

It is self-evident that nothing concerning art is self-evident anymore, not its inner life, not its relation to the world, not even its right to exist. The forfeiture of what could be done spontaneously or unproblematically has not been compensated for by the open infinitude of new possibilities that reflection confronts. In many regards, expansion appears as contraction. The sea of the formerly inconceivable, on which around 1910 revolutionary art movements set out, did not bestow the promised happiness of adventure. Instead, the process that was unleashed consumed the categories in the name of that for which it was undertaken. More was constantly pulled into the vortex of the newly taboo; everywhere artists rejoiced less over the newly won realm of freedom than that they immediately sought once again after ostensible yet scarcely adequate order. For absolute freedom in art, always limited to a particular, comes into contradiction with the perennial unfreedom of the whole. In its place of art became uncertain. The autonomy it achieved, after having freed itself from cultic function and its images, was nourished by the idea of humanity. As society became ever less a human one, this autonomy was shattered. Drawn from the ideal of humanity, art's constituent elements withered by art's own law of movement. Yet art's autonomy remains irrevocable. All efforts to restore art by giving it a social function—of which art is itself uncertain and by which it expresses its own uncertainty—are doomed. Indeed, art's autonomy shows signs of blindness. Blindness was ever an aspect of art; in the age of art's emancipation, however, this blindness has begun to predominate in spite of, if not because of, art's lost naïveté, which, as Hegel already perceived, art cannot undo. This binds art to a naïveté of a second order: the uncertainty over what purpose it serves. It is uncertain whether art is still possible; whether, with its complete emancipation, it did not sever its own preconditions. This question is kindled by art's own past. Artworks detach themselves from the empirical world and bring forth another world, one opposed to the empirical world as if this other world too were an autonomous entity. Thus, however tragic they appear, artworks tend a priori toward affirmation. The clichés of art's reconciling glow enfolding the world are repugnant not only because they parody the

emphatic concept of art with its bourgeois version and class it among those Sunday institutions that provide solace. These clichés rub against the wound that art itself bears. As a result of its inevitable withdrawal from theology, from the unqualified claim to the truth of salvation, a secularization without which art would never have developed, art is condemned to provide the world as it exists with a consolation that—shorn of any hope of a world beyond—strengthens the spell of that from which the autonomy of art wants to free itself. The principle of autonomy is itself suspect of giving consolation: By undertaking to posit totality out of itself, whole and self-encompassing, this image is transferred to the world in which art exists and that engenders it. By virtue of its rejection of the empirical world—a rejection that inheres in art’s concept and thus is no mere *escape*, but a law immanent to it—art sanctions the primacy of reality. In a work dedicated to the praise of art, Helmut Kuhn warranted that art’s each and every work is a paean.¹ His thesis would be true, were it meant critically. In the face of the abnormality into which reality is developing, art’s inescapable affirmative essence has become insufferable. Art must turn against itself, in opposition to its own concept, and thus become uncertain of itself right into its innermost fiber. Yet art is not to be dismissed simply by its abstract negation. By attacking what seemed to be its foundation throughout the whole of its tradition, art has been qualitatively transformed; it itself becomes qualitatively other. It can do this because through the ages by means of its form, art has turned against the status quo and what merely exists just as much as it has come to its aid by giving form to its elements. Art can no more be reduced to the general formula of consolation than to its opposite. The concept of art is located in a historically changing constellation of elements; it refuses definition. Its essence cannot be deduced from its origin as if the first work were a foundation on which everything that followed were constructed and would collapse if shaken. The belief that the first artworks are the highest and purest is warmed-over romanticism; with no less justification it could be claimed that the earliest artistic works are dull and impure in that they are not yet separated from magic, historical documentation, and such pragmatic aims as communicating over great distances by means of calls or horn sounds; the classical conception of art gladly made use of such arguments. In bluntly historical terms, the facts blur.² The effort to subsume the historical genesis of art ontologically under an ultimate motif would necessarily flounder in such disparate material that the theory would emerge empty-handed except for the obviously relevant insight that the arts will not fit into any gapless concept of art.³ In those studies devoted to the aesthetic ἀρχαί, positivistic sampling of material and such speculation as is otherwise disdained by the sciences flourish wildly alongside each other; Bachofen is the best example of this. If, nevertheless, one wanted in the usual philosophical fashion categorically to distinguish the so-called question of origin—as that of art’s essence—from the question of art’s historical origin, that would amount only to turning the concept of origin arbitrarily against the usual sense of the word. The

