [1957], in *Notes to Literature, Volume 1*, p.44 [GS11, p.58].

<sup>74</sup> Adorno, *Sound Figures*, p.150 [GS16, p.176].

<sup>75</sup> Theodor Adorno, “Commitment” [1962], in *Notes to Literature, Volume 2*, pp.89-90 [GS11, p.425]. All references are to this edition except where otherwise stated.

shelters it.”<sup>76</sup> The references here are to art as an overarching category, not to music or literature alone. His sense of philistinism is usually the same for art in general as it is for specific disciplines, and neither does his application of the concept vary much between them. The substantive point is that advanced art, and the failure of critics to interpret it adequately, are located at a particular stage of historical development, as further demonstrated by “Presuppositions: On the Occasion of a Reading by Hans G Helms” [1960]: “Certainly the extreme philistine [*Philister*] is wrong when he intones that after the swing of the pendulum to the extremes of unconstrained subjectivism it is time to think about a middle-of-the-road objectivity which in actuality has already condemned itself as mediocre. On the contrary, after the Second World War all advanced art is moved to abandon that position[.]”<sup>77</sup> This sense of compulsion is characteristic of the evolution of advanced art for Adorno.

He comes close to conceding the alleged incomprehensibility of advanced art in this period, granting the perspective of the philistine a degree of justification, by extending it to an informed and well-disposed audience of new music in *Sound Figures*:

Whoever listens to a lot of new music, particularly works that he knows well, will not lightly abandon his view that very many performances are incomprehensible, for all the sympathy he may feel for the players who have embarked upon a thankless task – incomprehensible not just to the layman, who does not expect anything else, and almost wants things that way, but specifically to anyone who is familiar with the music and who identifies with it. It often sounds in reality much as the indignant Philistine [*Banause*] expects it to: chaotic, ugly, and meaningless.<sup>78</sup>

He pulls back from this affirmation of philistinism by attributing the effect of incomprehensibility chiefly to deficiencies in performances, while acknowledging that these are partly due to the undeniable difficulty of the compositions themselves. His view is that advanced art is compelled towards

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<sup>76</sup> Theodor Adorno, “Titles” [1962], in *Notes to Literature, Volume 2*, p.9 [GS11, p.332].

<sup>77</sup> Theodor Adorno, “Presuppositions: On the Occasion of a Reading by Hans G Helms” [1960], in *Notes to Literature, Volume 2*, pp.102-103 [GS11, p.439].

<sup>78</sup> Adorno, *Sound Figures*, p.29 [GS16, p.40].

complexity, or rather the repudiation of “conventional surface coherence” and the “appearance of harmony”, by the objective demands of the social situation.<sup>79</sup>

In “The Position of the Narrator in the Contemporary Novel” [1954], Adorno presses the case for his model of advanced art, which he claims does not merely reflect the social situation, but constitutes a form of resistance to it:

There is no modern work of art worth anything that does not delight in dissonance and release. But by uncompromisingly embodying the horror and putting all the pleasure of contemplation into the purity of this expression, such works of art serve freedom – something the average production betrays, simply because it does not bear witness to what has befallen the individual in the age of liberalism. These products fall outside the controversy over committed art and *l’art pour l’art*, outside the choice between the philistinism [*Banausie*] of art with a cause and the philistinism [*Banausie*] of art for enjoyment.<sup>80</sup>

He contrasts his version of advanced art to two aesthetic modes normally considered antithetical to each other, which are here equated rhetorically, through their joint designation as philistine. The philistinism of art with a cause and the philistinism of art for enjoyment negatively delimit his conception of advanced art, notwithstanding the claim that the latter is external to the opposition between them. We might therefore use these formulations as a guide to the type of modernism to which he attributes value, by way of an examination of the aesthetic modes which he denies possess value.

#### THE PHILISTINISM OF ART WITH A CAUSE

The philistinism of art with a cause encompasses socialist realism in the East as well as committed art in the West, and its alleged inferiority compared to advanced art is expressed forcefully in *Sound Figures*: “[T]he claim of the Eastern bloc that what they produce emanates from socialism is refuted by the

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<sup>79</sup> Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p.218.

<sup>80</sup> Theodor Adorno, “The Position of the Narrator in the Contemporary Novel” [1954], in *Notes to Literature, Volume 1*, pp.35-36 [GS11, p.47].

music itself, which simply warms up late Romantic, philistine [*spätromantisch-spießbürgerliche*] clichés and sedulously avoids everything that threatens to deviate from conformist consumer needs.”<sup>81</sup> *Negative Dialectics* [1966] is similarly scathing about “materialism’s philistine [*Banausische*] and barbarian aspects”, contending that these have “spread throughout culture” in the USSR: “Materialism comes to be the very relapse into barbarism which it was supposed to prevent.”<sup>82</sup> In *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno suggests that the aesthetic regressiveness of dialectical materialism can be traced to the inheritance of GWF Hegel: “Hegel’s aesthetics of content [*Inhaltsästhetik*], an aesthetics of subject matter, in keeping with the spirit of many of his intentions, subscribes undialectically to the objectivation of art by way of a raw relation to objects. [...] In German idealism the turn to the object was always coupled with philistinism [*Banausie*][.]”<sup>83</sup> He argues that the turn to the object, which rightly opposed the empty play of formalism, results in an undue emphasis on content: “As a result, an art-alien [*Kunstfremdes*] and philistine [*Banausisches*] element entered Hegel’s aesthetics, which manifests its fatal character in the aesthetics of dialectical materialism, which in this regard had no more misgivings about Hegel than did Marx.”<sup>84</sup> The dominant themes of the philistinism of art with a cause, also characteristic of his sense of philistinism more generally, are conservatism, conformism and insensitivity to form.

This is reflected in the assertion that the importance of form has been overestimated in modernism, made by Georg Lukács in *Realism in our Time: Literature and the Class Struggle* [1958], and cited by Adorno in *Aesthetic Theory*: “Evident in this philistine [*banausischen*] call to arms is a discontent with art of which Lukács the cultural conservative is unconscious, as well as a concept of form that is inadequate to art.”<sup>85</sup> In a review of the same book called “Extorted Reconciliation: On Georg Lukács’ *Realism in our Time*” [1958], Adorno dismisses his “philistine [*banausischen*] evaluations of modern art”, and labels his theory of art “philistine [*banausisch*] and ideological at the same

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<sup>81</sup> Adorno, *Sound Figures*, p.9 [GS16, p.18].

<sup>82</sup> Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p.205 [GS6, p.204].

<sup>83</sup> Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p.196 [GS7, p.224].

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p.449 [GS7, p.526].

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p.187 [GS7, p.213].

time”.<sup>86</sup> Disputing his interpretation of Thomas Mann’s *The Magic Mountain* [1924], Adorno describes a character in the novel as embodying the “reified consciousness of the philistine [*Philisters*]”.<sup>87</sup> The affinity between philistinism and reification – an attenuated state of being in which dynamism, fluidity and interconnectedness give way to the stasis of rigidified categorizations, as social relations increasingly take on the character of things – is reinforced elsewhere in his oeuvre.<sup>88</sup> The reference might appear to be incidental in this context, but it in fact recalls the influential account of the category of reification in Lukács’ *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics* [1923], which is praised at the outset of “Extorted Reconciliation”.<sup>89</sup> His subsequent accommodation to official dogma is said to bear the effects of reification on his own thought: “The dialectic is paid lip service, but for this kind of thought the dialectic has been determined in advance.”<sup>90</sup> This type of reasoning is itself abstract and formalistic, the principal charges made against advanced art, while the content of the latter inheres in its immanent form, instead of being imposed upon it as it is with socialist realism, according to Adorno.<sup>91</sup>

The figure of the philistine is deployed polemically throughout this review, to counter the accusations of decadence and degeneracy levelled at modernism by Lukács. His “blustering about decadence” and “indignation about degeneracy” are attacked as crude social Darwinism by Adorno: “Talk about decadence cannot be separated from its positive counterimage of a nature bursting with strength; natural categories are projected onto things that are socially mediated. The tenor of Marx and Engels’ critique of ideology, however, is directed against precisely that.”<sup>92</sup> He is critical of the reduction of the aesthetic to the social in *Philosophy of New Music*: “The reduction of avant-garde music to its social origin and its social function scarcely goes beyond the hostile undifferentiating definition that it is a bourgeois and decadent luxury. That is the

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<sup>86</sup> Adorno, “Extorted Reconciliation”, p.239 [*GS11*, p.278], p.225 [*GS11*, p.261].

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p.236 [*GS11*, p.274].

<sup>88</sup> See: Theodor Adorno, *Hegel: Three Studies* [1963], trans. by Shierry Weber Nicholzen (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1993), pp.61-62 [*GS5*, p.302]; Adorno, *Quasi Una Fantasia*, p.278 [*GS16*, p.500]; Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p.130 [*GS7*, p.154].

<sup>89</sup> Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics* [1923], trans. by Rodney Livingstone (London: Merlin Press, 2010), pp.83-209; Adorno, “Extorted Reconciliation”, p.216.

<sup>90</sup> Adorno, “Extorted Reconciliation”, p.219.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p.218.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p.221, p.220, pp.219-220.

language of banausic, administrative [*banausisch-verwaltungsmäßiger*] oppression.”<sup>93</sup> He responds to negative reviews of this book by dissociating himself from the philistines, in a short piece called “Misunderstandings” [1950]: “I would never have imagined it possible that I would be counted in among the philistines [*Philister*] who work themselves into a rage over “insane” and degenerate modern art.”<sup>94</sup> He also articulates the link between philistinism and health in *Alban Berg: Master of the Smallest Link* [1968]: “This concept of health, inherently as ineradicable a part of prevailing musical criteria as it is of Philistinism [*Banausie*], is in league with conformism; health is allied with what in life is stronger, with the victors.”<sup>95</sup> In “Extorted Reconciliation”, Adorno states that judgements of art in terms of health or sickness are inadmissible: “If it is a question of historical relationships, words like sick and healthy should be avoided altogether. They have nothing to do with the progress/reaction dimension; they are brought in purely for the sake of their demagogic appeal.”<sup>96</sup> His own use of the concept of philistinism might seem on the face of it to rely on a similar demagogic appeal, and it is certainly the case that he seeks to delegitimize the reductive approach of his adversary. Perhaps the polemical style he adopts can be better understood as an attempt to ally himself with the sick against the healthy, the weak against the strong, and the victims against the victors, occupying the terms of debate established by Lukács.

Adorno holds that the conservatism and conformism of the philistinism of art with a cause are obviously incompatible with any programme of social critique, while the insensitivity to form is bound up with a failure to recognize the political dimension of advanced art. *Aesthetic Theory* asserts that advanced art is prohibited from “tarnishing itself any further with the topical preferences of philistine [*banausische*] culture”, which are listed as “the true, the beautiful, and the good”: “Into its innermost core what is usually called art’s social critique or *engagement*, all that is critical or negative in art, has been fused with spirit, with art’s law of form.”<sup>97</sup> Adorno contends that aesthetic autonomy is a precondition

<sup>93</sup> Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, pp.23-24 [*GS12*, p.32].

<sup>94</sup> Theodor Adorno, ““Misunderstandings”: Adorno’s Response to the Commentary on *Philosophy of New Music*” [1950], in *Philosophy of New Music*, p.167 [*GS12*, p.205].

<sup>95</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Alban Berg: Master of the Smallest Link* [1968], trans. by Juliane Brand and Christopher Hailey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.5 [*GS13*, p.330].

<sup>96</sup> Adorno, “Extorted Reconciliation”, p.221.

<sup>97</sup> Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p.122 [*GS7*, p.144].

for the social import of artistic productions, arguing that the formally autonomous artwork, by pursuing a logic other than that which exists, is *a priori* radical as a negation of the given order, irrespective of the affirmative or oppositional stance of its creator. He sets this observation in the context of a society organized according to the principle of exchange, where every item is quantifiable in terms of a universal equivalent, and therefore potentially interchangeable. The formally autonomous artwork, by adhering strictly to its own law of construction, resists incorporation into that system. He claims that this immanent problematic, if it is negotiated with sufficient rigour, necessarily points beyond itself towards the extra-aesthetic sphere. The formally autonomous artwork, by responding solely to the requirements of the material, encodes a constellation of the reality of which it is a part, reconfiguring the force field of historical processes in its internal tensions. In “Commitment”, Adorno maintains that such a strategy is superior to an explicitly activist orientation in political as well as in aesthetic terms: “Literature that exists for the human being, like committed literature but also like the kind of literature the moral philistine [*Philister*] wants, betrays the human being by betraying what could help him only if it did not act as though it were doing so.”<sup>98</sup> The passage repeats his technique of conflating the poles of an apparent antagonism, on this occasion the commitment of the left and the moralism of the right, whose representatives also share in the outrage at the alleged unintelligibility of advanced art.<sup>99</sup>

#### THE PHILISTINISM OF ART FOR ENJOYMENT

Adorno’s model of advanced art emerges in opposition to the philistinism of art with a cause, but it is also differentiated from the philistinism of art for enjoyment in “Commitment”. The reversal introduced in the very next line of this essay shifts focus to the absolutism of *l’art pour l’art*: “But anything that made itself absolute in response, existing only for its own sake, would degenerate into ideology.”<sup>100</sup> The juxtaposition of these extremes, both of which are repudiated, delineates the dialectic of the aesthetic and the social, formulated

<sup>98</sup> Adorno, “Commitment”, p.93 [*GSII*, p.429].

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p.92.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p.93.



succinctly in *Aesthetic Theory*: “That art on the one hand confronts society autonomously, and, on the other hand, is itself social, defines the law of its experience. Whoever experiences only the material aspect of art and puffs this up into an aesthetics is philistine [*banausisch*], yet whoever perceives art exclusively as art and ensconces this as its prerogative deprives himself of its content [*Gehalt*].”<sup>101</sup> The latter risk is that the formally autonomous artwork, in refusing to subordinate itself to an external imperative like the philistinism of art for a cause, deteriorates from radical self-sufficiency to the philistinism of art for enjoyment. This applies to figures from outside the ranks of programmatic aestheticism, extending as far as Schoenberg, in the notes collected posthumously as *Beethoven: The Philosophy of Music* [1993]: “Schoenberg to Eduard [Steuermann]: Music is there to be listened to, not criticized. But is this not to condescend? Is this not the talk of philistines [*Banausen*] who do not want their enjoyment spoiled?”<sup>102</sup>

In “Valéry Proust Museum” [1953], Adorno compares the accounts of museums found in Paul Valéry’s *Rooms of Art* [1931] and Marcel Proust’s *Within a Budding Grove* [1919]. Valéry is said to be concerned that the forced coexistence of qualitatively unique objects in an exhibition, and the instrumentalizing of inwardly directed constructions for the purpose of education, undermine the independence on which aesthetic value is predicated. Adorno observes of *Rooms of Art*: “Valéry’s argumentation bears the stamp of cultural conservatism.”<sup>103</sup> This perspective is pushed to the point where it is transformed into its opposite, though:

He follows the principle of art for art’s sake to the verge of its negation. He makes the pure work of art the object of absolute unwavering contemplation, but he scrutinizes it so long and so intensely that he comes to see that the object of such pure contemplation must wither and degenerate to commercialized decoration, robbed of the dignity in which both its *raison d’être* and Valéry’s consist. The pure work is threatened by reification and neutralization. This is the recognition that overwhelms

<sup>101</sup> Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p.442 [GS7, p.518].

<sup>102</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Beethoven: The Philosophy of Music* [1993], ed. by Rolf Tiedemann, trans. by Edmund Jephcott (London: Polity Press, 2005), p.109 [NAS1:2, p.161].

<sup>103</sup> Theodor Adorno, “Valéry Proust Museum” [1953], in *Prisms*, p.177.

him in the museum. He discovers that the only pure works, the only works that can sustain serious observation, are the impure ones that do not exhaust themselves in that observation but point beyond, towards a social context.<sup>104</sup>

According to Adorno, Proust believes that aesthetic value does not inhere in the immanent meaning of the artwork, but rather in its impression on the consciousness of the spectator, and for that reason he is less critical of museums. His focus on the impact of the object on the observer can at times become reductive, making of the artwork no more than a set of psychological stimuli: “Proust’s work contains passages on art which approach in unbridled subjectivism the philistine [*banausischen*] attitude that turns the work into a battery of projective tests.”<sup>105</sup> This weakness is also a strength, however: “Proust, in his unfettered subjectivism, is untrue to objectifications of the spirit, but it is only this subjectivism that enables him to break through the immanence of culture.”<sup>106</sup>

In “Valéry Proust Museum”, Valéry and Proust are construed as holding antithetical positions, each of which is internally dynamic, with limitations that give rise to its moment of truth vis-à-vis the other. In summary, Valéry does not interrogate the category of the artwork as such, but he is more sensitive to the qualities of individual artworks. Proust is frequently superficial in his treatment of individual artworks, but he is better placed to historicize the category of the artwork as such. The impasse between them cannot be circumvented, because it arises from a contradiction within the matter itself. Nevertheless, Adorno identifies a point of convergence in their privileging of aesthetic pleasure:

[T]hey share the presupposition that works of art should be enjoyed. Valéry speaks of “*délices*”, Proust of “*joie enivrante*”, exhilarating joy. Nothing is more characteristic than that presupposition of the distance not merely between the present generation and the previous one but also between the German and the French attitudes towards art. As early as the

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p.180.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p.183 [*GS10.1*, p.191].

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., p.183.

writing of *A l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs* [*Within a Budding Grove*], the expression *Kunstgenuss* [aesthetic pleasure] must have sounded as touchingly philistine [*philiströs*] in German as a Wilhelm Busch rhyme. This aesthetic pleasure, furthermore, in which Valéry and Proust have as much faith as in a revered mother, has always been a questionable matter.<sup>107</sup>

“In Memory of Eichendorff” [1957] instead distinguishes German and French literature on the basis of the “prudishness” and “idealistic philistinism [*Philistertum*]” of the former.<sup>108</sup> The claims of conservatism and philistinism made about Valéry and Proust are also complicated by references to them elsewhere in his oeuvre. In “Valéry’s Deviations” [1960], *Rooms of Art* is cited approvingly for its “denunciation of the forest-and-meadow aesthetics of the simple things”, described as a “notion the philistine [*Philister*] cherishes”.<sup>109</sup> “Punctuation Marks” [1956] attributes to parentheses the quality of “pedantic philistinism [*Banausie*]”, before acknowledging that “Proust, whom no one can lightly call a philistine [*Banausen*] and whose pedantry is nothing but one aspect of his wonderful micrological power, did not hesitate to use brackets”.<sup>110</sup> Across his body of work, Adorno often identifies the same individuals as philistine and anti-philistine, among them Plato, Goethe, Kant, Hegel, Wagner and Nietzsche.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., p.179 [*GS10.1*, p.186].

<sup>108</sup> Theodor Adorno, “In Memory of Eichendorff” [1957], in *Notes to Literature, Volume 1*, p.63 [*GS11*, p.77].

<sup>109</sup> Theodor Adorno, “Valéry’s Deviations” [1960], in *Notes to Literature, Volume 1*, p.141 [*GS11*, p.163].

<sup>110</sup> Theodor Adorno, “Punctuation Marks” [1956], in *Notes to Literature, Volume 1*, pp.95-96 [*GS11*, p.111].

<sup>111</sup> For Plato, see: Adorno, “Cultural Criticism and Society”, p.27 [*GS10.1*, p.21]; Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p.110 [*GS7*, p.129]. For Goethe, see: Adorno, “Prologue to Television”, p.56 [*GS10.2*, p.516]; Theodor Adorno, “On the Final Scene of *Faust*” [1959], in *Notes to Literature, Volume 1*, pp.116-117 [*GS11*, p.134]. For Kant, see: Adorno, *Hegel: Three Studies*, pp.61-62 [*GS5*, p.302]; Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p.12 [*GS7*, p.23], p.345 [*GS7*, p.396]. For Hegel, see: Adorno, *Hegel: Three Studies*, pp.61-62 [*GS5*, p.302]; Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p.23 [*GS7*, p.33], p.196 [*GS7*, p.224], p.449 [*GS7*, p.526]. For Wagner, see: Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, p.192 [*GS12*, p.181]; Theodor Adorno, *In Search of Wagner* [1952], trans. by Rodney Livingstone (London: Verso, 2005), pp.39-40 [*GS13*, p.48]; Adorno, *Sound Figures*, p.164 [*GS16*, p.192]; Theodor Adorno, “Wagner’s Relevance for Today” [1963], trans. by Susan H Gillespie, in *Essays on Music*, pp.584-585 [*GS16*, p.543], p.586 [*GS16*, p.545]. For Nietzsche, see: Adorno, “On the Crisis of Literary Criticism”, p.307 [*GS11*, p.664]; Adorno, *Sound Figures*, p.164 [*GS16*, p.192].

*Aesthetic Theory* also contains this incidental remark disparaging “an aesthetic that constantly insists on subjective feeling”, in the context of a critique of the “element of pleasure in art”: “Almost without exception its descriptions were banausic [*banausisch*], perhaps because from the beginning the subjective approach made it impossible to recognize that something compelling can be grasped of aesthetic experience only on the basis of a relation to the aesthetic object, not by recurring to the fun of the art lover.”<sup>112</sup> The passage continues with an account of how aesthetic pleasure weakens the resistance to the given order which the formally autonomous artwork represents:

The concept of artistic enjoyment was a bad compromise between the social and the socially critical essence of the artwork. If art is useless for the business of self-preservation – bourgeois society never quite forgives that – it should at least demonstrate a sort of use-value modelled on sensual pleasure. This distorts art as well as the physical fulfillment that art’s aesthetic representatives do not dispense. That a person who is incapable of sensual differentiation – who cannot distinguish a beautiful from a flat sound, a brilliant from a dull color – is hardly capable of aesthetic experience, is hypostatized.<sup>113</sup>

The last line conjures up the figure of the philistine. In a footnote to “Commitment”, Adorno quotes Jean-Paul Sartre’s *What is Literature?* [1948], associating the “aesthetic purism” of *l’art pour l’art* with “bourgeois [...] philistines [*Philister*]”.<sup>114</sup> He turns this around with a description of “some Philistine [*philiströs*]”, who “rants against the ideal of *l’art pour l’art*”, accusing it of “decadence and degeneration and other nefarious things”, in his early essay “Why is the New Art So Hard to Understand?” [1931].<sup>115</sup> These somewhat obscure references to philistinism further demonstrate the flexibility of the term, as it is mobilized on behalf of and in opposition to *l’art pour l’art*, much as we saw it deployed for and against both Valéry and Proust.

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<sup>112</sup> Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p.16 [GS7, p.28].

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p.17.

<sup>114</sup> Adorno, “Commitment”, p.338 [GS11, p.427].

<sup>115</sup> Theodor Adorno, “Why is the New Art So Hard to Understand?” [1931], trans. by Susan H Gillespie, in *Essays on Music*, p.128 [GS18, p.825].

Adorno counterposes the formally autonomous artwork to the philistinism of art with a cause, arguing that its critical force rests on its distance from empirical reality, negatively articulating utopian potential by resisting universal fungibility. He also sets it against the philistinism of art for enjoyment, which arises from the similarity of aesthetic autonomy to the fetish-character of the commodity form, and is realized in a social situation in which the relation to culture is modelled on the relation to consumer goods. He connects this version of philistinism to the emphasis on aesthetic pleasure, attributing that attitude to both public opinion and official taste in *Aesthetic Theory*:

What popular consciousness and a complaisant aesthetics regard as the taking pleasure in art, modelled on real enjoyment, probably does not exist. The empirical subject has only a limited and modified part in artistic experience *tel quel*, and this part may well be diminished the higher the work's rank. Whoever concretely enjoys artworks is a philistine [*Banause*]; he is convicted by expressions like "a feast for the ears". Yet if the last traces of pleasure were extirpated, the question of what artworks are for would be an embarrassment.<sup>116</sup>

He deconstructs the experience of aesthetic pleasure, before enacting another of his characteristic reversals, acknowledging that his brand of modernism, even in its most ascetic manifestations, always contains an irreducible element of enjoyment. He maintains that this aspect of aesthetic experience, which is all that remains in *l'art pour l'art*, undermines the drive towards radical self-sufficiency. He insists that the formally autonomous artwork, if its ideal of autarchy is made absolute, becomes a vehicle for ideology as much as any propaganda. In keeping with his dialectical method, Adorno's model of advanced art does not seek to steer a middle course between these extremes, but instead inhabits both poles of the antithesis to the utmost, thereby effecting the mediation of the aesthetic and the social.

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<sup>116</sup> Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p.15 [GS7, p.27].

### THE PHILISTINE AND THE CONNOISSEUR

This analysis of the philistinism of art with a cause and the philistinism of art for enjoyment returns us to the alleged incomprehensibility of advanced art, and to the explicit affirmation of the critical potential of philistinism quoted by Beech and Roberts in “Spectres of the Aesthetic”. The context of the quotation which they select as an example is a discussion of the enigmaticalness of art from *Aesthetic Theory*, which begins: “The task of aesthetics is not to comprehend artworks as hermeneutical objects; in the contemporary situation, it is their incomprehensibility that needs to be comprehended.”<sup>117</sup> Adorno goes on to reiterate his belief in an integral structuration that is ultimately mimetic, identifying this paradox as the spirit of artworks under current conditions: “In artworks, spirit has become their principle of construction, although it fulfils its telos only when it emerges from what is to be constructed, from the mimetic impulses, by shaping itself to them rather than allowing itself to be imposed on them by sovereign rule.”<sup>118</sup> He says of the formally autonomous artwork that its “rationality [...] becomes spirit only when it is immersed in its polar opposite”, highlighting the concomitant “divergence between the constructive and the mimetic”, of which the correlative is the “element of the clownish and the ridiculous that even the most significant works bear”.<sup>119</sup> The element of the clownish and the ridiculous is supposed to be especially pronounced when art “assimilates itself to a logical order by virtue of its inner exactitude”, as the rigour of its construction then accentuates the “difference between the artwork’s logicity and the logicity that governs empirically”, and becomes critical by accusing the “rationality of social praxis of having become an end in itself and as such the irrational and mad reversal of means into ends”.<sup>120</sup> This description recalls his model of advanced art, constructed in opposition to the philistinism of art with a cause, but there is also an allusion to the philistinism of art for enjoyment, when he says that those lacking an aesthetic sensibility misconstrue the enigmaticalness of art by taking it as a source of pleasure.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., p.157.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., p.158.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., p.158.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., p.158.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., p.159.

Adorno accords the art-alien a privileged perspective with regard to ridiculousness, which allows them to participate in its criticism of rationality: “The ridiculous in art, which philistines [*Amusischen*] recognize better than do those who are naively at home in art, and the folly of a rationality made absolute indict one another reciprocally[.]”<sup>122</sup> Beech and Roberts emphasize one side of this reciprocal negation, focusing on his qualified endorsement of the figure of the philistine, independently of the interplay with their counterpart the connoisseur, which is evident in the expanded quotation from *Aesthetic Theory*:

Ridiculousness is the residue of the mimetic in art, the price of its self-enclosure. In his condemnation of this element, the philistine [*Philister*] always has an ignominious measure of justification. The ridiculous, as a barbaric residuum of something alien to form, misfires in art if art fails to reflect and shape it. If it remains on the level of the childish and is taken for such, it merges with the calculated *fun* of the culture industry. By its very concept, art implies kitsch, just as by the obligation it imposes of sublimating the ridiculous it presupposes educational privilege and class structure; *fun* is art’s punishment for this. All the same, the ridiculous elements in artworks are most akin to their intentionless levels and therefore, in great works, also closest to their secret.<sup>123</sup>

The philistine is excluded from aesthetic experience, and for that reason they are meant to be better able to disclose the enigmaticalness of art than the connoisseur, who remains immersed in the internal logic of the formally autonomous artwork: “[I]f one is within the artwork, if one participates in its immanent completion, this enigmaticalness makes itself invisible; if one steps outside the work, breaking the contract with its immanent context, this enigmaticalness returns like a spirit.”<sup>124</sup> *Aesthetic Theory* argues that this remainder is constitutive of the truth content of art, granting the philistine a key role in its crystallization.

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid., p.158 [*GS7*, p.181].

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., pp.158-159 [*GS7*, p.181].

<sup>124</sup> Ibid. p.160.

The connoisseur may master the material, but they cannot resolve its enigmaticalness, according to Adorno: “Whoever seeks to understand artworks exclusively through the immanence of consciousness within them by this very measure fails to understand them and as such understanding grows, so does the feeling of its insufficiency caught blindly in the spell of art, to which art’s own truth content is opposed.”<sup>125</sup> He contends conversely that the philistine is unable to encompass the complexity of the formally autonomous artwork, which turns into resentment towards it and precludes the possibility of comprehending its enigmaticalness:

This gives further reason for the study of those who are alien to art [*amusischer*]: In their proximity the enigmaticalness of art becomes outrageous to the point that art is completely negated, unwittingly the ultimate criticism of art and, in that it is a defective attitude, a confirmation of art’s truth. It is impossible to explain art to those who have no feeling for it [*Amusischen*]; they are not able to bring an intellectual understanding of it into their living experience. For them the reality principle is such an obsession that it places a taboo on aesthetic comportment as a whole; incited by the cultural approbation of art, alienness to art [*Amusie*] often changes into aggression, not the least of the causes of the contemporary deaestheticization of art.<sup>126</sup>

The fundamental incapacity of the philistine is most evident in the field of music on account of its aconceptuality, according to Adorno: “[E]nigmaticalness may in an elementary fashion confirm the so-called unmusical [*Unmusikalische*], who does not understand the “language of music”, hears nothing but nonsense, and wonders what all the noise is about; the difference between what this person hears and what the initiated hear defines art’s enigmaticalness.”<sup>127</sup> He adds that the recognition of ridiculousness, though undoubtedly an advantage over the connoisseur and a check on the ideological aspects of advanced art, is also insufficient unless it is assimilated into a higher-order analysis.

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid., p.161.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., p.160 [*GS7*, p.183].

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., p.160 [*GS7*, p.183].



I will now attempt to summarize his argument, which concerns the modes of attention appropriate to aesthetic experience as he understands it, a topic taken up more fully in the next part of this chapter. Adorno's model of advanced art, adapted to the dialectic of the aesthetic and the social, necessitates a form of engagement which combines the stances of the connoisseur and the philistine without compromise, bringing each of them to bear negatively on the other. The connoisseur is too invested in the rationality of art, and consequently impervious to the ridiculousness which accompanies it. The philistine apprehends this element of the formally autonomous artwork, but they lack the expertise to reflect and shape it, reserved for members of the cultural elite. The connoisseur is superior in their knowledge of and sympathy for art, which are required for any meaningful encounter with it. The philistine acts as a corrective to the absolutism of the formally autonomous artwork, by posing the embarrassing question of what it is for, which strikes at its underlying principle. The connoisseur circumvents this challenge to the *raison d'être* of art, by bracketing off the aesthetic as an exceptional realm. The philistine touches on what is ideological about the formally autonomous artwork, but the naivety with which the issue is raised has to be overcome, in order to move beyond uncomprehending rage. The connoisseur nevertheless fails to resolve the enigmaticalness of art, which is definitively irreducible to conceptual elucidation. The philistine therefore attains their true value at a later stage in the interpretation of the formally autonomous artwork, when the controversy over its purpose recurs, in the face of the continuing contradiction of its rationality and its ridiculousness. Adorno insists that these positions must not be falsely reconciled, because the tension between them is the substance of advanced art, which demands the perspective of the connoisseur as much as that of the philistine.<sup>128</sup> My contention is that the affirmation of the latter is intelligible only if it is taken together with their negation, and similarly his derogatory comments about the critics of advanced art, and about the alternative models of art with a cause and art for enjoyment, should be given the binding status of truth-claims, and allowed to indict reciprocally the critical insight of the philistine.

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid., pp.160-162.

## Aesthetics

### AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE

In his writings on music, literature and visual art, Adorno attempts to articulate philosophically the concrete specificity of aesthetic experience, a notion never clearly defined or argued for in his work, and indeed considered to be irreducible to conceptual generalization or discursive justification. *Aesthetic Theory* mainly operates at a more abstract level, as an immanent analysis of the apparently outmoded categories of philosophical aesthetics, which he believes should not simply be abandoned, but rather critically reconfigured from within that discourse. In the “Paralipomena”, Kant’s account of the sublime – in which the subject apprehends its own insignificance, reaching beyond itself to something else – is extended to cover all forms of beauty by Adorno. This adaptation of the encounter of the self with what exceeds it rejects the concept of infinity, which in the original version is established as the positive side to that awareness of nullity, and used to master it intellectually. Instead, Adorno recommends immersion in the individual artwork, even submission to its internal logic, positioning aesthetic experience in opposition to philistinism:

Pain in the face of beauty is the longing for what the subjective block closes off to the subject, of which the subject nevertheless knows that it is truer than itself. Experience, which would without violence be free of the block, results from the surrender of the subject to the aesthetic law of form. The viewer enters into a contract with the artwork so that it will speak. Those who brag of having “got” something from an artwork transfer in philistine [*Banausisch*] fashion the relation of possession to what is strictly foreign to it; they extend the comportment of unbroken self-preservation, subordinating beauty to that interest that beauty, according to Kant’s ever valid insight, transcends.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid., p.345 [*GS7*, p.396].

Following on from his formulation of the sublime, Kant's principle of the disinterested judgement of beauty is taken up here, along with its correlative the uselessness of art for the purpose of self-preservation, which is said to run counter to the dominant ideology of the bourgeoisie. There are broadly two types of interest in the Kantian schema, the interest in the good and the interest in the agreeable, with the former equivalent to the moral or political imperative of the philistinism of art with a cause, while the latter corresponds to the material or sensual gratification of the philistinism of art for enjoyment. Elsewhere in the "Paralipomena", Adorno represents the practice of instrumentalizing the artwork with the emblematic phrase, written in English: "What do I get out of it?"<sup>130</sup> This is an attitude associated with the culture industry, but it applies as well to demands for art to fulfil a social function or satisfy the desire for pleasure. It has already been identified as characteristic of the cultivated philistine, who in his work is the archetype for the bourgeois identity of the philistine.

In the draft introduction to *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno distinguishes pre-artistic experience from aesthetic experience as follows: "Preartistic experience requires projection, yet aesthetic experience – precisely by virtue of the *a priori* primacy of subjectivity in it – is a countermovement to the subject. It demands something on the order of the self-denial of the observer, his capacity to address or recognize what aesthetic objects themselves enunciate and what they conceal."<sup>131</sup> The surrender to the aesthetic law of form required of the spectator involves a sacrifice of subjectivity, as they adapt themselves to the rigour of the integral structuration of the individual artwork in its qualitative uniqueness. Adorno also insists on the importance of aesthetic distance, again recalling the disinterested observer advocated by Kant:

Aesthetic experience first of all places the observer at a distance from the object. This resonates in the idea of disinterested observation. Philistines [*Banausen*] are those whose relation to artworks is ruled by whether and to what degree they can, for example, put themselves in the place of the actors as they come forth; this is what all parts of the culture industry are based on and they foster it insistently in their customers. The more artistic

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid., p.392.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., pp.438-439.

experience possesses its objects and the closer it approaches them in a certain sense, the farther it is at the same time shifted away from them; artistic enthusiasm is art-alien [*kunstfremd*].<sup>132</sup>

The possibility of this type of aesthetic experience is progressively undermined with the rise of the culture industry, which is said to cancel the aesthetic distance on which the disinterested judgement of beauty depends. Adorno holds that this lack of interest allows for an intimation of the artwork as a negative prolepsis of a liberated humanity in a world free from domination, including the self-domination of the rational subject: “It is thus that aesthetic experience [...] breaks through the spell of obstinate self-preservation; it is the model of a stage of consciousness in which the I no longer has its happiness in its interests, or, ultimately, in its reproduction.”<sup>133</sup> This inverted image of utopia is inaccessible via the immediate identification encouraged by the culture industry, which serves the interests of bourgeois self-preservation.

These themes are explored in texts other than *Aesthetic Theory*. The illegitimate transfer of the relation of possession to the aesthetic sphere is literalized in the activity of the collector, for whom it is “more important to possess books than to read them”, according to Adorno’s “Bibliographical Musings” [1959]: “Hence private libraries made up predominantly of editions of collected works easily acquire a philistine [*Banausisches*] aspect.”<sup>134</sup> This relation of possession, which is of course fundamental to the constitution of the bourgeoisie as the ruling class, is anathema to aesthetic experience as he understands it. A sense of what that actually involves emerges incrementally as he distinguishes it from philistinism, drawing on Hegel as well as Kant. Hegel’s turn to the object, which as we have seen is branded philistine for its undue emphasis on content, is opposed to the perspective of the philistine in *Aesthetic Theory*:

Prior to total administration, the subject who viewed, heard, or read a work was to lose himself, forget himself, extinguish himself in the

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid., p.439 [*GS7*, p.514, p.515].

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., p.439.

<sup>134</sup> Theodor Adorno, “Bibliographical Musings” [1959], in *Notes to Literature, Volume 2*, p.23 [*GS11*, p.349].

artwork. The identification carried out by the subject was ideally not that of making the artwork like himself, but rather that of making himself like the artwork. This identification constituted aesthetic sublimation: Hegel named this comportment freedom to the object. He thus paid homage to the subject that becomes subject in spiritual experience through self-relinquishment, the opposite of the philistine [*speißbürgerlichen*] demand that the artwork give him something.<sup>135</sup>

The expectation that the artwork will give the spectator something, alternatively formulated as their preoccupation with what they can get out of it, is elsewhere explicitly connected to the relation of possession by Adorno. It recurs throughout his oeuvre, for example in “On Wilhelm Lehmann’s “*Bemerkungen zur Kunst des Gedichts* [Remarks on the Art of the Poem]” [1974]: “[T]he philistine [*Banausenidee*] notion of art [...] requires art to be continually giving and affirming something.”<sup>136</sup> The act of identification described in the passage above differs radically from the more immediate variant promoted by the culture industry, which is false because it is based on subjective projection. Hegel’s insight that full subjecthood instead results from granting primacy to the object, risking the self in a transformative encounter with what is other to it, suggests an alternative model for aesthetic experience.

Back in the “Paralipomena” to *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno extends his prohibition on identification with the characters in an artwork to identification with the artist, both modes of attention common to the culture industry: “Just as the exemplary instance of the philistine [*Banausie*] is a reader who judges his relation to artworks on the basis of whether he can identify with the protagonists, so false identification with the immediately empirical person is the index of complete obtuseness towards art.”<sup>137</sup> He confirms the philistinism of the second stance elsewhere in his body of work.<sup>138</sup> *Aesthetic Theory* goes on to reaffirm the importance of a relationship to the artwork based on a different type of

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<sup>135</sup> Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p.23 [GS7, p.33].

<sup>136</sup> Adorno, “On Wilhelm Lehmann’s “*Bemerkungen zur Kunst des Gedichts*”, p.310 [GS11, p.666].

<sup>137</sup> Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p.355 [GS7, p.409].

<sup>138</sup> See: Adorno, *Quasi una Fantasia*, p.148 [GS16, p.385]; Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p.148 [GS7, p.385].

identification, again discussed in terms of the self-relinquishment of the subject to the object in Hegel:

[T]he medium of this relationship is what Hegel called freedom toward the object: The spectator must not project what transpires in himself on to the artwork in order to find himself confirmed, uplifted, and satisfied in it, but must, on the contrary, relinquish himself to the artwork, assimilate himself to it, and fulfil the work in its own terms. In other words, he must submit to the discipline of the work rather than demand that the artwork give him something. The aesthetic comportment, however, that avoids this, thereby remaining blind to what in the artwork is more than factually the case, is unitary with the projective attitude, that of *terre à terre*, which characterizes the contemporary epoch and deaestheticizes artworks.<sup>139</sup>

The viability of aesthetic experience like this is threatened in the contemporary epoch, as the regressive tendencies of enlightenment are realized in a fully administered society. The projective attitude, where the spectator – or, for that matter, the artist – imposes a subjectively posited meaning on the artwork, is repeatedly labelled philistine in *Aesthetic Theory*. Adorno acknowledges a moment of truth in this philistinism, that is, its reflection of the underlying reality of advanced capitalism: “[T]he thesis of the projective character of art [...] is important as the expression of a historical tendency. What in philistine [*banausisch*] fashion it inflicts on artworks corresponds to the positivistic caricature of enlightenment, of unfettered subjective reason.”<sup>140</sup> His version of aesthetic experience resists that historical tendency, embracing a countermovement to the subject.

He is influenced in this regard by the aesthetics of Kant and Hegel. The disinterested judgement of beauty and the self-relinquishment of the subject to the object, which he combines in an idiosyncratic synthesis, are respectively differentiated from the philistinism of getting something out of the artwork, and the philistinism of subjective projection. These attitudes are associated with the culture industry, which inculcates in its consumers the relation of possession and

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<sup>139</sup> Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p.355.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, p.348.

a disposition to immediate identification. Adorno maintains that the other extreme to the projective attitude, where the subject is shaped by the object without impacting on it reciprocally, is equally unacceptable as a model of aesthetic experience. What is required is a dialectical approach, as he argues in *Aesthetic Theory*:

Even in its fallibility and weakness, the subject who contemplates art is not expected simply to retreat from the claim to objectivity. Otherwise it would hold that those alien to art [*Kunstfremde*] – the philistines [*Banause*] devoid of any relation to art, who let it affect them as if they were a *tabula rasa* – would be the most qualified to understand and judge it, and the unmusical [*Unmusikalische*] would be the best music critics. Like art itself, knowledge of it is consummated dialectically. The more the observer adds to the process, the greater the energy with which he penetrates the artwork, the more he then becomes aware of objectivity from within. He takes part in objectivity when his energy, even that of his misguided subjective “projection”, extinguishes itself in the artwork.<sup>141</sup>

Adorno is clear that any philosophical articulation of aesthetic experience cannot hope to encapsulate its richness, but he considers that the aconceptual knowledge represented by artworks nevertheless demands to be completed discursively. His remarks on the topic in relation to philistinism reveal a consistent set of interconnected themes, which provide points of orientation for an account of his aesthetics. The key features which emerge – historically situated and subject to change – include aesthetic distance and disinterested contemplation, freedom towards the object and a countermovement to the subject. He holds that art itself is dialectical, and that knowledge of it must therefore be consummated dialectically. In what follows, I expand on this claim by exploring his theory of the artwork and his technique of immanent analysis, both of which are saturated by aesthetic experience, before again touching on the topic of beauty, in relation to the blindness of the philistine.