order, and therefore it is not substantial in art either. That explains the ambivalence of aesthetic construction. Construction is equally able to codify the resignation of the weakened subject and to make absolute alienation the sole concern of art—which once wanted the opposite—as it is able to anticipate a reconciled condition that would itself be situated beyond static and dynamic. The many interrelations with technocracy give reason to suspect that the principle of construction remains aesthetically obedient to the administered world; but it may terminate in a yet unknown aesthetic form, whose rational organization might point to the abolition of all categories of administration along with their reflexes in art.

Prior to the emancipation of the subject, art was undoubtedly in a certain sense more immediately social than it was afterward. Its autonomy, its growing independence from society, was a function of the bourgeois consciousness of freedom that was itself bound up with the social structure. Prior to the emergence of this consciousness, art certainly stood in opposition to social domination and its *mores*, but not with an awareness of its own independence. There had been conflicts between art and society desultorily ever since art was condemned in Plato's state, but the idea of a fundamentally oppositional art was inconceivable, and social controls worked much more immediately than in the bourgeois era until the rise of totalitarian states. On the other hand, the bourgeoisie integrated art much more completely than any previous society had. Under the pressure of an intensifying nominalism, the ever present yet latent social character of art was made increasingly manifest; this social character is incomparably more evident in the novel than it was in the highly stylized and remote epics of chivalry. The influx of experiences that are no longer forced into a priori genres, the requirement of constituting form out of these experiences, that is, from below: This is "realistic" in purely aesthetic terms, regardless of content [*Inhalt*]. No longer sublimated by the principle of stylization, the relation of content to the society from which it derives at first becomes much less refracted, and this is not only the case in literature. The so-called lower genres too held their distance from society, even when, like Attic comedy, they made bourgeois relations and the events of daily life thematic; the flight into no-man's-land is not just one of Aristophanes' antics but rather an essential element of his form. If, in one regard, as a product of the social labor of spirit, art is always implicitly a *fait social*, in becoming bourgeois art its social aspect was made explicit. The object of bourgeois art is the relation of itself as artifact to empirical society; Don Quixote stands at the beginning of this development. Art, however, is social not only because of its mode of production, in which the dialectic of the forces and relations of production is concentrated, nor simply because of the social derivation of its thematic material. Much more importantly, art becomes social by its opposition to society, and it occupies this position only as autonomous art. By crystallizing in itself as something unique to itself, rather than