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid., p.229 [*GS7*, p.261].

## FORM AND CONTENT

In this chapter, I have already highlighted some of the recurring traits of Adorno's philistine, and there are a number of other qualities consistently associated with this figure, such as narrowness, prosaism and provincialism, all of which are mentioned in the Introduction.<sup>142</sup> These constitute a more or less stable set of features, attached to what is nevertheless a highly mobile term, applied to a wide variety of targets across his oeuvre and within the same text, for example both the *rentier* and the believer in his early monograph on Søren Kierkegaard.<sup>143</sup> This combination of consistency and mobility has the effect of critically conflating apparently distinct or even opposed positions, among them fascism and socialism, idealism and materialism, and positivism and psychoanalysis.<sup>144</sup> In an expanded version of a quotation cited above in relation to Lukács, *Aesthetic Theory* identifies insensitivity to form as another key characteristic of the philistine:

The participation of form in the crisis of art becomes evident in statements like those of Lukács, who said that in modern art the importance of form has been greatly overestimated. Evident in this philistine [*banausischen*] call to arms is a discontent with art of which Lukács the cultural conservative is unconscious, as well as a concept of form that is inadequate to art. To hit upon the idea that form has been

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<sup>142</sup> For narrowness, see: Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, pp.96-97 [GS4, p.107]; Adorno, *Hegel: Three Studies*, pp.61-62 [GS5, p.302]; Adorno, "Wagner's Relevance for Today", pp.585-587 [GS16, p.545]; Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p.71 [GS7, p.87]. For prosaism, see: Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p.71 [GS7, p.87], p.283 [GS7, p.321]. For provincialism, see: Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, p.192 [GS12, p.181]; Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, pp.218-219 [GS4, p.247].

<sup>143</sup> Adorno, *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic* [1933], trans. by Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), p.48 [GS6, p.71], p.128 [GS6, p.182].

<sup>144</sup> For fascism and socialism, see: Theodor Adorno, "What National Socialism Has Done to the Arts" [1945], in *Essays on Music*, p.385; Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, p.136 [GS12, p.169]; Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, pp.52-53 [GS4, p.59], pp.96-97 [GS4, p.107]; Adorno, *Sound Figures*, p.9 [GS16, p.18]. For idealism and materialism, see: Adorno, *Hegel: Three Studies*, pp.61-62 [GS5, p.302]; Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, pp.204-205 [GS6, p.204]; Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p.196 [GS7, p.224], p.442 [GS7, p.518], p.449 [GS7, p.526]. For psychoanalysis and positivism, see: Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, pp.52-53 [GS4, p.59]; Adorno, "The Essay as Form", p.5 [GS11, p.11]; Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p.274 [GS6, p.270]; Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, pp.10-11 [GS7, p.21], p.14 [GS7, p.25], p.348 [GS7, p.399].



overestimated in art, one must have failed to recognize that form is essential to art, that it mediates content [*Inhalt*].<sup>145</sup>

Adorno's claim that form mediates content can be clarified by distinguishing form from technique and content from material in his nomenclature, with the proviso that these should not be treated as invariant categories. The material is everything the artist works on, like colours, words and sounds, but also the forms and techniques available at a particular stage of historical development. The technique, at a general level, is the means by which these elements are organized purposefully, and through that process set against what currently exists. The dynamic relations of the parts to each other and of the parts to the whole together comprise the form, which in its integral structuration posits the negation of the world as it is. The content then is both what happens within the artwork, and its additional significance beyond what is empirically there, the intertwined senses of subject matter ("*Inhalt*") and import ("*Gehalt*").

Elsewhere in *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno confirms the philistinism of insensitivity to form, as well as the preeminent status of the latter as the central element of art.<sup>146</sup> However, "Television as Ideology" [1953] calls for the formal analysis of television to be "supplemented by closer consideration of the specific contents [*Inhalt*] of programmes", while noting that in this medium the "contents [*Inhalt*] and the form of presentation are so complicitous with one another that each may vouch for the other": "Abstracting from the form would be philistine [*banausisch*] vis-à-vis any work of art; it would amount to measuring by its own standard a sphere that ignores aesthetic autonomy and replaces form with function and packaging."<sup>147</sup> His insistence that content should not be subordinated wholly to form applies to artistic productions from beyond the realm of the culture industry, as we can see in another expanded quotation familiar to us from *Aesthetic Theory*, dealing with Hegel's anti-formalism:

What even his [Hegel's] sworn enemy Kierkegaard so admired him for, the accent he put on content [*Inhalt*] vis-à-vis form, did not merely

<sup>145</sup> Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p.187 [GS7, p.213].

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., p.110 [GS7, p.129].

<sup>147</sup> Theodor Adorno, "Television as Ideology" [1953], in *Critical Models*, p.59 [GS10.2, p.518].

announce opposition to empty and indifferent play, that is, the relation of art to truth, which was his preeminent concern. Rather, at the same time it revealed an overestimation of the thematic content [*Stoffgehalt*] of artworks regardless of their dialectic of form. As a result, an art-alien [*Kunstfremdes*] and philistine [*Banausisches*] element entered Hegel's aesthetics, which manifests its fatal character in the aesthetics of dialectical materialism, which in this regard had no more misgivings about Hegel than did Marx.<sup>148</sup>

The accusation of philistinism is still directed at the overestimation of content rather than form, but it is accompanied by an awareness of the countervailing risk of the empty play of formalism. Adorno maintains that the content mediates the form, just as the form mediates the content, in this passage from *Aesthetic Theory*: “Even in so-called formal elements there is by virtue of their relation to the unreconcilable a return of content [*Inhalt*] that is refracted by their law. This dialectic in the form constitutes its depth; without it form would be what philistines [*Banausen*] take it to be: empty play.”<sup>149</sup> He holds that it is the task of aesthetic reflection to crystallize the artwork's truth content (“*Wahrheitsgehalt*”), which emerges out of the dialectic of form and content (“*Inhalt*”).

Characteristically, *Aesthetic Theory* articulates this dialectic by way of a double-sided negation, in a formulation to which we will return in the next section: “Against the philistine [*banausische*] division of art into form and content [*Inhalt*] it is necessary to insist on their unity; against the sentimental view of their indifference in the artwork it is necessary to insist that their difference endures even in their mediation.”<sup>150</sup> The tendency to compartmentalize is another feature of the philistine established in the Introduction, which along with narrowness is taken up by Adorno in *Hegel: Three Studies* [1963]: “The experience of post-Kantian German Idealism reacts against philistine [*spießbürgerliche*] narrowness and contentment with the compartmentalization of life and organized knowledge in accordance with the

<sup>148</sup> Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p.449 [GS7, p.526].

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., p.249 [GS7, p.283].

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., p.194 [GS7, p.221].

division of labour.”<sup>151</sup> There are further examples of this philistine mindset, for example the division of the artwork into an appearance appreciated intuitively and a meaning requiring conceptual elucidation, which is imputed to traditional aesthetics in *Aesthetic Theory*.<sup>152</sup> Analogous to the treatment of form and content, *Sound Figures* warns against both the compartmentalization and the conflation of the categories of technique and meaning, in a discussion about the correct approach to aesthetics:

It would not be legitimate to devise an aesthetics from above with quasi-ontological status, one that was unconcerned with the laws governing musical language and the concrete musical structures in which alone those laws are crystallized. Nor would it be sufficient to give a positivist description of the technical facts and then to tack on to it retrospectively a theory that would lose all sense of its own meaning once it had ceased to grasp its truth or falsity. Only the philistine [*Banause*] keeps questions of musical technique and aesthetic meaning in separate compartments; only the unrepentant technofreak or resolute idealist confuses the two. But neither will the solution be found in a middle course between speculative thought remote from musical practice and a diligent craftsmanship. [...] The work of art is not best served by a compromise between the extremes of the internal and external, of spirit and technicality. True mediation can result only from preserving the extremes as such.<sup>153</sup>

Adorno echoes this claim later in *Sound Figures*: “Only philistines [*Philiströs*] can entertain the notion of a ready-made and self-contained artistic content that is then projected into the external world with the aid of a technique conceived of in similarly thinglike terms. Inner experience and outer form are created by a reciprocal process of interaction.”<sup>154</sup> The model of mediation alluded to in these passages has already been identified as key to his dialectical method, and it informs his aesthetics in the case of the dialectic of form and content. The definition of content as what happens within the artwork includes formal

<sup>151</sup> Adorno, *Hegel: Three Studies*, pp.61-62 [GS5, p.302].

<sup>152</sup> See: Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p.127 [GS7, p.150], p.128 [GS7, p.151].

<sup>153</sup> Adorno, *Sound Figures*, p.124 [GS16, p.146].

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, p.198 [GS16, p.229].

elements in motion, for example the development of a theme in a musical composition. The images and ideas that might usually be thought of as the content of the artwork in fact mostly fall within the category of material, worked on by the artist using technical means, and transformed as they are integrated into a formal complex. The content in the sense of the import of the artwork is its utopian potential, negatively articulated on the level of form. The form is itself sedimented content though, in that it is shaped historically and participates in the relation of the artwork to society. There is content too in the implicit criticism of the evident disparity between the semblance of reconciliation constituted by the artwork and the impossibility of achieving such reconciliation in empirical reality.

Consistent with his theory of the artwork, Adorno advocates a type of aesthetic reflection open and agile enough to negotiate the dialectic of form and content, which really is an elaboration in inner-aesthetic terms of the dialectic of the aesthetic and the social. His technique of immanent analysis, which he insists is not a fixed method to be applied uniformly, is nevertheless distinguished by its practice of immersion in the individual artwork, and the associated set of aesthetic dispositions adumbrated in the last section. He argues that it must orient itself both internally and externally to the object, as described in relation to the philistine and the connoisseur at the end of the preceding part of this chapter. The approach is sympathetic to the extent that it closely follows the internal logic of the formally autonomous artwork, but critical in that it recognizes the social character of aesthetic autonomy itself. Stressing the vital role played by interpretation in crystallizing truth content in *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno maintains that fidelity to the object includes the obligation to negate what is false in it, to assist in drawing out its social import:

The immanence of society in the artwork is the essential social relation of art, not the immanence of art in society. Because the social content of art is not related externally to its *principium individuationis* but rather inheres in individuation, which is itself a social reality, art's social character is concealed and can only be grasped by its interpretation. Yet even in artworks that are to their very core ideological, truth content can assert itself. Ideology, socially necessary semblance, is by this same

necessity also the distorted image of the true. A threshold that divides the social consciousness of aesthetics from the philistine [*Banausie*] is that aesthetics reflects the social critique of the ideological in artworks, rather than mechanically reiterating it.<sup>155</sup>

If ideology is defined as socially necessary semblance, then its determinate negation may disclose something about contemporary society, in this way forming part of the truth content of the artwork, according to Adorno. There might be straightforwardly ideological elements to it, incorporated from the surrounding culture, or a particular social function it is designed to fulfil, as with religious art. He argues that the formally autonomous artwork has a higher-order ideological character, which consists in its resemblance to the commodity form, that is, its objectivation of a process as a thing, and its pretensions to radically self-sufficient status: “Only a philistine [*philiströs*] and stubborn faith in artists could overlook the complicity of the artwork’s thing-character with social reification and thus with its untruth: the fetishization of what is in itself a process as a relation between elements.”<sup>156</sup> That the rigour of its construction paradoxically produces a model of freedom, but that it fails to make good on this utopian promise, is another reason art is said to require critique as well as interpretation. Adorno’s version of immanent analysis critically reconfigures the elements of the artwork, arranging them in a new constellation, in order to cast light on its truth and falsity.

This technique situates itself within the inner-aesthetic nexus of the artwork, but ultimately registers a significance extending beyond that formal complex. Adorno comments on the question of his own form, specifically the open and unsystematic structure of the essay, in the self-reflexive text “The Essay as Form”: “[T]he essay has something like an aesthetic autonomy that is easily accused of being simply derived from art, although it is distinguished from art by its medium, concepts, and by its claim to a truth devoid of aesthetic semblance.”<sup>157</sup> He believes that immanent analysis is well suited to the task of translating aconceptual knowledge into discursive terms, but there is nevertheless

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<sup>155</sup> Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p.304 [GS7, p.346].

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, p.130 [GS7, p.154].

<sup>157</sup> Adorno, “The Essay as Form”, p.5.

an aesthetic aspect to its imaginative reconstruction of its object, by contrast with the methodological division of form and content in positivism:

Lukács failed to recognize this [what distinguishes the essay from art] when he called the essay an art form in the letter to Leo Popper that introduces *Soul and Form*. But the positivist maxim according to which what is written about art may in no way lay claim to artistic presentation, that is, autonomy of form, is no better. Here as elsewhere, the general positivist tendency to set every possible object, as an object of research, in stark opposition to the subject, does not go beyond the mere separation of form and content – for one can hardly speak of aesthetic matters unaesthetically, devoid of resemblance to the subject matter, without falling into philistinism [*Banausie*] and losing touch with the object *a priori*.<sup>158</sup>

Adorno's claim about aesthetics here is broadened to cover all philosophy in "Notes on Philosophical Thinking" [1965]: "Philosophical thoughts that can be reduced to their skeleton or their net profit are of no worth. That countless philosophical treatises are philistine [*Banausische*] and could not care less about being so is more than just an aesthetic shortcoming: it is the index of their own falsity."<sup>159</sup> There are of course important differences, which he acknowledges, between the interpretation of artworks and theoretical texts, not least that the latter are already discursive and conceptual. These two types of immanent analysis nevertheless share many features, including the aesthetic component of truth, that is, the moment of mimesis in which thought makes itself like its object, rather than merely classifying or describing it. The practice of constellational thinking is also common to his essays on art and his readings of philosophers, where he eschews a closed deductive organization or total system in favour of a force field of elements held in tension by their reciprocal negation. In this chapter, I am attempting such an immanent analysis of Adorno's model of culture, art and aesthetics, structured around the figure of the philistine.

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid., p.5 [*GS11*, p.11].

<sup>159</sup> Theodor Adorno, "Notes on Philosophical Thinking" [1965], in *Critical Models*, pp.131-132 [*GS10.2*, p.604].

## BLINDNESS

In the course of my survey of his work, I have touched on some of the ways in which philistinism is creatively incorporated into unorthodox structures of argumentation by Adorno. He often applies this label to each pole of an antithesis, so that the philistine becomes a rhetorical container for contradiction, embodying irreconcilable aspects of a truth that can only be expressed negatively. The term functions as the point of mediation in a dialectical reversal on a number of occasions. There are many examples of entities being identified as both philistine and anti-philistine, either in different contexts or within the same passage, and this construct is considered in combination with a wide range of ideas. *Aesthetic Theory*, in which the realization of the double-sided concept of philistinism is at its most sophisticated, frequently deploys it in close proximity to the trope of blindness, beginning with this extract from the chapter on “Natural Beauty”:

Art does not imitate nature, not even individual instances of natural beauty, but natural beauty as such. This denominates not only the aporia of natural beauty but the aporia of aesthetics as a whole. Its object is determined negatively, as indeterminable. It is for this reason that art requires philosophy, which interprets it in order to say what it is unable to say, whereas art is only able to say it by not saying it. The paradoxes of aesthetics are dictated to it by its object: “Beauty demands, perhaps, the slavish imitation of what is indeterminable in things.” If it is barbaric to say of something in nature that it is more beautiful than something else, the concept of beauty in nature as the concept of something that can be distinguished as such nevertheless bears that barbarism teleologically in itself, whereas the figure of the philistine [*Banausen*] remains prototypically that of a person who is blind to beauty. The origin of this paradox is the enigmatic character of nature’s language.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p.94 [GS7, p.113].

Adorno again constructs an opposition where each side of the formulation is negative, without resolving the tension between them. The philistine is prototypically blind to beauty, because they are incapable of producing comparative judgements about aesthetic value in the natural world. The act of discrimination which makes it possible to recognize beauty is barbaric, being a prototypical form of the domination of nature by instrumental rationality. The co-occurrence of philistinism and barbarism, which is not uncommon in his work either, here serves to illustrate a paradox it is claimed is inherent to the apprehension of beauty in nature.<sup>161</sup> *Aesthetic Theory* explains how the simultaneous need for and resistance to definition is transferred from natural beauty to art beauty, in turn circumscribing the practice of aesthetics, which must reflect the aporias of its object.

Adorno reprises the trope of blindness in the chapter on “Art Beauty”, in which he rebuts the critique of art found in Plato: “Plato’s ontology, more congenial to positivism than dialectic is, took offence at art’s semblance character, as if the promise made by art awakened doubt in the positive omnipresence of being and idea, for which Plato hoped to find surety in the concept.”<sup>162</sup> For Adorno, Plato’s rejection of aesthetic semblance as mendacious is misconceived, because the artwork does not seek to copy reality or approximate the universal ideas behind it, but instead gestures towards an alternative to the given order on the level of form. Its mimesis is not mimesis of the world as currently constituted, except by way of negation, rather it imitates natural beauty as such, specifically its opposition to instrumental rationality. The blindness referred to here is an insensitivity to form, which we have already encountered as a philistine trait in relation to Lukács:

If the Platonic ideas were existence-in-itself, art would not be needed; the ontologists of antiquity mistrusted art and sought pragmatic control over it because in their innermost being they knew that the hypostatized universal concept is not what beauty promises. Plato’s critique of art is

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<sup>161</sup> See: Adorno, “The Sociology of Knowledge and its Consciousness”, p.39 [GS10.1, p.34]; Adorno, “What National Socialism Has Done to the Arts”, p.385; Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, p.112 [GS12, p.136]; Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p.205 [GS6, p.204]; Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p.158 [GS7, p.181]. Adorno even substitutes the word “philistine” for the word “barbaric” in a revision to his essay “Television as Ideology”, p.59 [GS10.2, p.518].

<sup>162</sup> Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p.110.



indeed not compelling, because art negates the literal reality of its thematic content [*Stoffgehalte*], which Plato had indicted as a lie. The exaltation of the concept as idea is allied with the philistine [*banausischer*] blindness for the central element of art, its form.<sup>163</sup>

At another point in the book, Adorno asserts that to “lambast art as human deception” is to “stand[...] in sympathetic accord with philistinism [*Banausie*]”.<sup>164</sup> He holds that the promise of art is its utopian potential, which consists in the integral development of its own organizational principle. It thereby posits a radically transformed existence, rather than affirming things as they are, but it is worth noting the reversal immediately following the extract above: “In spite of all this, however, the blemish of mendacity obviously cannot be rubbed off art; nothing guarantees that it will keep its objective promise. [...] Even radical art is a lie insofar as it fails to create the possible to which it gives rise as semblance.”<sup>165</sup> The fact that art is unable to bring about the alternative to the given order it gestures towards, because that utopian potential cannot be fulfilled within the aesthetic sphere, means that any theory of art has to be a critique of art as well, it is suggested in *Aesthetic Theory*.

Adorno’s assertion of the centrality of form to art does not fully reflect his sophisticated understanding of how it relates to other elements of the artwork, as we have seen. He condemns as philistine the compartmentalization of form and content, maintaining that these categories are inextricably intertwined, and that thinking of them in isolation would rob them of much of their substance. He also repudiates the identity of form and content, which overrides their irreducible difference, and in practice means one component of the equation wholly subsuming the other. In the chapter on “Coherence and Meaning”, Kant’s formulation that thoughts without content are empty, while intuitions without concepts are blind, is applied to the aesthetic sphere to make this point, in an expanded version of a quotation cited in the last section:

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid., p.110 [*GS7*, p.129].

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., p.236 [*GS7*, p.267].

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., p.110.

Against the philistine [*banaisische*] division of art into form and content [*Inhalt*] it is necessary to insist on their unity; against the sentimental view of their indifference in the artwork it is necessary to insist that their difference endures even in their mediation. Not only is the perfect identity of the two chimerical, it would not redound to the success of the works: By analogy to Kant's maxim, they would become empty or blind, self-sufficient play or raw empiria.<sup>166</sup>

In keeping with his dialectical method, Adorno negates both of these unacceptable alternatives, mediating them in their extremity. The empty play of formalism is attacked elsewhere, as the error which the Hegelian turn to the object attempts to redress. It is the artwork rather than the philistine that is now called blind, to convey how too narrow a focus on content fails to capture what is specifically aesthetic. These are the problems that result from subordinating content to form or vice versa, which is what happens when they are conflated. Seeking instead to maintain the tension between them, Adorno recommends a version of immanent analysis that pays close attention to form, while recognizing it as internally related to the social situation, with the ultimate aim of crystallizing truth content, which cannot be conceived independently of its aesthetic articulation.

He further complicates the trope of blindness, again insisting on the social import of inwardly directed constructions, in the chapter headed "Toward a Theory of the Artwork": "Artworks are closed to one another, blind, and yet in their hermeticism they represent what is external."<sup>167</sup> The type of aesthetic reflection that can apprehend this relation to the external, which paradoxically consists in an inner-aesthetic orientation, must also negate what is false in its object, working through the internal contradictions of the formally autonomous artwork to deconstruct the myth of radical self-sufficiency from within. He acknowledges that immanent analysis, which is supposed to resist ideology, may itself serve ideological ends, if its internal perspective is absolutized, echoing his argument about *l'art pour l'art*:

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid., p.194 [*GS7*, p.221].

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., p.237.

If it is made absolute, immanent analysis falls prey to ideology, against which it struggled when it wanted to devote itself to the artworks internally rather than deducing their worldviews. Today it is already evident that immanent analysis, which was once a weapon of artistic experience against philistinism [*Banausie*], is being misused as a slogan to hold social reflection at a distance from an absolutized art. With social reflection, however, the artwork is not to be understood in relation to that of which it constitutes one element, nor is it to be deciphered in terms of its own content [*Gehalt*]. The blindness of the artwork is not only a corrective of the nature-dominating universal, it is also its correlative; as always the blind and the empty belong together in their abstractness.<sup>168</sup>

The artwork should not be understood reductively as an inert reflection of its social situation, nor conceived of in total isolation from the extra-aesthetic sphere. Its blindness is once again double-sided, with regard to the domination of nature by instrumental rationality. There is an insistence on a dialectical approach, in response to the interplay of the universal and the particular: “The reciprocal relation of the universal and the particular, which takes place unconsciously in artworks and which aesthetics must bring to consciousness, is what truly necessitates a dialectical approach.”<sup>169</sup> This substantially completes the complex of arguments constructed around philistinism and blindness in *Aesthetic Theory*.

There are additional instances of these concepts co-occurring throughout the book, and part of the reason for the selection presented here is to recapitulate and reinforce my reading of Adorno’s aesthetics. The recurrence of blindness adds a specifically ocular dimension to the insensateness to aesthetic experience that is the defining characteristic of the philistine. The implication is that visual art is the preeminent domain of aesthetic experience, when greater attention is typically given to the fields of literature and music in his oeuvre. In relation to the latter, *Aesthetic Theory* contains far fewer examples of the trope of deafness than of blindness, with the most significant of these not integrated into the main body of the text, but included in the “Paralipomena”:

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid., pp.237-238 [*GS7*, p.269].

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., p.238.

The philosophical construction of the unequivocal primacy of the whole over the part is as alien to art [*Kunst so fremd*] as it is epistemologically untenable. In important works, details never merge tracelessly into the totality. Certainly the autonomization of the details, when they become indifferent to the nexus of the work and reduce it to a subordinating schema, is accompanied by the regression of the work to the preartistic. Yet artworks distinguish themselves productively from the merely schematic exclusively by the element of the autonomy of their details; every authentic work is the result of centripetal and centrifugal forces. Anyone who listens to music seeking out the beautiful passages is a dilettante [*Dilettant*]; but whoever is unable to perceive beautiful passages, the varying density of invention and texture in a work, is deaf.<sup>170</sup>

Adorno here invokes the dilettante, another typological figure, mentioned alongside the philistine and the art-alien elsewhere in his body of work.<sup>171</sup> The usual practice of traditional aesthetics is to subordinate the parts to the whole, seeing beauty in surface coherence and the appearance of harmony. The dilettante, on the other hand, isolates the part from the whole, calling individual elements beautiful, when that effect depends on their place within the totality. The philistine does not participate in either of these degraded forms of aesthetic experience, because they are constitutively insensate to beauty, whether the deficiency is imagined as blindness or deafness. In my immanent analysis of Adorno's model of culture, art and aesthetics, I have deployed their constitutive counterconcept and immanent negation the figure of the philistine, to bind together the elements of this constellation.

### **Adorno's Blindnesses**

Adorno's philistine is developed dialectically to a far greater extent than admitted by either Beech and Roberts in "Spectres of the Aesthetic" or Bull in

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid., p.384 [*GS7*, p.449].

<sup>171</sup> See: Theodor Adorno, "The George-Hofmannsthal Correspondence, 1891-1906" [1942], in *Prisms*, p.206 [*GS10.1*, p.214]; Adorno, "Commitment", pp.89-90 [*GS11*, p.425]; Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, pp.10-11 [*GS7*, p.21].

“The Ecstasy of Philistinism”. His treatment of the concept is double-sided, in that he first deploys it polemically against opponents, in the process negatively delineating his own position. He then makes a theoretical countermove, affirming the perspective of the philistine, in order to disclose the corresponding moment of falsity in his aesthetic theory. The sequence of these elements of the argument varies, as does their proximity within a text or indeed across his oeuvre, but in my opinion they need to be considered together. Adorno insists on the truth content of the accusation of philistinism, while recognizing that this vocabulary is invested in educational privilege and class structure, seeking to register that tension with a self-critical turn. There is an inbuilt flexibility to the term, which he exploits rhetorically. He combines it with its antitheses in compound words and paradoxical formulations, and plays on its ambivalent temporality. He uses it to construct oppositions where both components are negated, and makes it the fulcrum on which dialectical reversals pivot. He mobilizes it to defend and undermine the same entities, and as a means of equating seemingly disparate ideas. This diversity of applications does not add up to conceptual incoherence however, and the figure of the philistine is given greater precision through their differentiation from the vulgarian, the connoisseur and the dilettante. Adorno suggests that they fulfil a specified role among this cast of characters, as the absolute negation of art and aesthetics, which remains immanent to that discourse. They therefore represent, at least on a theoretical level, the immanent negation of art and aesthetics, sublating the partial positions of an immanent non-negation and a non-immanent negation, earlier attributed respectively to Beech and Roberts and Bull. He does not fully realize that critical potential though, and in my view his aesthetic theory ought to be subjected to greater counterpressure from the philistine. His approach has its own blindnesses, aporias and exclusions, which this investigation allows us to broach. In the concluding section, I recapitulate his model of culture, art and aesthetics, and advance a preliminary critique of it guided by his dialectical conception of the philistine, before turning in the next chapter to the topic of Dada.

In terms of the field of culture, Adorno situates the dialectic of art and its other on one side of the division of pure culture and popular culture, imagining the interplay of the aesthetic and the philistine as internal to the higher domain, and accordingly as predominantly intra-bourgeois. He holds that advanced art is

the only type of cultural production with any critical potential, but that ultimately its promise of an alternative to the given order cannot be concretized by aesthetic means. He denies that oppositional capacity to popular and commercial art, which he says merely affirm the status quo while gratifying the masses, and though he acknowledges some lower forms may once have contained the potential for resistance he believes that it has been eliminated with their assimilation by the culture industry. The rise of this phenomenon reflects the development of a fully administered society, in which differences in the modes of consciousness of the classes are said to break down, along with the distinction between pure culture and popular culture. The consumers of the mass-produced entertainment of the culture industry are depicted unevenly as working-class vulgarians, on whom middle-class philistinism is imposed, but for the most part they are excluded from the struggle over the continued possibility of aesthetic truth. It is the cultivated philistine, representing the deterioration of the sphere of pure culture, who is charged with effecting the negation of advanced art. Their strategies of disinvestment, albeit partially derived from modes of attention associated with the culture industry, successfully neutralize the radical content of the artwork. However, Adorno's focus on this confrontation, confining the dialectic of art and its other to a particular zone of the field of culture, is open to question.

His controversial construct of the culture industry, and his disputed model of the fully administered society, need to be addressed in the first instance. He has been criticized for his alleged elitism and denial of agency to the masses, and as the author of a totalizing account ultimately tied to an economic paradigm of monopoly capitalism and the bureaucratic state which has now been historically superseded. His insights into mass culture, and its industrial apparatuses of production and distribution, have been taken up despite the suspicion of snobbery, and applied to new media technologies, typically accompanied by the caveat that his overall assessment is too pessimistic. This tendency to temper his supposed extremism, to introduce qualifications or balancing statements, fundamentally fails to reckon with the form of his argument, which is deemed

unimportant in positivistic fashion.<sup>172</sup> His writings on culture often operate in the polemic mode, in which absolute formulations and strategic hyperbole are to be expected. The purpose of these devices is not merely rhetorical, meant to convey his point with greater emphasis or graphicness, rather this unorthodox approach reflects his conviction that language cannot function as a neutral medium through which truth is communicated indifferently, as well as the foundational principle of a critical theory that understands itself as actively intervening in the society it describes.<sup>173</sup> His dialectical method could be said to require a mode of presentation which overshoots literal reality, and he confirms the legitimacy of techniques like exaggeration more than once.<sup>174</sup> It would be a mistake to recognize this but then attempt to translate his transcendent critique into a normative framework, as if his work concealed what he really thinks, which might be extracted from it, as soon as stylistic peculiarities are stripped away and overstatements rowed back.<sup>175</sup> This would miss how he proceeds by pushing interdependent opposites to an extreme, so that the moment of falsity in each is exposed by the other. We must avoid isolating elements of his dialectical constructions, treating them as independent claims to be endorsed or denied, or trying to find a compromise by charting a middle path. The way out of this interpretive double-bind, in which his claims cannot be accepted at face value, nor recast in a realistic register, is to criticize his analysis of the field of culture in its own terms.

We might ask whether he gives sufficient weight to the critical potential of popular culture, neglecting opportunities to exploit its status as the antithesis of pure culture, notwithstanding the increasing permeability of the boundary between these spheres. He recognizes that advanced art contains ideological

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<sup>172</sup> For a sketch of this institutionalized straw-manning of Adorno, see: Militant Esthetix, “Adornism: A Manifesto”, <http://www.militantesthetix.co.uk/adorno/twamani.htm> [accessed 24 January 2019].

<sup>173</sup> For a brief discussion of this aspect of Adorno’s implicit philosophy of language, in the context of a consideration of the similarity between language and music, see: Mark Abel, “Is Music a Language? Adorno, Voloshinov and the Language Character of Music”, *Historical Materialism* 26.4 (2018): pp.65-66, pp.73-76. For the programmatic statement of critical theory, see: Max Horkheimer, “Traditional and Critical Theory” [1937], trans. by Matthew J O’Connell, in *Critical Theory: Selected Essays* (New York, New York: Continuum, 2002), pp.188-243.

<sup>174</sup> Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p.49, pp.126-127.

<sup>175</sup> For a sophisticated example of this approach applied in a reading of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, see: Axel Honneth, *Disrespect: The Normative Foundations of Critical Theory* [2000], trans. by John Farrell and Siobhan Kattago (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), pp.49-61.

elements as well as an inverted utopianism, and calls for an interpretation that negates what is false in its object, as part of the process of crystallizing its truth content. His assessment of the productions of the culture industry is much less nuanced, and they are dismissed as wholly ideological, denied even the minimal oppositional capacity that is allowed for certain forms of popular culture prior to their integration. There is reason to challenge this position, if only because it appears incompatible with his claim that ideology, understood as socially necessary semblance, constitutes an indirect route to truth content. I believe that a more complex account of the relationship between truth and falsity in the productions of the culture industry is required, not in order to champion this domain as a source of resistance in its own right, but rather to bring out how its focus on function and pleasure exerts counterpressure on his aesthetic theory with its Kantian inheritance. That the cultivated philistine is shown successfully neutralizing the radical content of advanced art, by applying to it modes of attention modelled on the relation to consumer goods, falls short of a critique of the aesthetic comportment which he does consider appropriate to the formally autonomous artwork. This self-critical turn is what the dialectical approach he envisages demands, however in my view he fails to enact it properly, leaving advanced art insufficiently negatively mediated by the productions of the culture industry. To correct this error need not involve moving outside the bounds of pure culture, perhaps just giving greater credence to the critical force of popular and commercial material incorporated into that realm by avant-garde movements, admittedly a tendency now so entrenched that in contemporary art it scarcely seems tenable to separate the spheres analytically. In keeping with the model of an immanent negation of art and aesthetics, Adorno may locate the dialectic of art and its other within pure culture, but the latter ought to be conceived as immanently permeated by popular culture, while his commitment to aesthetic autonomy is negated by the appetitive aspect of the philistine, who consistent with his actual practice should not be distinguished too strictly from the vulgarian.

The next part of the chapter addressed the question of art, specifically his model of advanced art. The philistinism which he attributes to critics of advanced art indirectly discloses some of its distinctive qualities, that is, its alleged incomprehensibility and abstractness, recast respectively as a repudiation of



conventional surface coherence and the appearance of harmony, and as a critically inflected mimetic adaptation to the dominant principle of exchange. He further justifies them as a response to the objective demands of the social situation, deemed necessary at this stage of the intrinsic and extrinsic development of advanced art. He credits it for its successful negotiation of the dialectic of the aesthetic and the social, which is articulated negatively with reference to the philistinism of art with a cause and the philistinism of art for enjoyment. The philistinism of art with a cause is attacked for reducing the aesthetic to the social, whereas in his opinion the social import of the artwork inheres in its aesthetic autonomy. He argues that advanced art sets itself against what currently exists by rigorously pursuing its own internal logic, and that its qualitative uniqueness thereby challenges the interchangeability of all things under advanced capitalism. The philistinism of art for enjoyment is accused of excluding the social from the aesthetic, but he recognizes that aesthetic autonomy is itself a social fact, highlighting the complicity of the formally autonomous artwork with the fetish-character of the commodity form. His aesthetics both underlies and is informed by this conception of advanced art, which again necessitates a dialectical approach. There is in his sketch of an interpretation adequate to it a back-and-forth movement between a close reading which evinces an affinity for art, and moments when its purposelessness is questioned from a position of art-alienness, perspectives attributed respectively to the connoisseur and the philistine. His version of the latter figure marks out what he takes to be the limits to aesthetic truth under the historical conditions of the time, and it is on that negative basis that his model of advanced art is constructed.

This account of the dialectic of the aesthetic and the social is compelling, but it is not the only way to negotiate it. We might think instead of the integration of art and design promoted at the Bauhaus, or of the interventions into everyday life undertaken by the Surrealists. It is possible to envisage a politically partisan art with a propaganda message, of the sort he disqualifies as reductive and instrumentalized, which challenges the given order on a formal level as well, as with the satirical photomontages of John Heartfield, and the graphic design of El Lissitzky. His rejection of an art oriented towards pleasure can likewise be countered by pointing to the subversive and disruptive force

which some of these productions exhibit, including the performative self-portraits of Claude Cahun, and the pornographic fiction of Georges Bataille. This block on a version of advanced art which aims at radical change, and which accords a central role to enjoyment, perhaps partly explains his lack of appreciation for Bertolt Brecht. These counterexamples are all drawn from the modernist milieu with which he was chiefly concerned, yet none of them are admitted into his extremely narrow canon of advanced art, which is not just almost exclusively Western, but focused to a large extent on a particular phase of new music in Vienna. He concentrates for the most part on formally autonomous artworks, giving priority to their integral structuration, in keeping with his theory of art and aesthetics. It is not simply that his range of references ought to be expanded, rather that his model of aesthetic comportment should be brought into productive tension with the approaches he excludes from his definition of advanced art. In this thesis, I attempt such a critical encounter between Adorno and Dada.

Adorno attributes to the philistine an essential function in the apprehension of the enigmaticalness of art, but they nevertheless operate in a secondary capacity, acting as a check on the connoisseur, whose knowledgeable and sympathetic attitude towards the object is closer to his default position. I am not proposing that the components of a dialectical mediation must be equally weighted, simply noting that the philistine is clearly delimited and allotted a fixed place within his aesthetics. They are also left largely abstract, lacking concrete content. The philistine, in his account of their interplay with the connoisseur, is barely defined beyond the fact of their art-alienness, which is understood broadly as a demand for art to have a purpose, in opposition to the principle of aesthetic autonomy. There are hints as to what that purpose might be in the philistinism of art with a cause and the philistinism of art for enjoyment, with the former implying partisanship and the latter pleasure, corresponding to the two types of interest repudiated by Kant. I would argue that these aspects of the philistine need to be pushed further, overcoming the definite limits placed on this figure by actually admitting the counterclaims of the partisan and the voluptuous into Adorno's aesthetics. My point is not that he ought to affirm these alternatives as valid in themselves, only that more could be made of their oppositional capacity vis-à-vis advanced art. His version of the dialectic of art

and its other suggests a self-critical approach to aesthetics, cognizant of the fact that it is implicated in untruth, readily incorporating its own negation in the shape of the philistine. Their insensitivity to the aesthetic, the moment of art-alienness which he incorporates into his preferred form of interpretation, must be allowed to permeate it more thoroughly if he is to fully realize the critical potential of the philistine as the immanent negation of art and aesthetics. I want to suggest that he remains too invested in aesthetic autonomy, and can as a result appear insensitive to attempts to challenge this principle from within aesthetic discourse, for example the critique of the institutionality of art which is characteristic of the early twentieth-century avant-garde movements, according to Peter Bürger.<sup>176</sup> Adorno's philistine should be brought to bear negatively on his aesthetic theory, allowing greater scope to the countervailing force of the excluded modes in their specificity.

For my investigation into his aesthetics, I began with Adorno's notion of aesthetic experience, for him the core of the enigma with which the discipline must come to grips, noting that it is inherently resistant to discursive articulation of its aconceptual knowledge. This is not to say that it lacks any philosophical content, and he draws on Kant and Hegel in sketching its principal features, notwithstanding the acknowledged danger of generalization. From Kant, Adorno takes the stances of aesthetic distance and disinterested contemplation, which are at odds with an appetitive philistinism. From Hegel, Adorno adapts the positions of freedom towards the object and a countermovement to the subject, advocating surrender to the aesthetic law of form. These Kantian and Hegelian influences, combined despite the apparent opposition of detached contemplation and immersive engagement, correspond to the modes of attention deemed appropriate to advanced art, which are the inverse of the philistine practices of demanding something out of the artwork and subjective projection onto it. Adorno's version of aesthetic experience informs his theory of the artwork. He accords central importance to form, while stressing its dynamic relations with other elements of the artwork. This emphasis reflects his commitment to aesthetic autonomy, as exemplified by the formally autonomous artwork. His understanding of aesthetic experience also shapes his technique of immanent analysis. He argues that the

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<sup>176</sup> Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* [1974], trans. by Michael Shaw (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), pp.22-23.

critic must orient themselves both internally and externally to the object, moving within its inner-aesthetic nexus, while remaining alert to its extra-aesthetic significance. They have to mix sympathetic and critical approaches, faithfully adhering to the immanent logic of the artwork, yet negating its moment of falsity. The philistine represents the external and critical aspects of this model of interpretation, with their art-alienness puncturing the closed circle of an immanent analysis which becomes ideological when it is made absolute, according to Adorno. The dialectic of form and content and the dialectic of internal and external are localized variants of the dialectic of the aesthetic and the social, which is key to my reconstruction of his aesthetic theory. He incorporates them all into the dialectic of art and its other, setting up the philistine as the immanent negation of art and aesthetics, though it is questionable how far he follows through on this insight.

Before concluding on that point, I want to address some immediate objections to his aesthetics which might be raised in response to the summary presented here. He never seeks to justify his notion of aesthetic experience, it is simply assumed as fundamental to art and aesthetics, an indefinable given which the reader either recognizes or not. This might be seen as an aporia in his argument, but really it falls out of his framing of the task of aesthetics, identifying the enigma of aesthetic experience as the ultimate object of study for the discipline, a theoretical move which it is necessary to accept in order to enter into meaningful dialogue with him on the topic. However, I do not believe that this precludes a critique of aesthetic experience insofar as he does define it, in descriptions formulated with recourse to Kantian and Hegelian categories. Adorno's theory of the artwork also exposes him to the accusation of formalism, though my reading has given reason to dispel that suspicion. He is certainly alive to the risk of the focus on form deteriorating into empty play, and his contention that content mediates form as well as the reverse goes some way towards mitigating this perceived bias. It is nevertheless the case that form is given special status in his aesthetics, as the element of the artwork in which all the others inhere, and through which aesthetic meaning is articulated. Finally, I return to the issue of his alleged elitism, observing that his technique of immanent analysis relies on a certain capacity for sympathy with the artwork, and a special competence for following its internal logic, which align it more

closely with the connoisseur than with the philistine. The latter figure is said to be constitutively insensate to aesthetic experience, from which we might infer the existence of the opposite, an elite imbued with a particular receptivity to it. He acknowledges the unjust social basis of this aesthetic disposition, the so-called “pure gaze” ascribed to the bourgeoisie by Pierre Bourdieu, checking that elitism by incorporating a moment of art-alienness into his model of interpretation.<sup>177</sup> Based on my reading of his work, I am unconvinced that his self-critical turn goes far enough in problematizing the modes of attention on which he instinctively falls back.

Adorno’s blindness in this regard is evident in his notion of aesthetic experience, his theory of the artwork, and his technique of immanent analysis. These all lean most heavily on the first side of the dialectic of the aesthetic and the social, whether expressed as an emphasis on form or an internal orientation, with the perspective of the philistine only admitted intermittently, and always limited in scope. This imbalance is not an error in itself, as there is no requirement for quantitative equivalence in order to effect a truly reciprocal negation, but it is still my assessment that he fails to fully mediate the poles of the antithesis. Contrary to the criticism of it as an aporia, Adorno’s refusal to circumscribe aesthetic experience by defining it in advance is actually a strength of his argument. If anything, I consider his descriptions of aesthetic experience too prescriptive and restrictive, tending to exclude encounters with art which do not conform to his understanding of it. The category should be opened up even further, so that it can encompass a wider spectrum of aesthetic experience, responding to each instance in its specificity without predetermined criteria. Similarly, Adorno does not so much overestimate the importance of form, incidentally an accusation which he labels philistine, as define it too narrowly, itself a philistine trait. His conception of the formal complex in which meaning consists ought to be expanded, going beyond the integral structuration of the artwork to incorporate the institutional structures enframing it, treating these as part of the set of dynamic relations which constitutes its inner-aesthetic nexus. This is justified where avant-garde movements resist the principle of aesthetic autonomy on the level of form, critically reflecting on their own institutionality,

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<sup>177</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* [1979], trans. by Richard Nice (London: Routledge, 2010), p.3.

as then that dimension is demonstrably implicated in the multi-directional play of elements which he takes to be the legitimate purview of aesthetics. However, Adorno's variant of immanent analysis also needs to be amended, not just to accommodate the broader definitions of aesthetic experience and aesthetic form proposed here, but to ensure that the modes of attention of which it is in part a technical expression are critically interrogated. These modes of attention, which have already been presented couched in philosophical terms, are those of a connoisseur at home in the artistic milieu and practised in aesthetic reflection, not that far removed from the aesthetic comportment officially endorsed as appropriate to the realm of pure culture. What is required is their determinate negation, which can be enacted by a less abstract version of the philistine, unleashing the proscribed modes of attention of the partisan and the voluptuous, emblematically iconoclastic destruction and eating the artwork. Adorno's aesthetics, transformed in this way, would be a better realization of his model of the dialectic of art and its other.

In my immanent analysis of Adorno's model of culture, art and aesthetics, I have employed the figure of the philistine as an organizing principle, an apophatic route to knowledge, and ultimately a means of teasing out the blindneses, aporias and exclusions of his aesthetic theory. Beginning from a position of sympathy with his philosophy, I have accepted most of its central tenets, limiting myself to a critique rooted in its internal tensions. With the aid of his dialectical conception of the philistine, I have sought to reconfigure his aesthetic theory from within, thereby crystallizing its insight and negating its moment of falsity. This approach is broadly consistent with his own method, and basically means revising his model of culture, art and aesthetics in the light of his version of the dialectic of art and its other, once the latter has been completed theoretically and its implications worked through in practice. Adorno should allow the critical force of the philistine, who he himself construes as the immanent negation of art and aesthetics, to be brought to bear more fully on his preferred form of aesthetic comportment, giving this figure concrete realization in the modes of attention of the partisan and the voluptuous. Beech and Roberts' emphasis on these perspectives appears to be confirmed by a close reading of his aesthetic theory, which invokes them in its depiction of the consumers of the culture industry as instrumentalizing and appetitive, in its opposition between the

philistinism of art with a cause and the philistinism of art for enjoyment, and in its adherence to the Kantian prohibitions on the interest in the good and the interest in the agreeable. However, I would caution that the critical potential of the philistine is not exhausted by cultural contestation and bodily pleasure, and other non-sanctioned forms of engagement with art are also relevant to the task of correcting the blindnesses of his aesthetic theory, as will become clear in the following chapters. This is only a preliminary critique of Adorno's model of culture, art and aesthetics, which remains to be tested and further developed through a sustained encounter with an actual body of creative practice, that of Dada.

## Adorno and Dada

In the last chapter, Adorno's model of culture, art and aesthetics was critically reconfigured, through an immanent analysis organized around its definitional other or constitutive counterconcept, the figure of the philistine. In this chapter, I introduce a different form of symbolic negation, which like philistinism is opposed to art as such, while remaining internal to aesthetic discourse, namely the anti-art of Dada. Adorno does not dedicate much attention to this avant-garde movement, writing at a time of widespread indifference towards it after its dissolution in the 1920s, which continued until the neo-avant-garde revival of it on which he reflected in the 1950s and 1960s. During the intervening period, Dada was largely eclipsed by its successor Surrealism, and he engages more extensively with the latter in his essay "Looking Back on Surrealism" [1956], in which he does not mention Dada.<sup>178</sup> There are relatively few passages addressing the earlier movement, either directly or indirectly, anywhere in his body of work. This is the case compared to his contemporaries, some of whom broke with the consensus to recognize its significance, for example Walter Benjamin.<sup>179</sup> The references to Dada which do exist in Adorno's oeuvre are usually brief, often allusive or incidental, and distributed across a number of texts. It is therefore necessary to undertake a labour of reconstruction, in which disparate statements are brought into combination with one another, and implicit attitudes are drawn out more clearly. His overall assessment of the movement, insofar as it can be pieced together in this way, appears underdeveloped and occasionally mistaken in its assumptions. In what follows, I aim to correct his reading where it is flawed, and to amplify his moments of insight, arriving by this roundabout route at a better understanding of Dada. To supplement and dispute the assertions made by Adorno, I cite concrete instances of its activity, drawing on the full range of its creative practice, though with a

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<sup>178</sup> Theodor Adorno, "Looking Back on Surrealism" [1956], in *Notes to Literature, Volume 1*, pp.86-90.

<sup>179</sup> See: Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" [1936], in *Illuminations* [1968], ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zorn (London: Pimlico, 1999), pp.232-234, p.243.



particular focus on the field of music, reflecting his interests as a critic.<sup>180</sup> In advance of making this argument, I should engage with Dada's current scholarly reception, clarifying the context in which my own interpretation intervenes, and taking up preliminary positions on key issues.

### Perspectives on Dada

Mark Hutchinson was active on the fringes of the philistine controversy, for example writing the catalogue essay "Just Give Me The Truth: A Philistine's Guide to Public Art" [2007], for an exhibition by the Free Art Collective, the membership of which included Beech.<sup>181</sup> With his article "Dada Contra Art History" [2015], which incidentally quotes Beech and Roberts' "The Philistine and the Logic of Negation", Hutchinson makes a sharply critical intervention in the revisionist art history which according to him has in recent years successfully reoriented the academic study of Dada. He outlines how leading figures in the field have sought to broaden the understanding of this movement, in order to correct the previously hegemonic account of it, which they see as reductive in two main respects. First, Dada has been uniformly represented as an expression of nihilistic despair emerging in response to war and social crisis. Second, Dada has been retroactively limited to the status of a juvenile precursor to Surrealism. Hutchinson does not defend this imputed traditional position, any more than he does the new orthodoxy which is supposed to have supplanted it. He does though consider it too narrow a characterization of past scholarship on the subject, which neglects an important strand of interpretation focused on the institutionality of art, originating with Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde* [1974]. The revisionist art historians are said to redescribe the negativity of anti-art in positive terms, highlighting features such as innovation, interdisciplinarity and the multiplicity of artistic practices. This entails dismissing or minimizing the anti-artistic rhetoric which runs counter to these sentiments, so as to reassert a conventional emphasis on the centrality of art-making, which is in addition more compatible

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<sup>180</sup> In this chapter, I introduce a number of examples of Dadaist music discussed at greater length in my article: Paul Ingram, "Songs, Anti-Symphonies and Sodomist Music: Dadaist Music in Zurich, Berlin and Paris", *Dada/Surrealism* 21 (2017):

<https://ir.uiowa.edu/dadasur/vol21/iss1/10/> [accessed 28 January 2019].

<sup>181</sup> Hutchinson, "Just Give Me the Truth".

with contemporary preoccupations. By contrast, Hutchinson sees Dada neither as reactive and inchoate, nor as creative and diverse, but instead as engaged in a systematic negation of the aesthetic.<sup>182</sup>

Let us start with a brief summary of the traditional art-historical account of Dada, in part based on the one provided by Hutchinson. The dominant critical consensus prior to the revisionist turn invariably situates the movement within its immediate historical context, in relation to the mass slaughter and revolutionary upheavals inaugurated by WW1. The Dadaists' rejection of the status quo is allegedly prompted by these extreme circumstances, which disclose to them the insufficiency of civilization and especially of high culture. They are said to embrace irrationality, as a protest against the barbarism which appears to them to be the culmination of the Enlightenment. Shock, and the violation of established taste, are taken to be key components of this project. The destructive capacity of the movement is acknowledged, but it is usually represented, somewhat dismissively, as instinctive and anarchic. Bürger diverges markedly from this consensus with an analysis of Dada as the most radical section of the historical avant-garde, enacting the self-criticism of art as an institution, opposing aesthetic autonomy to overcome the separation of this sphere from that of everyday life.<sup>183</sup> This strand of interpretation may be set apart from the bulk of the criticism under consideration, in that it suggests a conscious strategy, rooted in a longer view of the development of art, with implications extending beyond the politics of personal rebellion. What both of these versions of the movement have in common is their foregrounding of negativity, whether that is imagined as random contrariness or targeted antagonism. This is borne out by the many Dadaist manifestos and other polemics attacking all existing artistic production, and indeed repudiating art as such. Hutchinson maintains that recent art historians, abandoning these themes and ignoring the art-institutional dimension, have lost sight of the fundamentally negative orientation of the movement, which he construes according to a model of thoroughgoing negation rather than glib nihilism.<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Mark Hutchinson, "Dada Contra Art History", *Dada/Surrealism* 20 (2015): <https://ir.uiowa.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1262&context=dadasur> [accessed 28 January 2019], pp.1-4, pp.14-15, p.18.

<sup>183</sup> Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, pp.22-23.

<sup>184</sup> Hutchinson, "Dada Contra Art History", pp.1-7.

“Dada Contra Art History” cites a number of examples of the revisionist approach, dealing at length with a programmatic statement of this tendency contained in *The Dada Seminars* [2005], a collection of essays based on a seminar series held in association with the major retrospective exhibition “Dada: Zurich, Berlin, Hannover, Paris, New York”. In her introduction to the volume, Leah Dickerman lists six imperatives that she says are broadly shared by the contributors, which depart from the traditional reception of Dada. First, Dada is to be understood primarily as an artistic endeavour, for which the creation of artworks is the central concern, rather than a preoccupation with the rhetoric of anti-art. Second, the Dadaists’ interest in and engagement with the artistic tradition preceding them should not be obscured by an overemphasis on their iconoclasm, according to Dickerman. Third, Dada needs to be decoupled from Surrealism, against the conventional practice of bracketing them together which is thought too linear and Francocentric. Fourth, Dickerman calls for an end to the reliance on monographs and biographies about the same few Dadaists, with the consequence that previously marginalized figures are brought to prominence, and extra attention is paid to group dynamics. Fifth, Dada’s different centres are to be considered in terms of their relations to one another, as well as to the distinct political situation obtaining in each of them. Sixth, Dickerman presents the movement as anticipating the development of modernity, into which it is said to have a privileged insight.<sup>185</sup> In his article, Hutchinson takes issue with all six of these imperatives, though his opposition to them is largely concentrated on the first, which he believes underpins the rest.<sup>186</sup> His critical stance is generally welcome, but he might be accused of subordinating everything else to the problematic of art and anti-art, risking jettisoning much that is potentially useful in the revisionist approach, evident even in the schematic form it is given here.

Beginning with the first imperative, Hutchinson rightly resists the centrality of art-making insisted on in the introduction to *The Dada Seminars*. Dickerman’s claim that the movement is fundamentally about continuing to create art under different historical conditions is a misrepresentation, ignoring precisely what distinguishes it from other sections of the historical avant-

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<sup>185</sup> Leah Dickerman, “Introduction”, in *The Dada Seminars*, ed. by Leah Dickerman (Washington DC: National Gallery of Art, 2005), pp.3-5.

<sup>186</sup> Hutchinson, “Dada Contra Art History”, p.7.

garde.<sup>187</sup> This is its denunciation of art as such, going beyond the attacks on artistic tradition by immediate precursors like the Futurists. The Dadaists are not seeking to adapt or to extend art but to destroy it, effecting the annihilation of creativity rather than liberating it from the constraints of aesthetic convention. Hutchinson criticizes the tendency to promote the artworks actually produced by members of the movement, when this is done at the expense of the commitment to anti-art expressed in their manifestos, in addition seeking to correct the revisionist bias in favour of individual activity over collective action. Certainly, Dada's critical force consists in part in its displacement of the category of the artwork, by means of its public pronouncements, manipulation of the press, self-promotional stunts, and various other manifestations. He perhaps oversteps when he suggests that the movement is in essence its slogans, thereby participating in a conflict between its words and its objects, despite warning against setting up such a false dichotomy in "Dada Contra Art History".<sup>188</sup> Dickerman's call for greater attention to be paid to productions that can be readily recognized as artworks would not necessarily be problematic, provided they were still read in conjunction with less conventional interventions, and considered in relation to the anti-artistic orientation which serves as a unifying principle for Dada. The literature, visual art and other traditional media that she has in mind should be included alongside the full range of artistic and non-artistic practices employed by the movement, and neither entirely reduced to the cause of anti-art, nor detached from that context and analysed in isolation.

Turning to the second and sixth imperatives, Dada is here incorporated into a narrative of art history, rooted in what went before, and anticipating what came afterwards. This is contrary to how it often presents itself, which is as an absolute end point, the termination of the foregoing artistic tradition, and the forestalling of future artistic development. Dickerman stresses the Dadaists' deep knowledge of and investment in their artistic heritage, in order to counteract the impression of an immediate and superficial iconoclasm.<sup>189</sup> Hutchinson does not dispute their level of expertise and interest, leaving open the possibility that a close engagement with art history informs the attack on the status quo. They both

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<sup>187</sup> Dickerman, "Introduction", p.3.

<sup>188</sup> Hutchinson, "Dada Contra Art History", pp.7-8, p.10.

<sup>189</sup> Dickerman, "Introduction", p.3.

maintain that Dada should be credited with a more sophisticated understanding of its art-historical position, but only he retains the negativity which characterizes its relationship to artistic tradition. Dickerman also projects forwards, connecting the movement to the subsequent evolution of modern and contemporary culture, of which it is said to be a far-sighted pioneer.<sup>190</sup> Hutchinson identifies this manoeuvre as another way to shore up the centrality of art-making, by fixing Dada in its place within art history, and redescribing it as generative of new artistic practices.<sup>191</sup> They actually share a narrow art-historical perspective, neglecting the insights of media studies, visual culture and critical and theoretical practice into a movement which purposely transgresses disciplinary boundaries. Dada's self-mythologization as a wholly singular event in art history ought to be rejected, but it is important in doing so not to transform it illegitimately into a positive force which affirms the continuity of the canon. Instead, Bürger's reading of the movement might suggest that its members are cognizant of this broader context, through their recognition of and resistance to the institutionality of art, and in that light the continuing prevalence of their themes and techniques can perhaps be better understood in terms of recuperation rather than influence.

The fourth and fifth imperatives may also be considered together, as they bear on the same question of whether to conceptualize the movement as a closely-knit group with a shared identity, or as a loose network of independent artists. Hutchinson favours maintaining a strong sense of what unites them under the banner of Dada, while Dickerman prefers to emphasize the wide variations in beliefs and practices that existed between and indeed within individuals. She contends that expanding the limited range of sources about the movement beyond the usual monographs and biographies is beneficial because it promotes participants who have been neglected in previous scholarship, and also helps to map the boundaries and interrelations of zones of activity. Her proposal is for a synchronic account which, instead of being organized diachronically around the careers of key Dadaists, would explore the web of connections between artworks, taking into account the political conditions in different locations.<sup>192</sup> Hutchinson

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<sup>190</sup> Ibid., pp.4-5.

<sup>191</sup> Hutchinson, "Dada Contra Art History", pp.13-14.

<sup>192</sup> Dickerman, "Introduction", p.1, p.4.

sees in these imperatives a surreptitious attempt to undermine the anti-artistic project, by confirming that the principal business of the movement was the production of art objects.<sup>193</sup> There is though no compelling reason why greater visibility for marginalized figures, as well as detailed knowledge of group dynamics, should be incompatible with an interpretation giving sufficient weight to anti-art. The expansion of the field is undoubtedly valuable, insofar as it deepens and diversifies our understanding of Dada, on the condition that the commonalities which make for a coherent object of study are kept in mind.

Finally, Dada and Surrealism, and the need to treat them separately, are the subject of the third imperative proposed by Dickerman, linked to the second and sixth imperatives by Hutchinson. On the face of it, Dickerman's demand for a clear dividing line between Dada and Surrealism, intended to sharpen our sense of the former, remains pertinent given how often it is still coupled with the latter, as for example with the title of the journal *Dada/Surrealism*, which published Hutchinson's "Dada Contra Art History". He acknowledges that the ostensible purpose of such a divorce is to allow space to consider Dada's connections with other avant-garde tendencies, but he argues that the actual effect of this manoeuvre is to leap over closer comparisons to highlight affinities with later manifestations of modernity and postmodernity, to which he objects on the grounds that it is illegitimate to assimilate anti-art to a narrative of art history that is basically positive in its orientation. He claims that Dickerman ignores all examples of criticism where Dada is not treated as an immature version of Surrealism, again alluding to the body of scholarship descended from Bürger.<sup>194</sup> He also advances an alternative model of the relationship between the two movements, drawing on an essay on revolution by Slavoj Žižek. Žižek describes social revolution as comprising two phases, the first of which is the negative destruction of existing power structures, and the second of which is the positive transformation of the forms of everyday life. Hutchinson applies this schema to aesthetic revolution, taking as an analogue for the first phase the attack on art perpetrated by the Dadaists, and as the equivalent of the second phase the radical reconstruction of art on a new basis pursued by the Surrealists.<sup>195</sup> He thereby

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<sup>193</sup> Hutchinson, "Dada Contra Art History", pp.10-11.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., pp13-15.

<sup>195</sup> Hutchinson, "Dada Contra Art History", pp.16-17.

posits a linear progression from one movement to the other, and despite his protestations to the contrary repeats the critical commonplace of presenting Dada as negative and Surrealism as positive.

In her introduction to *The Dada Seminars*, Dickerman puts forward a critique of traditional art history and its characterization of Dada which is basically correct. She identifies how the movement has been misrepresented as a spontaneous howl of rage, supposedly protesting against the status quo through recourse to nonsense and shock tactics. This description certainly applies to a lot of the earlier literature about Dada, though it is fair to say that it largely overlooks Bürger's reflections with regard to the institutionality of art. Some of the prescriptions she makes for the study of the movement are valid as well, so long as they are not pressed into service on behalf of a project of minimizing the importance of anti-art. There is no inherent contradiction between maintaining the focus on this aspect of Dada and her stated aims of better contextualizing it within art history, promoting marginalized figures, giving greater consideration to group dynamics, mapping the relationships between zones of activity, and unharnessing the movement from Surrealism. However, Dickerman's insistence on the centrality of art-making does bleed into the other imperatives to a certain extent, as she abandons the deep-seated and thoroughgoing negativity that is central to the movement, in order to counteract false perceptions of it as subjectively motivated and undirected in its nihilism.

By contrast, "Dada Contra Art History" retains that negativity, while still repudiating the main problems with the traditional art-historical account of Dada. Hutchinson agrees with Dickerman about many of the failings of this body of scholarship, but unlike her he acknowledges the alternative associated with Bürger. He refutes the revisionists primarily for their turn away from anti-art, and for their characterization of the movement as above all else an artistic phenomenon. As he points out, Dada is in fact motivated by a critical consciousness of the institutionality of art, to which it responds by adopting an anti-artistic approach, extending even to its own productions. Its efforts to destroy art, far from being instinctive and anarchic, are actually relatively systematic, according to Hutchinson. He implicitly accepts Dickerman's recommendation that the movement be understood in terms of its place within art history, on the condition that its iconoclastic attitude is not obscured in the

process. He is right to give this emphasis to anti-art, and to recognize how the Dadaists' artistic expertise feeds into their attempted destruction of art. He is less reliable on the issue of whether it would be preferable to have a synchronic analysis of group dynamics and individual artworks, as opposed to a diachronic analysis based on the careers of core participants. His article does not adequately demonstrate why the promotion of marginalized figures, which responds to real errors and omissions in the existing scholarship, necessarily advances an agenda of aestheticizing Dada. As set out above, I do not accept his proposed conceptualization of the relationship between Dada and Surrealism either. Nevertheless, "Dada Contra Art History" is valuable for refocusing attention on the problematic of art and anti-art.

My analysis of Dada builds on this assessment of the relative merits of the respective stances of Dickerman and Hutchinson. Like the former, I connect my approach to the strand of interpretation focused on the institutionality of art. With regard to the first imperative, I consider the anti-artistic orientation to be a defining feature of the movement, and believe that sidelining it as many recent writers have done has a depoliticizing effect. However, I recognize that the level of commitment to anti-art within the movement is variable, and furthermore that it is expressed in myriad ways. It would obviously be illegitimate to exclude less explicitly anti-artistic tendencies, falsifying the object of study for the sake of conceptual clarity. There is scope to broaden our perspective to accommodate such countercurrents, without sacrificing the critical force of anti-art. This does not necessitate resolving the apparent conflict between anti-artistic rhetoric and continued artistic production by choosing one side over the other, because the movement actively embraces the paradox of the destruction of art by artistic means. In relation to the second and sixth imperatives, I am in favour of reading Dada as maintaining its negativity while consciously taking up a position within art history, imagining its iconoclasm as informed by a deep engagement with artistic tradition. As for the fourth and fifth imperatives, I adopt a broad and inclusive approach regarding who and what qualifies as Dadaist, and try to be attentive to differences in group dynamics and political context across a range of locations. In addition, I think that the third imperative is still valid, and that in a wide-ranging and properly international account of the movement much less prominence would be given to Surrealism. Finally, I intend to go beyond the



narrow confines of art history, drawing on the insights of other disciplines, for example literary criticism and musicology. These preliminary positions on key issues within the field guide my analysis of Dada, which will now be elaborated in dialogue with Adorno.

### **Alienating Infantilism**

#### **SERIOUS MUSIC**

In his early essay “On the Social Situation of Music” [1932], Adorno presents a rough typology of contemporary music, focusing on those sections of it which in his estimation qualify as advanced art, according to the following criterion: “Musical production which in the narrower sense does not subordinate itself unconditionally to the law of the market – that is, “serious” music with the exception of the obviously quantitatively dominant music, which likewise serves the market in disguise – is that music that expresses alienation.”<sup>196</sup> The first type of music, which is not named here but may for convenience be called new music, is identified with Schoenberg. His works and those of his school are described as being ignorant of or else indifferent to their social situation, but this does not mean that they lack social import. The negotiation of a problematic immanent to the musical material, which nevertheless has been formed historically and exists in relation to society, necessarily bears on the extra-aesthetic sphere. Adorno endorses new music in terms of shock: “[T]he only music which offers a serious shock to the listener[.]”<sup>197</sup> The second type of music, which he labels objectivist music, is personified by Igor Stravinsky. These composers are said to be responding to a shared social situation, though each of them adopts a different approach to it. The objectivist work starts from an awareness of its own alienation, which it attempts to master by inhabiting past forms believed to be immune to that state, as with the use of folklore, and the programme of neoclassicism. Adorno is unambiguous that this strategy is mistaken: “[S]uch forms cannot be reconstituted within a completely changed society and through

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<sup>196</sup> Theodor Adorno, “On the Social Situation of Music” [1932], trans. by Wes Blomster, rev. by Richard Leppert, in *Essays on Music*, pp.395-396.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, p.396.

completely changed musical material.”<sup>198</sup> In his view, Schoenberg and Stravinsky embody the two major tendencies in serious music at that time, and the opposition between them also structures his later book *Philosophy of New Music*.

The third type of music is dubbed surrealistic music, by analogy with the predominantly literary and artistic movement Surrealism: “Extensive objective correspondences between this third type and French surrealism justify speaking in this case of surrealistic music.”<sup>199</sup> The preeminent practitioner of this type of music is not usually considered a Surrealist: Kurt Weill, specifically for his collaborations with Brecht *The Threepenny Opera* [1928] and *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* [1930]. Adorno argues that the surrealistic work begins from the same consciousness of alienation as objectivist music, and indeed that it was originally developed out of compositions such as Stravinsky’s *The Soldier’s Tale* [1918].<sup>200</sup> These three compositions all incorporate elements of popular music, including ragtime, tango and jazz. “On the Social Situation of Music” pinpoints the moment at which surrealistic music diverges from objectivist music:

Hand in hand with objectivism, this composer proceeds from the cognition of alienation. At the same time, he is socially more alert than the objectivist and recognizes the solutions offered by his colleague as illusion. He denies himself the positive solution and contents himself with permitting social flaws to manifest themselves by means of a flawed invoice which defines itself as illusory with no attempt at camouflage through attempts at an aesthetic totality. In his effort, he employs the formal language belonging in part to the bourgeois musical culture of the nineteenth century, in part to present-day consumer music. These means are used to reveal the flaws which he detects.<sup>201</sup>

Adorno would later adopt a less favourable view of Weill, but he praises him in “On the Social Situation of Music”: “Weill’s music is today the only music of

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<sup>198</sup> Ibid., p.396.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., p.396.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., pp.396-397.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., p.396.

genuine social-polemic impact, which it will remain so long as it resides at the height of its negativity[.]”<sup>202</sup> This critical force is channelled through the appropriation of the pre-formed structures of the classical tradition and mass-produced entertainment, which are broken up and recombined according to the organizational principle of montage, also associated with *The Soldier’s Tale*. The implication is that surrealistic music is generally superior to objectivist music in its thoroughgoing negativity, while falling short of the serious shock offered to the listener by new music. In this way, Brecht and Weill are interposed between Schoenberg and Stravinsky.

Adorno also lists a fourth type of music, which comprises use music and communal music, associated respectively with Paul Hindemith and Hans Eisler, both of whom also collaborated with Brecht. What unites these composers is that they seek to resolve the problem of the alienation of art non-artistically, rather than on the level of aesthetic form: “The fourth type involves music which attempts to break through alienation from within itself, even at the expense of its immanent form.”<sup>203</sup> This involves giving art a positive social function, such as pedagogical instruction for amateur musicians, or the forging of solidarity in workers’ choirs. There is a resemblance to surrealistic music, to the extent that both oppose aesthetic autonomy: “[T]his [surrealistic music...] approaches man so directly that he will no longer even consider the possibility of the autonomous work of art.”<sup>204</sup> However, Adorno quickly dismisses the vast majority of use music as being indistinguishable from the productions of the culture industry.<sup>205</sup> He asserts that even in its elevated mode as communal music it remains inferior to surrealistic music, speaking approvingly of the latter: “[I]t is the living negation of the possibility of a positive communal music, which collapses in the laughter of devilish vulgar [*Vulgär*] music as which true use music is exposed.”<sup>206</sup> The place of use music/communal music at the bottom of his hierarchy of the different types of music is clear, and hardly surprising given the importance he attaches to aesthetic form and aesthetic autonomy. Following the lead of “On the Social Situation of Music”, I intend largely to pass over it here,

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<sup>202</sup> Ibid., p.409.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid., p.397.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid., p.409.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., p.397.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid., p.409 [*GS18*, p.749].

instead taking as my framework the tripartite schema of new music, objectivist music and surrealist music, and their respective representatives Schoenberg, Stravinsky and Brecht and Weill, who provide a way in to the discussion of Dada.

### SCHOENBERG

Another early essay by Adorno, “Mahler Today” [1930] contains a parenthetical remark about the Dadaist, in close proximity to a digression on Schoenberg: “The musician [Gustav Mahler] who was once ridiculed for using car horns and sirens, like an impudent dadaist, is no longer objective enough for the most gray-bearded conservatory types, and every better music history seminar considers itself to be more modern than he as it recites its concepts of play of movement and process music, of pre-classical and neo-classical polyphony.”<sup>207</sup> Adorno does not himself dismiss the Dadaist as impudent, but instead attributes that opinion to conservative critics of Mahler. The main point is that the work of this composer, once rejected as extreme, is now considered outmoded: “[U]nmodern before it was properly modern[.]”<sup>208</sup> This is equivalent to the alleged treatment of Schoenberg: “[C]onsigned to the future as a lonely prophet until it was concluded that he had been surpassed as a lonely *artiste*[.]”<sup>209</sup> Adorno describes this position as “purposely ideological” in the case of Mahler, and as a “reactionary trick” in the case of Schoenberg.<sup>210</sup> Derived from Futurism, the Dadaist’s experiments with bruitism were indeed a prominent feature of the first performances staged by the movement, for example Hugo Ball’s *Nativity Play (Bruitist)* [1916] in Zurich, and Jefim Golyscheff’s *Anti-Symphony: Musical Circular Guillotine* [1919] in Berlin.<sup>211</sup> The use of noise is subject to the opprobrium of official culture, and by virtue of that reaction perhaps it might be placed alongside the similarly denigrated innovations of Mahler and Schoenberg. However, “Mahler Today” tacitly endorses a dismissive

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<sup>207</sup> Theodor Adorno, “Mahler Today” [1930], trans. by Susan H Gillespie, in *Essays on Music*, p.603.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*, p.603.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*, p.603.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.603-604.

<sup>211</sup> Ingram, “Songs, Anti-Symphonies and Sodomist Music”, p.4, pp.10-12.

verdict on Dada, which occupies a subordinate position relative to new music in the alternative canon proposed by Adorno.

Adorno's awareness of Dadaist music appears to have been limited, probably not going much beyond the popular conception of purveyors of noise that is repeated in "Mahler Today". This is to be expected, as historically the musical dimension of the movement has been neglected, considered of secondary importance compared to its poetry and visual art.<sup>212</sup> As it happens, Schoenberg's early experiments with free atonality were presented at Dadaist soirées in Zurich by Suzanne Perrottet: "Previously, in Germany, I had become acquainted with Arnold Schönberg's music, which, however, was little known in Switzerland. I was so enthusiastic about this new dissonant music that I talked the Dadaists into performing it."<sup>213</sup> It reportedly met with a muted response, and there appears to have been no serious or sustained engagement from the Dadaists in Zurich.<sup>214</sup> In Dresden and Berlin, Dada briefly had the participation of composers who were already, or would become subsequently, identified with new music to a greater or lesser extent: Erwin Schulhoff, Hanz Heinz Stuckenschmidt and Stefan Wolpe. In Paris, Schoenberg was even less prominent as a reference point for Dada, the musical output of which is better represented by the iconoclasm of Francis Picabia's "sodomist music" and Erik Satie's "furniture music", as well as their post-Dadaist collaboration on the sustained exercise in provocation *Relâche: Instantaneist Ballet in Two Acts, a Cinematic Intermission, and a Dog's Tail* [1924]. Admittedly, Dadaist composers did incorporate dissonant elements, from the rhythmic but erratic dances of Hans Heusser in Zurich, to the jarring combinations of notes selected by chance by Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes in Paris.<sup>215</sup> For Adorno, Schoenberg's dissonance presumably functions in a different way, being more deeply rooted in the immanent development of the musical material. By contrast, Dadaist music is characterized by improvised

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<sup>212</sup> This has begun to change in recent years. For the first book-length account of Dadaist music, see: Peter Dayan, *The Music of Dada: A Lesson in Intermediality for Our Times* (New York, New York: Routledge, 2019).

<sup>213</sup> Suzanne Perrottet, cited and discussed in Jeanpaul Goergen, "The Big Drum: Boom Boom Boom Boom: The Music of Zurich Dada", trans. by Barbara Allen, in *Crisis and the Arts: The History of Dada, Volume 2 – Dada Zurich: A Clown's Game from Nothing*, ed. by Brigitte Pichon and Karl Riha, gen. ed. Stephen C Foster (New York, New York: GK Hall & Co., 1996), p.162.

<sup>214</sup> Goergen, "The Big Drum", pp.162-163.

<sup>215</sup> Ingram, "Songs, Anti-Symphonies and Sodomist Music", pp.7-10, pp.12-14, pp.16-17, pp.21-23.

noise and aleatory procedures, which are anathema to the rigorously worked through compositional logic of new music, most pronounced during the phase of twelve-tone technique. In truth, Schoenberg's reputation for generating controversy was probably the main basis of any attraction he may have had for the Dadaists.

When he refers to car horns and sirens in "Mahler Today", Adorno is most likely thinking of the extra-musical sounds inserted by Jean Cocteau into Satie's score for the ballet *Parade* [1917], the premiere of which caused a scandal within the high-culture milieu of pre-Dadaist Paris.<sup>216</sup> In my view, Adorno's implicit judgement of bruitism is that it is a gimmick, the effect of which does not come close to the serious shock offered to the listener by new music, in terms of how deep-seated or far-reaching it is. Certainly, Dada made use of shock effects in its wider practice, whether that was its provocative slogans and antagonistic rhetoric, the radical formatting and typography of its little magazines, or its perpetuation of stunts, hoaxes and other subversive interventions into the public sphere, with extreme examples including the collage made of firecrackers on the cover of third issue of *MAVO* in Tokyo, and the "ready to wear" art incorporating items such as a battery-operated tail-light and a canary in a cage worn by Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven on the streets of New York.<sup>217</sup> This tendency is particularly apparent in the spectacular performances, which famously climaxed in Paris in 1920. The First Friday of *Littérature* sought to entrap an inappropriate audience by falsely announcing a lecture on the exchange rate crisis, then further provoked them with the presentation of a crude drawing in chalk on a blackboard which was immediately rubbed out, and a reading of a recent speech by a far-right parliamentarian accompanied by the ringing of bells.<sup>218</sup> The Dada Manifestation went further than its predecessor in spreading misinformation in the press that Charlie Chaplin would be in

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<sup>216</sup> Steven Moore Whiting, *Satie the Bohemian: From Cabaret to Concert Hall* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p.481.

<sup>217</sup> Toshiharu Omuka, "Tada=Dada (Devotedly Dada) for the Stage: The Japanese Dada Movement 1920-1925", in *Crisis and the Arts: The History of Dada, Volume 4 – The Eastern Dada Orbit: Russia, Georgia, Ukraine, Central Europe and Japan*, ed. by Gerald Janeczek, gen. ed. Stephen C Foster (New York, New York: GK Hall & Co., 1998), p.268; Linda Lappin, "Dada Queen in the Bad Boys' Club: Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven", *Southwest Review* 89.2/3 (2004): pp.308-310.

<sup>218</sup> Michel Sanouillet, *Dada in Paris* [1965], rev. by Anne Sanouillet, trans. by Sharmila Ganguly (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2009), pp.102-105.

attendance, resulting in a large crowd which was baited with antagonistic manifestos until the proceedings descended into open confrontation.<sup>219</sup> The Dada Festival was likewise promoted with the empty promise that the participants would have their heads shaved on stage, and by various means such a febrile atmosphere was created that the entire event was disrupted by booing, heckling and the hurling of projectiles.<sup>220</sup> There is a suggestion that audience members must have come prepared with rotten food to throw, and undoubtedly the expectation of a ruckus had quickly become part of Dada's appeal. This does not necessarily indicate how easily such tactics are exhausted, confirming their alleged superficiality. It might even be understood conversely, as the success of their challenge to the conventional separation between performers and spectators. That dynamic is in any case a central part of their project, and the role played by shock is undoubtedly more complex than allowed for by the ventriloquized characterization of it as mere impudence.

#### STRAVINSKY

There is another tangential reference to the Dadaist in *Philosophy of New Music*, where this figure is connected to Stravinsky: "Musical infantilism [*Infantilismus*] belongs to a movement that everywhere devised schizophrenic models as mimetic defence against combat psychosis: Around 1918, Stravinsky was attacked as a dadaist, and *The Soldier's Tale* as well as *Renard* shattered all unity of the person in order to *épater les bourgeois* [shock the bourgeoisie]."<sup>221</sup> As in "Mahler Today", the Dadaist functions as a negative exemplar of advanced art, now from the perspective of conservative critics of Stravinsky. Like *The Soldier's Tale*, *Renard the Fox* [1916] is contemporaneous with Dada, and it also engages with popular culture, mining Russian folk themes and mimicking the circus form. The movement, it is suggested, shares the objective imputed to these works of shocking the bourgeoisie, by enacting the destruction of the unified subject. This involves a critical mimesis of the psychological condition of shell shock, the structure of which is imitated on a formal level, in an adaptation to it

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<sup>219</sup> Ibid., pp.118-121.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid., pp.125-128.

<sup>221</sup> Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, p.126 [GS12, p.155].

which is supposed to defend against it. In a footnote to this passage, Adorno highlights the potential for an approach reliant on shock effects to become conformist: “[T]he composer who sets out to *épater les bourgeois* is always preoccupied with considerations of effect, even the effect of alienation[.] [...] This is why collusion between the intention to *épater* and the status quo is ultimately so much easier.”<sup>222</sup> The theme of recuperation figures in many of his discussions of Dada, but here it is applied primarily to Stravinsky. In *Philosophy of New Music*, *The Soldier’s Tale* and *Renard the Fox* are identified as key works of musical infantilism, following on from the use of folklore in his previous productions, and preceding the turn to neoclassicism.<sup>223</sup> Dada’s supposed affinity with the alienating infantilism of this phase of objectivist music is not explored further by Adorno.

The Dadaists made numerous attempts to associate themselves with this famous composer, no doubt in part motivated by a desire to share in the artistic legitimacy accorded to him, as a leading avant-garde figure of the time.<sup>224</sup> As with Schoenberg, Stravinsky was most likely attractive to members of the movement because of his reputation for scandal, arising principally from the legendary riot at the Paris premiere of *The Rite of Spring* [1913]. In a fictionalized report on the First Dada World Congress in Geneva in 1919, Walter Serner claims there was a similarly violent reaction to a performance of Stravinsky’s *The Song of the Nightingale* [1917]: “When Serner jumped on a chair and exclaimed “Vive Stravinsky! Vive Dada!”, an uproar broke out which even the attendants could not get under control. The evening ended in street fights which Serner and Stravinsky escaped only by making a hasty exit by car.”<sup>225</sup> By coincidence, Adorno uses the same form of words as an ironic exclamation (“Vive Stravinsky! Vive Dada!”), in an early review of his that is critical of Stravinsky, and in particular *The Soldier’s Tale*.<sup>226</sup> In this piece and others from the same period, Stravinsky incorporates elements of popular music, a preference which he has in common with the Dadaists. In Zurich, Emmy

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<sup>222</sup> Ibid., p.188.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid., p.121.

<sup>224</sup> Ingram, “Songs, Anti-Symphonies and Sodomist Music”, pp.20-21.

<sup>225</sup> Walter Serner, cited and discussed in Goergen, “The Big Drum”, p.162.

<sup>226</sup> Theodor Adorno, cited and discussed in Stefan Müller-Doohm, *Adorno: A Biography* [2003], trans. by Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: Polity, 2005), p.46.



Hennings performed folk songs and cabaret chansons.<sup>227</sup> In Berlin, George Grosz tap-danced to ragtime and jazz records.<sup>228</sup> In Paris, Georges Auric and Darius Milhaud, members of the group Les Six who were loosely affiliated with the movement, participated in the wider avant-garde trend for jazz-influenced compositions.<sup>229</sup> The Dutch Dada Tour of 1923 featured piano recitals by Petronella van Moorsel, whose repertoire included “Ragtime” from *The Soldier’s Tale*.<sup>230</sup> In purely quantitative terms, Dada’s musical output was dominated by songs and jazz, but its populism was often more nuanced than a straightforward affirmation of these forms. Credited by Adorno with avoiding the pitfalls of folklorism and neoclassicism during the transitional phase of objectivist music, Stravinsky is at that stage said to attempt neither to recover an idealized lost authenticity, nor to reconstitute an illusory aesthetic totality, an uncompromisingly negative attitude which arguably brings him closer to the Dadaists.

In its wider practice, Dada embraced minor arts like puppetry and embroidery, as well as popular media like the press and advertising. In Zurich, Sophie Taeuber imported the low form of the marionette theatre into avant-garde art with her quasi-primitivist and quasi-Cubist puppets, while her embroideries collapsed the opposition of art and craft by placing on an equal footing geometric abstraction in this medium and in her contemporaneous paintings.<sup>231</sup> In Berlin, Johannes Baader in particular succeeded in manipulating the press, and the group established a mock advertising agency, moving between the rarefied domain of high culture and the more prosaic realms of journalism and publicity.<sup>232</sup> Also in Berlin, Hannah Höch drew on popular and commercial material for her collages and photomontages, radically recontextualizing the mass-produced imagery of fashion magazines and illustrated sports coverage in monstrous composite

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<sup>227</sup> For an account of Hennings’ contributions as a singer and performer, see: Ruth Hemus, *Dada’s Women* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2009), pp.24-34.

<sup>228</sup> Hanne Bergius, *Crisis and the Arts: The History of Dada, Volume 5 – “Dada Triumphs!”: Dada Berlin, 1917-1923: Artistry of Polarities: Montages – Metamechanics – Manifestations* [2000], trans. by Brigitte Pichon, gen. ed. Stephen C Foster (New York, New York: GK Hall & Co., 2003), p.56.