complying with existing social norms and qualifying as “socially useful,” it criticizes society by merely existing, for which puritans of all stripes condemn it. There is nothing pure, nothing structured strictly according to its own immanent law, that does not implicitly criticize the debasement of a situation evolving in the direction of a total exchange society in which everything is heteronomously defined. Art’s asociality is the determinate negation of a determinate society. Certainly through its refusal of society, which is equivalent to sublimation through the law of form, autonomous art makes itself a vehicle of ideology: The society at which it shudders is left in the distance, undisturbed. Yet this is more than ideology: Society is not only the negativity that the aesthetic law of form condemns but also, even in its most objectionable shape, the quintessence of self-producing and self-reproducing human life. Art was no more able to dispense with this element than with critique until that moment when the social process revealed itself as one of self-annihilation; and it is not in the power of art, which does not make judgments, to separate these two elements intentionally. A pure productive force such as that of the aesthetic, once freed from heteronomously control, is objectively the counterimage of enchained forces, but it is also the paradigm of fateful, self-interested doings. Art keeps itself alive through its social force of resistance; unless it reifies itself, it becomes a commodity. Its contribution to society is not communication with it but rather something extremely mediated: It is resistance in which, by virtue of inner-aesthetic development, social development is reproduced without being imitated. At the risk of its self-alienation, radical modernity preserves art’s immanence by admitting society only in an obscured form, as in the dreams with which artworks have always been compared. Nothing social in art is immediately social, not even when this is its aim. Not long ago even the socially committed Brecht found that to give his political position artistic expression it was necessary to distance himself precisely from that social reality at which his works took aim. Jesuitical machinations were needed sufficiently to camouflage what he wrote as socialist realism to escape the inquisition. Music betrays all art. Just as in music society, its movement, and its contradictions appear only in shadowy fashion—speaking out of it, indeed, yet in need of identification—so it is with all other arts. Whenever art seems to copy society, it becomes all the more an “as-if.” For opposite reasons, Brecht’s *China in the Good Woman of Setzuan* is no less stylized than Schiller’s *Messina* in *The Bride of Messina*. All moral judgments on the characters in novels or plays have been senseless even when these judgments have justly taken the empirical figures back of the work as their targets; discussions about whether a positive hero can have negative traits are as foolish as they sound to anyone who overhears them from so much as the slightest remove. Form works like a magnet that orders elements of the empirical world in such a fashion that they are estranged from their extra-aesthetic existence, and it is only as a result of this estrangement that they master the extra-aesthetic essence. Conversely, by exploiting these elements the culture industry all the more successfully joins slavish

respect for empirical detail, the gapless semblance of photographic fidelity, with ideological manipulation. What is social in art is its immanent movement against society, not its manifest opinions. Its historical gesture repels empirical reality, of which artworks are nevertheless part in that they are things. Insofar as a social function can be predicated for artworks, it is their functionlessness. Through their difference from a bewitched reality, they embody negatively a position in which what is would find its rightful place, its own. Their enchantment is disenchantment. Their social essence requires a double reflection on their being-for-themselves and on their relations to society. Their double character is manifest at every point; they change and contradict themselves. It was plausible that socially progressive critics should have accused the program of *l'art pour l'art*, which has often been in league with political reaction, of promoting a fetish with the concept of a pure, exclusively self-sufficient artwork. What is true in this accusation is that artworks, products of social labor that are subject to or produce their own law of form, seal themselves off from what they themselves are. To this extent, each artwork could be charged with false consciousness and chalked up to ideology. In formal terms, independent of what they say, they are ideology in that a priori they posit something spiritual as being independent from the conditions of its material production and therefore as being intrinsically superior and beyond the primordial guilt of the separation of physical and spiritual labor. What is exalted on the basis of this guilt is at the same time debased by it. This is why artworks with truth content do not blend seamlessly with the concept of art; *l'art pour l'art* theorists, like Valéry, have pointed this out. But the guilt they bear of fetishism does not disqualify art, any more so than it disqualifies anything culpable; for in the universally, socially mediated world nothing stands external to its nexus of guilt. The truth content of artworks, which is indeed their social truth, is predicated on their fetish character. The principle of heteronomy, apparently the counterpart of fetishism, is the principle of exchange, and in it domination is masked. Only what does not submit to that principle acts as the plenipotentiary of what is free from domination; only what is useless can stand in for the stunted use value. Artworks are plenipotentiaries of things that are no longer distorted by exchange, profit, and the false needs of a degraded humanity. In the context of total semblance, art's semblance of being-in-itself is the mask of truth. Marx's scorn of the pittance Milton received for *Paradise Lost*, a work that did not appear to the market as socially useful labor,¹ is, as a denunciation of useful labor, the strongest defense of art against its bourgeois functionalization, which is perpetuated in art's undialectical social condemnation. A liberated society would be beyond the irrationality of its *faux frais* and beyond the ends-means-rationality of utility. This is enciphered in art and is the source of art's social explosiveness. Although the magic fetishes are one of the historical roots of art, a fetishistic element remains admixed in artworks, an element that goes beyond commodity fetishism. Artworks can neither exclude nor deny this; even socially the emphatic element of semblance in artworks is, as a