<sup>229</sup> Ingram, “Songs, Anti-Symphonies and Sodomist Music”, p.22.

<sup>230</sup> Hubert F van den Berg, *Crisis and the Arts: The History of Dada, Volume 7 – The Import of Nothing: How Dada Came, Saw, and Vanished in the Low Countries (1915-1929)*, gen. ed. Stephen C Foster (New York, New York: GK Hall & Co., 2002), p.155.

<sup>231</sup> For an overview of Taeuber’s work with puppets, embroideries and paintings, see: Hemus, *Dada’s Women*, pp.57-63, pp.72-84.

<sup>232</sup> Bergius, *Crisis and the Arts, Volume 5*, pp.49-51, p.59, pp.131-135.

figures, in the process subverting the idealized standards of beauty and athleticism propagated by these sources.<sup>233</sup> In New York, Freytag-Loringhoven's "Subjoyride" [1922] is comprised of appropriated advertising slogans, arranged in a poetic construction in which they are imbued with new meanings through juxtaposition and enjambment, while the persuasive function and commercial intent of the originals are distorted.<sup>234</sup> These examples all carry some radical charge on account of their transgression of the disciplinary boundaries and internal hierarchies of the aesthetic sphere, but it is important to note that in most cases the culture industry is also treated critically, its productions subjected to the violence and deformations of an avant-gardist sensibility. This is not a one-sided relationship in which popular culture is mobilized to undermine pure culture, rather these fields are pitted against each other in a mutually transformative confrontation. Adorno recognizes this reciprocity, but fails to fully integrate it into his reading of the attempt to *épater les bourgeois* in *Philosophy of New Music*.

#### BRECHT AND WEILL

In the later essay "Commitment", Dada is introduced as an aside to an analysis of Brecht: "[T]he process of aesthetic reduction he [Brecht] undertakes for the sake of political truth works against political truth. That truth requires countless mediations, which Brecht disdains. What has artistic legitimacy as an alienating infantilism [*Infantilismus*] – Brecht's first plays kept company with Dada – becomes infantility [*Infantilität*] when it claims theoretical and social validity."<sup>235</sup> By association with the early Brecht, Dada is granted a degree of artistic legitimacy, on account of what is described as an alienating infantilism, echoing the language of *Philosophy of New Music*. His first plays, said to be closer to the spirit of the movement, are compared favourably with the output of his mature period, in which there is a tendency towards reductive didacticism.

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<sup>233</sup> For an introduction to her use of this technique with a focus on gender, see: Dawn Ades, "Hannah Höch, Dada and the "New Woman"", in *Hannah Höch* (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2014), pp.18-28.

<sup>234</sup> Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, "Subjoyride" [1922], in *Body Sweats: The Uncensored Writings of Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven*, ed. by Irene Gammel and Suzanne Zelazo (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2011), pp.99-102.

<sup>235</sup> Adorno, "Commitment", p.82 [*GS11*, p.416].

These works are judged to be illegitimate, on political as well as artistic grounds. This position relies on a distinction between social impact and social import, with the politically motivated art which aims at the former considered inferior to the indirect form of critique associated with the latter. Regarding the collaborations with Weill, Adorno does not deal with them directly in this essay, but he does suggest that they precede the degeneration from infantilism to infantility. He refers back with approval to *Mahagonny*, in relation to the transitional *Saint Joan of the Stockyards* [1932]: “*St. Joan* is set in a Chicago that is a middle ground between economic data and a Wild West fairy tale of capitalism from *Mahagonny*. The more intimately Brecht involves himself with the former and the less he aims at imagery, the more he misses the essence of capitalism[.]”<sup>236</sup> According to Adorno, Brecht goes on to advance a positive claim to theoretical and social validity on behalf of his alienating infantilism, an error it is implied is not made by the Dadaists.

Brecht was never a member of the movement, but he had connections with some of the more politically committed contingent in Berlin. In his memoirs, Richard Huelsenbeck recalls losing Heartfield from Dada, as he fell under the influence of Brecht: “[T]he success of *Threepenny Opera* convinced him of Brecht’s literary and, last but not least, political value.”<sup>237</sup> Weill was even further removed from the movement than Schoenberg and Stravinsky, despite moving in the same circles as Stuckenschmidt and Wolpe, with all three of them attending the private musical evenings of the November Group.<sup>238</sup> Dada’s clearest link to surrealist music, beyond these political and personal affiliations, is that following its dissolution in Paris, it fed directly into the creation of Surrealism. Ex-Dadaists founded the new movement, which in important respects continued the assault on aesthetic and social norms inaugurated by its predecessor. Accordingly, Adorno speaks of them together on a few occasions.<sup>239</sup> As discussed in the opening section of this chapter, Dada and Surrealism should

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<sup>236</sup> Ibid., p.83.

<sup>237</sup> Richard Huelsenbeck, *Memoirs of a Dada Drummer* [1969], ed. by Hans Kleinschmidt, trans. by Joachim Neugroschel (New York, New York: Viking Press, 1974), p.73.

<sup>238</sup> Austin Clarkson, “Introduction”, in *On the Music of Stefan Wolpe: Essays and Recollections*, ed. by Austin Clarkson (Hillsdale, New York: Pendragon Press, 2003), p.7.

<sup>239</sup> See: Theodor Adorno, “Art and the Arts” [1967], trans. by Rodney Livingstone, in *Can One Live After Auschwitz? A Philosophical Reader* [1997], ed. by Rolf Tiedemann (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2003), p.385; Adorno, “Difficulties”, p.658; Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p.38.

not be too hastily conflated, as this has often served to override their differences, as well as obscuring other significant relationships. There are nevertheless obvious similarities between Dada and surrealistic music, as it is characterized in “On the Social Situation of Music”, and by extension in “Commitment”. In common with Brecht and Weill, the Dadaists pursue the aggressive fragmentation of canonical and popular forms, with the pieces combined in new wholes imbued with socially critical intent, especially the collages and photomontages of Höch and Heartfield, produced in the most overtly politicized Dadaist milieu of Berlin.

In addition, Dada shares with surrealistic music the thoroughgoing negativity that differentiates the latter from the bulk of objectivist music, other than works like *The Soldier's Tale*. This attitude is expressed in many of its manifestos, which enumerate its negations in list form, arguably suggesting a nihilism that is systematic and comprehensive, rather than reactive and indiscriminate. “Dada Manifesto”, published anonymously at the head of the collective *Twenty-Three Manifestos of the Dada Movement* [1920], begins with an attack on artists and quickly broadens its scope: “No more painters, no more writers, no more musicians, no more sculptors, no more religions, no more republicans, no more royalists, no more imperialists, no more anarchists, no more socialists, no more Bolsheviks, no more politicians, no more proletarians, no more democrats, no more bourgeois, no more aristocrats, no more armies, no more police, no more fatherlands, enough of all these imbeciles, no more anything, no more anything, nothing, *nothing, nothing, nothing.*”<sup>240</sup> Picabia’s *Dada Cannibal Manifesto* [1920] has a similar structure and some of the same targets, extending this thoroughgoing negativity to Dada itself: “DADA smells like nothing, it is nothing, nothing, nothing. / It is like your hopes: nothing / like your paradises: nothing / like your idols: nothing / like your politicians: nothing / like your heroes: nothing / like your artists: nothing / like your religions: nothing.”<sup>241</sup> The self-critical turn of anti-art is a central theme of many of the texts included in *Twenty-Three Manifestos of the Dada Movement*, ranging from

<sup>240</sup> “Dada Manifesto”, in *Twenty-Three Manifestos of the Dada Movement* [1920], in *100 Artists' Manifestos: From the Futurists to the Stuckists*, ed. by Alex Danchev (London: Penguin, 2011), p.167.

<sup>241</sup> Francis Picabia, *Dada Cannibal Manifesto* [1920], in *I am a Beautiful Monster: Poetry, Prose, and Provocation* [2002], trans. by Mark Lowenthal (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2007), p.204.

blunt statements like “Art and beauty = NOTHING” in Philippe Soupault’s “Dada Typewriter” [1920], to subversive misspellings like “Aart” and “Poetreee” in Céline Arnauld’s “Dada Parasol” [1920].<sup>242</sup> These manifestos reflect the anti-artistic orientation on a formal level as well, iconoclastically supplanting the poem as the preeminent literary mode, and consciously accelerating the exhaustion of this form in turn, with an obvious excess of minor variations presented together. They were mostly written in the less overtly politicized Dadaist milieu of Paris, as indicated by the repudiation of proletarians and bourgeois alike, the blanket condemnation of politicians, and the insular focus on the aesthetic sphere, in the examples quoted here. However, Adorno holds that it is precisely a lack of commitment which guarantees the power of an absolute refusal, to which we might add that Dada’s thoroughgoing negativity culminates in the self-negation of anti-art. I believe that this is the distorted moment of insight behind his concession of a limited artistic legitimacy to the movement in “Commitment”.

#### POPULAR MUSIC

In these comments spread across his oeuvre from “Mahler Today” to “Commitment”, Adorno provides clues to his interpretation of Dada, which is broadly consistent in its main points, and coincides with much of the traditional art-historical account attacked by Dickerman and Hutchinson. In summary, the Dadaists are thought to be engaged in a struggle against artistic convention, and indeed against the status quo more generally. Their alleged impudence provokes the rage of the ruling class, as they set out to shock the bourgeoisie. The intention is to produce an experience of alienation in the audience, as a critical reflection of the alienation of art. When he writes about infantilism, Adorno uses the term “*Infantilismus*”, which designates a style dedicated to generating alienation. There is a pejorative charge to it, as it seems to imply some degree of retardation or regression, even when he takes care to distinguish it from infantility (“*Infantilität*”). Similarly, “Dada” as a word is suggestive of baby-talk, and its

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<sup>242</sup> Philippe Soupault, “Dada Typewriter” [1920], in *Twenty-Three Manifestos of the Dada Movement*, p.185; Céline Arnauld, “Dada Parasol” [1920], in *Twenty-Three Manifestos of the Dada Movement*, p.184.

childish repetitiveness even carries a faint echo of the infant of Sigmund Freud's "Fort-Da [Gone-There]" from *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* [1920].<sup>243</sup> Vladimir Lenin's *Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder* [1920] may also be a distant reference point for Adorno, with the accusation of ultra-leftism arguably applicable to some of the Berlin Dadaists, though the key word in the title of the pamphlet was translated into German as "Kinderkrankheit".<sup>244</sup> It would however be a mistake to equate this approach with immaturity or backwardness, as it is better understood as an emphatic response to modern conditions. The consciousness of childhood is evoked, in part as a refuge from alienation as with folklorism and neoclassicism, and in part because recourse to the infantile has shock value. There is supposed to be a risk that in focusing on social impact rather than social import, Dada weakens the resistance it offers, making itself more amenable to the forces of conformism. Adorno's argument suggests that its best defence against such recuperation is to hold fast to its negativity, advancing no positive claims, whether to authenticity or aesthetic totality on the one hand, or to social or theoretical validity on the other.

In terms of the typology of contemporary music sketched out in "On the Social Situation of Music", Adorno's Dada may be situated at the intersection of objectivist music and surrealist music, tending more towards the latter. As noted above, Stravinsky's *The Soldier's Tale* is identified as the point of transition between these two types of music, preparing the way for the mutations of popular music in Brecht and Weill's *The Threepenny Opera* and *Mahagonny*. Analysing *The Soldier's Tale* in *Philosophy of New Music*, Adorno elaborates on how this work appropriates the debased forms of "the lowest and most vulgar music [*Vulgärmusik*]", including "the march, the idiotic scraping on the violin, the outmoded waltz", as well as "the current dances, tango and ragtime":

Through its affinity to this sphere of music, the infantilism [*Infantilismus*] gains a "realistic", if negative, hold on whatever the going thing is and at the same time distributes shocks by cornering people so closely with this

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<sup>243</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* [1920], trans. by James Strachey, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume 18*, gen. ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), pp.14-16.

<sup>244</sup> Vladimir Lenin, "Left-Wing" *Communism: An Infantile Disorder* [1920], trans. by Julius Katzer (London: Bookmarks, 1993).

familiar, popular music that they are as frightened by it as by something purely mediated by the market, reified, and utterly remote. Convention is reversed, for now it is exclusively through conventional means that music produces alienation. The music discovers the latent horror of inferior music in botched performances, in its being fitted together out of disorganized particles, and draws its principle of organization from the universal disorganization. The infantilism is the style of the worn-out and exhausted. Its sound can be compared to the visual aspect of painted-up postage stamps: fragile and yet gaplessly dense, glued-together montages, as threatening as in the worst dreams.<sup>245</sup>

As well as containing what may be a reference to the collages of Kurt Schwitters, who is cited elsewhere as a pioneer of this technique in close proximity to Dada and Surrealism, Adorno's phrasing here recalls the montages, incorporating elements of nineteenth-century bourgeois musical culture and twentieth-century consumer music, which are described in connection with surrealist music in "On the Social Situation of Music".<sup>246</sup> He observes that infantilism often latches onto the productions of the culture industry, most typically jazz or other forms of contemporary dance music. These are exposed as bankrupt, as they are treated as interchangeable, deconstructed and manipulated, in his view befitting their status as commodities. This is another critically inflected mimetic adaptation, which utilizes distortion to lay bare the untruth of the culture industry, according to a footnote in *Philosophy of New Music*: "Stravinsky, through distortion, exposes what is shabby, worn out, and market enthralled in the established dance music of the last thirty years. He in a sense compels its shortcomings to speak, and transforms its standardized formulae into ciphers of disintegration."<sup>247</sup> Brecht and Weill follow their precursor in repurposing conventional means to produce alienation, defamiliarizing the familiar forms of popular music.

How far does this account of alienating infantilism correspond to the actual practice of the Dadaists, and does it justify the association posited by Adorno? I have already mentioned the affinity with some of their collages and

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<sup>245</sup> Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, p.133 [GS12, p.165].

<sup>246</sup> Adorno, "Art and the Arts", p.385.

<sup>247</sup> Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, p.188.

photomontages, and their engagement with popular music will be discussed at greater length in the next chapter, as part of a detailed analysis of its role at the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich in 1916. In many respects, Dada resembles the description of alienating infantilism provided above, especially in its transformation of material that would otherwise be recognizable and reassuring into something remote and threatening. It is important to emphasize the negativity that is brought to bear on the sphere of popular culture, which is simultaneously exploited for its critical potential vis-à-vis pure culture, and itself destabilized through the countervailing force of avant-garde experimentation. Adorno attributes this attitude to middle-period Stravinsky and the collaborations of Brecht and Weill, but it also informs his interpretation of Dada. He is correct to highlight that thoroughgoing negativity, of which anti-art is the ultimate expression. There are additional dimensions to the shock effects generated by the movement, which his focus on alienating infantilism tends to obscure, for example the conscious manipulation of the dynamic between performers and spectators, challenging the traditional passivity of the latter. I would question the extent to which his reading is able to encapsulate the full breadth of these interventions and provocations, which go beyond the narrowly formal to encompass the manipulation of art-institutional mechanisms, another topic taken up in the next chapter. In my opinion, Dada is most reminiscent of surrealist music in its opposition to aesthetic autonomy, a feature of its closest correlate identified but left largely unexamined by Adorno in “On the Social Situation of Music”.

### **Subjective Expression**

#### **DADA AND EXPRESSIONISM**

At its inception, Dada was a porous entity, open to a range of crosscurrents within the European avant-garde, including the pre-existing movements Symbolism, Cubism and Futurism. It went on to feed into diverse developments in the history of art, short-lived outgrowths such as Instantaneism and Tabu, and major independent tendencies like Constructivism and New Objectivity, as well as the much discussed connection with Surrealism. In his



scattered remarks about Dada, Adorno often couples and occasionally conflates it with Expressionism. This association is not wholly lacking in objective substantiation, as there was in fact a significant overlap of personnel and ideas between the two movements, especially nearer to the beginning of Dada in Zurich. Among the founding members were émigrés who previously had been affiliated with German Expressionism, most prominently Hennings, Ball and Hans Arp. Expressionist writers and artists contributed to the first issues of the little magazines *Cabaret Voltaire* and *Dada*, and the same continuity was evident in performances and exhibitions at the venues Cabaret Voltaire and Galerie Dada. In the crowded and contested cultural marketplace of Berlin, Dadaists sought to differentiate themselves aggressively from Expressionism, in manifestos and polemics by Huelsenbeck, Raoul Hausmann, and Grosz and Heartfield. The main charges against Expressionism were its alleged apoliticism and aestheticism, compared to the declared activist character of Berlin Dada.<sup>248</sup> Such a clear-cut distinction is not really tenable, as the level of politicization on both sides was in practice variable, and depended on the shifting historical context. There were substantive differences, but they were exaggerated by avant-gardist posturing and positioning. In other centres of Dadaist activity, Expressionism was neither an influence nor an antagonist to the same extent as in Zurich and Berlin. By the time it was at the height of its fame in Paris, Dada was far removed from the concerns of Expressionism, notwithstanding the historic links of a few participants such as Max Ernst. Via Ernst and Arp in Cologne and Schwitters in Hannover, Dada maintained residual ties with Expressionism. The perceived relevance of this precursor diminishes with geographical distance from Germany, as demonstrated by its relative lack of purchase in the Dadaist outpost of New York. As we will see, Adorno consistently overstates the closeness of Dada to Expressionism. In what follows, I explicate what it is that for him

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<sup>248</sup> Richard Huelsenbeck, "First German Dada Manifesto"/"Collective Dada Manifesto" [1918/1920], trans. by Ralph Mannheim, in *The Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology* [1951], ed. by Robert Motherwell (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp.242-46; Raoul Hausmann, "The German Philistine Gets Upset" [1919], trans. by Don Reneau, in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, ed. by Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, Edward Dimendberg (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1994), pp.482-483; George Grosz and John Heartfield, "The Art Scab" [1920], trans. by Charles W Haxthausen, in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, pp.483-486.

legitimizes speaking of them together, while drawing out what it is that in my view sets them apart.

Comparing and contrasting Dada and Expressionism in this way perhaps exposes me to the accusation of playing the kind of art-historical game warned against by Hutchinson. Nevertheless, Adorno's conflation of these movements is instructive, as it reveals a false assumption underlying his interpretation of Dada. He holds that both tendencies are invested in the idea of art as a medium for subjective expression, hinting that the Dadaists' sound poetry should be read as an extreme manifestation of that principle, as we will see below. Ball's "poems without words" may be what he has in mind, of which an exemplary instance is "Karawane" [1917]: "jolifanto bambla ô falli bambla / grossiga m'pfa habla horem / égiga goramen / higo bloiko russula huju / hollaka hollala / anlogo bung / blago bung / bosso fataka / ü üü ü / schampa wulla wussa ólobo / hej tatta gôrem / eschige zunbada / wulubu ssubudu uluw ssubudu / tumba ba- umf / kusagauma / ba - umf".<sup>249</sup> Verses like these may convey a sense of the liberation of expressive possibilities, however they are hardly a straightforward affirmation of that capacity. The negative side to the process, namely the destruction of meaning, should not be underestimated, and will be discussed at length later in this chapter. By his own account, Ball is attempting to access the "innermost alchemy of the word", redeeming instrumentalized language from its fate in a fallen world.<sup>250</sup> This does not necessarily imply an elevation of individual subjectivity, and indeed inhabiting language in its elemental form could be experienced as a radical loss of self, as it reportedly was during one especially intense performance of his at the Cabaret Voltaire: "I noticed that my voice had no choice but to take on the ancient cadence of priestly lamentation, the style of liturgical singing that wails in the Catholic churches of East and West. I do not know what gave me the idea of this music, but I began to chant my vowel sequences in a church style like a recitative, and tried not only to look serious but to be serious."<sup>251</sup> Ball attributed to the word an inner significance, which he attempted to channel in phonetic constructions relieved of the function of

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<sup>249</sup> Hugo Ball, "Karawane" [1917], in *The Dada Almanac* [1920], ed. by Richard Huelsenbeck, rev. by Malcolm Green (London: Atlas Press, 1998), p.61.

<sup>250</sup> Hugo Ball, *Flight Out of Time: A Dada Diary* [1927], ed. by John Elderfield, trans. by Ann Raimés (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1996), p.71.

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid.*, p.71.

discursive signification, but this was conceived as an adaptation to an objective truth, rather than the emancipation of subjective expression. Putting aside the question of whether the latter is an accurate characterization of Expressionism either, I would suggest that Adorno underplays the extent to which the categories of expression and subjectivity are critically interrogated by Dada.

Many Dadaists appear on the face of it to be working in the opposite direction to subjective expression, for example in the field of visual art: Arp's experiments with chance were intended to remove the subjective decision of the artist, in favour of a method that he considered more objective; Taueber's geometric abstraction minimizes the expressive impulse, instead adopting control and order as its guiding compositional principles; Picabia's mechanomorphic drawings also suppress that urge to emote and its attendant aura of transcendental seriousness, with technical diagrams supplemented by puns and innuendo.<sup>252</sup> In addition, Picabia displays a complex attitude towards individual subjectivity, belying the impression of straightforward solipsism created by his propensity for self-aggrandizement and his refusal to be bound by any collective identity, ultimately including that of Dada. His excessive egocentricity incorporates performative self-negation, as with the anti-Dadaist handout he distributed at an exhibition in Paris in 1921, featuring the slogans "FRANCIS PICABIA IS AN IMBECILE, AN IDIOT, A PICKPOCKET!!!", "FRANCIS PICABIA is an idiotic spanish professor, who was never dada" and "FRANCIS PICABIA IS NOTHING!"<sup>253</sup> He was not so much concerned with the assertion of the self, as with its continual transformation through erasure, as described in "Thank You Francis!" [1923]: "What I like is inventing, imagining, creating a new man out of myself at every moment, then forgetting him, forgetting everything. We should secrete a special eraser, rubbing out our works and any memory of them as we go along. Our brain should just be a black and whiteboard, or better yet, a mirror into which we look at ourselves for a moment so as to turn our back to it two minutes later."<sup>254</sup> The absolute freedom he demanded went beyond the liberation of individual

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<sup>252</sup> For an anecdotal account of Arp's experiments with chance, see: Hans Richter, *Dada: Art and Anti-Art* [1964], trans. by David Britt (London: Thames and Hudson, 2007), p.51. For a discussion of Taueber's geometric abstraction, see: Hemus, *Dada's Women*, pp.72-79. For an overview of Picabia's mechanomorphic drawings, see: Francis M Naumann, *New York Dada 1915-1923* (New York, New York: Abrams, 1994), pp.59-75.

<sup>253</sup> Francis Picabia, [Handout] [1921], in *I am a Beautiful Monster*, p.279.

<sup>254</sup> Francis Picabia, "Thank You Francis!" [1923], in *I am a Beautiful Monster*, pp.299-300.

subjectivity, to encompass a liberation from individual subjectivity.<sup>255</sup> These counterexamples do not in themselves disprove the supposition that subjective expression was important to the movement, and certainly it remained a motivating force in some instances. However, the Dadaists' performance strategies of simultaneous presentation, noise accompaniments and staged disruptions, their curatorial practice of overfilling an exhibition space with a confused jumble of artworks, promotional materials and miscellaneous objects, and their violation of the conventions of readability in little magazines with unstable page orientation and overlapping text and images, all serve to frustrate the access to interiority and the immediacy of experience which are the main supports of such an approach. What in the end distinguishes them from Expressionism is their thoroughgoing negativity, which climaxes in the self-critical turn of anti-art, a difference noted but not sufficiently emphasized by Adorno.

#### ABSOLUTE EXPRESSION

*Dialectic of Enlightenment* contains a discussion of artistic style, the set of aesthetic conventions associated with a particular artist, movement or epoch, which is criticized as an external imposition on the immanent logic of the individual artwork. The total regimentation and standardization of cultural production under advanced capitalism is said to disclose the untruth of style, making plain how it functions repressively as the "aesthetic equivalent of power".<sup>256</sup> The unity of style, a defining feature of the art of previous historical periods, was always a marker of their "structures of social coercion".<sup>257</sup> The rigour of style, on the other hand, has its moment of truth, if it is brought to bear negatively on the "chaotic expression of suffering".<sup>258</sup> In advancing their argument that great artists have made use of this capacity of style without wholly conforming to its prescriptions, Adorno and Horkheimer equate Dada and Expressionism:

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<sup>255</sup> Leslie, "Philistines and Art Vandals Get Upset", pp.208-209.

<sup>256</sup> Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p.103.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*, p.103.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*, p.103.

Even works which are called classical, like the music of Mozart, contain objective tendencies which resist the style they incarnate. Up to Schönberg and Picasso, great artists have been mistrustful of style, which at decisive points has guided them less than the logic of the subject matter. What the Expressionists and Dadaists attacked in their polemics, the untruth of style as such, triumphs today in the vocal jargon of the crooner, in the adept grace of the film star, and even in the mastery of the photographic shot of the farm labourer's hovel.<sup>259</sup>

The uniformity found across all sectors of the culture industry, from popular music to middlebrow photography, is understood as the culmination of the repressive logic of style, previously a polemical target of Dada and Expressionism. Adorno and Horkheimer do not identify members of these movements as great artists, reserving that canonical status for the usual favoured figure of Schoenberg, here joined by Pablo Picasso. Picasso and Schoenberg are elevated to this rank because they maintain the tension between expression and style, so that the poles of freedom and discipline interpenetrate productively. The Dadaists and the Expressionists likewise resist the constraint of established norms, but they fail to check the subjective moment as well. This we have to infer from other comments by Adorno, as there is no developed critique of their allegedly one-sided approach in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

In "Presuppositions", Adorno turns to the field of literature, arguing that writers must reckon with the "double nature of language", which encompasses the expressive impulse and the function of "discursive signification", with the latter glossed as "communication first and foremost".<sup>260</sup> He cites as somebody who engages with this problematic the satirist and playwright Karl Kraus, a contemporary of the Dadaists and the Expressionists, who exposed the corruption of language by journalism and politics in his long-running publication *Die Fackel* in Vienna. In "Presuppositions", Kraus is praised for successfully negotiating the conflict between expression and meaning, while a failure to do so is attributed to Expressionism, and to a lesser extent Dada:

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<sup>259</sup> Ibid., p.103.

<sup>260</sup> Adorno, "Presuppositions", p.98.

With utter integrity, Karl Kraus, who was hostile to Expressionism and hence to the unqualified primacy of expression over sign in language, in no way relaxed the distinction between literary and communicative language. His oeuvre persists in trying to produce an artistic autonomy for language without doing violence to its other aspect, the communicative, which is inseparable from transmission. The Expressionists, on the other hand, tried to jump over their own shadows. They championed the primacy of expression without regard for other considerations. They envisioned using words as pure expressive values, the way colours or tone relationships are used in painting or music. Language put up such sharp resistance to the Expressionist idea that it was hardly ever realized except by the Dadaists.<sup>261</sup>

When he writes about “using words as pure expressive values”, Adorno may be thinking of sound poetry. The Expressionists, and by extension the Dadaists, are accused of promoting expression at the expense of communication, in a simplistic attempt to institute a realm of absolute freedom linguistically. By contrast, Kraus is credited with preserving the claims of both sides in a state of tension, recognizing that though language always has an intention “above and beyond communication”, it nevertheless cannot do without its “significant moment”, or working with “concepts and meanings”.<sup>262</sup> Compared to the Expressionists, the Dadaists come closer to achieving the ideal of the primacy of expression, but they too are ultimately unable to sustain it in the face of the ineradicable element of signification or communication, which acts as an objective limit on the aesthetic autonomy that can be won for language, according to Adorno.<sup>263</sup>

“Presuppositions” is a response to a performance of experimental lyric poetry by Hans G Helms, a writer, composer and pupil of Adorno’s. Helms’ *FA: M’AHNIESGWOW* [1959] is described as a hybrid “music-language composition”, which is indebted to James Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake* [1939], and

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<sup>261</sup> Ibid., p.98.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid., p.98.

<sup>263</sup> For an argument developing this aspect of Adorno’s implicit philosophy of language, which broadens out into a consideration of the similarity between language and music, see: Shierry Weber Nicholsen, *Exact Imagination, Late Work: On Adorno’s Aesthetics* [1997] (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1999), pp.66-73.

also has an affinity with the serialism of Karlheinz Stockhausen.<sup>264</sup> Joyce's novel sometimes approaches sound poetry, though arguably it never abandons discursive signification entirely, an impossible aim if we accept Adorno's account of the double nature of language. Similarly, Stockhausen is said to be grappling with the contemporary "crisis of meaning", not by rejecting conventional musical sense altogether, but by incorporating it on a continuum with the most radical alternative configurations.<sup>265</sup> Adorno reiterates his criticism of the Dadaists' supposed one-sided emphasis on expression over meaning, as he likens Helms to Stockhausen:

Helms' conception [of language] stands in an analogous relationship to discursive meaning. Its continuum extends from quasi-narrative portions intelligible on the surface to parts in which the phonetic values, the pure expressive qualities, completely outweigh the semantic values, the meanings. The conflict between expression and meaning in language is not, as with the Dadaists, simply decided in favour of expression. It is respected as an antinomy. But the literary work does not accommodate to it as a homogenous mixture. It polarizes it between extremes whose sequence is itself structure, that is, provides the work with its form.<sup>266</sup>

Adorno might once more put us in mind of sound poetry, with this reference to "phonetic values, the pure expressive qualities". He recalls his own dialectical method, when describing how Helms seeks neither to strike a balance of expression and meaning, nor to steer a middle course between them, but instead to push both to the point where they are mediated in each other as extremes. By contrast, the Dadaists are judged to pursue only one of these poles, neglecting its interplay with its opposite, and consequently their approach is considered inferior to that of Helms, in the same way that they are compared unfavourably to Kraus. In connection with Kraus, Adorno suggests that the desire to eliminate signification or communication from language in favour of absolute expression reveals an anti-artistic orientation, which is programmatic in Dada: "Dadaism's

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<sup>264</sup> Adorno, "Presuppositions", p.104.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid., p.104.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid., p.104.

aim, in fact, was not art but its assassination.”<sup>267</sup> This insight ought to be more central to his understanding of the movement, as it is in fact the anti-artistic orientation, albeit established on a different basis, which constitutes the dividing line from Expressionism.

#### PURE SUBJECTIVITY

As part of an extended argument in *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno once again links Dada and Expressionism, this time in relation to the field of visual art:

The shadow of art's autarchic radicalism is its harmlessness: Absolute color compositions verge on wallpaper patterns. Now that American hotels are decorated with abstract paintings *à la manière de...* and aesthetic radicalism has shown itself to be socially affordable, radicalism itself must pay the price that it is no longer radical. Among the dangers faced by new art, the worst is the absence of danger. The more art expels the preestablished, the more it is thrown back on what purports to get by, as it were, without borrowing from what has become distant and foreign: Art is thrown back on the dimensionless point of pure subjectivity, strictly on its particular and thus abstract subjectivity. This tendency was passionately anticipated by the radical wing of expressionism up to and including dada.<sup>268</sup>

His assessment of these movements is informed by his impression of the failure of the early twentieth-century avant-garde, writing some fifty years after its highpoint, from which perspective its protest appears to have been fully neutralized, its integration within the canon of modernism well established, and its aesthetic effects cannibalized by the culture industry. He reflects on the recuperation of abstract art, and the trajectory of its uncompromising claim to aesthetic autonomy. The drive towards radical self-sufficiency is supposed to repudiate all the accumulated conventions of artistic tradition, excluding everything extraneous to the artwork. This is said to lead to an increasing

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<sup>267</sup> Ibid., p.98.

<sup>268</sup> Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, pp.37-38.



reliance on the false immediacy of individual subjectivity, which is presented as if it were absolute. That attempt to occupy a dimensionless point culminates in an empty abstractness, entirely unthreatening to the given order, as with the mass-produced abstract art hung in North American hotels. Dada is meant to have prefigured this development, placing the movement in a somewhat unfamiliar lineage with Abstract Expressionism, which is however justified by the presence of abstraction in the visual art of Taueber and Arp, and in the experimental films of Viking Eggeling and Hans Richter.

The passage continues:

The absence of social resonance, however, was not alone to blame for the collapse of expressionism: It was not possible to persevere within the bounds of a dimensionless point; the contraction of the accessible, the totality of the refusal, terminates in complete impoverishment: the scream or the destitute, powerless gesture, literally the syllables “da-da”. This became an amusement for all concerned, the dadaists as well as the conformists they challenged, because it confessed the impossibility of artistic objectivation that is postulated by each and every artistic manifestation, whether intentionally or not; what after all is left to do but scream. The dadaists consistently tried to abrogate this postulate; the programme of their surrealist successors rejected art, yet without being able to shake itself free of it. Their truth was that it would be better not to have art than to have a false one.<sup>269</sup>

Expressionism, incorporating Dada, is identified as a failure, for which there is both an objective and a subjective basis. Adorno is clear that a lack of social import fatally undermines these movements, but he also says that the extremism of their position is internally unsustainable. The critical force of the attack on the status quo is quickly exhausted, deteriorating into an expression of its own desperation, represented on the one hand by the scream, an allusion to Edvard Munch’s famous Expressionist painting *The Scream* [1893-1910], and on the other hand by the helpless pointing suggested by the repetition of the German

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<sup>269</sup> Ibid., p.38.

“Da” (“There”) in “Dada”. The Dadaists’ opposition to conformism turns into a bitter joke shared with their antagonists, as the limitations of the approach become clear to all. Their defeatism arises from the inability of art to make good on its promise of happiness, which it has to posit but cannot fulfil, never transcending the aesthetic sphere to become praxis, or realizing its utopian potential in reality. Adorno believes that this aporia of art can only be overcome with a revolutionary transformation of social conditions, which is itself the substance of the promise. The Surrealists, descended from the Dadaists, are commended for embracing anti-art in recognition of this fact, though they too are judged to have failed in their project.

After elaborating a little on the failure of Surrealism, Adorno returns to the recuperation of Dada and Expressionism:

Not only did the expressionists make concessions as they became older and had to make a living; not only did dadaists convert to Catholicism or enroll in the Communist Party: Artists with the integrity of Picasso and Schoenberg went beyond the subjective point. Their difficulties in this could be sensed and feared right from their first efforts to achieve a so-called new order. Since then these difficulties have developed into the difficulties of art as such.<sup>270</sup>

When he refers to conversions to Catholicism, Adorno is most likely thinking of Hennings and Ball, who withdrew from Dadaist activity in Zurich to live in seclusion as practicing Christians.<sup>271</sup> Many of the Paris Dadaists subsequently joined the Communist Party, in addition to becoming Surrealists: Tristan Tzara, and later André Breton, Louis Aragon and Paul Éluard.<sup>272</sup> Adorno takes these changes in direction as confirmation of the bankruptcy of the movement, because for him they signify subordination to different forms of authority. He also highlights instances of the dimensionless point of pure subjectivity being surpassed, invoking the same canonical figures as in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*:

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<sup>270</sup> Ibid., p.38.

<sup>271</sup> Hemus, *Dada's Women*, p.44.

<sup>272</sup> For a detailed investigation of the relationship between the Surrealists and the Communist Party, see: Helena Lewis, *Dada Turns Red: The Politics of Surrealism* [1988] (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990).

Picasso and Schoenberg. Unlike the dead end he sees in Dada and Expressionism, Adorno identifies the struggles of these great artists with progress in art as a whole, praising them for going beyond subjective expression. The Dadaists' approach to that capacity is by contrast condemned as one-sided and unsustainable. Regardless of whether this is a fair assessment, Adorno's emphasis on recuperation paradoxically has the advantage of focusing attention on anti-art, which in my view needs to be given greater weight in his account of Dada.

### DEICTIC GESTURE

In the "Draft Introduction" to *Aesthetic Theory*, Dada is described as a deictic gesture, by which objects are referred to without being named, with the extreme specificity and at the same time contentless generality of demonstrative pronouns like "This" and "That":

Even dada, as the deictic gesture into which the world is transformed in the effort to shake off its conceptuality, was as universal as the childishly reiterated demonstrative word that dadaism took as its motto. Whereas art dreams the absolutely monadological, it is both happily and unhappily suffused with the universal. Art must contract to the geometrical point of the absolute τοδε τι ["a this", "some this", "a something"] and go beyond it. This imposed the objective limit to expressionism; art would have been compelled to go beyond it even if the artists had been less accommodating: They regressed behind expressionism. Whenever artworks on their way toward concretion polemically eliminate the universal, whether as a genre, a type, an idiom or a formula, the excluded is maintained in them through its negation; this state of affairs is constitutive of the modern.<sup>273</sup>

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<sup>273</sup> Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p.445; Martin Paul Eve, "Adorno Terminology: τοδε τι", <https://www.martineve.com/2012/01/13/adorno-terminology-%25cf%2584%25ce%25bf%25ce%25b4%25ce%25b5-%25cf%2584%25ce%25b9/> [accessed 4 March 2019].

This passage recalls the opposition to conceptuality which is concomitant with the primacy of expression for Adorno, as well as again conjuring up a pointing gesture with the repetition of “*Da*” (“There”). It is worth noting in passing the German bias of that reading, which ignores other associations of the overdetermined word “Dada”, such as the French for “Hobbyhorse” and the Romanian for “Yes-yes”.<sup>274</sup> Adorno presents a variation of his phrase about great artists going beyond the subjective point, though on this occasion it is pure “thisness”, the condition of being an individuated substance, which has to be transcended.<sup>275</sup> He hits another familiar note by highlighting the limitations of Expressionism, which in his interpretation encompasses Dada. Elsewhere in *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno presents a slightly modified version of the argument, emphasizing the role played by ideology: “Even dada, the purely deictic gesture, was as universal as the demonstrative pronoun; that expressionism was more powerful as an idea than in its works perhaps has its origins in the fact that its utopia of the pure τοδε τι is itself a fragment of false consciousness.”<sup>276</sup> In both passages, Dada is understood as an extreme manifestation of the principle of individuation or particularization, at the boundaries of which it paradoxically passes over into the universal, as happens when an uncompromising commitment to subjective expression converges with its counterpoles objectivity and meaning.

As stated above in relation to alienating infantilism, Adorno’s account of Dada is largely consistent over time, and this is also evident in the single thread of argument running from *Dialectic of Enlightenment* to *Aesthetic Theory*. He falsely assumes that the movement is primarily motivated by subjective expression, on that basis repeatedly associating it with and even assimilating it to Expressionism. The Dadaists and the Expressionists are said to share a one-sided approach, repudiating artistic style and the rigour it imposes on the spontaneous expression of subjective experience, rather than maintaining a productive tension of discipline and freedom. Adorno is right to highlight Dada’s resistance to a prescriptive style, but wrong to construe that opposition as consisting mainly in the unmediated expression of suffering. In the field of literature, the Dadaists and

<sup>274</sup> Jed Rasula, *Destruction was my Beatrice: Dada and the Unmaking of the Twentieth Century* (New York, New York: Basic Books, 2015), p.x.

<sup>275</sup> Eve, “Adorno Terminology: τοδε τι”.

<sup>276</sup> Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, pp.238-239.

the Expressionists are likewise accused of wholly prioritizing expression over meaning, when what is required is their dialectical mediation. The attempt to eliminate discursive signification is in any case doomed, because for him language has an irreducible communicative component. I do not need to address whether this claim about language is correct, as for my purposes a preliminary consideration is that his characterization of the movement is simply inaccurate. Far from pursuing the chimera of absolute expression as he suggests, Dada actually exhibits a more critical attitude, in effect negating both sides of the antithesis. In the field of visual art, the Dadaists and the Expressionists are similarly depicted as seeking to embody pure subjectivity, another unsustainable position, according to Adorno. Nevertheless, Dada is granted a limited artistic legitimacy, as the most radical faction of Expressionism. This relative advantage is connected to its anti-artistic orientation, an impression further sharpened by the retrospective assessment of these movements as a failed project, viewed from the perspective of their recuperation. However, Adorno is mistaken in attributing that anti-artistic orientation to Dada's supposed preoccupation with absolute expression and pure subjectivity. The passages treating it as a deictic gesture may act as a summation of this erroneous interpretation, as they describe the same dynamic of subjective expression reaching its objective limit. He repeats the error of neglecting the countervailing tendencies within the movement, which would complicate that reading. The thoroughgoing negativity that is brought to bear on the categories of expression and subjectivity points us in the direction of the self-critical turn of anti-art. It is not my intention to fully elaborate this problematic yet, but we can at least gesture towards it.

If Adorno's Dada is known principally by its sound poetry and abstract art, I want to emphasize another component of its creative output, that is, its use of found objects in assemblages and readymades. This technique has roots in Cubist collage, pioneered by Picasso with Georges Braque, but it is deployed more extensively and taken to greater extremes by the Dadaists. In Berlin, Baader constructed a monumental sculpture out of a table, a chair, a barrel and a board, festooned it with signposts and newspapers, and mounted on it sundry items, including a mousetrap, a bicycle chain and a stove pipe, for his *Great Plasto-Dio-Dada-Drama: Germany's Greatness and Fall at the Hands of Schoolmaster Hagendorf, or: The Fantastic Life Story of the Superdada*

[1920].<sup>277</sup> In Hannover, Schwitters repurposed the refuse of the city, incorporating labels, bus tickets and bits of wood into his pictures, a tendency which culminated in the labyrinthine live-in space of his *Merzbau* [c.1923-1936].<sup>278</sup> In Tokyo, Tomoyoshi Murayama exhibited cut flowers in a pointed high-heeled shoe with the title *Work with Flowers and a Shoe* [1923], and went on to construct assemblages on a much larger scale such as *Architectural Idea of the Mavo Headquarters* [1924].<sup>279</sup> In New York, Freytag-Loringhoven's *God* [c.1917] was a cast-iron plumbing trap set upside-down on a wooden mitre box, and she experimented further with found objects in pieces like *Cathedral* [c.1918] and *Portrait of Marcel Duchamp* [c.1920].<sup>280</sup> In New York and Paris, Duchamp created the readymades which are the best-known examples of this form, and the next chapter contains a detailed analysis of his urinal *Fountain* [1917]. There is in this widespread Dadaist practice a refusal of the false choice between representation and abstraction, instead inserting fragments of the material world directly into the artwork. It seems to reject conceptuality in favour of materiality, and points to empirical reality rather than seeking to reproduce it as faithfully as possible as in representational art, or to replace it with a *sui generis* order as in abstract art. The significance of such a manoeuvre does not depend solely on particularization or individuation, as the mass-produced goods and miscellaneous junk preferred by the Dadaists evoke the universal fungibility which characterizes a society organized according to the principle of exchange. Their assertion of non-art as art also operates on a meta-level, drawing attention to the art-institutional mechanisms which must be set in motion to confer that aesthetic status on commodities and detritus. In this sense, Dada's approach is still thoroughly conceptual, replacing intuitive understanding and sensual appreciation with critical reflection on the functioning of the institution of art.

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<sup>277</sup> For details of *Great Plasto-Dio-Dada-Drama*, see: Katharina Hoins, "Johannes Baader's Post-War Plasto-Dio-Dada-Drama and German War Exhibitions During World War I", *Dada/Surrealism* 21 (2017): <https://ir.uiowa.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1336&context=dadasur> [accessed 4 March 2019], pp.2-3.

<sup>278</sup> For an analysis of Schwitters' working methods and their realization in the *Merzbau*, see: Elizabeth Burns Gamard, *Kurt Schwitters' Merzbau: The Cathedral of Erotic Misery* (New York, New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2000), pp.87-109.

<sup>279</sup> Omuka, "Tada=Dada (Devotedly Dada) for the Stage", p.256, pp.264-265.

<sup>280</sup> For details of *God*, *Cathedral* and *Portrait of Marcel Duchamp*, see: Irene Gammel, *Baroness Elsa: Gender, Dada, and Everyday Modernity – A Cultural Biography* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2002), p.11, pp.218-222, pp.234-236.

Adorno mostly misses that aspect of the movement, in part because of his misguided focus on subjective expression.

### **Anarchic Destruction**

#### **NEGATION OF MEANING**

Though it is true to say that he gives undue weight to subjective expression in his interpretation of Dada, Adorno does acknowledge the other side to this process, which is the negation of meaning. If he is mistaken in treating the affirmation of expression as a necessary correlative to that destructive capacity, his description of the latter is still valid to a certain extent. The simultaneous poetry pioneered by the movement in Zurich has the effect of breaking down discursive signification, without obviously promoting subjective expression. A collaboration by Huelsenbeck, Tzara and Marcel Janco, “The Admiral is Looking for a House to Rent” [1916] is made up of disjointed sentences in multiple languages interspersed with sound poetry, all presented at once in a cacophony calculated to undermine intelligibility.<sup>281</sup> The significative function is also deliberately frustrated on a textual level in concrete poetry, experiments with typography and layout which in their visual dimension approach the collages and photomontages of the Berlin Dadaists. Hausmann’s *Green* [1918] combines fragmentary words and letters, incorporating snatches of nonsense alongside recognizable semantic units, written in different styles and sizes, and set at wildly varying angles, in an overall arrangement which cannot be read linearly in any direction.<sup>282</sup> On the other hand, Dada’s literary output includes slogans, statements and polemics which are straightforwardly declarative and imperative in tone, as well as deploying formatting innovations to convey a message with greater impact, such as capitalization, bold type and underlining for emphasis, common features of the direct mode of communication most associated with the movement, the manifesto form. These countertendencies are

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<sup>281</sup> Richard Huelsenbeck, Marcel Janco, Tristan Tzara, *L’amiral cherche une maison à louer* [1916], in *The Dada Painters and Poets*, p.241.

<sup>282</sup> Raoul Hausmann, “Green” [1918], in Timothy O Benson, *Raoul Hausmann and Berlin Dada* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1987), p.92.

largely left out of his account of the negation of meaning discussed below, but then he is rarely dealing directly with the topic of Dada.

Adorno is not concerned simply with linguistic meaning, but also refers to musical meaning, and more broadly to aesthetic meaning. This for him consists in the integral structuration of the artwork, the inner-aesthetic nexus which indirectly invokes the extra-aesthetic sphere. He grants a privileged status to aesthetic form, as the site of the social import of aesthetic autonomy, crystallizing that truth content which exceeds the sum of internal relations between aesthetic elements.<sup>283</sup> The negation of meaning, as he conceives it, is therefore as much an attack on coherence as it is on significance. The Dadaists systematically disrupt the traditional model of the artwork as an integrated and self-contained whole in their collages, photomontages and assemblages, and further undermine its autonomous status with their unorthodox approach to presentation in publishing, performance and curatorial practice. It is important to take account of variations in specific disciplines, rather than subsuming them under an overarching concept of art. We have seen him argue that literature, because its medium is language, is unable ultimately to escape the discursive realm, and to eliminate entirely the residuum of a significative function. The situation is different with music, which is held merely to resemble language, as a sequence of sounds articulating something greater than itself, without being reducible to the conceptual determinations of a sign system.<sup>284</sup> His reading of the negation of meaning, in the wider sense of aesthetic meaning, is applicable to this field as much as to visual art and literature, and it is in relation to music that he makes many of his most valuable observations about Dada. In what follows, I examine how he alludes to the movement in connection with the composers Ernst Krenek and John Cage. However, Adorno never cites any actual examples of Dadaist music, a gap in his knowledge which this chapter has begun to correct.

As is typical of Adorno, Dada is only ever mentioned in passing, yet there is a certain consistency to his portrayal of its negation of meaning, which is usually characterized as an outbreak of anarchic destruction. This impression of a spontaneous and chaotic destructive capacity recalls the traditional art-historical

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<sup>283</sup> Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, p.98.

<sup>284</sup> Adorno, "Music, Language, Composition", p.113.



account of the movement, against which we might set Hutchinson's claim that its thoroughgoing negativity is in fact relatively systematic. The Dadaists' wide-ranging attack on morality and society, rejecting all established values and norms, extends to the self-negation of anti-art. They mobilize artistic means against art, drawing on the resources of their area of expertise to undermine its conditions of existence, in an attempt to destroy the aesthetic sphere from within. The extremes to which they pursue this end – attacking all existing artistic production, explicitly inviting the destruction of their own artworks, and taking preemptive action to resist the recuperation of anti-art as another artistic style – indicate a relatively systematic approach, an impression confirmed by the recollections of some members of the movement.<sup>285</sup> There were of course differences in the salience of the anti-artistic orientation between locations and individuals, and certainly a number of them remained invested in the idea of the power of creativity to effect a renewal of art. The negation of meaning may be read as part of the anti-artistic project regardless of their intentions, as arguably it definitively forestalls the possibility of an interpretation constituted through the play of aesthetic elements, thereby repudiating the principle of aesthetic autonomy promoted by the bourgeois form of the institution of art. Its relatively systematic character becomes visible when we adopt a broader perspective, considering not just the negation of meaning construed purely in inner-aesthetic terms, but also negations enacted on the art-institutional level. I will defer a full discussion of this subject until the next chapter, for now focusing on the negation of meaning as it is understood by Adorno.

#### KRENEK

In order to explore the negation of meaning attributed to Dada, I need to return to the topic of new music, set aside earlier in favour of objectivist music and surrealistic music. Passing over his origins in late Romanticism, Schoenberg's oeuvre, and the body of work produced by his school, can be

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<sup>285</sup> For examples of first-hand accounts of the movement which emphasize its relatively systematic application of the principle of negation, see: Tristan Tzara, "Lecture on Dada" [1922], trans. by Ralph Manheim, in *The Dada Painters and Poets*, pp.246-251; Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes, "History of Dada" [1931], trans. by Ralph Manheim, in *The Dada Painters and Poets*, pp.101-120.

divided into two major phases, which have already been introduced. The first of these is the phase of free atonality, usually dated from 1908 to 1923. This consisted of compositions without a tonal centre, which also reject traditional melody and harmony. It was followed by the phase of twelve-tone technique, with compositions based on the organizational principle of the tone row. This reintroduced a degree of systematization, which later developed into integral serialism after WW2. Krenek participated in both phases, but retained an independent identity as a composer who always experimented widely. In *Philosophy of New Music*, Adorno posits an affinity between new music and Dada, which he locates in the free atonality of Krenek's *Second Symphony* [1922]:

If technical analysis demonstrates the emerging element of meaninglessness as constitutive of twelve-tone technique, this analysis comprehends not merely the critique of twelve-tone technique that the total, fully constructed – that is, fully integrated – artwork comes into conflict with its own idea. Rather, this analysis also indicates that by virtue of a dawning meaninglessness the immanent unity of the work is terminated. This unity consists precisely in the nexus that constitutes meaning. After its elimination, music transforms itself into protest. What becomes inexorably evident in the technological constellations was announced with an explosive force, akin to Dadaism, in the era of free atonality in the truly incommensurable early work of Krenek, especially in his *Second Symphony*. It is the rebellion of music against its own meaning.<sup>286</sup>

Adorno believes that new music represents the most advanced stage of a process which, while conducted on the aesthetic plane, is historically necessary and socially resonant. The internal logicity of twelve-tone technique, the absolute rigour of its construction, eventually turns into its opposite, the appearance of arbitrariness. The nexus of meaning, through which the elements of the work are bound together in their difference, is itself suspended in response to the objective

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<sup>286</sup> Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, p.98.

demands of that immanent problematic. The negation of meaning emerges from the contradictions of the musical material, which in a mediated fashion reflect the contradictions of empirical reality. According to Adorno, Krenek's *Second Symphony*, along with his other freely atonal works from the same period, anticipate the meaninglessness that is latent within the dodecaphonic system, but invest its disclosure with a spontaneity and violence prompting the comparison with Dada.

Produced contemporaneously to Dada, Krenek's *Second Symphony* shares some of its capacity to shock, though this takes different forms with the movement, such as a soprano mimicking the sounds of orgasm in Schulhoff's *Sonata Erotica for Solo Mother-Trumpet* [1919], and a girl in a communion dress reciting obscene poetry at the opening of the exhibition Dada – Early Spring in Cologne in 1920.<sup>287</sup> By rushing to assimilate Dada to Expressionism, Adorno brings it closer to new music during the phase of free atonality. Schoenberg and his school were then the chief representatives of musical Expressionism, and the same label has been applied to Krenek, in particular on account of his *Second Symphony*. In an argument that is distinct from yet related to his interpretation of the literary variant of Expressionism, Adorno contends that new music is engaged in a struggle to overcome the similarity of music to language, which culminates in a more thoroughgoing negation of aesthetic meaning. In a passage on the same theme from his essay "Music, Language, and Composition" [1956], Dada is not named explicitly, but the technique of montage associated with it is mentioned in connection with Krenek's *Second Symphony*:

The indestructible traits of music that comprise its similarity to language are ostracized as the alien element in music, as mere distraction from its immanent logic, as if they, immediately and in themselves, were its perversion into a system of signs. In the heroic periods of the new music, the vehemence of the escape attempts – comparable to the tendency of early radical painting to absorb materials that mock all attempts at subjective inspiration, the fundamental phenomenon of montage –

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<sup>287</sup> Ingram, "Songs, Anti-Symphonies and Sodomist Music", p.13; Charlotte Stokes, "Rage and Liberation: Cologne Dada", in *Crisis and the Arts: The History of Dada, Volume 3 – Dada Cologne Hanover*, gen. ed. Stephen C Foster (New York, New York: GK Hall & Co., 1997), p.52.

presents itself as an anarchic rebellion against the sense of musical coherence in general; the young Krenek's eruptions around the time of his *Second Symphony* are a case in point.<sup>288</sup>

Krenek's "vehemence" in seeking to repudiate the resemblance of music to language, and the "eruptions" arising from his pursuit of this ambition, recall his "explosive force" from *Philosophy of New Music*.<sup>289</sup> Adorno also talks about "an anarchic rebellion against musical coherence in general", which likewise echoes his earlier reference to the "rebellion of music against its own meaning".<sup>290</sup> This terminology is deployed primarily in relation to *Second Symphony*, and only by extension or indirectly applied to Dada, but it nevertheless gives an insight into the view of the latter held by Adorno. He consistently foregrounds anarchic destruction, characterizing the negation of meaning as instinctive and aggressive, in keeping with the widespread perception of the movement which became a critical commonplace. *Second Symphony* fits this description, combining an array of musical styles and idioms, and building towards a cataclysmic climax.

In the same section of *Philosophy of New Music*, Adorno presents the negation of meaning effected by new music as an attack on the traditional artwork, which predominated prior to the advent of modernism. The "closed" or "organic" work is characterized by coherence and unity, with a meaning that appears to be immediately intuitable.<sup>291</sup> The "disrupted" or "fragmentary" work reveals that supposed intuitability as illusory, and derives much of its own power from its violation of the norms governing the previous model.<sup>292</sup> The radical break with aesthetic meaning is brought on by a critical consciousness of the enduring contradiction between the semblance of reconciliation offered by art, and the fact that this promise of happiness cannot be fulfilled through art.<sup>293</sup> In a continuation of the passage quoted above, Adorno connects the negation of meaning in a wider sense to the liberation of music from language, discussing those early compositions by Krenek, which he has just compared to Dada:

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<sup>288</sup> Adorno, "Music, Language, and Composition", p.121.

<sup>289</sup> Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, p.98.

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid.*, p.98.

<sup>291</sup> Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, p.96, p.98.

<sup>292</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.96-97.

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.96-97.

The nexus of these works is the negation of the nexus, and their triumph resides in the fact that music itself proves to be the opponent of the language of words in that it is able to speak meaninglessly, whereas all closed musical artworks stand together under the sign of pseudomorphosis, as the language of words. All organic music emerged from the *stile recitativo* [a recitative style between speech and song]. From the beginning it was modelled on speech. The emancipation of music today is synonymous with its emancipation from the language of words, and this is the lightning that flashes up in the destruction of “meaning”. But it concerns expression first of all.<sup>294</sup>

Adorno chiefly has in mind the significative function, rather than the expressive impulse, when he refers to the transcended language of words. He commends new music, during the phase of free atonality, for eliminating the resemblance to this medium and speaking meaninglessly. He thereby affirms the primacy of expression, while recognizing that it is intimately bound up with the negation of meaning. Their continuing imbrication is evident in the subsequent development of twelve-tone technique, as well as in works such as *Second Symphony*: “Just as the absence of meaning in those pieces by Krenek accords them the most powerful expression, that of objective catastrophe, the inserted expressive elements in the most recent twelve-tone compositions indicate the loosening of expression from the consistency of language.”<sup>295</sup> By asserting that the negation of the nexus is itself the nexus of these works, Adorno effectively contains the destruction of meaning, redescribing it as meaningful.

#### CAGE

In the closing essay of *Quasi una Fantasia*, Adorno suggests a possible direction for serious music to take following its development after WW2. He presents notes towards what he terms a “*musique informelle*”, which would move beyond the integral serialism that grew out of twelve-tone technique, without reverting to the free atonality that preceded it, or indeed to the tonality of the

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<sup>294</sup> Ibid., pp.98-99.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid., p.99.

common practice period. This informal music resists easy definition, but he says that it would reject “all forms which are external or abstract or which confront it in an inflexible way”, going so far as to abandon even the “system of musical coordinates which have crystallized out in the innermost recesses of the musical substance itself”.<sup>296</sup> He further differentiates his conception of *musique informelle* from the contemporary development of aleatory music, which is associated with Cage. Adorno’s assessment of this neo-avant-garde composer and his school is nuanced:

The aspirations of Cage and his school have eradicated all topoi, without going into mourning for a subjective, organic ideal in which they suspect the topoi of maintaining an after-life. This is why to dismiss anti-art as pretentious cabaret and humour would be as great an error as to celebrate it. But such aspirations do not yet amount to a *musique informelle*. As a joke they hurl culture into people’s faces, a fate which both culture and people richly deserve. They do this not as a barbaric gesture, but to demonstrate what they have made of each other. The joke only turns sour when it appeals to an exotic, arty-crafty metaphysics and ends up with an exaggerated version of the very positivism which it set out to denounce. This helps to explain why the joke, which I respect, has been neutralized in contemporary society. The latter defends itself ideologically by swallowing everything. A *musique informelle* should also take good care to protect itself against revivals of *Die Aktion* and Dadaism, against Alexandrian anarchy.<sup>297</sup>

Warning a *musique informelle* against adopting an attitude derivative of Dada, Adorno again couples the latter with Expressionism, here represented by the magazine *Die Aktion*, attributing to both movements the same spirit of anarchy identified in “Music, Language, and Composition”. Cage’s version of anti-art is granted a qualified legitimacy, such that it should neither be dismissed nor celebrated. There is an acknowledgement of its critical force, brought to bear on culture and people, indicting art and its public. This double-pronged attack

<sup>296</sup> Adorno, *Quasi Una Fantasia*, p.272-273.

<sup>297</sup> *Ibid.*, p.314.

discloses their similarly degraded state under current conditions, with the ascendancy of the mutually reinforcing phenomena of the culture industry and reified consciousness. The respect accorded to the joke is however strictly limited, in recognition of the fact that the capacity for resistance is itself circumscribed under late capitalism, with its tendency to recuperate all opposition. We might consider the extent to which this analysis also applies to Dadaist anti-art, taking into account the different historical context and state of development of the musical material.

What do Cage and Dada have in common, beyond the anti-artistic orientation assumed here? I have already highlighted the role played by chance in the work of many Dadaists, including in the field of music Ribemont-Dessaignes. There are further musical connections between Cage and Dada, for example his rediscovery of pre-Dadaist aleatory and indeterminate compositions by Duchamp.<sup>298</sup> He also championed Satie, arranging the first performance of *Vexations* [1893], which with its instruction to play a short musical theme eight hundred and forty times anticipates the open-ended repetition of a single note in Picabia's *American Nanny* [1920], the only example of "sodomist music".<sup>299</sup> Cage's *4'33"* [1952] was itself anticipated by Schulhoff's "In Futurum", an elaborately notated period of silence which interrupted his jazz-influenced suite *Five Picturesques* [1919].<sup>300</sup> There are obvious similarities between the famous happenings in which Cage participated and the performances staged by the Dadaists. In the essay "Difficulties" [1964], Adorno points to the convergence of the apparent opposites serial music and aleatory music, while comparing Cage to Dada, which on this occasion is coupled with Surrealism:

[I]n their effect the extremes of absolute determination and absolute chance coincide. Statistical generality becomes the law of composition, a law that is alien to the ego. Certainly the absolute indeterminacy of Cage and his school is not exhausted in it. It has a polemical meaning; it comes close to the dadaist and surrealist actions of the past. But their

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<sup>298</sup> Sylvère Lotringer, "Becoming Duchamp" [1998], in *Tout-Fait: The Marcel Duchamp Studies Online Journal* 1.2 (2000): [http://www.toutfait.com/issues/issue\\_2/Articles/lotringer.html](http://www.toutfait.com/issues/issue_2/Articles/lotringer.html) [accessed 4 March 2019].

<sup>299</sup> Robert Orledge, *Satie the Composer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p.259.

<sup>300</sup> Ingram, "Songs, Anti-Symphonies and Sodomist Music", p.13.

“*happenings*”, in keeping with the political situation, no longer have any politically demolishing content and hence tend to take on a sectarian, séance-like quality – while everyone believes they have participated in something uncanny, nothing at all happens, no ghost appears. It is Cage’s contribution, which cannot be exaggerated, to have sown doubts regarding the extremes of musical logic, the blind ideal of complete domination over nature in music; hardly uninfluenced by “*action painting*”. What he himself offers in his most radical works is nevertheless not as different as one might suppose from studying the programme, even if his best pieces, like the piano Concerto, still emit an extraordinary shock that stubbornly resists all neutralization.<sup>301</sup>

Also picked out as a highlight in *Quasi una Fantasia*, Cage’s *Piano Concerto* [1958] is here credited with “resist[ing] all neutralization”, contrary to the claim in the other text that the “joke [...] has been neutralized”. It is reminiscent of Dada in its open and indeterminate score, and in the chance interaction of its autonomous parts. Adorno praises this type of music for its opposition to the domination of nature, which he thinks is simply duplicated by integral serialism. He also criticizes its attempt to access an illusory immediacy, which ultimately causes it to fall into the same trap. Returning to the topic of *musique informelle* in “Difficulties”, Adorno underlines the risk of lapsing into apolitical aestheticism, as he reflects on the “preponderance of extras, of the extra-musical in the most recent music”, or more specifically the use of “noise, bruitistic effects, and then optical, especially mimetic ones”, techniques taken from the Dadaists: “These actions [...] frequently have something aimless about them. Dada turns into *l’art pour l’art*, and this is hard to reconcile with the idea of dada.”<sup>302</sup> He recognizes the political orientation of Dadaist anti-art, attributing the relative lack of urgency and direction in Cage’s version of it to the narrowing of the scope for resistance in contemporary society.

*Quasi una Fantasia* talks disparagingly of “exotic, arty-crafty metaphysics”, perhaps alluding to the composer’s interest in Eastern philosophy, including Zen Buddhism and the *I-Ching*. There is said to be an affinity between

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<sup>301</sup> Adorno, “Difficulties”, p.658.

<sup>302</sup> *Ibid.*, p.659.



this school and spiritualism, something it does share with early Surrealism, especially during the transitional phase of experimentation with séances involving many ex-Dadaists.<sup>303</sup> Just as he describes its happenings as “séance-like” in “Difficulties”, Adorno here highlights the “folly” of “abstract negation in seances with overtones of Steiner, eurhythmics and healthy living sects”, while pointing to the utopian moment in the “hope of escaping from the lie of everything meaningful, where meaning is merely subjectively postulated”.<sup>304</sup> This negation of meaning is predicated on the collapse of both the formal structures of the traditional artwork, and the unified subject which projected coherence onto it. Adorno connects this phenomenon to the element of abstruseness, which he says is a constant presence in serious music from free atonality and twelve-tone technique up to integral serialism and aleatory music:

Perhaps the reason for this most recent abstruseness is that in contrast to its Dadaist grandparents it degenerates at once into culture, and it cannot remain unaffected by this. The assaults of Dadaism could not be accused of abstruseness because they were both conceived and interpreted as hostile to art and culture. Abstruseness degenerates into ideology and to a vacuous craft where its actions remain on the aesthetic plane and thereby submit to the very criterion of meaning – and culture is for good or ill the embodiment of meaning – which they have challenged. However, this is dictated by the impossibility today of that politics on which Dadaism still relied. “Action painting”, “action composing” are cryptograms of the direct action that has now been ruled out; they have arisen in an age in which every such action is either forestalled by technology or recuperated by an administered world.<sup>305</sup>

As in “Difficulties”, Cage is associated with the action painting of the Abstract Expressionists, whom we have seen identified as descendants of the Dadaists in *Aesthetic Theory*. For Adorno, Dada’s anti-artistic orientation is politically motivated, which is what distinguishes its negation of meaning from that enacted

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<sup>303</sup> Sanouillet, *Dada in Paris*, pp.158-160, pp.274-276.

<sup>304</sup> Adorno, *Quasi una Fantasia*, p.315.

<sup>305</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.315-316.

in neo-avant-garde manifestations. Cage's version of anti-art, produced and received in a social situation in which every avenue of potential resistance is blocked, is unable to transcend aesthetic concerns. This is however an objective limit to all art under current conditions, which the Dadaists also ultimately run up against, according to other statements by Adorno. *Quasi una Fantasia* asserts that in any case "meaning is inescapable", as it "imposes itself on works of art against their will", using a phrase that echoes *Philosophy of New Music*: "[E]ven negated meaning is still meaning."<sup>306</sup> He understands culture essentially as the embodiment of meaning, even when its content is the negation of meaning, once again interpreting meaninglessness as meaningful.

#### NEO-DADA

In *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno revisits the theme of the negation of meaning, which is now attributed to Neo-Dada. This term reflects the resurgence of interest in the concerns of the early twentieth-century avant-garde, especially Dada, in the 1950s and 1960s. It is most associated with neo-avant-garde figures based first at Black Mountain College, then in New York, including Cage, Allan Kaprow, Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg. They overlapped with and reacted against the Abstract Expressionists, as well as returning to practices and techniques pioneered by the Dadaists. Cage's participation in happenings and his experiments with chance have already been noted. We might in addition highlight the breaking down of the boundary between the performers and the audience with Kaprow, the appropriation of popular iconography by Johns, and the use of collage and assemblage in Rauschenberg's "combines".<sup>307</sup> For Adorno, Neo-Dada is a contemporary manifestation of advanced art, following through the destruction of meaning initially undertaken by the Dadaists:

In that artworks relentlessly chip away at the nexus in which meaning is founded, they turn against this nexus and against meaning altogether. The unconscious labour of the artistic *ingenium* on the meaning of the work as

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<sup>306</sup> Ibid., p.317.

<sup>307</sup> For an introduction to Neo-Dada, see: Susan Hapgood, "Neo-Dada", in *Neo-Dada: Redefining Art 1958-62*, ed. by Susan Hapgood (New York, New York: American Federation of Arts and Universe Publishing, 1994), pp.11-56.

on something substantial and enduring transcends this meaning. The advanced production of recent decades has become self-conscious of this issue, has made it thematic and translated it into the structure of artworks. It is easy to convict neodadaism of a lack of political import and dismiss it as meaningless and purposeless in every sense of the word. But to do so is to forget that its products ruthlessly demonstrate the fate of meaning without any regard to themselves as artworks.<sup>308</sup>

As we have seen, *Quasi una Fantasia* and “Difficulties” give a mixed response to the question of whether there is any possibility for neo-avant-garde anti-art to resist its neutralization by advanced capitalism, though their outlook is predominantly pessimistic. Adorno says that these works necessarily lack “any politically demolishing content”, differentiating them from their precursors with reference to the “impossibility today of that politics on which Dadaism still relied”.<sup>309</sup> He further states that “direct action [...] has now been ruled out”, emphasizing the recuperation of all opposition by a society that “defends itself ideologically by swallowing everything”.<sup>310</sup> Cage is nevertheless judged to have made a contribution which it is said “cannot be exaggerated”, and in particular he is praised for generating an “extraordinary shock” with his *Piano Concerto*.<sup>311</sup> Elsewhere in *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno is sceptical about the aestheticization of politics by the neo-avant-garde, describing the “enthusiasm for the beauty of street battles” as a “reprise of futurist and dadaist actions”.<sup>312</sup> However, Neo-Dada is to some extent defended against charges of apoliticism and irrelevance in the passage quoted above, because of the uncompromising way in which it carries out the negation of meaning, at the expense of the aesthetic status of its own works. This is ultimately mimetic, a reaction to the crisis of meaning in contemporary society.

Immediately following the text excerpted above, Adorno introduces the canonical figure of Samuel Beckett, not usually considered a Neo-Dadaist: “Beckett’s oeuvre already presupposes this experience of the destruction of

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<sup>308</sup> Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p.201.

<sup>309</sup> Adorno, “Difficulties”, p.658; Adorno, *Quasi una Fantasia*, p.316.

<sup>310</sup> Adorno, *Quasi una Fantasia*, p.314, p.316.

<sup>311</sup> Adorno, “Difficulties”, p.658.

<sup>312</sup> *Ibid.*, p.403.

meaning as self-evident, yet also pushes it beyond meaning's abstract negation in that his plays force the traditional categories of art to undergo this experience, concretely suspend them, and extrapolate others out of the nothingness."<sup>313</sup> In the later writings of Adorno, Beckett is often held up as one of his favoured artists, in this respect increasingly supplanting Schoenberg. In a note he made on Beckett's *Endgame* [1957], during preparatory work for his essay "Trying to Understand *Endgame*" [1961], Adorno describes the playwright as a "Dadaist without Dada".<sup>314</sup> After the discussion of Beckett in *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno also cites the familiar example of Cage's *Piano Concerto*:

The dividing line between authentic art that takes on itself the crisis of meaning and a resigned art consisting literally and figuratively of protocol sentences is that in significant works the negation of meaning itself takes shape as a negative, whereas in the others the negation of meaning is stubbornly and positively replicated. Everything depends on this: whether meaning inheres in the negation of meaning in the artwork or if the negation conforms to the status quo; whether the crisis of meaning is reflected in the works or whether it remains immediate and therefore alien to the subject. Key events may include certain musical works such as Cage's *Piano Concerto*, which impose on themselves a law of inexorable aleatoriness and thereby achieve a sort of meaning: the expression of horror.<sup>315</sup>

By contrast with this positive assessment of Beckett, Cage's school is accused of remaining stuck at the stage of "abstract negation" in *Quasi una Fantasia*.<sup>316</sup> In *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno counts one of his compositions among the authentic artworks which critically reflect the crisis of meaning, as opposed to those which simply reproduce it. As with Krenek's "expression [...] of objective catastrophe" in *Philosophy of New Music*, Cage's negation of meaning is understood in

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<sup>313</sup> Ibid., p.201.

<sup>314</sup> Samuel Beckett, cited and discussed in Shane Weller and Dirk Van Hulle, "Dossier: Adorno's Notes on Beckett", *Journal of Beckett Studies*, 19.2 (2010): p.21.

<sup>315</sup> Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p.202.

<sup>316</sup> Adorno, *Quasi una Fantasia*, p.315.

relation to its counterpart expression, in this case the “expression of horror”.<sup>317</sup> Next, Adorno talks about montage, which he positions as central to the “process of destroying the artwork as a nexus of meaning”, tracing it back to “radical manifestations of expressionism”, a formulation which elsewhere in the book is identified with Dada.<sup>318</sup> He identifies the paradox at the core of this technique: “Artworks [...] that negate meaning must also necessarily be disrupted in their unity; this is the function of montage, which disavows unity through the emerging disparateness of the parts at the same time that, as a principle of form, it reaffirms unity.”<sup>319</sup>

It is in my view reasonable to make inferences about his interpretation of Dada, based on his account of Neo-Dada, and in particular its representative Cage. A number of continuities have been highlighted here, chief among them the common thread of the negation of meaning, which also features as a point of comparison between Dada and Krenek. The main difference is that the neo-avant-garde has less potential for social import, by virtue of a changing historical context, in which the space for opposition is progressively attenuated. Unlike the purely aesthetic rebellion which emerges in response to that development, the Dadaists’ political dimension informs their anti-artistic orientation, according to Adorno. *Aesthetic Theory* elaborates on the negation of meaning in advanced art, stressing how it is borne out of the immanent development of the artistic material:

Artworks that divest themselves of any semblance to meaning do not thereby forfeit their similitude to language. They enunciate their meaninglessness with the same determinacy as traditional artworks enunciate their positive meaning. Today this is the capacity of art: Through the consistent negation of meaning it does justice to the postulates that once constituted the meaning of artworks. Works of the highest level of form that are meaningless or alien to meaning are therefore more than simply meaningless because they gain their content [*Gehalt*] through the negation of meaning. An artwork that rigorously

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<sup>317</sup> Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, p.99.

<sup>318</sup> Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p.203.

<sup>319</sup> *Ibid.*, p.202.

negates meaning is by this very rigour bound to the same density and unity that was once requisite to the presence of meaning. Artworks become nexuses of meaning, even against their will, to the extent that they negate meaning.<sup>320</sup>

This is an expanded exposition of an attitude hinted at in previous quotations from *Philosophy of New Music* and *Quasi una Fantasia*. The resemblance of music to language is likewise extended, so that all art is treated as a repository of meaning, up to and including the point at which it embraces meaninglessness. Adorno construes it as a form of negative meaning, which still shares the characteristic features of positive meaning, being described in terms of its “determinancy”, “density” and “unity”, and praised as “consistent” and “rigorous”. His conception of the artwork gives priority to its integral structuration as a nexus of meaning, even as that principle is repudiated by the Dadaists. He remains committed to the category of aesthetic autonomy, himself neutralizing the critical force of anti-art by judging it according to the criteria it attempts to overcome. There are political stakes to this tendency to contain the negation of meaning as itself meaningful, as his perspective tends to reinforce the dominant values of the institution of art, as reflected in the notion of meaning constituted through the multi-directional play of aesthetic elements in a formally autonomous artwork. My point is not that we should simply affirm meaninglessness instead, but rather that the potentially productive tension between Dadaist anti-art and Adorno’s aesthetics ought to be accentuated.

#### POLITICAL ORIENTATION

Deriving Adorno’s interpretation of Dada from incidental references to it made in connection with Krenek, Cage and Neo-Dada, I have cast doubt on his characterization of the negation of meaning as an outbreak of anarchic destruction, instead pointing to the relatively systematic anti-artistic project, which encompasses a self-reflexive critique of its own institutional basis. In addition, I have criticized him for automatically treating that negation of meaning in terms of the affirmation of expression, and for neglecting

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<sup>320</sup> Ibid., pp.201-202.

countertendencies within Dada's creative practice which mobilize straightforward signification and direct communication. The negation of meaning includes the negation of linguistic meaning and the negation of musical meaning, discipline-specific variations on the negation of aesthetic meaning, which for him consists in the repudiation of the integral structuration of the artwork, the internal logic of a formal complex, and the play of aesthetic elements. This conception of meaning implicates his aesthetics in the dominant values of the institution of art, above all the principle of aesthetic autonomy, which is rejected by the Dadaists as central to the bourgeois ideology of art, but maintained by Adorno as a necessary condition for social import. He holds that language has an irreducible significative or communicative component, and similarly that music always retains a residual resemblance to discursive articulation, assertions of objective limits which correspond to his claim that the negation of meaning is itself meaningful. These theoretical manoeuvres are themselves limiting, arguably reflecting his investment in aesthetic autonomy, which admittedly is complicated by his critical awareness of its ideological aspects. He grants a measure of artistic legitimacy to the movement, chiefly on account of the vehemence with which it strives after a political effect, enacting the destruction of meaning as part of its anti-artistic project. That political dimension to anti-art is a consistent theme of his interpretation of Dada, which might constitute a moment of insight, if it is repurposed to put pressure on his framework of aesthetic judgement.

As we have seen, Adorno often highlights the political orientation of the movement, but he does not elaborate it much beyond an undefined antagonism to the status quo, as in the following observation about the Symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé from *Aesthetic Theory*: “Out of his desire for a utopian art free of everything art-alien [*Kunstfremden*], Mallarmé was apolitical and therefore extremely conservative. But by his rejection of the sort of unctuous message as preached by every conservative voice today, he converges with his political counterpole, dadaism[.]”<sup>321</sup> In Zurich during WW1, Dada was militantly pacifist, internationalist and anti-bourgeois. Its political sympathies arguably inclined towards anarchism, especially in the case of its co-founder Ball, who studied the

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<sup>321</sup> Ibid., p.405 [*GS7*, p.476].

works of Mikhail Bakunin and Peter Kropotkin.<sup>322</sup> In solidarity with communist revolutions in Budapest and Munich in 1919, Richter, Arp, Eggeling, Hennings and Janco joined with others in an Association of Revolutionary Artists, a short-lived outgrowth of Dada.<sup>323</sup> In Berlin, Dada pledged allegiance to revolutionary communism in one of its main manifestos, while simultaneously parodying the rhetoric of political demands.<sup>324</sup> There were differences of emphasis within this branch of the movement: Grosz, Heartfield and Wieland Herzfelde were members of the Communist Party; Höch, Hausmann and Baader would be better classified as unaffiliated anarcho-communists.<sup>325</sup> Schwitters was excluded for being politically disengaged, perhaps part of the reason for establishing the separate identity of Merz in Hannover.<sup>326</sup> Cologne Dada split over the question of how far aesthetic radicalism should be sacrificed to make art accessible to the masses, with members in favour of clarity and simplicity leaving to form the rival group Stupid.<sup>327</sup> In Paris and New York, Dada conformed most closely to a strand of individualist anarchism which can be traced to the influence of Max Stirner.<sup>328</sup> This is the sense in which the description of its destructive capacity as anarchic could be said to be correct. Overall, Dada's political orientation is uneven, varying in prominence, intensity and character, vacillating between anarchism and communism, with the occasional outlier like the proto-fascist Julius Evola in Rome. Adorno's reading of the movement does not accommodate these nuances, but it is correct in positioning the movement broadly on the radical left.

At another point in *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno again refers to Dada's political orientation without specifying its content, when discussing the renunciation of semblance by advanced art, and the neutralization of its critical potential in contemporary society: “[E]ven those works that renounce semblance are cut off from real political effect, which was the original inspiration for the

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<sup>322</sup> Ball, *Flight Out of Time*, p.10.

<sup>323</sup> Theresa Papanikolas, *Anarchism and the Advent of Paris Dada: Art and Criticism 1914-1924* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), p.105.

<sup>324</sup> Raoul Hausmann and Richard Huelsenbeck, “What is Dadaism and What Does it Want in Germany?” [1919], trans. by Ralph Manheim, in *The Dada Painters and Poets*, pp.41-42.

<sup>325</sup> Maud Lavin, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife: The Weimar Photomontages of Hannah Höch* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1933), p.16.

<sup>326</sup> Rasula, *Destruction was my Beatrice*, p.xiii, p.88.

<sup>327</sup> Stokes, “Rage and Liberation”, p.3, pp.54-56.

<sup>328</sup> David Ashford, *Autarchies: The Invention of Selfishness* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), pp.1-49; Papanikolas, *Anarchism and the Advent of Paris Dada*, pp.83-84, pp.105-112.



rejection of semblance by dadaism.”<sup>329</sup> I think that he is wrong to construe Dadaist anti-art as being concerned primarily with political effect, as he does in the passages quoted here. Rather, Dada’s renunciation of semblance – like its negation of meaning, insofar as both contribute to the wider anti-artistic project – actually works more on the level of social import than social impact. The movement for the most part does not seek to further a cause by propagandistic means, nor does it attempt to implement social change directly, though there are notable exceptions, particularly in Berlin. Its political orientation typically takes a mediated form, with the art-institutional dimension acting as a point of contact between the realms of the aesthetic and the social, so that through its subversive interventions into that network of institutions, discourses and practices it might reach beyond the aesthetic sphere to a critique of the social system as a whole. The field of culture is an integral component of that broader reality, co-constructed and continuous with other social structures, and its complicity with the given order is disclosed and attacked by Dadaist anti-art. There is a greater political resonance to the systematic destruction of the dominant ideas which shape the production and reception of artworks, by virtue of their relation to the social situation in which they circulate, immanently permeated by it even in the case of aesthetic autonomy itself. I delve deeper into this problematic in the next chapter, focusing on the disruption of the modes of attention considered appropriate to art, in a detailed analysis of the First International Dada Fair in Berlin in 1920. Adorno explains that the renunciation of semblance, which for him involves a higher-order semblance of reconciliation articulated on the level of form, is borne out of a recognition that the artwork cannot transcend aesthetic concerns to realize this promise of happiness, an aporia of art which has only sharpened over time. If Dada is commended retrospectively for its clear-sightedness in violently rejecting art on the basis of that falsity, its artistic legitimacy is still strictly limited, with its negation of meaning presumably falling short of the standard of a critical reflection of the general tendency towards meaninglessness. In my view, Adorno misreads the movement in crucial respects, and his scepticism about politically motivated art, combined with his

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<sup>329</sup> Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p.137.

investment in aesthetic autonomy, prevent him from grasping the full significance of anti-art, which also has implications for his own aesthetics.

### **Dada Contra Adorno**

In this chapter, I have reconstructed Adorno's interpretation of Dada, building on his scattered remarks about the movement. These are supplemented by a wide range of examples of its creative practice, introduced to complete and complicate that picture. He mainly focuses on the techniques of montage, sound poetry and abstract art, to which have been added accounts of its performances, manifestos and found sculptures, as well as other experiments in a variety of media. His characterization of the movement as a spontaneous and chaotic destructive force coincides with the established art-historical narrative criticized by Dickerman and Hutchinson. For Adorno, Dada is concerned primarily with shock, an effect it seeks to generate by enacting the destruction of the unified subject and the unified artwork, in collages and photomontages that violently reconstitute traditional and popular source material. His model of alienating infantilism is unable to accommodate the diversity of tactics in fact adopted by the movement in pursuit of its objective of shocking the bourgeoisie, nor does he emphasize sufficiently its critical relation to the popular culture which is mobilized against pure culture as part of that endeavour. He incorrectly identifies subjective expression as the main motivation for Dada, an error evident from his repeated conflation of it with Expressionism. The refusal to be bound by the discipline of a consistent artistic style is falsely construed in terms of an unchecked overflow of the experience of suffering, an accusation of one-sidedness which recurs in his discussions of the movement. Its sound poetry is said to deny the irreducible discursive component of language to embrace an unattainable ideal of absolute expression, while its abstract art supposedly strives towards an equally chimerical dimensionless point of pure subjectivity, paradoxes neatly encapsulated by the interpenetration of extreme specificity and contentless generality in the deictic gesture. He overstates the importance of subjective expression to the movement, and neglects the ways in which it critically interrogates the categories of subjectivity and expression. This bias affects his evaluation of the negation of meaning, which is treated reductively as

conditioned by the expressive impulse, and further misrepresented as a form of anarchic destruction, when in reality it is often self-conscious and relatively systematic. On the face of it, Adorno is unfairly dismissive of Dada. However, I believe that there is scope to derive an alternative interpretation from the comments collected here, which would draw out the ambiguities in his position, and cast the movement in a more favourable light.

Continuing with the focus on music, I will distil this summary into a playlist of the compositions cited in connection with Dada by Adorno: Stravinsky's *Renard* and *The Solider's Tale*; Brecht and Weill's *The Threepenny Opera* and *Mahagonny*; Krenek's *Second Symphony*; and Cage's *Piano Concerto*. These are all by figures about whom he is sharply critical in a number of places, though interestingly he tends to accord greater artistic legitimacy to the pieces of theirs that he considers proximate to Dada. In particular, the Stravinsky of *Renard* and *The Solider's Tale* and the Brecht and Weill of *The Threepenny Opera* and *Mahagonny* are praised for their thoroughgoing negativity, repudiating respectively the ideals of authenticity and aesthetic totality, and claims to social and political validity, illusions they are said to affirm at other points in their careers. Stravinsky is described as "preoccupied with considerations of effect", while Weill is credited for his "social-polemic impact".<sup>330</sup> This imputed preference for political effect over political resonance, or alternatively social impact over social import, is thought to carry with it an increased risk of recuperation, and it is the degree of negativity they are able to maintain which guards against such an outcome, with more critical force attributed to surrealistic music than objectivist music on that basis. Generally, Adorno is sceptical of art which pursues a political end or attempts to bring about social change, and even when it is restricted to producing an effect of alienation, or relies solely on the impact of infantilism, the same perceived problems arise. We might be tempted to explain the partial exceptions made for *The Threepenny Opera* and *Mahagonny*, and to a lesser extent *Renard* and *The Solider's Tale*, by pointing to the correspondence between the thoroughgoing negativity he identifies in these works and the central role played by negation in his own dialectical method, a negative orientation also shared by Dada. In relation to

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<sup>330</sup> Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, p.188; Adorno, "On the Social Situation of Music", p.409.

Brecht and Weill, Adorno states that this uncompromising attitude extends to the repudiation of aesthetic autonomy, a stance which has ramifications for his aesthetic theory.

Turning to Krenek's *Second Symphony* and Cage's *Piano Concerto*, I want to emphasize the singular status granted to these compositions, noting that their creators do not fit easily within Adorno's account of the evolution of advanced art. Krenek's experimental disposition, his refusal to be confined to a set artistic trajectory, conflicts with a model that asserts the absolute necessity of free atonality at a certain historical stage. He later progressed to a version of twelve-tone technique, debating it in correspondence with Adorno, but diverged from that path with his jazz-influenced opera *Jonny Plays* [1927], anticipating the populist style of *The Threepenny Opera* and *Mahagonny*.<sup>331</sup> Cage's aleatory and indeterminate music is arguably the antithesis of the integrated and closed works produced within the dodecaphonic system, though like them it is deeply rooted in the immanent development of the musical material. He was radically opposed to integral serialism as well, notwithstanding the ultimate convergence of chance and determination as extremes which is posited by Adorno. Nevertheless, *Second Symphony* and *Piano Concerto* seem to exercise a peculiar power for him, originating in qualitatively unique aesthetic experiences. As a young man he attended an early performance of the first piece in Kassel in 1923, a year before he met Krenek. It is reported to have made a profound and lasting impression on him, and he strives to capture the initial sense of shock in his subsequent reflections highlighting the "vehemence" and "explosive force" of *Second Symphony*.<sup>332</sup> In *Quasi una Fantasia*, Adorno recalls a similarly significant encounter with *Piano Concerto* in Cologne in 1958: "I was [...] deeply moved by a single hearing of Cage's *Piano Concerto* played on Cologne radio, though I would be hard put to define the effect with any precision. Even at the best of times precise definition is anything but straightforward with works of this kind."<sup>333</sup> Of course, Adorno's difficulty in defining the effect of *Piano Concerto*, and in adequately conveying the impact of *Second Symphony*, is bound up with the enigmaticalness of art, and as such essential to aesthetic experience.

<sup>331</sup> Müller-Doohm, *Adorno: A Biography*, pp.115-118.

<sup>332</sup> *Ibid.*, p.116; Peter Tregear, *Ernst Krenek and the Politics of Musical Style* (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2013), pp.11-12.

<sup>333</sup> Adorno, *Quasi una Fantasia*, p.270.

We might still speculate whether his hesitation in the face of these works suggests that on some level he intuits the fundamental challenge to his framework of aesthetic judgement which they represent, a critical potential also latent in Dada. Indeed, Adorno implies that their peculiar power may be attributed in part to this very capacity to unsettle his model of advanced art.

The key concept here is anti-art, a semi-submerged theme of Adorno's interpretation of Dada. In my reading, I have sought to bring it to the surface, following the lead taken by Hutchinson. Via the association with middle-period Stravinsky and the collaborations of Brecht and Weill, Adorno recognizes the thoroughgoing negativity of the movement, but in my view he does not appreciate the full extent of it, as manifested in the self-critical turn of anti-art. He acknowledges that the anti-artistic orientation is a distinctive feature of Dada, but it is treated almost as accidental, falling out of the attempt to eliminate discursive meaning from language, when it is introduced in "Presuppositions". Highlighting the link with the Surrealists, *Aesthetic Theory* contains a qualified endorsement of their anti-art, locating its truth content in the justified rejection of an art that is incapable of realizing its utopian potential as praxis, an insight they inherited from Dada. Identifying the movement as an antecedent of Cage, *Quasi una Fantasia* again concedes a measure of artistic legitimacy to anti-art, arguing in a typically nuanced fashion that it should not simply be dismissed, any more than it ought to be celebrated uncritically. In both instances, Adorno depicts the anti-artistic project as a failure, with its oppositional capacity quickly exhausted or neutralized, increasingly so given the limited scope for resistance under advanced capitalism. By comparison, Dadaist anti-art is implicitly granted a greater degree of critical force, largely due to the urgency and direction conferred by its alleged political orientation, less obviously untenable in that different historical context, which is thrown into relief by the focus on recuperation. Drawing on Bürger, I have proposed that the movement can be better understood as grounded in a critical awareness of the institutionality of art, and it is on this level that its true political resonance or social import crystallizes, through the incorporation of art-institutional mechanisms into the play of aesthetic elements making up the artwork. If it is reconstellated in this way, Adorno's interpretation of Dada reveals its moment of truth, which is the artistic legitimacy accorded to it on account of the thoroughgoing negativity of its anti-artistic orientation. This

aspect of the movement in turn calls into question some of his central assumptions, a critical insight which in my view he fails to reckon with fully.

At the end of the previous chapter, I set out a preliminary assessment of Adorno's blindnesses, which would provisionally seem to have been confirmed by my reconstruction of his interpretation of Dada. To recapitulate, Adorno fails to give sufficient weight to the critical potential of popular culture vis-à-vis pure culture, especially with regard to the strategic incorporation of elements of the former into the domain of the latter that was widely practised by the historical avant-garde. The appetitive and instrumentalizing modes of attention associated with the culture industry can be embodied by the figures of the voluptuous and the partisan, evoked respectively by the critically inflected populism and the politically motivated anti-art which he attributes to the Dadaists. He does not appreciate the full complexity of their relationship with popular culture, which is reciprocally negated through avant-garde experimentation at the same time as it is mobilized against pure culture. He also misunderstands the nature of their political orientation, which by engaging the art-institutional dimension operates more on the level of social import than social impact. His model of advanced art, privileging the formally autonomous artwork, is insufficiently negatively mediated by these excluded modes of attention, which refuse aesthetic autonomy by insisting that art have a purpose, such as pleasure or commitment. The Dadaists further violate aesthetic autonomy by integrating their critical relation to the institution of art into the inner-aesthetic nexus in which meaning consists, thereby negotiating the dialectic of the aesthetic and the social in a different manner than he envisages. Their manipulation of art-institutional mechanisms demands an expansion of his conceptions of aesthetic experience and aesthetic form, a need which has already been identified through my immanent analysis of his aesthetic theory. That development is blocked by his investment in aesthetic autonomy, also the principle underpinning the traditional aesthetics of the bourgeois institution of art, which he sets himself against, but with which he shares a Kantian inheritance. He repeatedly redescribes the negation of meaning as meaningful, which is in practice a defensive manoeuvre, deflecting its critical charge. He evaluates anti-art using the same framework of aesthetic judgement as it attacks, thereby reasserting the ultimate priority of aesthetic autonomy, even as he recognizes its ideological aspects. This bolsters his conception of aesthetic

meaning as the dynamic mutual interaction of the elements of a formally autonomous artwork, as well as the concentrated and immersive engagement which he advocates as appropriate to advanced art, rather than accentuating the pressure brought to bear on them by anti-art. In these respects, Adorno's blindneses can be seen to have contributed to his misreading of the movement, and the alternative interpretation gestured towards here suggests some areas to be explored in greater detail in the next chapter, which contains case studies of the Cabaret Voltaire, Duchamp's *Fountain* and the First International Dada Fair. Once again circling around the figure of the philistine, I will probe deeper into the relationship with popular culture, the manipulation of art-institutional mechanisms, and the disruption of the dominant modes of attention, to complete this process of reimagining Dada contra Adorno.

## Dada's Philistine: The Destruction of Art by Artistic Means

Before further elaborating my interpretation of Dada, I should briefly gloss the concept of the institution of art, which has already been introduced, but takes on greater prominence here. This preparatory note is an extremely truncated overview of its theoretical development, marking out the broad contours of a provisional definition, which is further refined in the course of the chapter through case studies foregrounding the art-institutional dimension of the movement. The institution of art was first explicitly theorized as such within the discipline of analytic philosophy, in classificatory exercises conducted by Arthur Danto and George Dickie.<sup>1</sup> They separately set themselves the task of identifying what is specifically aesthetic about the artwork, both solving that puzzle with reference to an artworld which has the power to confer aesthetic status. Danto highlights participation in an aesthetic discourse comprising art theory and art history, while Dickie puts more stress on institutions and practices, though neither of them provides much concrete detail concerning the structure of the institution of art.<sup>2</sup> Their accounts are abstract and apolitical, especially compared to the alternative put forward by Bürger. Emerging from the traditions of critical theory and the social history of art, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* traces the evolution of the institution of art over time, from sacral art through courtly art to bourgeois art, with the last of these fully established by the end of the eighteenth century, reaching its apogee with programmatic aestheticism a hundred years later. It is characterized by the increasing detachment of art and life, and the

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur Danto, "The Artistic Enfranchisement of Real Objects: The Artworld" [1964], in *Aesthetics: A Critical Anthology* [1977], ed. by George Dickie, Richard Sclafani, Ronald Robin (New York, New York: St Martin's Press, 1989), pp.171-182; George Dickie, "Defining Art", *American Philosophical Quarterly* 6.3 (1969): pp.253-256; George Dickie, *Aesthetics: An Introduction* (Indianapolis, Indiana: Pegasus, 1971), pp.98-108; George Dickie, *Art and the Aesthetic: An Institutional Analysis* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1974). For further reflections on and refinements of these theories by the authors, see: Arthur Danto, "The Artworld Revisited: Comedies of Similarity", in *Beyond the Brillo Box: The Visual Arts in Post-Historical Perspective* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1992), pp.33-53; George Dickie, *Art and Value* (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 2001), p.31, pp.33-34.

<sup>2</sup> Danto, "The Artistic Enfranchisement of Real Objects", p.177, p.180; Dickie, *Art and the Aesthetic*, pp.28-41.



creation of a specialized sphere of aesthetic experience, which set the stage for the self-reflexive critique of the institutionality of art by the historical avant-garde, in particular the Dadaists. This narrative has been criticized as insufficiently empirically grounded, and the category of life is left largely untheorized, but a critical consciousness of art as an institution is indeed key to understanding the movement. Combining Danto's emphasis on aesthetic ideology with Dickie's focus on actual institutions, Bürger states that the institution of art encompasses the dominant ideas in circulation which shape the production and reception of artworks, as well as distribution apparatuses like the publishing industry and the gallery system, however he does not really expand on that high-level summary.<sup>3</sup>

If we shift discipline again, Bourdieu furnishes us with a more complex model of the institution of art in his sociological writings on art and culture, among other texts *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* [1979] and "The Field of Cultural Production, or: The Economic World Reversed" [1983].<sup>4</sup> The field of cultural production is said to be relatively autonomous from the fields of power and class relations, which nevertheless contain and condition it. It is internally divided into a field of large-scale production which is subject to heteronomous principles of legitimacy imposed by the market, and a field of restricted production which relies on autonomous principles of legitimacy like recognition from respected peers. The former is equivalent to the culture industry, while the latter contains the realm of the avant-garde, a sub-field that is itself constituted by the struggle between the opposed factions of the emerging avant-garde and the consecrated avant-garde, according to Bourdieu.<sup>5</sup> He shows little interest in individual artworks except as examples, tending to generalize to an overarching account of the institution of art. In what follows, Bürger and Bourdieu are used selectively as sources for a vocabulary to describe the art-institutional dimension of Dada, without adopting wholesale their externally oriented paradigms, or wholly displacing immanent analysis with attention to the social functions served by art. These few figures obviously do not

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<sup>3</sup> Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, pp.22-23, pp.47-50.

<sup>4</sup> Bourdieu, *Distinction*; Pierre Bourdieu, "The Field of Cultural Production, or: The Economic World Reversed" [1983], trans. by Richard Nice, in *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, ed. by Randal Johnson (Cambridge: Polity, 1993), pp.29-73.

<sup>5</sup> Bourdieu, "The Field of Cultural Production", pp.37-39, p.53.

exhaust the theorization of the institution of art, which has also yielded valuable insights into how institutional spaces construct art and its audience, and a growing body of research on the economics of art and the question of value, including a recent book-length contribution by Beech.<sup>6</sup> In this chapter, I touch on some of these aspects of the topic where they are relevant to my argument, but do not pretend to a systematic theory of the institution of art, instead approaching that concept principally via its instantiation in Dadaist anti-art.

### **The Philistine Against Philistinism**

According to Tzara, Dada's central objective was the "destruction of art by artistic means".<sup>7</sup> This phrase is suggestive of the paradoxical position of the anti-artist, who is opposed to the institution of art, but operates inside it, aiming to effect its immanent negation. The resources of artistic practice and aesthetic discourse are mobilized to undermine their own conditions of existence. This self-critical turn extends to the activity of the anti-artist, who reflects on their position in relation to the institution of art, and attempts to destabilize that nexus of the aesthetic and the social from within. The destruction of art by artistic means is concentrated in the Dadaist against Dada. This formulation appears often in their body of work, where it is intended to convey the uncompromising character of their negation of the aesthetic, setting themselves against all art including their own. For example, Tzara announces in his "Dada Manifesto on Feeble Love and Bitter Love" [1920]: "Antidadaism is a disease [...] But the real Dadas are against DADA."<sup>8</sup> The Dutch Dada Tour undertaken by Schwitters and Theo van Doesburg, respectively associated with Merz and Constructivism, was

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<sup>6</sup> For analyses of institutional spaces, see: Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* [1976] (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1986); Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* [1995] (London: Routledge, 1997); Tony Bennett, *Culture: A Reformer's Science* (London: SAGE Publications, 1998). For discussion of the economics of art, see: Isabelle Graw, *High Price: Art Between the Market and Celebrity Culture* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2009); Anne E Davis, "The New 'Voodoo Economics': Fetishism and the Public/Private Divide", *Review of Radical Political Economics* 45.1 (2012): pp.42-58; Sven Lütticken, "The Coming Exception: Art and the Crisis of Value", *New Left Review* 2.99 (2016): pp.111-136; Beech, *Art and Value*.

<sup>7</sup> Tristan Tzara, cited in Richter, *Dada: Art and Anti-Art*, p.164.

<sup>8</sup> Tristan Tzara, "Dada Manifesto on Feeble Love and Bitter Love" [1920], in *Seven Dada Manifestos and Lampisteries* [1963], trans. by Barbara Wright (London: John Calder, 1981), p.38.

styled as anti-Dadaist.<sup>9</sup> In Zagreb, Virgil Poljanski, a member of the leading avant-garde movement there known as Zenitism, produced an anti-Dadaist manifesto for the spoof magazine *Dada-Jok*, which parodies this approach and in fact exactly reproduces its logic under the title “Dada Antidada” [1922].<sup>10</sup> The complement to this auto-destructive dynamic is the pose of the philistine against philistinism. This variant of the anti-artist is itself comprised of two components, which are inherently contradictory. The philistine is frequently invoked as an object of abuse by members of the movement, such that this figure might seem to be the principal target or ideal audience for their interventions and provocations. This tendency is countered by the anti-artist inhabiting the role of the other of art, adopting many of the traits commonly attributed to the philistine. The term is even applied as a self-description in the titles of Dadaist pieces like Grosz’s *Twenty-Four Dada Philistines* [*Dada-Spiesser*] *Climbing a Pudding* [c.1920], and his collaboration with Heartfield *The Philistine* [*Spiesser*] *Heartfield Run Wild* [1920]. In this chapter, I explore the destruction of art by artistic means, with reference to the Dadaist against Dada and the philistine against philistinism.

The theorization of the philistine against philistinism is derived from Leslie’s “Philistines and Art Vandals Get Upset” [2002], the only contribution to the philistine controversy which gives sustained attention to Dada. Bull’s “The Ecstasy of Philistinism” and Beech and Roberts’ “The Philistine and the Logic of Negation” both touch on the movement, and these arguments are rehearsed below. Her analysis is more extensive in this regard, though it is largely restricted to Berlin Dada. She places the movement in a tradition of anti-philistinism which is recognizably German, descending from Romanticism through Expressionism. The Dadaists denounce culture as the true bearer of philistinism, while themselves willingly taking on the mantle of the philistine:

In one guise, the philistine is the Dadaist and appears as traditional art’s undoing, the vanquisher of value. The philistine Dadaist, mobilized under the banner of anti-art, trashes the transcendent claims for art voiced by academy artists, some of whom were Expressionists who had themselves

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<sup>9</sup> Van den Berg, *Crisis and the Arts, Volume 7*, p.158.

<sup>10</sup> Virgil Poljanski, “Dada Antidada” [1922], trans. by Celia Hawkesworth, in *The Dada Reader*, pp.281-282.

been motivated by the traditional Romanticism-tinged anti-philistine impulse. In another guise, the anti-artist unmasks the defence of art as the real philistinism, for it turns out to be a defence of property. The Dadaist is the philistine against philistinism.<sup>11</sup>

Discussing Grosz and Heartfield, as well as Höch and Hausmann, and more tangentially to Dada Willi Baumeister, Leslie concentrates on the techniques of collage and photomontage developed during WW1 and the Weimar Republic, and later deployed covertly for purposes of cultural resistance under Nazism. She sees the cutting up of mass-produced images as an iconoclastic gesture, a direct intervention in ideological mystifications in order to reconstitute them critically. The Dadaists' tendency to reuse their own work as source material for collages and photomontages is described as self-corrective, and explicitly connected to the figure of the Dadaist against Dada: "It is as if the Dada practice – which is, in effect, a philosophy or ideology – of alteration of found materials (or correction of reality) has to spill over into Dada's own productions, rendering them truly provisional, non-eternal, subject to revision. Dadaists were, of course, anti-Dadaists."<sup>12</sup>

As evidence of the double-sided construction of the philistine against philistinism, Leslie cites a short text by Hausmann, published in the second issue of the little magazine *Der Dada*, "The German Philistine [*Spiesser*] Gets Upset" [1919].<sup>13</sup> This polemic begins with a question as to the identity of the philistine, while making clear that they exist in an antagonistic relationship with Dada: "Who is the German philistine [*Spießler*] that he should be upset by dadaism?"<sup>14</sup> The answer comes immediately that it is the "German writer" and the "German intellectual", recalling Nietzsche's cultivated philistine.<sup>15</sup> Hausmann's chief representative of this type of philistinism is the Expressionist Herwath Walden, who ran the journal *Der Sturm*, and the associated Galerie Der Sturm: "[A] typical German philistine [*Spießler*] who believes it necessary to wrap his

<sup>11</sup> Leslie, "Philistines and Art Vandals Get Upset", p.204.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p.208.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., pp.209-210.

<sup>14</sup> Hausmann, "The German Philistine Gets Upset", p.482.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p.482.

transactions in a Buddhistic-bombastic little cloak.”<sup>16</sup> The purported proximity of the spiritual and the transactional within culture is reinforced by the ironic salute to Walden’s “business genius”, and by the critique of Expressionism as a “small, profitable war industry” and the “aesthetic harmonization of bourgeois notions of property”.<sup>17</sup> Hausmann’s anti-artistic rhetoric extends beyond an intra-avant-garde attack on the Expressionists to encompass culture as such: “[W]e do not give a hoot for culture, which was no tangible affair. We wish an end to it and with it an end to the philistine writer [*Spiesserdichter*], the manufacturer of ideals that were nothing but its excrement.”<sup>18</sup> The philistine is here located at the heart of culture, to which they are conventionally opposed, not merely because art has been contaminated by contact with the commercial, but rather because art serves on a more fundamental level as an aestheticization of and justification for capitalism. The Dadaists’ deep-seated antipathy towards art, couched in terms of anti-philistinism, leads them to adopt the persona of the philistine, thereby fulfilling the role of the philistine against philistinism.

The related concept of the Dadaist against Dada makes a number of appearances in “The German Philistine Gets Upset”. Early on in this text, Hausmann warns the German philistine “not [to] attack us”, because “we are already our own enemies”, exclaiming: “Dada! For we are – anti-dadaists!”<sup>19</sup> He aligns the movement with the proletariat against the bourgeoisie, adopting the attitude towards art attributed to the former, said to be clear-sighted about the fact that this realm of activity emanates from and serves the interests of the latter.<sup>20</sup> This prompts a far-reaching repudiation of the aesthetic, including its concepts of beauty and feeling, the metaphysical associations of which are undercut by equating them with a quotidian item of food: “And we are anti-dadaists to such an extent that when some fellow among us wants to exhibit something beautiful or aesthetic – a securely bounded good little feeling – we will knock his well-smear sandwich out of his hand into the garbage.”<sup>21</sup> There is a logic of escalation at work, which pushes to an extreme the principle of opposition to the institution of art, culminating in the self-critical turn of the anti-

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p.482.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p.482.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p.483.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p.482.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p.483.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p.483.

artist. It is part of an ongoing process of deaestheticization, to which Hausmann is committed as a self-declared Dadaist against Dada: “And we are anti-dadaists because for us the dadaist still possesses too much feeling and aesthetics.”<sup>22</sup> This double-sided construction is complementary to that of the philistine against philistinism, and these positions taken together articulate the thoroughgoing negativity of the movement.

As noted above, Leslie discusses iconoclasm as a stylistic principle, focusing on the destructive rather than the constructive aspects of collage and photomontage. On the cover of the same issue of *Der Dada*, Hausmann places a collage of images and text, including the word “*Spiesser!*”<sup>23</sup> As it appears in this context, “*Spiesser!*” is not typographically identical to any use of it overleaf in “The German Philistine Gets Upset”, the closest match in size, format and choice of “*ss*” or “*ß*” being the final slogan appended to the statement: “Down with the German philistine [*Spiesser!*]”<sup>24</sup> Hausmann has incorporated into this collage various excerpts from his own publications, and the resemblance between these two instances of the term on successive pages of the magazine gestures towards the same procedure. This might be understood as a form of self-portrait through self-mutilation, turning the symbolic violence of the technique on the artist, an impression reinforced by the presence of his name among the fragments, next to the truncated title of his essay “The Notion of Property in the Family and the Right to Own One’s Body” [1919]. The collage also draws on the manifesto he co-authored with Huelsenbeck, “What is Dadaism and What Does It Want in Germany?” [1919], which had been included in the first issue of *Der Dada*.<sup>25</sup> In being seen to cut up his own work and previous issues of the magazine, Hausmann visibly assimilates iconoclasm as a stylistic principle, consistent with the pose of the philistine against philistinism argued for by Leslie, though she does not analyse this collage in “Philistines and Art Vandals Get Upset”.

She does however cite “The Art Scab” [1920], another polemical text by Grosz and Heartfield, published in a radical leftist magazine with close links to Dada, *Der Gegner*. Writing in the immediate aftermath of violent clashes

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p.483.

<sup>23</sup> Raoul Hausmann, [Collage] [1919], *Der Dada* 2: <http://sdrc.lib.uiowa.edu/dada/derdada/2/index.htm> [accessed 16 April 2019], cover.

<sup>24</sup> Raoul Hausmann, “*Der deutsche Spiesser ärgert sich*”, *Der Dada* 2 (1919): p.1; Hausmann, “The German Philistine Gets Upset”, p.483.

<sup>25</sup> Bergius, *Crisis and the Arts, Volume 5*, pp.101-102.

following the Kapp Putsch, Grosz and Heartfield launch an attack on the Expressionist Oskar Kokoschka, branding him an “Art Scab”. Based in Dresden, Kokoschka had sent a letter to forty newspapers the previous month, appealing to revolutionaries on left and right to ensure that their political activities did not endanger cultural artefacts: “Certainly the German people will later find more joy and meaning in these preserved pictures than in the collected views of the politicized Germans of today.”<sup>26</sup> This conservative call to preserve the cultural heritage came in response to news that during fighting in the city a stray bullet had damaged Peter Paul Rubens’ *Bathsheba at the Fountain* [1635] in the Zwinger Museum.<sup>27</sup> By contrast, Grosz and Heartfield react to this incident enthusiastically: “With joy we welcome the news that the bullets are whistling through the galleries and palaces, into the masterpieces of Rubens, instead of into the houses of the poor in the working-class neighbourhoods!”<sup>28</sup> For Grosz and Heartfield, Kokoschka’s apolitical stance is obviously untenable in this charged context, but his ascription of elevated status and enduring significance to cultural artefacts is also theoretically suspect. They extend the critique of culture as an elite pursuit dependent on the extraction of surplus value through the exploitation of the proletariat, and as a propaganda apparatus for the bourgeoisie, promoting its ideology, distracting the opposition, and beautifying an unjust society. This political position underpins their support for iconoclasm.

In addition, Leslie highlights the instances of actual art vandalism, directed at reproductions of consecrated artworks, which were perpetrated by the Dadaists: “[D]esecration of reproductions was as close as the Dadaists got to effecting their manifesto pledges of destroying art.”<sup>29</sup> The First International Dada Fair included examples of “corrected masterworks” by Grosz and Heartfield. *Pablo Picasso, The Happy Life: Corrected Masterwork!* [1920], a photomontage based on a reproduction of *Girl’s Head with Small Bird* [1913], is

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<sup>26</sup> Oskar Kokoschka, cited in Grosz and Heartfield, “The Art Scab”, p.484; Sabine T Kriebel, “Radical Left Magazines in Berlin: *Die Pleite* (1919, 1923-4); *Der Gegner* (1919-22); *Der blutige Ernst* (1919); *Der Knüppel* (1923-7); *Eulenspiegel* (1928-31); and *AIZ/VI* (1924-38)”, in *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines, Volume III, Part II: Europe 1880-1940*, ed. by Peter Brooker, Sascha Bru, Andrew Thacker, Christian Weikop (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p.842.

<sup>27</sup> Kriebel, “Radical Left Magazines in Berlin”, p.842.

<sup>28</sup> Grosz and Heartfield, “The Art Scab”, p.485.

<sup>29</sup> Leslie, “Philistines and Art Vandals Get Upset”, p.209.

mentioned in “Philistines and Art Vandals Get Upset”.<sup>30</sup> She might also have listed, among other pieces in the exhibition: Hausmann’s *An Old Masterwork* [c.1920], which corrected Rubens’ *Bacchanal* [1615]; Grosz’s *Disregard of a Masterwork by Botticelli* [c.1920], in which he literally crossed out *Primavera* [c.1482]; and, going still further back in art history, a series of “improved masterworks of classical antiquity” by Rudolf Schlichter.<sup>31</sup> There is of course a reference in the article to the most famous act of iconoclasm associated with Dada, a version of which was exhibited at the First International Dada Fair, but which was originally executed in Paris by Duchamp: *L.H.O.O.Q.* [1919], a postcard of Leonardo da Vinci’s *Mona Lisa* [c.1503-1506], to which he added in black pencil a moustache and goatee beard, as well as the otherwise meaningless letters of its title, which when read aloud sound like “*Elle a chaud au cul* [She has a hot ass]”.<sup>32</sup> These interventions conjure up the image of the philistine as an art-smashing brute.

In summary, Leslie argues that the Dadaists give expression to their anti-artistic orientation by mobilizing the philistine, while the culture to which they are opposed is itself denounced as a bastion of philistinism. They adopt the posture of the philistine principally through their embrace of iconoclasm, which might take rhetorical form in their manifestos, symbolic form in their collages and photomontages, or concrete form in their vandalism of artworks. They want to destroy art because they understand it to be deeply invested in the current social order, a creation of the bourgeoisie which ultimately defends the idea of private property. They accuse art of philistinism on this political basis, but their own identification with the philistine consists in the prioritization of politics over aesthetics, according to Leslie. She maps out this complex of relations, which comprises the philistine against philistinism:

Heartfield, Grosz and Hausmann have reversed the conventional meaning of philistine. The philistine is not the person who dislikes art or cannot comprehend culture. The philistine is not the destroyer of artworks. The philistine is the culture lover, the one who believes in art and its power.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p.208.

<sup>31</sup> Bergius, *Crisis and the Arts, Volume 5*, pp.240-241.

<sup>32</sup> Leslie, “Philistines and Art Vandals Get Upset”, p.208.



This belief in art, though, was unmasked as self-interest. The philistine is the art lover who is able to worship art because he is cushioned financially, and because in elevating art, his spiritual commodity, he boosts his own investment. The Dada artist, in the guise of anti-artist, is the anti-philistine as philistine: all values are questioned in the face of unvarnished political positions.<sup>33</sup>

With this reference to “unvarnished political positions”, Leslie’s narrow focus on Berlin Dada becomes apparent, and we might ask whether it limits the applicability of her theorization of the philistine against philistinism. As discussed in the previous chapter, Dadaists in this context sometimes made an explicit commitment to revolutionary communism part of their programme, but many members of the movement remained politically unaffiliated, and in other branches the greatest affinity was with individualist anarchism. For example, Duchamp’s correction of the *Mona Lisa* is not overtly politically partisan in the way envisaged here, though he undoubtedly seeks to puncture the pretensions of the bourgeois cult surrounding this painting. In my opinion, it is Dada’s critical relation to the institution of art, rather than its positive political identifications, which is the key to apprehending its social import. This interpretation is still compatible with the theorization of the philistine against philistinism.

In this chapter, I do not exhaustively enumerate all the uses of the term “Philistine” by the Dadaists. Instead, I examine how different versions of this figure map onto their anti-artistic practice, drawing on contributions to the philistine controversy, as well as the dialectical conception which emerged from my immanent analysis of Adorno’s aesthetic theory. First, I consider the notion of the philistine as wholly appetitive, a consumer partaking of popular pleasures. The next part of the chapter deals with the philistine as peculiarly insensitive, defined by their inability or unwillingness to differentiate between art and non-art. Finally, Dada’s philistine is interpreted as a destructive force, with regard to the dominant modes of attention to art. These variants of the philistine are evaluated in terms of their compatibility with the immanent negation of art, a model previously developed in relation to Adorno. The appetitive, insensitive

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p.211.

and destructive aspects of the philistine are separated out here for explanatory purposes, explored in case studies focusing on specific instances of Dadaist anti-art in which they are particularly prominent, respectively the Cabaret Voltaire, Duchamp's *Fountain* and the First International Dada Fair. There are however cross-references to the other characteristics of the philistine dotted throughout the chapter, testifying to the fact that they are in practice always combined, though in varying proportions. They are also subsumed under the formulation of the philistine against philistinism, in which the anti-artist adopts whichever of these features of the philistine might best disclose the philistinism of the institution of art. It is on this art-institutional level that the full political significance of the movement becomes apparent, as the self-reflexive critique of the institutionality of art engages indirectly with the wider social structures in which it is embedded. In the concluding section of this chapter, I pit this understanding of Dada's philistine against Adorno's model of culture, art and aesthetics.

## **Culture**

### **POPULAR PLEASURES**

As we have seen, Beech and Roberts' "Spectres of the Aesthetic" inaugurated the main phase of the philistine controversy, including disputes with Bernstein and Bowie, over the contested legacy of Adorno. However, Roberts' "Mad For It!" was the starting point for another strand of debate, comprising rows with Stallabrass and Home, about the aesthetic and political value of the YBAs. He focuses in particular on the art collective Bank, among whose members was Beech. He defends their attitude towards mass culture – which they accept as a shared context within which they work and their output is received – as a corrective to the perceived censoriousness and sterility of the previously hegemonic institutional critique. He praises them for not simply reverting to blurring the boundary between high and low art, said to be a redundant theme since postmodernism.<sup>34</sup> By contrast, Stallabrass was a trenchant

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<sup>34</sup> Roberts, "Mad For It!".

critic of the YBAs, depicting them as facile, relativistic and vulnerable to recuperation.<sup>35</sup> “Phoney War” [1997] accuses Roberts of pandering to the anti-theoretical tendency among contemporary artists, by inserting into his own overtly theoretical writing superficial gestures of allegiance to the popular.<sup>36</sup> Stallabrass continues to speak against the theorization of the philistine as a justification for the YBAs in *High Art Lite: The Rise and Fall of Young British Art* [1999], where he disparagingly dubs Beech and Roberts the “Clement Greenbergs of *Fuck Suck Spank Wank*”, alluding to an artwork with that title by Sam Taylor-Wood.<sup>37</sup> Separately, Home also took issue with “Mad For It!” in “The Art of Chauvinism in Britain and France” [1996]. He argues that postmodernism has not in fact dissolved the distinction between high and low art, but instead has reinstated it surreptitiously with the faux democratization of culture represented by the YBAs.<sup>38</sup> Roberts responded with “Home Truths” [1996], in turn eliciting another broadside from Home, “From Arse to Arsehole: John Roberts and the Spectres of Philistinism” [1997].<sup>39</sup> In truth, Beech and Roberts’ approach to the question of philistinism and populism is more complex. They are at pains to distinguish their model of the philistine from the postmodern celebration of mass culture in two subsequent essays, “Tolerating Impurities” and “The Philistine and the Logic of Negation”.

“Tolerating Impurities” contends that philistinism cannot be equated definitively with a particular class or social group, any more than it should be imagined as the undifferentiated repository of all the exclusions of aesthetic discourse. The latter interpretation is attributed to the anti-artists who have taken on the mantle of the philistine over the years, including Duchamp.<sup>40</sup> It is suggested that a more nuanced version of the philistine, opposed to both populist and elitist conceptions of art, might offer a solution to the impasse in the debate between cultural studies and critical theory, about mass culture conceived either as a site of resistance or as a mechanism of subjugation. This dispute can be traced back to the exchange between Benjamin in “The Work of Art in the Age

<sup>35</sup> Julian Stallabrass, “In and Out of Love with Damian Hirst”, *New Left Review* 1.216 (1996): pp.153-160.

<sup>36</sup> Stallabrass, “Phoney War”, pp.15-16.

<sup>37</sup> Stallabrass, *High Art Lite*, pp.118-124.

<sup>38</sup> Home, “The Art of Chauvinism in Britain and France”.

<sup>39</sup> Roberts, “Home Truths”; Home, “From Arse to Arsehole”.

<sup>40</sup> Beech and Roberts, “Tolerating Impurities”, pp.130-132.

of its Technological Reproducibility” [1936] and Adorno in “On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening” [1938]. That legacy has since polarized into a crude dichotomy of consumers seen as passive recipients of dominant ideology on the one hand, or as active agents of radical change on the other, according to Beech and Roberts. The critical theorists attack the output of the culture industry, but from a position which leaves them open to the charge of elitism, whereas cultural studies exerts itself to uncover the potential for resistance in these productions, but in doing so is insufficiently critical. “Tolerating Impurities” desires a critical stance that does not entail elitism, and points to the philistine as the vehicle for realizing it.<sup>41</sup>

In “The Philistine and the Logic of Negation”, Beech and Roberts clarify that their opposition to the new aestheticism does not automatically ally them with postmodernism. This entails once again correcting the impression that their conception of the philistine is no more than a modification of the postmodern challenge to the hierarchy of high and low art. They assert that their use of this figure is instead intended to disclose how all cultures, whether dominant or dominated, are ultimately violated by that relation of domination. The negation of the dominant culture, through recourse to the dominated culture, is characterized in dialectical terminology as a bad sublation. What is required is the negation of the social division underlying the dynamics of domination, but it is precisely this primary violation that is obscured by postmodernism. The promotion of marginalized cultural forms, and the incorporation of what has previously been excluded from the definition of art, are criticized for merely bringing about the symbolic resolution of secondary violations. By contrast, Beech and Roberts make the primary violation of social division central to their notion of aesthetic autonomy. The autonomy of art is said to be predicated on its immanent permeation by non-art, and the philistine is therefore advantageously positioned to give an account of violation as the basis of the aesthetic subject. They argue that the philistine contains the violation suppressed by the postmodern emphasis on inclusivity, and must be mobilized to reintroduce the dynamics of social division into the debate.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p.142-150.

<sup>42</sup> Beech and Roberts, “The Philistine and the Logic of Negation”, pp.275-282.

There is an unevenness to their depiction of the philistine, across their contributions to the philistine controversy from “Mad For It!” to “The Philistine and the Logic of Negation”. They later stress that their version of this figure is anti-populist as well as anti-artistic, but the early texts come much closer to uncritically affirming popular pleasures than they would like to admit, including at times in “Spectres of the Aesthetic”. “The Philistine and the Logic of Negation” attempts to sharpen the distinction between philistinism and populism with a consideration of the avant-gardist philistine, giving as an example Dada: “What was philistine about Dada was not its immersion in popular pleasures but its systematic negation of art and aesthetic values. [...] Art drained of artisticness is a model of philistinism that invariably produces the nonpopular – unpopular, even – because it is based on self-violation and violation, not on the inclusion or assimilation of the culturally “other”.”<sup>43</sup> They exclude populist elements from their interpretation of the movement, instead highlighting the anti-artistic stunts of Duchamp, Picabia and Tzara. Dada did in fact mobilize a critically inflected populism, as an integral part of its anti-artistic project. This aspect of its creative practice is not necessarily about disclosing the underlying dynamics of social division, but neither is it just a question of championing the forms marginalized by the bourgeois institution of art. In my view, Dada’s philistine is appetitive, as well as insensitive and destructive, and the following case study examines the role played by cabaret with that supposition in mind.

#### CABARET VOLTAIRE

Let us now focus on a key example of Dada’s engagement with popular culture, which to a certain extent remains the template for subsequent manifestations of its populist orientation, but is also atypical in one important respect, discussed further below.<sup>44</sup> The Cabaret Voltaire was established by Hennings and Ball in Zurich, soon after they had fled from Germany to neutral territory to escape WW1. This was the context in which the enterprise was undertaken, against the backdrop of a conflict actively opposed by them both. It

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., pp.290-291.

<sup>44</sup> In what follows, I draw on my analysis of the Cabaret Voltaire in Ingram, “Songs, Anti-Symphonies and Sodomist Music”, pp.4-6.

was in operation for six months between February and July 1916, during which time it served as the official birthplace of Dada, notwithstanding independent developments in New York. A regular performance troupe of émigrés quickly coalesced around the two founders, comprising Arp, Huelsenbeck, Janco and Tzara. They infused the cabaret with the spirit of the avant-garde, drawing inspiration from other movements, with innovations such as simultaneous poetry and sound poetry, primitivist chants, masked dances, and a bruitist nativity play. This was however only a portion of the material presented, which generally has been given disproportionate emphasis in Dada scholarship. There is a tendency to relegate the less obviously radical contributions to the margins, despite their quantitative preponderance. These popular songs and canonical works, and the myriad idiosyncratic acts facilitated by the open stage policy, in my opinion deserve greater attention, as does the overall approach to the programme at the Cabaret Voltaire. Though it may appear at first sight to embrace popular culture in a relatively uncomplicated way, Dada's populism is actually much more ambitious than a straightforward endorsement, attempting to effect the destruction of art by artistic means, by pitting one sector of the field of cultural production against another.

The Cabaret Voltaire largely conformed to the cabaret format, with a commitment to variety, and a prominent role for popular music. There were cabaret chansons, folk ballads and soldiers' songs, as well as recitals of works by established composers such as Claude Debussy, Franz Liszt, Sergei Rachmaninoff and Camille Saint-Saëns. A notice in the press announcing the venture highlights its musical dimension, alongside the expected emphasis on literature: "The idea of the cabaret will be that guest artists will come and give musical performances and readings at the daily meetings. The young artists of Zurich, whatever their orientation, are invited to come along with suggestions and contributions of all kinds."<sup>45</sup> This ethic of inclusivity, partly born of necessity with only three days until the first night, translated into the open stage policy, which gave rise to a wide range of acts. These included dancing banjo and mandolin players, an impromptu balalaika orchestra, and a socialist choir, as well as diverse poetry and prose, readings of famous authors and amateur

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<sup>45</sup> Cited in Ball, *Flight Out of Time*, p.50.

offerings by members of the audience. This extreme heterogeneity, in particular the mix of aesthetic seriousness with light-hearted entertainment, was itself intended to be iconoclastic. In his diary, Ball makes this point with reference to Voltaire, a touchstone for iconoclasm who ironically also represents the denigrated culture of the Enlightenment: “The ideals of culture and of art as the programme for a variety show – that is our kind of *Candide* against the times.”<sup>46</sup> This juxtaposition of high and low forms diminishes the status of the former through the elevation of the latter, in the process exceeding the limits of legitimate taste. The Dadaists violate the sanctity of the aesthetic realm by bringing it into contact with popular culture, thereby protesting against the broader social situation, in which the institution of art is implicated.

Acclaimed in a contemporary review as the “star” of the Cabaret Voltaire, Hennings performed popular songs, usually accompanied on the piano by Ball.<sup>47</sup> The most celebrated of their collaborations is probably “Dance of Death” [1916], Ball’s bitter anti-war poem parodying the drinking song “This is How We Live”, which she delivered with a cheery demeanour to the jaunty military tune “The Old Dessauer”: “This is how we die, this is how we die. / We die every day, / Because they make it so comfortable to die.”<sup>48</sup> This jarring of registers, the satirical purpose of which is clear, underlines the fact that the function of popular music was not simply to provide relief from the more challenging material at the Cabaret Voltaire. In addition to the incongruous combination of form and content here, Hennings’ subversive intent was also evident in her unconventional style of performance, as acknowledged, somewhat patronisingly, by Richter: “[H]er performances were not artistic in the traditional sense, either vocally or as interpretations. Their unaccustomed shrillness was an affront to the audience, and perturbed it quite as much as did the provocations of her male colleagues.”<sup>49</sup> Hennings’ unsettling shrill voice is confirmed in other sources, along with a reported repertoire of obscure gestures.<sup>50</sup> She played with the expectations of the audience, defamiliarizing familiar forms through avant-garde experimentation, even as the critical force of populism was mobilized in

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<sup>46</sup> Ball, *Flight Out of Time*, p.67.

<sup>47</sup> Cited in Hemus, *Dada’s Women*, p.27.

<sup>48</sup> Ball, cited and discussed in Hemus, *Dada’s Women*, p.31.

<sup>49</sup> Richter, *Dada: Art and Anti-Art*, pp.26-27.

<sup>50</sup> Hemus, *Dada’s Women*, p.28.

opposition to a narrowly defined musical tradition. The effect of this approach is to collapse the hierarchical distinction between art music and popular music, in such a way that both sides are transformed by their interpenetration. At the Cabaret Voltaire, Dada's anti-artistic orientation is expressed primarily through the destabilization of the canon, but it extends to a self-reflexive critique of the populist methods used to secure that destabilization as well.

We can understand this dynamic in terms of the philistine against philistinism, where the embrace of popular culture may be taken as evidence of an appetitive philistinism, but is itself subject to an anti-artistic orientation which might be characterized as philistine. It goes beyond mixing high and low forms, and applying a critical attitude to both sides, as it works on the art-institutional level as well, with the movement situating itself in a venue outside the rarefied world of pure culture. As Debbie Lewer has written, the Cabaret Voltaire was based in a backroom at a Dutch bar and restaurant called the Holländische Meierei, in the insalubrious Niederdorf quarter of Zurich. This area was known for its many drinking establishments, with entertainment including singers, dancing girls and freak shows. The clientele at the cabaret, charged only a small cloakroom fee to enter, would have been overwhelmingly male, mainly working-class or students, and more likely than not drinking heavily. It was undoubtedly a rowdy atmosphere, with a transitory and variable crowd, to which the open stage policy added a further layer of unpredictability.<sup>51</sup> Subsequent soirées organized by the core group excluded this unplanned element, taking place in the comparatively staid art gallery setting of the Galerie Dada, and at upmarket concert halls like the Zunfthaus zur Waag, the Zunfthaus zur Meise and the Kaufleutensaal. It is arguable how far this shift in milieu, with the movement now occupying the consecrated spaces of the bourgeoisie, in fact sharpened its iconoclastic edge, as suggested by Lewer.<sup>52</sup> The radicalism of the reverse approach, bringing the innovations of the avant-garde into the realm of entertainment, ought not to be underestimated either. Regardless of which position one favours, I would maintain that this art-institutional dimension is the

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<sup>51</sup> Debbie Lewer, "From the Cabaret Voltaire to Kaufleutensaal: "Mapping" Zurich Dada", in *Crisis and the Arts, Volume 2*, pp.47-51, pp.53-54.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p.46, pp.52-55.



most distinctive aspect of the engagement with popular culture during the initial phase of Dada.

#### THE APPETITIVE PHILISTINE

In my view, Beech and Roberts are mistaken in progressively excluding the voluptuous from their theorization of philistine, and also in denying the importance of a critically inflected populism to Dada. The appetitive philistine, incorporating the voluptuous, may serve as the symbolic representation of this variant of anti-art, which violates official taste with recourse to mass-produced entertainment, and applies non-sanctioned modes of attention derived from that sphere to advanced art. This sense of philistinism can be traced back to the class-based animosity of seventeenth-century town and gown disputes and the “hollow gut” of Goethe, but it comes to prominence in the twentieth century as part of the elitist backlash against the rise of the culture industry, as summarized in the Introduction.<sup>53</sup> Despite often being accused of such elitism himself, Adorno actually rarely describes the masses in this way, and his principal focus is the cultivated philistine, conforming to a more conventional characterization of the philistine as bourgeois. As with the voluptuous in Beech and Roberts, Adorno’s treatment of the vulgarian is uneven, but ultimately dismissive. He portrays them as a consumer whose archetypal disposition towards the artwork is to eat it, distinguishing this degraded form of aesthetic experience from the art-alienness of the philistine. His use of the latter term does not preclude the appetitive aspect entirely though, as he sometimes evokes the imagery of eating the artwork in relation to philistinism as well. I have suggested that it would be better to follow his practice rather than his theory on this point, and choose not to maintain too strictly the distinction between the vulgarian and the philistine. The appetitive philistine, incorporating the vulgarian, stands for the critical potential of popular culture vis-à-vis pure culture. My first case study has explored this component of Dadaist anti-art in the specific context of the Cabaret Voltaire.

In the last chapter, I reconstructed Adorno’s interpretation of Dada, on the basis of the limited textual evidence available. One theme clearly emerging

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<sup>53</sup> Goethe, cited and discussed in Morgan, “Goethe and the Philistine”, p.378.

from his comments about contemporary composers, who are tangentially linked to the movement, concerns its relationship with popular culture. This realm is used as a source for montages, in the service of an alienating infantilism, according to Adorno. The familiar is made strange through deformation and juxtaposition, generating an uncanny effect which he argues has a critical mimetic function. As we have seen, the Dadaists do engage extensively with popular culture, not least at the Cabaret Voltaire. Their populism includes the selection of material for collages, photomontages and assemblages, but it extends to other techniques and media as well, in particular the songs and jazz which dominate their musical output. The enthusiastic embrace of heteronomous forms is fairly common among avant-garde movements at the time, as a reaction to the development of the culture industry. That populism is given a negative character and incorporated into the anti-artistic project by the Dadaists. Adorno perhaps focuses too narrowly on montage, but he is right to highlight how popular culture is critically reconstituted rather than simply endorsed by the movement. The concept of alienating infantilism is however unable to encapsulate the full complexity of this relationship. Crucially, Adorno's interpretation largely overlooks the art-institutional dimension of Dada.

There are undoubtedly moments when the sphere of entertainment appears to be uncritically celebrated by the movement, but even these instances necessarily involve a transgression of the hierarchical structure of the field of culture. By virtue of their positioning as part of the avant-garde, the Dadaists belong to the domain of pure culture, or the field of restricted production. They nevertheless recognize the complicity of that system with the unjust organization of society, most evident in the class character of its opposition to popular culture, or the field of large-scale production. Their response is a self-critical turn, attacking the institution of art by mobilizing popular culture against pure culture, exploiting the critical potential of the former to disclose the exclusions which are constitutive of the latter. This iconoclastic impulse, intersecting with an ethic of inclusivity, motivates the mix of high and low art at the Cabaret Voltaire. The Dadaists continue to adopt the cabaret format for their performances in other locations, with the programmes often including popular music, humourous skits and variety acts alongside the more obviously radical material. The elements of popular culture which they assimilate are themselves subject to the

thoroughgoing negativity of the anti-artistic orientation, typically presented with some ironic distance, in ways which impede straightforward consumption. The full range of techniques of distortion developed by the avant-garde is applied to negate folk forms and the productions of the culture industry, as with the subversive strategies deployed to that end by Hennings. This is a reciprocal negation, working in both directions, with the elevated diminished, and the familiar defamiliarized. It is therefore more than a mere celebration of popular culture, and it also goes beyond simply blurring the boundary with pure culture, to invoke two criticisms which we have seen levelled at postmodernism.

Theorizing Adorno's philistine with and against the rival versions of this figure which are put forward by Beech and Roberts and Bull, I described them as embodying the immanent negation of art, which can now be read as the immanent negation of the institution of art. In terms of its relationship with popular culture, Dada's distinguishing feature at the outset was its institutional location, the fact that it was actually based within the milieu of cabaret. The movement later shifted strategy, bringing heteronomous forms into the art galleries and concert halls of pure culture. There was first an attempt to escape the institution of art, by moving into another sector of the field of cultural production. This was followed by an attempt to undermine the institution of art, staying inside its confines but importing material from elsewhere. It has been proposed that the interventions in consecrated spaces are superior in this regard, because they directly confront their target. There is though much to be said for the counter-position that the original approach constitutes a more emphatic repudiation of pure culture. In this interpretation, the Cabaret Voltaire represents a fundamental breach with the institutional basis of high art, albeit one which is short-lived and incomplete. The earlier strategy was never entirely given up: Tokyo Dada showed its works and staged manifestations in the streets; Cologne Dada held an exhibition in a public tavern; Paris Dada brought its performances to establishments dedicated to the leisure and education of the working class.<sup>54</sup> However, Dada's appetitive philistine is arguably able to mobilize the oppositional force of popular culture only to the extent that it separates itself

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<sup>54</sup> Omuka, "Tada=Dada (Devotedly Dada) for the Stage", pp.258-259, p.270; Stokes, "Rage and Liberation", p.52; Sanouillet, *Dada in Paris*, pp.111-114.

from pure culture, and it therefore resembles not the immanent negation of art, but the non-immanent negation of art, earlier attributed to Bull.

## Art

### ART AND NON-ART

As Beech and Roberts write in “Spectres of the Aesthetic”: “Given that no one attends to art without sensitivity or knowledge at all – but with different sensitivities and knowledge – the constitutive insensitivity of philistinism must be a particular form of insensitivity: namely, of being insensitive to what is established as appropriate to art.”<sup>55</sup> The insensitivity of philistinism, which corresponds to the failure or refusal to recognize the distinction between art and non-art, is often taken to be its defining feature. In “The Ecstasy of Philistinism”, Bull elaborates on the same aspect of the concept, drawing on the typology of objects in Michael Thompson’s *Rubbish Theory: The Creation and Destruction of Value* [1979]. The three main types of object enumerated in this book are those with a value that is durable and increases over time, for example antiques; those with a value that is transient and decreases over time, for example commodities; and those with no value whatsoever, for example rubbish. Bull’s philistine contends neither that the durable aesthetic value of consecrated artworks is in fact transient, nor that the transient aesthetic value of mass-produced entertainment should be elevated to the status of timelessness at their expense, but rather that all objects are permanently aesthetically valueless. The implication is that there is no specifically aesthetic basis on which we might differentiate objects from one another, or make comparative judgements about them.<sup>56</sup> Bull emphasizes how total this perspective is for the philistine: “[T]he idea that other people might discern aesthetic differences between objects and evaluate them accordingly would seem intrinsically absurd.”<sup>57</sup> He construes the philistine as the direct and absolute negation of art and aesthetics. By contrast,

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<sup>55</sup> Beech and Roberts, “Spectres of the Aesthetic”, p.44.

<sup>56</sup> Bull, “The Ecstasy of Philistinism”, pp.50-51.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p.51.

Beech and Roberts' philistine is imagined relationally, as reiterated with regard to sensitivity and knowledge in "Spectres of the Aesthetic".

For Bull, Dada does not quite conform to his model of the philistine:

Dada certainly gave expression to the philistine impulse, but although its rhetoric was vigorously anti-aesthetic, what actually happened in the creation of a ready-made was something that had the transient aesthetic value of a machine-produced object or was even an object of no value at all was then treated as though it were a durable of lasting aesthetic value. It is therefore misleading to suggest that the ready-made says "art is junk"; what it says is only that "junk is art".<sup>58</sup>

Given his focus on the question of art and non-art, Bull's choice of the readymade as an example of Dadaist activity is hardly surprising, as this form of sculpture seems particularly well suited to illuminating the peculiar insensitivity of the philistine to aesthetic value. His assessment of the movement does however fall short of this aim, according to the criteria he has established. The Dadaists do not actually deny the status of art, instead merely extending the application of this category to objects constituted non-artistically, according to Bull. He describes this as the "inclusive extrapolation of value", as opposed to its "direct negation", criticizing the "promiscuous pan-aestheticism of Dada", as an inversion of the "absolute negation of the aesthetic".<sup>59</sup>

"The Ecstasy of Philistinism" continues:

To demonstrate that art is junk, Dada would have had to work in the opposite direction. Duchamp certainly contemplated this: "At another time, wanting to expose the basic antinomy between art and "ready-mades", I imagined a reciprocal ready-made: use a Rembrandt as an ironing board." However, neither he nor the other Dadaists did so, and the museums of the world were never turned into laundry rooms. In consequence, although art galleries are now filled with objects that might

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p.50.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p.51.

have been taken from rubbish tips, rubbish tips remain barren of objects taken from art galleries.<sup>60</sup>

The reciprocal readymade is here treated as a special type of iconoclasm in the literal sense of art vandalism, where artworks are repurposed as everyday functional items, or even discarded as rubbish. It involves essentially the same transgression of the boundary between art and non-art as with the regular readymade, only this time in reverse. Bull takes this difference to be decisive, judging the revaluation of art as non-art properly philistine, while disqualifying the assertion that non-art is art which he ascribes to Dada. This interpretation of the readymade overlooks how, regardless of the direction of the transgression, its effect is to focus critical attention on the policing of the boundary between art and non-art.

In “The Philistine and the Logic of Negation”, Beech and Roberts also invoke the readymade, identifying it with the philistine. They claim that the introduction of non-art as art is anti-art, which suspends conventional ideas of the artwork and the artist, and demands new modes of attention from the spectator.<sup>61</sup> As already established, I consider their version of the philistine to be insufficiently negative, as they understand its impact on the norms of the institution of art to be transformative rather than destructive. For his part, Bull is wrong to present this figure as an external force acting on the aesthetic sphere, instead of as its immanent negation. He is right to insist on the uncompromising negativity of the philistine, though he denies this quality to Dada. His brief account of the movement is much more critical than the similarly cursory assessment in “The Philistine and the Logic of Negation”. There, Beech and Roberts have no hesitation in incorporating Dada into their model of the philistine.<sup>62</sup> “The Ecstasy of Philistinism” does not share this positive attitude, but the two texts do coincide in their misconception that the philistine is simply affirmed as an ideal by the movement. In fact, Dada has a more complex relationship with this concept, as we saw above with the double-sided construction of the philistine against philistinism in Leslie. In any case, Bull’s

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p.50.

<sup>61</sup> Beech and Roberts, “The Philistine and the Logic of Negation”, pp.292-293.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., pp.290-294.

typology of objects is hardly the best framework within which to address the problematic of art and non-art, because it does not give enough emphasis to the art-institutional mechanisms by which aesthetic status is secured. The result is that the readymade is taken at face value as asserting that “junk is art”, or alternatively for the reciprocal variant “art is junk”. In what follows, I develop a different interpretation, which takes as its point of departure the inability or unwillingness to distinguish between art and non-art embodied by the insensitive philistine.

### *FOUNTAIN*

Of all his readymades, Duchamp’s *Fountain*, a porcelain urinal set on its back, is the most well-known, and will serve as our second case study, informed throughout by the historical research of William A Camfield.<sup>63</sup> It is actually a fairly unusual example, in that this mass-produced item was designated an artwork with the intention of having it exhibited, unlike most of the other readymades, which at the time were displayed only in his studio.<sup>64</sup> The attempt to insert the object into the gallery system is in my estimation an important part of any adequate account of it, which ought not to be artificially circumscribed to a narrow consideration of the physical thing. There have been many interpretations emphasizing its formal features, comparing it to other artworks on that level, and grafting onto it religious, psychoanalytic and sexual symbolism based on visual cues.<sup>65</sup> These critics can sometimes appear faintly ridiculous, as if they have themselves become the butt of the joke, by being drawn into statements that are bathetically undercut by the object itself. In my opinion, *Fountain* is inherently unsuitable as a subject for immanent analysis, conducted solely in terms of its inner-aesthetic properties, because it explicitly engages its extra-aesthetic institutional context. This dimension is integral to its meaning, requiring a reading which goes beyond the aesthetic structure internal to the sculpture, to

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<sup>63</sup> William A Camfield, “Marcel Duchamp’s *Fountain*: Its History and Aesthetics in the Context of 1917” [1987], in *Marcel Duchamp: Artist of the Century*, ed. by Rudolf Kuenzli and Francis M Naumann (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1989), pp.64-94. In what follows, I also draw on my article “Pissing in Duchamp’s *Fountain*”, *3:AM Magazine*, 23 June 2014, <https://www.3ammagazine.com/3am/pissing-in-duchamps-fountain/> [accessed 30 March 2019].

<sup>64</sup> There were a few exceptions, as noted in Camfield, “Marcel Duchamp’s *Fountain*”, p.66, p.87.

<sup>65</sup> For a typical argument in favour of an “aesthetic” reading of the readymade, see: Camfield, “Marcel Duchamp’s *Fountain*”, pp.79-86.

incorporate the institutional structure enframing it. The assertion of non-art as art necessarily directs us to the forces within the field of culture which have the power either to accept or reject that claim to legitimacy. With *Fountain*, Duchamp makes this procedure the substantive content of an artwork. He is not merely highlighting the aesthetic qualities of a functional item, elevating the everyday to the status of art. This is no positive message of creative liberation, promoting the idea that anything can be art, and that therefore anyone can be an artist. Rather, *Fountain* prompts us to focus critically on the art-institutional mechanisms which confer recognition on artworks as such.

In the spring of 1917, Duchamp purchased a urinal from an ironworks showroom in New York, added the pseudonym and date “R. Mutt 1917”, and under that name submitted it to the inaugural exhibition of the Society of Independents. He was himself one of the directors of this organization, recently established by supporters of the cause of modern art in the USA. The Independents imposed no restrictions on the right to exhibit, other than the payment of a nominal membership fee, a measure designed to guarantee artistic freedom. This submission was nevertheless rejected by a majority of the board members present at a hastily convened meeting, a decision which led to the resignation of Duchamp, along with his fellow director and major patron Walter Arensberg.<sup>66</sup> The Independents thereby served as a proxy for the power of the institution of art as a whole, as he tested the limits of its supposedly democratic selection criteria, revealing how the policing of aesthetic value was still in operation behind that progressive front. It is perhaps significant that he chose to attack a branch of the institution of art to which he belonged, dedicated to the promotion of the emerging avant-garde. Although he was not affiliated with the movement at the time and always maintained a certain distance from it, Duchamp with this act epitomizes the auto-destructive logic of the Dadaist against Dada. Relatedly, *Fountain* suggests philistine insensitivity to the difference between art and non-art, in opposition to the philistinism of the institution of art, thereby fulfilling the role of the philistine against philistinism.

Working with collaborators, Duchamp effectively staged the exclusion of the urinal from the institution of art as a spectacle. This spectacle itself depended

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<sup>66</sup> Camfield, “Marcel Duchamp’s *Fountain*”, pp.65-71.



on art-institutional mechanisms to function, making use of the network of patrons, independent galleries and little magazines which usually sustain emerging avant-gardes. After it was recovered from the Independents, *Fountain* was moved to the 291 Gallery, where it was photographed by Alfred Stieglitz. His picture appeared in the little magazine *The Blind Man*, edited by Duchamp, Henri-Pierre Roché and Beatrice Wood. The exhibition tag of the rejected sculpture is visible in the bottom-left corner of the carefully composed image, which is presented alongside the caption: “THE EXHIBIT REFUSED BY THE INDEPENDENTS”.<sup>67</sup> On the opposite page, Wood’s unsigned defence of the readymade likewise dramatizes its rejection by the Independents: “They say any artist paying six dollars may exhibit. Mr. Richard Mutt sent in a fountain. Without discussion this article disappeared and never was exhibited.”<sup>68</sup> There is also a longer text arguing in favour of *Fountain* by Louise Norton, and a poem dedicated to Richard Mutt by Charles Demuth.<sup>69</sup> In addition to this material promoting the sculpture to the relatively narrow artworld and high-society readership of *The Blind Man*, Duchamp’s resignation from the Independents generated sufficient controversy to attract some coverage in the mainstream press, another tactic typical of emerging avant-gardes.<sup>70</sup> His intervention therefore exemplifies the destruction of art by artistic means, understood as the destruction of art as an institution by art-institutional means.

Soon after the events recounted here, *Fountain* was either mislaid or destroyed, disappearing into obscurity for over thirty years, notwithstanding Breton’s efforts to promote it.<sup>71</sup> From 1950 to 1964, Duchamp authorized a number of replicas of the urinal, with the largest batch manufactured rather than purchased, modelled as closely as possible on the version in the photograph by Stieglitz.<sup>72</sup> This approach might appear to be at odds with the spirit of the

<sup>67</sup> Alfred Stieglitz, [Photograph of *Fountain*] [1917], in *Three New York Dadas and The Blind Man* (London: Atlas Press, 2013), p.134.

<sup>68</sup> Beatrice Wood, “The Richard Mutt Case” [1917], in *Three New York Dadas and The Blind Man*, p.135.

<sup>69</sup> Louise Norton, “Buddha of the Bathroom” [1917], in *Three New York Dadas and The Blind Man*, pp.135-136; Charles Demuth, “For Richard Mutt” [1917], in *Three New York Dadas and The Blind Man*, p.136.

<sup>70</sup> Camfield, “Marcel Duchamp’s *Fountain*”, pp.67-68.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p.64; André Breton, “Lighthouse of *The Bride*” [1935], in *Surrealism and Painting* [1965], trans. by Simon Watson Taylor (London: Macdonald & Co., 1972), pp.91-92.

<sup>72</sup> Francis M Naumann, *The Recurrent, Haunting Ghost: Essays on the Art, Life and Legacy of Marcel Duchamp* (New York, New York: Readymade Press, 2012), pp.76-79.

sculpture, which problematizes the notions of authorship and the original seemingly fetishized here. In fact, Duchamp further developed the initial idea, provoking another artworld scandal with his challenge to the myth surrounding the lost artwork that was propagated by the neo-avant-garde. The multiples facilitated its circulation within the network of galleries and museums to which it had famously been denied entry, while the artisanal turn pushed back against its established meaning as a mass-produced item. The physical reproduction of the sculpture was coterminous with its discursive reproduction, which accompanied the resurgence of interest in Dada and Duchamp in the 1950s and 1960s. The volume of scholarly commentary on this object has risen exponentially since then, and it has now been firmly installed in the canon, variously as an icon of the avant-garde, the ultimate anti-artistic gesture, and the beginning of conceptual art. The recuperation of the sculpture does not consist in the assimilation to the field of culture of an object previously located outside of it, but more precisely in its transition from the sub-field of the emerging avant-garde to that of the consecrated avant-garde, within the field of restricted production. The significance of the readymade is that it makes visible and calls into question the power of the network of institutions, discourses and practices which imbue objects with aesthetic value. This attack on the institution of art was always internal to it, itself drawing on the art-institutional resources available, an insight which might prompt us to reconfigure the over-rehearsed narrative of resistance and recuperation. We could ask whether the sculpture continues to fulfil the same function, even as its position within the field of culture, and indeed the structure of that field as a whole, are transformed over time. Arguably, *Fountain* retains its critical force after its alleged recuperation, insofar as it still points to the extra-aesthetic institutional context conditioning its aesthetic status, by its very presence in galleries and museums casting doubt on the processes which have conferred such critical and commercial approbation on what is still, on one level, a urinal.

#### THE INSENSITIVE PHILISTINE

As we have seen, Beech and Roberts consider the insensitivity of the philistine to be constitutive of the category, and certainly this assertion is well

established in its history. The Introduction referred to insensitivity to the beauty of nature, to sweetness and light, and to the aesthetic, but it is also consistent with the general portrayal of this figure as obtuse, incurious and imperceptive. The *OED* defines the philistine as “hostile or indifferent to art and culture”, with no mention of insensitivity.<sup>73</sup> As in Adorno’s description of the “assaults of Dadaism” as “hostile to art and culture”, I would ascribe hostility chiefly to the destructive philistine, while indifference is best represented by the cultivated philistine who responds to radical art by shrugging that they do not understand it.<sup>74</sup> These both sound like attitudes consciously or unconsciously adopted, whereas insensitivity is naturalized as a fundamental incapacity, as with the association of this figure and blindness. The philistine simply cannot perceive what is beautiful, illuminating or specifically aesthetic about an artwork, and the distinction between art and non-art is therefore not operative for them. It is on this basis that they are identified as the absolute negation of art and aesthetics, as compared to the vulgarian and the dilettante, who represent degraded forms of aesthetic experience. This emphasis on the thoroughgoing negativity of the insensitive philistine is echoed by Bull, though he disputes that their critical potential is successfully harnessed by either Adorno or Dada. In my opinion, Adorno’s dialectical conception of the philistine is superior to his, though it does require further theoretical development. Dada’s insensitive philistine will now be assessed in relation to *Fountain*.

In his analysis of the movement, Adorno barely alludes to the readymades, despite their radical refusal of the distinction between art and non-art, paying more attention to the opposition of expression and meaning, which for him reflects the double nature of language. The Dadaists are accused of denying this underlying reality, seeking to establish through their sound poetry a realm of absolute expression in the field of literature. This tendency has its analogue in the field of visual art, where he describes the drive to greater abstraction as an attempt to realize a condition of pure subjectivity. In advance of my case study of *Fountain*, I cited a number of counterexamples, which already went some way to demonstrating how this interpretation is limited. Bull’s reading has the advantage of setting aside the alleged primacy of subjective

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<sup>73</sup> “Philistine”, *OED Online*.

<sup>74</sup> Adorno, *Quasi una Fantasia*, p.316.

expression, of which we see little evidence in the readymades. *Fountain* is not concerned with conveying the inner emotional state of the empirical person who is its creator, but rather with exploring how the marker of the name of the artist functions within the field of culture. The centrality of the artist to the production of meaning is challenged, and indeed this figure is made into a caricature, reduced to their minimal symbolic representation as a signature, with the slightly comical invented name “R. Mutt”. Duchamp’s gesture might be understood as buttressing the status of the creator, as he appears to exercise the power of asserting that non-art is art, but crucially this claim is contested, and it is the institution of art which settles it.

Arguably, Adorno is himself insensitive to the self-reflexive critique of the institutionality of art which is central to my alternative interpretation of Dada. As acknowledged above, *Fountain* is relatively atypical in that it was produced with exhibition in mind, but the other readymades also intersect with the art-institutional dimension in various ways, whether by mimicking the classical arrangement of sculpture and base by mounting a bicycle wheel on a stool in *Bicycle Wheel* [1913], or with the iconoclastic addition of facial hair to the *Mona Lisa* in *L.H.O.O.Q.* The point of such interventions is not to broaden the range of material which may be appropriated for the aesthetic sphere, nor even to assert that consecrated masterpieces in fact have no lasting value, contrary to the opposition set up by Bull. Instead, Duchamp’s readymades disclose the otherwise invisible functioning of the institution of art, specifically its arbitration of the question of art and non-art. His professed indifference to the aesthetic qualities of the functional items he selected for readymades reinforces the impression that strictly formal considerations have been supplanted by a focus on the art-institutional mechanisms which guarantee its status as art.<sup>75</sup> These become part of its integral structuration, the multi-directional play of elements which constitutes its meaning. Adorno neglects that art-institutional dimension, perhaps because he relies on too narrow a conception of form, bracketing off the extra-aesthetic institutional context.

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<sup>75</sup> Marcel Duchamp, “Apropos of “Readymades”” [1961], in *The Essential Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, ed. by Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson (London: Thames and Hudson, 1975), p.141.

His philistine, fully realized in the manner set out earlier, represents the immanent negation of art, or the immanent negation of the institution of art. On the basis of this case study, Dada's insensitive philistine does not fully succeed in achieving that sublation. With the preceding analysis, I have shown how the critique of the institution of art which the readymade represents remains internal to its target, utilizing the art-institutional resources of the emerging avant-garde. This has led me to propose a modification to histories of the reception of the sculpture which are couched in terms of resistance and recuperation. Departing from this explanatory framework, I have suggested that there may be no fundamental shift in the way the readymade operates as it moves from the sub-field of the emerging avant-garde to that of the consecrated avant-garde. What has changed, in this reading, is only the configuration of the institutional complex to which it directs our attention. It continues to fulfil this critical function, by virtue of its location on the boundary of art and non-art, a liminal position reaffirmed by the coexistence of urinals installed in the exhibition space and in the male toilets at contemporary galleries. However, I want to stress that this proposed interpretation of the recuperation of the sculpture ought not to be taken as an unqualified endorsement. The relatively smooth transition of the object to the status of a renowned artwork should instead alert us to the question of how resistant it ever was to the institution of art. From this perspective, *Fountain* makes no serious attempt to transcend the aesthetic sphere, preferring to subject it to an attack from within which falls short of effecting the destruction of art by artistic means. If this is correct, Dada's insensitive philistine is closer to the immanent non-negation of art, previously associated with Beech and Roberts.

## Aesthetics

### MODES OF ATTENTION

In the three essays making up the core of their contribution to the philistine controversy, Beech and Roberts repeatedly return to the modes of attention which official culture designates appropriate to art, and the alternative forms of engagement which they associate with the philistine. For the latter, "Spectres of the Aesthetic" uses the phrase "inexpert modes of attention",

without defining these much beyond their opposition to the modernist norm of the “deferral of happiness”.<sup>76</sup> This insight about the refusal of the postponement of pleasure is attributed to Frederic Jameson, who discusses the importance of the philistine to the aesthetic theory of Adorno in *Late Marxism: Adorno, Or, The Persistence of the Dialectic* [1990].<sup>77</sup> At this stage in the development of their theorization of the philistine, Beech and Roberts are still folding into it the figure of the voluptuous, with an emphasis on bodily gratification which becomes less prominent as their position is further refined.<sup>78</sup> Signalling an ambition to go into greater detail in a future essay, “Tolerating Impurities” for now lists “distraction, dissipation, relaxation and idle thrills”, and gives examples of ““inalert” and leisurely forms of attention associated with TV viewing, radio listening, movie going, watching football and sex-shop browsing”.<sup>79</sup> There is also a reference to the philistine adopting “disparaged modes [...] such as Kant’s “appetite” and Adorno’s “distraction””.<sup>80</sup> Although the shift from a typological figure to a set of practices is intended to guard against too restrictive an identification with particular classes or social groups, Beech and Roberts clearly draw inspiration from the realm of popular culture for their sense of philistine modes of attention, as well as directly negating aesthetic discourse.<sup>81</sup> Finally, “The Philistine and the Logic of Negation” cites the “appetitive and partisan spectator of art”, as counterpole to the “bourgeois notion of the disembodied beholder”.<sup>82</sup> Tony Bennett’s *Culture: A Reformer’s Science* [1998] is the source of a discussion of the role played by nineteenth-century cultural institutions in regulating the conduct of the public, prohibiting behaviour such as picnicking in museums and running through galleries, in order to train the working class in the bourgeois values of detachment and self-discipline. Beech and Roberts reinterpret that historical moment as a missed opportunity for the democratization of art, and for the liberation of philistine modes of attention.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Beech and Roberts, “Spectres of the Aesthetic”, pp.43-44.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p.43; Jameson, *Late Marxism*, pp.151-154.

<sup>78</sup> Beech and Roberts, “Spectres of the Aesthetic”, pp.45-46.

<sup>79</sup> Beech and Roberts, “Tolerating Impurities”, pp.159-160.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p.157.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., pp.156-157.

<sup>82</sup> Beech and Roberts, “The Philistine and the Logic of Negation”, p.284.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., pp.282-286.

This concept requires clearer definition than it is given in their essays, a task for which we might consult Bourdieu.

In *Distinction*, Bourdieu provides an empirically grounded description of the dominant modes of attention, which are dubbed the “pure gaze” or the “aesthetic disposition”.<sup>84</sup> This way of appropriating an object is bourgeois, established as dominant and therefore normative by the power of that class. It is shaped by the distance from necessity which is the privilege of economic security, resulting in an orientation towards life based on the values of the “gratuitous” and the “disinterested”.<sup>85</sup> The principal model is the attitude of the aesthete, naturalized as a “quasi-creative power which sets the aesthete apart from the common herd by a radical difference which seems to be inscribed in “persons””.<sup>86</sup> This perspective is applied outside the aesthetic sphere, as a “generalized capacity to neutralize ordinary urgencies and to bracket off practical ends”.<sup>87</sup> The most distinctive feature of the pure gaze is a preoccupation with form, according to Bourdieu:

The aesthetic mode of perception in the “pure” form which it has now assumed corresponds to a particular state of the mode of artistic production. An art which, like all post-Impressionist painting, for example, is the product of an artistic intention which asserts the *absolute primacy of form over function*, of the mode of representation over the object represented, *categorically* demands a purely aesthetic disposition which earlier art demanded only conditionally. The demiurgic ambition of the artist, capable of applying to *any* object the pure intention of an artistic effort which is an end in itself, calls for unlimited receptiveness of the part of an aesthete capable of applying the specifically artistic intention to any object, whether or not it has been produced with aesthetic intention.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Bourdieu, *Distinction*, pp.20-24, pp.26-27, pp.42-55.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p.48.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p.23.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p.47.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p.22.

This might put us in mind of the readymades, which can be read as exercising the capacity of the pure gaze to transform objects not constituted artistically into artworks, provided that the institutional character of the aesthetic disposition and its interaction with other art-institutional mechanisms are taken into account. These found sculptures also prioritize form over function, by transposing functional items into the aesthetic realm, where they will be assessed in formal terms, though once again this should be an expanded concept of aesthetic form incorporating the art-institutional dimension. The privileging of form here refers to a shift in focus away from the thematic content of artworks, and from the social functions they fulfil, instead emphasizing their specifically aesthetic features, understood in terms of an intrinsic history of art, and a synchronic universe of other artworks. Bourdieu's aesthete is further characterized by distance and detachment, which are the guarantee of distinction.

Criticizing Bourdieu in "Tolerating Impurities", Beech and Roberts assert that philistinism cannot be understood through sociological analysis, even with a method as relational and reflexive as his. He is accused of redescribing the absence of taste as the presence of alternative tastes, when according to them the philistine is not otherly cultured, but emphatically uncultured. This figure may be identified with any number of classes or social groups, but they should be defined chiefly by the negation of the dominant modes of attention. The philistine is conceptualized as a real absence, derived from a refusal of legitimate taste, rather than based on an affirmation of marginalized perspectives.<sup>89</sup> By contrast, Bourdieu locates the pure gaze within a conflictual field of perceptual frameworks which correspond to different class positions, presenting it as the inverse of the popular aesthetic in its anti-Kantianism:

It is no accident that, when one sets about reconstructing its logic, the popular "aesthetic" appears as the negative opposite of the Kantian aesthetic, and that the popular ethos implicitly answers each proposition of the "Analytic of the Beautiful" with a thesis contradicting it. In order to apprehend what makes the specificity of aesthetic judgement, Kant ingeniously distinguished "that which pleases" from "that which

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<sup>89</sup> Beech and Roberts, "Tolerating Impurities", pp.132-133.



gratifies”, and, more generally, strove to separate “disinterestedness”, the sole guarantee of the specifically aesthetic quality of contemplation, from “the interest of the senses”, which defines “the agreeable”, and from “the interest of Reason”, which defines “the Good”. By contrast, working-class people, who expect every image to fulfil a function, if only that of a sign, refer, often explicitly, to norms of morality or agreeableness in all their judgements.<sup>90</sup>

The Kantian maxim of disinterested contemplation prohibits the perspectives of the voluptuous and the partisan, associated respectively with bodily pleasure and cultural contestation. Bourdieu ascribes these attitudes to the working-class philistine, who is counterposed to the bourgeois ideal of a disembodied spectator. This recalls the class basis of the opposition of pure culture and popular culture, as distinct from the dialectic of art and its other, which as we have seen is largely an intra-bourgeois struggle for Adorno. Beech and Roberts’ insistence on an approach which treats philistinism as a construct of aesthetic discourse, instead of searching for analogues in empirical reality, is belied by the popular models they adopt for their version of philistine modes of attention. We might however hypothesize a philistine gaze, which negates the values behind the pure gaze, without substituting for them judgements made on the basis of morality and agreeableness, or for that matter vague invocations of popular culture.

From Beech and Roberts’ inchoate formulation of the philistine gaze, I would pick out the themes of appetite and partisanship, while noting that the bodily gratification linked to the voluptuous retreats from view as their theorization of the philistine is developed. This figure is said to reject the bourgeois value of political neutrality as well, but the question of partisanship does not actually feature much in their account of philistine modes of attention, whereas the prioritization of politics over aesthetics is central to the anti-artistic orientation for Leslie. She ascribes a political motivation to the Dadaists’ embrace of iconoclasm, seeing their opposition to aesthetic autonomy as informed by a commitment to revolutionary communism, and their collages and photomontages as correctives to the dominant culture embedded in the source

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<sup>90</sup> Bourdieu, *Distinction*, p.33.

material. Beech and Roberts set themselves against Adorno's insistence on concentrated engagement, and the submission of the self to the logic of the artwork. They turn to the distraction and relaxation which he associates with the culture industry, promoting inalertness and leisureliness over self-discipline and detachment. Bourdieu enables us to delineate the pure gaze with greater precision, confirming that distance and disinterestedness, adding to it a preoccupation with form, and the widespread application of this perspective outside the aesthetic sphere. The philistine gaze might instead be constructed on the basis of its direct negation of aesthetic discourse, central to which would be its anti-Kantianism. It is possible to distinguish the philistine gaze from the popular aesthetic, which despite sharing in the opposition to pure culture is not simply synonymous with philistinism, contrary to what we might infer from Bourdieu. In my final case study, Dada's radical curatorial strategies are analysed in terms of the perspectives of the voluptuous and the partisan, and as a purely destructive philistine gaze.

#### **FIRST INTERNATIONAL DADA FAIR**

The First International Dada Fair, held at the Galerie Otto Burchard in Berlin in July and August 1920, is the focus of my analysis here, drawing on the extensive account of it provided by Hanne Bergius.<sup>91</sup> A dealer specializing in east Asian art and French furniture, Burchard had taken over the ground floor of an apartment building renovated in upper-middle-class Wilhelmine style, which he decided to open as a small commercial gallery, similar to other establishments dedicated to the display of new art which were already in existence in the city, such as the abovementioned Galerie Der Sturm. The venture was short-lived and in financial terms a failure, as he invested the significant sum of a thousand marks in the only major exhibition mounted there, banking on the novelty and notoriety of the Dadaists. There was a relatively high admission fee, ensuring a predominantly bourgeois audience, but it still failed to recoup costs. As indicated by the word "Fair [*Messe*]", the First International Dada Fair was in part

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<sup>91</sup> Bergius, *Crisis and the Arts, Volume 5*, pp.231-282. Included as an insert in *Crisis and the Arts, Volume 5*, Bergius' reconstruction of the full catalogue, based on preliminary work by Helen Adkins, has proven invaluable.

modelled on a trade show, offering artworks for sale, with little success.<sup>92</sup> This enterprise was not merely commercial in nature however, as it also sought to raise the profile of a particular faction within the emerging avant-garde. The widespread press coverage was useful in this regard, though most of it was negative. The ensuing court case over the alleged insult to the military probably added to that prestige, according to the inverted logic of the field of restricted production.<sup>93</sup> Publicity for the First International Dada Fair comprised press announcements, and posters and stickers put up around the city. It intruded into the exhibition itself, with a proliferation of Dadaist paraphernalia including promotional material, little magazines, book covers, photographs, and so on.<sup>94</sup> This was simultaneously self-promotion and a satire of the close relationship between art and capitalism, refusing to respect the nominal separation between the aesthetic and commercial spheres, while calling into question the notion of value in both senses. The catalogue states programmatically: “Dada will lead to the cancellation of the art trade.”<sup>95</sup> With this destructive intent, the First International Dada Fair pits the philistine anti-artist against the philistinism of the art market.

The Dadaists simultaneously protest about and seek to hasten the decline of an autonomous realm for artistic production and reception, which is central to the bourgeois ideology of art. The First International Dada Fair was a large-scale undertaking, with over two hundred works crammed into two rooms. The collection included a diverse range of objects, many of which might not have been readily recognizable as belonging to the domain of art, instead evoking the domestic sphere, such as an entry for a cooking competition by Max Schlicter, cushions by Maud E Grosz, and dolls by Höch.<sup>96</sup> There were also pieces by the workers of a stencil factory (“Berlin Cliché Factory”) and teenagers (“The Dada Youth Group”).<sup>97</sup> The involvement of amateur artists violated the professionalized standards of the artworld, while the use of heteronomous forms exceeded its disciplinary boundaries. The ideal of aesthetic autonomy was further problematized by the political commitment common among members of this

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<sup>92</sup> Bergius, *Crisis and the Arts, Volume 5*, pp.232-235, p.267, p.279.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.273-280.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p.236, pp.242-243, p.272.

<sup>95</sup> Cited in Bergius, *Crisis and the Arts, Volume 5*, p.232.

<sup>96</sup> Bergius, *Crisis and the Arts, Volume 5*, p.236, p.239, p.259.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p.233, pp.257-259, p.269.

branch of the movement, evident from their propaganda and sloganeering. One of the most striking features of the show upon arrival would have been the outsized picture-posters of the organizers, Grosz, Heartfield and Hausmann. The Dadaists are depicted either shouting or in stern profile, accompanied by slogans which express their intention to destroy art and their partisanship: “Down with art”, “Dada is the deliberate subversion of bourgeois terminology”, “Dada is on the side of the revolutionary proletariat”.<sup>98</sup> A number of slogans, in a large uniform typeface, also dominated the first room, repeating the same themes, in particular reaffirming the rhetorical allegiance to anti-art: “Art is dead / Long live the new machine art of Tatlin”, “Some day photography will supersede and replace all of painting”, “Dilettantes [*Dilettanten*] rise up against art!”<sup>99</sup> This call to action was inspired by the subtitle of the Cologne Dada journal *Die Schammade*, “Dilettantes [*dilettanten*] Rise Up”.<sup>100</sup> The Dadaists interpellate the audience as dilettantes and exhort them to revolt against art, which we might compare to an insurgent philistinism.

The anti-artistic orientation translates into a conscious attempt to subvert the perspective of the spectator, insofar as it is shaped by the imperatives of the institution of art. The First International Dada Fair systematically frustrated the modes of attention an audience would have expected to apply in a bourgeois art salon, which conform to the description of the pure gaze in Bourdieu. This was achieved partly by incorporating appetitive and partisan alternatives, proscribed by the Kantian maxim of disinterested contemplation. The inclusion of a recipe among the exhibits conjures up the idea of eating the artwork, while the cushions and dolls suggest non-sanctioned forms of engagement like relaxation and play. The political slogans also cancel the distance and detachment on which the aesthetic disposition depends, addressing the spectator in a way which demands their active participation. It is however the overall organization of the space, as much as the objects contained within it, which constitutes the negation of the pure gaze. The pictures were hung close together, arranged in haphazard fashion, overlapping with other items. Some boasted kitsch frames, and some were affixed directly to the cluttered walls, in one case propped up on an easel in front

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., pp.238, insert: p.67.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p.237, insert: p.67.

<sup>100</sup> [Title Page], *Die Schammade* 1 (1920): <http://sdrc.lib.uiowa.edu/dada/die-schammade/index.htm> [accessed 16 April 2019], p.1.

of a door. Suspended from the ceiling was a dummy dressed as a soldier with the face of a pig, Heartfield and Rudolf Schlichter's *Prussian Archangel* [1920].<sup>101</sup> If the pure gaze is reinforced by the established practice of presenting artworks discretely against a neutral background, in order to allow for their individual contemplation while encouraging aesthetic distance, then that approach is emphatically rejected here. By overspilling the constraints of conventional curatorial practice like this, the Dadaists effectively preclude the concentrated engagement with an individual artwork which is characteristic of the aesthetic disposition.

There is a similar strategy behind some of the sculptures, such as the gargantuan assemblage almost filling the second room, Baader's *Great Plasto-Dio-Dada-Drama*. Subtitled "Dadaist Monumental Architecture in Five Floors, Three Facilities, One Tunnel, Two Elevators, and One Cylindrical Top", *Great Plasto-Dio-Dada-Drama* comprises a vast array of miscellaneous junk organized in ascending levels which correspond to the spiritual development of the Superdada Baader. Its sheer scale and complexity forces the spectator to explore it spatially, so that it approaches the status of architecture, in line with the background of the artist.<sup>102</sup> In this respect it anticipates Schwitters' *Merzbau* in Hannover, and subsequent iterations during his exile in Norway and Britain. As with these walk-in installations, *Great Plasto-Dio-Dada-Drama* leaves little scope for the bourgeois detachment which informs the pure gaze. Representative of the Dada group in Dresden, Otto Lasker-Dix's *Montage of Movable Figures* [c.1920] takes this a stage further, with a breach of the prohibition on touching usually in place at galleries and museums. The piece depicts male and female figures which can be manipulated by hand, with interactivity encouraged by the adjacent slogan "Just grab it and hold onto it".<sup>103</sup> This is a radical departure from the conventional separation between the audience and the artwork, which echoes the instruction to use the axe provided to destroy an exhibit at Dada – Early Spring, a precursor to the First International Dada Fair. Though it is less obviously destructive than this earlier stunt, *Montage of Movable Figures*

<sup>101</sup> Bergius, *Crisis and the Arts, Volume 5*, pp.235-236, p.240, p.256.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., pp.263-264, insert: pp.65-66.

<sup>103</sup> Bergius, *Crisis and the Arts, Volume 5*, insert: p.43, p.67.

likewise disrupts the dominant modes of attention, encouraging the spectator to abandon the bourgeois self-discipline underpinning that perspective.

Höch's *Cut with the Kitchen Knife Through the Last Weimar Beer-Belly Cultural Epoch of Germany* [1919-1920], analysed in detail by Maud Lavin, challenges the preoccupation with form, conceived in inner-aesthetic terms, which is another marker of the pure gaze. This large photomontage is made up of material taken from newspapers and magazines, predominantly pictures of public figures, the masses and machinery, and fragments of text including the slogans "Join Dada" and "Dada triumphs!" There are thematic clusters of images, such as the political and military leaders of the Weimar Republic, who appear together in the top-right quadrant under the phrase "The anti-Dadaist movement". This gives way to a collocation of revolutionaries and artists in the bottom-right quadrant labelled "World revolution / Dadaists", later amended to the less overtly political "The great Dada world / Dadaists". These loose groupings are matched respectively by representations of scientific progress in the top-left quadrant, and by photographs of crowds of people in the bottom-left quadrant, though the proportions of the sections are actually irregular, and their contents overlap and interact. *Cut with the Kitchen Knife* is organized roughly centrifugally, as it pivots on the body of a female dancer, who is ringed by wheels, cogs and rolling bearings, from which the different sections fan out, creating an effect of dynamic motion.<sup>104</sup> It is hardly possible to apprehend the design of the whole at once, due to the excess of constituent parts, and the calculated disjunctiveness of their arrangement, which resist attempts to read this work as an integrally structured formal complex. The photomontage necessarily refers outside of itself to its extra-aesthetic sources, and the way in which these elements are reconfigured in this instance also gestures beyond the frame. That impression would have been reinforced by the consistency of style between the piece and the space in which it was displayed, with the composition reflecting the apparent rejection of order at the curatorial level, seeming to participate in the montage-like organization of the exhibition as a whole. The First International Dada Fair thereby promotes a philistine gaze, based on the direct negation of aesthetic discourse, as well as admitting the perspectives of the voluptuous and the partisan.

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<sup>104</sup> Lavin, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife*, pp.19-25.

### THE DESTRUCTIVE PHILISTINE

This chapter has made destruction one of its central themes, through the overarching formulation of the destruction of art by artistic means, or more fully the destruction of art as an institution by art-institutional means. The destructive philistine is also a specific mode of the philistine against philistinism, a counterpart to the appetitive philistine and the insensitive philistine, who together comprise a multifaceted figure, adaptable enough to embody diverse manifestations of Dadaist anti-art. In my brief history of the philistine, the Biblical Goliath was proposed as the archetype for the destructive variant, which has a modern equivalent in the art-smashing iconoclasm adopted by anti-artists in the twentieth century. As we saw above, Leslie identifies iconoclasm as a stylistic principle and a guiding ideology for the Dadaists, citing their collages and photomontages and alluding to the instances of art vandalism displayed at the First International Dada Fair. There are many other examples of the movement exhibiting a destructive approach, besides its rhetorical, symbolic and concrete embrace of iconoclasm. In his fragmentary interpretation of Dada, Adorno refers to its destruction of the unified subject, as well as repeatedly highlighting the destruction of meaning. My final case study has explored how meaning is negated both within individual artworks and through the radical curatorial strategies applied to them collectively, as well as explicating the destructive approach to the dominant modes of attention at the First International Dada Fair.

As set out in the last chapter, Adorno defines aesthetic meaning in formal terms, though in its rigorous adherence to an internal logic it gestures towards the extra-aesthetic sphere. The integral structuration of the artwork, on which the social import of aesthetic autonomy is said to depend, is forcefully rejected by the Dadaists. Their collages, photomontages and assemblages deconstruct this model of meaning, also problematized by the general approach to presentation at the First International Dada Fair. Adorno characterizes the negation of meaning as instinctive and anarchic, whereas it is in fact relatively systematic. To adapt his description of advanced art, Dada repudiates surface coherence and the appearance of harmony, extending beyond the frame to encompass the context of reception, as in Höch's *Cut with the Kitchen Knife*. Adorno insists that the

negation of meaning is itself meaningful, thereby circumventing that challenge. His continued investment in the model of meaning under attack causes him to rely on a framework for interpretation which is inappropriate to the object in this instance, effectively abandoning the sympathy required by his method of immanent analysis. The destructive impact of collages, photomontages and assemblages is blunted as a result, while the critical relation to the art-institutional dimension is mostly missed in his account. It has been emphasized here, focusing on the strategies to subvert the aesthetic disposition which were adopted by the Dadaists. This aspect of their anti-artistic practice is not restricted to the First International Dada Fair, with notable experiments with the format of exhibitions taking place in Cologne and Paris. It is also evident in other media, with the ability of the audience to apply their usual perspective frustrated by unexpected interventions, cacophonous performances, and the disorienting layouts of little magazines.

My theorization of the philistine positions them as the immanent negation of the institution of art, building on Adorno's model of the dialectic of art and its other. At the First International Dada Fair, the Dadaists launch an assault on the dominant ideas governing the production and reception of artworks, and they also intervene directly in a gallery space, as well as in other institutional formations like the art market, the mainstream press, and even the legal system. The movement remains immanent to the institution of art, participating to a limited extent in commercial competition, and to a much greater extent in non-commercial struggles for distinction within the field of restricted production. It recognizes its own institutionality and seeks to subvert it in a self-critical turn, with a range of techniques including the disruption of the modes of attention generally considered appropriate to art. This component of the anti-artistic orientation guards against recuperation, anticipating the depoliticizing effect of the pure gaze, which as we have seen is capable of transforming any material, no matter how recalcitrant or rebarbative, into an object suitable for aesthetic meditation. It is probably not possible to arrest that process altogether, as evidenced by the new artistic forms which this exhibition promotes in spite of itself, such as installation art and interactive art. The determinate negation of the perspectives conventionally applied in a bourgeois art salon nevertheless represents a significant escalation of the destruction of art by artistic means. In



comparison to the appetitive philistine and the insensitive philistine, Dada's destructive philistine comes closest to approximating the immanent negation of art.

### **Adorno, Dada and the Philistine**

In the concluding section of this chapter, I expand on the relationship between Adorno's dialectic of art and its other and Dada's destruction of art by artistic means, both of which, in their fullest realization, may be construed as an immanent negation of art. The philistine has in each case served as the vehicle for elaborating that critical potential, whether in the form of Adorno's dialectical conception of them, or as the symbolic representation of Dada's anti-artistic orientation. This figure has been deployed in a number of guises throughout my thesis, but broadly they function as the bearer of the thoroughgoing negativity that is shared by Adorno's dialectical method and Dada's self-critical turn. As with Dada's variants, Adorno's philistine exhibits appetitive, insensitive and destructive aspects, but then these modulations of the concept are long-established, already featuring as recurring themes of the brief history in my Introduction. Notwithstanding such correspondences, Adorno's and Dada's versions of the philistine also conflict with one another in important respects, with the latter ultimately completing the former. Crucially, Dada's philistine gaze incorporates the perspectives of the partisan and the voluptuous which earlier emerged as a possible corrective to Adorno's blindnesses, as well as going beyond them to encompass a self-reflexive critique of the institutionality of art, and attempts to frustrate the dominant modes of attention. Conversely, Adorno's model of an immanent negation of art provides a framework for critically evaluating examples of Dadaist anti-art. In what follows, I further develop my theorization of the philistine out of that productive tension between Adorno and Dada, occasionally drawing on Beech and Roberts, Bull and Leslie.

This theorization of the philistine adheres to the amended model of the immanent negation of the institution of art, registering a far-reaching repudiation of its values and apparatuses, but one which is situated squarely within artistic practice and aesthetic discourse. Through the dialectic of art and its other, Adorno envisages an aesthetics conscious of how it is implicated in the unjust

organization of society, still insisting on the necessity of aesthetic autonomy, while acknowledging that this category is itself a social fact, and seeking to combat its ideological aspects with the critical insight of the philistine. He fails to fully realize that model in practice, limiting the incorporation of the truth-claims of the philistine, and acting in effect to neutralize the destruction of art, as when he redescribes the negation of meaning as meaningful. To their credit, Beech and Roberts and Bull are alert to these weaknesses of his, but their respective constructions of the philistine nevertheless revert to the opposed positions which he has already sublated, an immanent non-negation that is insufficiently critical, and a non-immanent negation that is alien to its object. Potentially, Dada's philistine could help to fulfil the promise of the model, in conjunction with an alternative interpretation of the movement, concentrating on those areas of its activity which his biases prevent him from properly appreciating. The destruction of art by artistic means, understood as the destruction of art as an institution by art-institutional means, likewise approximates an immanent negation, though its precise form and its degree of critical force vary. This variability is reflected in the different manifestations of the philistine presented here.

At the outset of this chapter, I took over the formulation of the philistine against philistinism from Leslie, following her in connecting it to the pose of the Dadaist against Dada, with both of these double-sided constructions reproducing the structure of the destruction of art by artistic means. She sees the movement as politically motivated, with its iconoclasm driven by a communist-inspired critique of art as complicit in exploitation and domination, providing ideological cover for the perpetuation of bourgeois property relations. In his comments about Dada, Adorno also highlights its political orientation, to which he attributes much of its force and urgency, at least compared to the neo-avant-garde revival of anti-art, operating in an even more attenuated space for resistance than its precursor. He is generally suspicious of artists who are preoccupied with political effect or social impact, detecting a surreptitious positivity behind their commitment, which dilutes the thoroughgoing negativity that is supposed to guard against recuperation. This is consistent with his opposition to the philistinism of art with a cause, in which the requirements of the artistic material are subordinated to political aims, while the approach to aesthetics is similarly

reductive and instrumentalizing, characterized above all by insensitivity to form. The partisan is however a plausible candidate for the role of the philistine, still somewhat abstractly conceived in his argument as a strategically positioned counterweight to the connoisseur, who disrupts their sympathetic immersion in the internal logic of the formally autonomous artwork by inquiring bluntly as to its purpose. That purpose might be identified as the prioritization of politics over aesthetics emphasized by Leslie, while noting that this attitude is unrepresentative of Dada as a whole. In my view, Adorno does not go far enough in admitting the perspective of the partisan into his aesthetic theory, which is what his model of the dialectic of art and its other demands.

Beech and Roberts pair the partisan with the voluptuous, and the latter should also form part of my theorization of the philistine, focusing now on their appetitive aspect. In the previous chapter “Adorno’s Philistine”, I explored the opposition he sets up between pure culture and popular culture, which begins to break down with the rise of the culture industry. The figure of the vulgarian, depicted emblematically eating the artwork, is considered more pertinent to this phenomenon than the philistine. He does not call the consumers of mass-produced entertainment philistines, typically reserving that charge for the elite who promote these products to them. He tends to represent the philistine as bourgeois, and their attack on art and aesthetics as an intra-bourgeois conflict. He shows the cultivated philistine, rather than the appetitive philistine, successfully negating advanced art, in his illustrative sketch of this key confrontation. The vulgarity he associates with the masses is not entirely distinct from philistinism, but in the main the dialectic of art and its other is imagined as internal to the sphere of pure culture. “Adorno’s Blindnesses”, a coda to the same chapter, built on the preceding analysis with a preliminary assessment of the blindnesses, aporias and exclusions of his aesthetic theory, including a claim that he neglects the critical potential of popular culture, failing to fully exploit its status as the antithesis of pure culture, especially with regard to the elements of the lower realm incorporated into radical art by the avant-garde. The modes of attention associated with the appetitive philistine might be applied as a corrective to that blindness, via the critically inflected populism of the Dadaists.

I would argue that Dada’s nuanced use of heteronomous forms like cabaret stands as a riposte to Adorno’s lack of attention to the oppositional

capacity of popular culture vis-à-vis pure culture. His profound scepticism about the possibility of aesthetic truth inhering in the productions of the culture industry, and what he perceives to be the political consequences of the relaxation and distraction provided for the masses, are perhaps what lead him to overlook genuinely innovative ways of engaging with that realm, such as are undertaken by the Dadaists. The Cabaret Voltaire combines high and low art with iconoclastic intent, undermining the hierarchical structure of the field of culture. The elevated aesthetic of pure culture is deliberately contaminated, by the calculated addition of the popular and the commercial. The familiarity and accessibility of popular culture are themselves negated, with the distorting techniques of the avant-garde brought to bear on material with a wider appeal. There is an institutional foundation to this dual manoeuvre, as initially the movement occupies the structures of the sphere of entertainment, carrying out its negation of art and aesthetics from that external location. If Adorno grants Dada artistic legitimacy on the strength of its thoroughgoing negativity, then it ought to be commended for maintaining a critical stance towards the heteronomous forms it mobilizes against the institution of art, though this example still falls short of my theorization of the philistine, in the sense that it is non-immanent.

The anti-artistic orientation is also channelled through the insensitive philistine, defined by their art-alienness, constitutively incapable of perceiving aesthetic value, and utterly impervious to the distinction between art and non-art. “Adorno’s Philistine” set out his model of advanced art, using philistinism to delineate it negatively. The philistine critics denounce it as incomprehensible, whereas for him that alleged incomprehensibility is evidence of a formally autonomous artwork, highly attuned to the state of development of the artistic material, rigorously pursuing its own law of construction. The philistinism of art with a cause is accused of treating its medium reductively, illegitimately instrumentalizing it for extra-aesthetic ends, at the expense of its immanent form. The philistinism of art for enjoyment on the other hand remains inwardly focused, but its absolutism in this regard, concomitant with isolation from the social situation, is itself potentially ideological. The philistinism of art with a cause and the philistinism of art for enjoyment are the negative poles of the dialectic of the social and the aesthetic, which in his preferred version of modernism are mediated as extremes, just as the perspectives of the philistine

and the connoisseur should be combined without compromise. “Adorno’s Blindnesses” listed some of the shortcomings of his aesthetic theory, chief among them his failure to allow the philistine gaze to exert sufficient counterpressure on the modes of attention of the connoisseur, in order to reveal the moment of falsity in a knowledgeable and sympathetic disposition based on an affinity for art. This blindness may be corrected partly by augmenting the concept of philistinism with the figures of the partisan and the voluptuous, but that is not the full extent of Dada’s challenge to Adorno.

The readymade demonstrates the stakes involved in anti-art appropriating the inability or unwillingness to distinguish art and non-art, that is, the critical potential of the insensitive philistine misrecognized by Bull. Contra Adorno, *Fountain* posits an alternative negotiation of the dialectic of the social and the aesthetic, focused on another point of contact between them, namely the art-institutional dimension. The philistinism of art with a cause is inapplicable here, as there is no explicit political imperative, only an indirect attack on the given order, mediated through resistance to the institution of art, on which more below. The sculpture does not conform to the philistinism of art for enjoyment either, because rather than turning its back on empirical reality, and restricting itself to narrowly formal concerns, it merges these levels by drawing the extra-aesthetic institutional context into the inner-aesthetic nexus of the artwork. The multi-directional play of elements which constitutes aesthetic meaning incorporates the manipulation of art-institutional mechanisms, whether that is staging the exclusion of the object, making the spectacle visible to a wider audience, or ironically accentuating its subsequent recuperation. The urinal hardly approaches the integrally structured formal complex that is expected in the case of advanced art, unless the conception of form is expanded to accommodate the self-reflexive critique of the institutionality of art. The locus of aesthetics is still the dynamic mutual interaction of the parts and the whole, though in this instance the cognitive processes set in motion in response to that aconceptual knowledge include critical reflection on the functioning of the institution of art. With *Fountain*, Duchamp discloses the power to confer aesthetic status which is invested in this network of institutions, discourses and practices, by working on them so as to calibrate their effects relative to other aspects of the artwork, in the same manner as an artist might treat the physical properties of their material.

However, I have questioned whether by remaining so enmeshed in these structures, and never really seeking to transcend them, this famous example of anti-art also falls down against my theorization of the philistine, being immanent but insufficiently negative.

Adorno's notion of aesthetic experience, his theory of the artwork, and his technique of immanent analysis can all be elaborated in relation to the figure of the philistine. "Adorno's Philistine" reconstructed his aesthetics, beginning with the first of these components, tracing the influences of Kant and Hegel. From the former, Adorno takes the maxim of disinterested contemplation, and the distance and detachment it entails. The latter is the source of the self-discipline of the subject in adapting to the logic of the artwork, in a concentrated and immersive engagement with it. These orientations, which might appear contradictory, are combined through their opposition to the philistine attitudes of expecting to get something out the artwork, and subjectively projecting meaning onto it. As discussed above, Adorno gives a decisive role to form in his aesthetics, as the element of the artwork in which all the others consist, and through which the meaning of the whole is crystallized. This model of the artwork demands a method of interpretation specially adapted to it, which is his version of immanent analysis, holding fast to the principle of immanence without it becoming absolute. He argues that critics should comport themselves both internally and externally to the artwork, in order to grasp its truth content, the social import that ultimately depends on aesthetic autonomy. The sympathy he believes is necessary to avoid imposing an alien perspective must be offset by a critique of art, in recognition of the fact that while the formally autonomous artwork may articulate an alternative to the given order, it is false in that it is unable ever to realize its negative utopianism. His conceptions of aesthetic experience and immanent analysis are respectively the philosophical and technical expression of the modes of attention he recommends for advanced art, which it is worth noting share the distance, detachment and self-discipline, and the prioritization of form over function, identified as key features of the pure gaze by Bourdieu. In "Adorno's Blindnesses", I suggested that his aesthetics sticks too closely to this type of aesthetic comportment, failing to enact properly the self-critical turn he envisages. There is a further potential corrective in Dada's negation of the dominant modes of attention that are promoted by the

bourgeois institution of art, insofar as this aesthetic disposition does indeed resemble Adorno's approach to the artwork.

Analysing Dada's concerted effort to disrupt the pure gaze brings into view the destructive aspect of the philistine, previously invoked in relation to iconoclasm by Leslie. Adorno's over-reliance on an aesthetic disposition based on disinterested contemplation, concentrated engagement, and the submission of the self to the logic of the artwork has been shown to be an impediment to the correct interpretation of the movement. At the First International Dada Fair, the Dadaists agitate against disinterested contemplation, through their political commitment conveyed in declarative and imperative slogans. They violate the conventions normally observed in museums and galleries, such as the discrete presentation of exhibits, rendering impossible any sustained focus on an individual artwork. This reinforces the immanent tendency to direct attention beyond the frame in pieces like Hoch's *Cut with the Kitchen Knife*. There are provocative and interactive elements, cancelling the traditional passivity of the audience, and pushing back against the idea of a surrender to the aesthetic law of form. Baader's *Great Plasto-Dio-Dada-Drama* and Lasker-Dix's *Montage of Movable Figures* further resist distance and detachment with their spatial and tactile character. The slogans also explicitly encourage diletantism instead of self-discipline, a rhetorical allegiance matched by the inclusion of amateur artists and non-sanctioned forms of art at the First International Dada Fair. These examples are a good indication of how thoroughgoing the negativity of the anti-artistic orientation is in this instance, anticipating the recuperating effect of the pure gaze, combatting it partly by drawing on the perspectives of the partisan and the voluptuous, partly through a direct negation of aesthetic discourse. In respect of the latter, Dada's destructive philistine most resembles the model of an immanent negation of art.

At the end of the opening section of this chapter, I suggested that the full significance of the Dadaists' political orientation consists not in their positive commitment, but in an indirect critique of the social situation, conducted on the art-institutional level. Their consciousness of the institutionality of art, at odds with the ideal of aesthetic autonomy, translates into the self-critical turn of anti-art. The institutional formations under attack are developed historically, bound up with other such structures, which work in conjunction with the aesthetic

sphere, like the education system and the market in luxury goods. These in turn are integrated into a wider network of institutions, discourses and practices less obviously connected to the culture industry, and ultimately into the false whole of contemporary society as it is theorized by Adorno. The anti-artistic stunts perpetrated by the movement, including the majority lacking an explicitly activist character, are nevertheless political by virtue of this relation to the social situation, and the antagonistic attitude towards the status quo which is exhibited within the more limited context. The Dadaists' assaults on their immediate institutional supports hint at the kind of struggle he thinks is necessary to resist the totalizing logic of advanced capitalism, characterized by a thoroughgoing negativity that extends to rigorous self-critique, seeking relentlessly to undermine its own conditions of existence. This expanded sense of political resonance or social import, as opposed to political effect or social impact, engages the social situation in a highly mediated way. If Adorno's aversion to the philistinism of art with a cause inclines him to see reductive and instrumentalizing tendencies in the Dadaists' political orientation, then reconfiguring this problematic in art-institutional terms perhaps makes them compatible with his notion of aesthetic truth, and therefore better able to act as a corrective to his blindnesses.

Overall, Adorno leans too heavily on the modes of attention of the connoisseur, which according to his version of the dialectic of art and its other ought to be reciprocally negated by the perspective of the philistine. This figure is left a little underdrawn in his account of their interplay with the connoisseur, but they can be fleshed out with reference to the partisan and the voluptuous, given concrete form in the cultural contestation and bodily pleasure incited by the Dadaists. The movement deepens our understanding of this concept by developing its appetitive, insensitive and destructive aspects, as well as further complicating it with the paradox of the philistine against philistinism. In addition, Dada's self-reflexive critique of the institutionality of art has ramifications for Adorno's aesthetic theory, calling into question his investment in aesthetic autonomy, and his narrow conception of aesthetic form. The strategies to subvert the pure gaze also cast light on how much of this way of appropriating an object is retained in his approach to the artwork, a moment of falsity which in my view is not counteracted by invoking the art-alienness of the



philistine as he does, in the abstract and to a strictly limited extent. In these areas, Dada's philistine is brought to bear critically on Adorno's blindnesses. The reverse is also true, as his model of an immanent negation of art is applied to criticize the examples of Dadaist anti-art explored in my case studies. It is not that a failure to conform to this model is in itself a problem, more that the model provides a useful framework for articulating the danger of either only being able to mount a critique of the institution of art by operating outside it, or remaining too entangled to oppose it emphatically. With this final manoeuvre, Adorno and Dada have been mutually transformed through their interpenetration, in the process refining my theorization of the philistine as the immanent negation of the institution of art.

## Conclusion

The central argument of this thesis has now been substantially completed, worked out in detail in the closing sections of previous chapters, and it need only be briefly summarized here. If the critical encounter between them is successfully realized, Adorno and Dada are dialectically mediated, beginning with a reconstruction of his aesthetic theory, which produces a preliminary assessment of his blindspots. These blindspots cause him to misconstrue the movement in crucial respects, and my provisional alternative interpretation, emerging out of a dialogue with his defective reading, provides a basis for further investigation into the semi-submerged theme of anti-art. In case studies showcasing different manifestations of the anti-artistic orientation, Dada's critically inflected populism, its manipulation of art-institutional mechanisms, and its disruption of the dominant modes of attention are first analysed on their own terms, then extended to conclude the critique of Adorno. Concretely, Dada may act as a corrective in this way because it mobilizes popular culture against pure culture, necessitates an expanded conception of form, and negates the aesthetic disposition associated with the connoisseur, thereby redressing some of the weaknesses identified in his approach. With the Cabaret Voltaire, Duchamp's *Fountain* and the First International Dada Fair, the Dadaists adopt overlapping but distinguishable strategies, varying in the extent to which they operate inside the institution of art, and also in the seriousness with which they attempt to destroy it, only occasionally achieving an adequate combination of closeness to the object and a critical attitude towards it. Just as Adorno's model of culture, art and aesthetics is revised as a result of the confrontation with Dadaist anti-art, so Dada's diverse experiments are subject to a standard of judgement originally derived from Adorno. This is the model of the philistine as the immanent negation of the institution of art, employed to critically interrogate both sides of the exchange, highlighting his insensitivity to the art-institutional dimension of the movement, while articulating the difficulty it experiences in remaining immanent to the institution of art without sacrificing thoroughgoing negativity.

These in broad outline are the theoretical manoeuvres which constitute the mutually transformative interpenetration of Adorno and Dada.

I have deferred discussion of methodological questions until the end, so as not to preempt the unfolding form of the argument, which is co-constructed with the content in the course of the thesis, in keeping with his insight that philosophy cannot be neutral with regard to its presentation.<sup>105</sup> It is explicitly stated at the outset that what is envisaged is a dialectical analysis, but the meaning of this formulation is left open, avoiding the error of a formalism which determines the shape of thought in advance, and applies it mechanically as an inflexible schema, indifferent to the specific qualities of its object. This incidentally is a criticism we have seen levelled at Lukács by Adorno.<sup>106</sup> Certainly, Adorno's dialectical method informs my approach, in particular his practice of mediating opposites in their extremity, instead of attempting to strike a balance or settle on a compromise, though it should be stressed that this is a general tendency in his work, rather than a prescriptive maxim. Insofar as it may be identified as a characteristic technique of his, I can be seen to follow him in pursuing the poles of an antithesis to the point where they converge, with the reciprocal negation of Adorno's aesthetic theory and Dadaist anti-art described above. The underlying assumption on his part is that truth cannot be expressed positively in the false whole of contemporary society. Accordingly, Adorno foregrounds the moment of negativity in his version of dialectics, whereas totality is the most salient category for Lukács. He renders illegitimate the Hegelian manoeuvres whereby the negation of the negation is transmuted into a positive, and identity and non-identity are subsumed under a greater identity.<sup>107</sup> This negative orientation is broadly reflected in my focus on the philistine and the anti-artist as the others of art, but there is no direct translation of his dialectical method, and even using this shorthand to refer to it risks falling into the kind of identity thinking which he criticizes for obscuring the irreducible difference between concepts and what they cover.<sup>108</sup> I do not conform to reified methodological principles extracted from his philosophy, rather the form of the

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<sup>105</sup> Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p.18.

<sup>106</sup> Adorno, "Extorted Reconciliation", pp.218-219.

<sup>107</sup> Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p.7, pp.158-161, p.318.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.4-6.

argument is elaborated reflexively and dynamically, in a continuous process of correction and recalibration.

This is apparent in the overall structure of the thesis, which is influenced by his notion of constellational thinking, with the problematic of art and aesthetics successively reconfigured in shifting combinations of repeated elements: Adorno's aesthetic theory is elucidated through the figure of the philistine; Dada's anti-artistic orientation is emphasized in opposition to Adorno's tendency to downplay it; Dada's philistine is brought to bear critically on Adorno's blindnesses; Adorno's philistine is further developed as a means of evaluating Dadaist anti-art. This mode of organization reveals different aspects of the object, facilitating an immersion in its details and their interrelations, without attempting an exhaustive treatment, or foreclosing alternative arrangements. Inspired by Benjamin, Adorno rejects the total system and the chain of deductive reasoning, preferring models of thought which are open and non-linear, attuned to the anomalous and the fragmentary. The elements of the constellation are concretized through their dynamic mutual interaction, a process arrested in the blinding insight that flashes up briefly as a dialectical image or a moment of truth, when a particular configuration crystallizes into a force field. Compared to Benjamin, Adorno relies more on negation to hold the various components in a state of tension, typically seeking to show how they expose the moment of falsity in each other.<sup>109</sup> This is the dominant note in my argument as well, for the most part accentuating the conflicting tendencies of Adorno's aesthetic theory and Dadaist anti-art. There are also coincidences and correspondences, resemblances and affinities, such as the shared commitment to thoroughgoing negativity itself. This constellation illuminates the problematic of art and aesthetics, with its elements repelled and attracted in multiple directions, in a web of connections which is consciously shaped in response to the subject matter.

If the thesis is ultimately concerned with art and aesthetics in a broader sense, then its primary object is Adorno's aesthetic theory. This is the starting point for my investigation, which initially takes the form of an immanent

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., pp.162-163; Adorno, "The Essay as Form", pp.9-20; Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* [1963], trans. by John Osborne (London: Verso, 2009), pp.27-38; Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History" [1950], in *Illuminations*, pp.254-255.

analysis, a close but critical reading of his body of work, presented as a mosaic of quotations bound together by the organizing principle of the philistine. It is a technique loosely derived from his own practice, discussed as part of my exposition of his aesthetics, in which it is recommended over approaches which impose meaning from above, or else merely replicate what is already there. He embraces it as especially appropriate to the formally autonomous artwork, which categorically demands to be understood inner-aesthetically, and moreover participates in a myth of radical self-sufficiency which requires deconstructing from within. The advantage of an immanent analysis in this instance, where it is applied to critical and theoretical writing, is that his aesthetics is subject to a critique conducted in terms that it itself establishes, which is therefore better placed to articulate its internal tensions. His claim that any theory of art must be rooted in actual aesthetic experiences and the contemplation of qualitatively unique artworks prompts me to test his model on the concrete example of Dada. My interpretation of the movement fills the gaps in his account of it, and develops those aspects of its creative practice which might act as a corrective to the blindnesses of his aesthetics. This should be thought of chiefly as an extension of the immanent analysis already underway, rather than an exercise in its own right, and even the case studies are to a certain extent determined by that framing. The key concept of the institution of art is not some external addition to his aesthetic theory, in fact emerging organically as a resolution of its inherent contradictions, with the potential to reconfigure the dialectic of the aesthetic and the social so that the problem of their mediation disappears. This is analogous to the effect of the commodity structure on the thing-in-itself problem, posited in one of his earliest illustrations of constellational thinking, which draws inspiration from Lukács and Benjamin.<sup>110</sup>

What this amounts to is a set of highly specific conclusions, forged through the interpenetration of the main conceptual blocs making up the thesis, which cannot easily be detached from the preceding argument and presented as standalone truths with general applicability. We might nevertheless reflect on the stakes involved, in particular the question of the correct approach of aesthetics to an avant-garde distinguished by its self-reflexive critique of the institutionality of

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<sup>110</sup> Theodor Adorno, "The Actuality of Philosophy" [1931], trans. by Benjamin Snow, *Telos* 31 (1977): pp.126-129.

art. As we have seen, Adorno proceeds by dialectically reconstructing the dominant categories of philosophical aesthetics, as well as undertaking a number of analyses of individual artists and artworks. The extra-aesthetic context in which these pieces are created, and the various social functions they fulfill, are not his principal interest. He does of course comment on the art-institutional dimension, most famously with his polemical treatment of the culture industry, and there are also miscellaneous reflections on the conditions governing the production and reception of different branches of high culture. It is though comparatively rare for him to make these issues central to his aesthetic theory, and in his analyses of individual artists and artworks the extra-aesthetic context is usually bracketed off in favour of a focus on form. By contrast, Dada puts its own institutional character front and centre, thereby seeming to direct attention outwards. This might tempt us to adopt an explanatory framework conceived externally to the object, standing apart from the bourgeois ideal of aesthetic autonomy by historicizing and sociologizing it, as in the accounts of the institution of art in Bürger and Bourdieu. In my view, Adorno does remain too invested in aesthetic autonomy, despite his recognition of its ideological aspects, and his inner-aesthetic orientation should indeed be subject to greater counterpressure than he allows. However, I would dispute that this necessarily implies abandoning formal concerns and reducing the aesthetic to the social, as at its best the movement engages with that wider realm in a far subtler way, working centripetally rather than centrifugally to make the functioning of the institution of art an integral part of the multi-directional play of elements which for him constitutes aesthetic meaning.

We can sketch out the revised version of Adorno's aesthetics that is suggested by this argument, with the proviso that it should not be taken as a guide to the correct interpretation of artworks in general, but instead as the singular result of this critical encounter with Dada. Specifically, Adorno's assumption that the possibility of aesthetic truth is restricted to the realm of pure culture overlooks how that rarefied domain is immanently permeated by the opposing sphere, while the movement exploits this tension by assimilating elements of popular culture and the culture industry, which are themselves distorted and defamiliarized through avant-garde experimentation. This doubly critical manoeuvre avoids simply affirming heteronomous forms, which would

have delegitimized it for an approach that values thoroughgoing negativity as a philosophical orientation and as a defence against recuperation in radical art. It allows us to reshape his aesthetics while respecting his topography of the field of culture, producing a model still centred on advanced art, but more receptive to nuanced populism. In addition, Adorno's account of the dialectic of the aesthetic and the social, in which they are mediated through a negative mimesis of the given order conducted on the level of form, neglects the art-institutional dimension highlighted by Dada as an alternative point of contact between these extremes. Where the movement succeeds in integrating the manipulation of art-institutional mechanisms into the formal complex of the artwork, and insofar as its indirect relation to the wider network of institutional formations constitutes social import, it is consistent with aesthetic meaning as he understands it. What is required in order to apprehend this truth content within the purview of his aesthetics is an expanded conception of form, which can accommodate the institutionality of art in cases where it is incorporated by the avant-garde. With its attempts to disrupt the dominant modes of attention, Dada indicts Adorno's tendency to fall back on the default position of the connoisseur, which is rooted in a Kantian tradition, and promoted by the bourgeois institution of art. The movement problematizes the pure gaze by admitting the perspectives of the partisan and the voluptuous, and by undertaking the direct negation of aesthetic discourse. If his investment in aesthetic autonomy is undermined by the introduction of the seemingly incompatible concept of the institutionality of art, then it paradoxically enables the full realization of the dialectic of art and its other he envisages, including the self-critical turn he fails to properly enact. Nevertheless, Adorno is right to insist on the importance of what is specifically aesthetic about the artwork, justifying the corresponding focus on form, and the close attention paid to its internal logic, without which aesthetic reflection would lose touch with its object. My revised version of Adorno's aesthetics retains those features of it, now transformed through their immanent negation, and so suitably adapted to the task of interpreting Dada.

How far would it be valid to extend this approach beyond the context in which it has been created, or must we conclude that its only legitimate object is Dada? In the Introduction, I briefly invoked the tradition of the avant-gardist philistine, citing among other key figures Duchamp. My reading of the

movement cements its position as a foundational moment in that tradition, despite its hostility to the continuity of art history. The avant-gardist philistine is defined more precisely than it was before, in terms of an anti-artistic orientation premised on a critical consciousness of the institutionality of art. This points us towards radical tendencies in twentieth- and twenty-first-century art, which in various ways continue to reckon with the central insight of the historical avant-garde, in the wake of its perceived failure and recuperation. One line of descent, furthering the project of the destruction of art by artistic means, encompasses Lettrism, the Situationist International and Fluxus, as well as splinter groups and subterranean currents including the Provos, Kommune 1, Black Mask, Up Against the Wall Motherfucker and King Mob.<sup>111</sup> Their anti-artistic stunts at times shaded into direct action, bringing artistic innovations like happenings into the realms of politics and protest, but this violation of the borders of the aesthetic sphere also worked in the opposite direction. Guerilla Art Action Group, Art Workers Coalition and Guerilla Girls instead applied activist tactics to the institution of art, issuing demands to museums and galleries, organizing exhibition boycotts and art strikes, and manipulating the media to amplify criticisms of unequal representation and complicity with power. *Art brut* and outsider art situated themselves on the boundary of art and non-art, destabilizing the canon, challenging its exclusions, and calling into question the processes whereby aesthetic status is granted or denied.<sup>112</sup> Some elements of conceptual art and performance art were contrived so as to resist their incorporation into the institution of art, and the desire to escape its structures altogether can be identified as an impulse behind land art, street art and community-based art. There are also diverse instances of alternative networks and micro-communities, established outside of and in opposition to the artworld and its distribution apparatuses, such as mail art, zine culture and early net.art. A different approach to this problem is the practice of institutional critique, which approximates an immanent negation, making visible and critically interrogating its own conditions of existence, the complex of institutions, discourses and practices in which it

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<sup>111</sup> This tradition is chronicled in Stewart Home, *The Assault on Culture: Utopian Currents from Lettrisme to Class War* [1988] (Stirling: AK Press, 1991).

<sup>112</sup> Lucienne Peiry provides the most comprehensive account of this tradition in *Art Brut: The Origins of Outsider Art* [1997], trans. by James Frank (Paris: Flammarion, 2006).



remains embedded.<sup>113</sup> These examples are too wide-ranging to be corralled into a coherent counter-narrative of art history, and certainly it is nowhere near an exhaustive list, but it at least gives an indication of areas which might be explored in the light of my amended model of Adorno's aesthetics. They all engage with the tension between aesthetic autonomy and the institutionality of art, and to that extent a form of interpretation focused on this dynamic may be appropriate, though it would of course need to be adapted to the specific contours of each case. In the Introduction, I mentioned the relatively recent literary trends of flarf poetry and conceptual writing, and it is hoped that the argument elaborated here could help alert us to significant developments bearing on the same issues in the present moment, provided that changes in the structure of the field of culture since he was writing are taken into account. Regardless of whether that intuition proves correct, Adorno and Dada have been presented in an original constellation, contributing to the critical conversation around both of them, while advancing the theorization of the philistine.

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<sup>113</sup> For reflections on institutional critique by a key second-generation practitioner, who explicitly acknowledges the theoretical influence of Bourdieu, see: Andrea Fraser, "An Artist's Statement" [1992], in *Museum Highlights: The Writings of Andrea Fraser*, ed. by Alexander Alberro (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2005), pp.3-15; Andrea Fraser, "It's Art When I Say It's Art, or..." [1995], in *Museum Highlights*, pp.37-44; Andrea Fraser, "What's Intangible, Transitory, Mediating, Participatory, and Rendered in the Public Sphere? Part II" [1997], in *Museum Highlights*, pp.55-78; Andrea Fraser, "'To Quote,' Say the Kabyles, 'Is to Bring Back to Life'" [2002], in *Museum Highlights*, pp.81-86.

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