corrective, the organon of truth. Artworks that do not insist fetishistically on their coherence, as if they were the absolute that they are unable to be, are worthless from the start; but the survival of art becomes precarious as soon as it becomes conscious of its fetishism and, as has been the case since the middle of the nineteenth century, insists obstinately on it. Art cannot advocate delusion by insisting that otherwise art would not exist. This forces art into an aporia. All that succeeds in going even minutely beyond it is insight into the rationality of its irrationality. Artworks that want to divest themselves of fetishism by real and extremely dubious political commitment regularly enmesh themselves in false consciousness as the result of inevitable and vainly praised simplification. In the shortsighted praxis to which they blindly subscribe, their own blindness is prolonged.

The objectivation of art, which is what society from its external perspective takes to be art's fetishism, is itself social in that it is the product of the division of labor. That is why the relation of art to society is not to be sought primarily in the sphere of reception. This relation is anterior to reception, in production. Interest in the social decipherment of art must orient itself to production rather than being content with the study and classification of effects that for social reasons often totally diverge from the artworks and their objective social content. Since time immemorial, human reactions to artworks have been mediated to their utmost and do not refer immediately to the object; indeed, they are now mediated by society as a whole. The study of social effect neither comes close to understanding what is social in art nor is it in any position to dictate norms for art, as it is inclined to do by positivist spirit. The heteronomy, which reception theory's normative interpretation of phenomena foists on art, is an ideological fetter that exceeds everything ideological that may be inherent in art's fetishization. Art and society converge in the artwork's content [*Gehalt*], not in anything external to it. This applies also to the history of art. Collectivization of the individual takes place at the cost of the social force of production. In the history of art, real history returns by virtue of the life of the productive force that originates in real history and is then separated from it. This is the basis of art's recollection of transience. Art preserves it and makes it present by transforming it: This is the social explanation of its temporal nucleus. Abstaining from praxis, art becomes the schema of social praxis: Every authentic artwork is internally revolutionary. However, whereas society reaches into art and disappears there by means of the identity of forces and relations, even the most advanced art has, conversely, the tendency toward social integration. Yet contrary to the cliché that touts the virtues of progress, this integration does not bring the blessings of justice in the form of retrospective confirmation. More often, reception wears away what constitutes the work's determinate negation of society. Works are usually critical in the era in which they appear; later they are neutralized, not least because of changed social relations. Neutralization is the social price of aesthetic autonomy. However, once artworks are entombed in the pantheon of cultural commodities, they themselves—their truth content—are

also damaged. In the administered world neutralization is universal. Surrealism began as a protest against the fetishization of art as an isolated realm, yet as art, which after all surrealism also was, it was forced beyond the pure form of protest. Painters for whom the quality of *peinture* was not an issue, as it was for André Masson, struck a balance between scandal and social reception. Ultimately, Salvador Dalí became an exalted society painter, the Laszlo or Van Dongen of a generation that liked to think of itself as being *sophisticated* on the basis of a vague sense of a crisis that had in any case been stabilized for decades. Thus the false afterlife of surrealism was established. Modern tendencies, in which irrupting shock-laden contents [*Inhalte*] demolish the law of form, are predestined to make peace with the world, which gives a cozy reception to unsublimated material as soon as the thorn is removed. In the age of total neutralization, false reconciliation has of course also paved the way in the sphere of radically abstract art: Nonrepresentational art is suitable for decorating the walls of the newly prosperous. It is uncertain whether that also diminishes the immanent quality of artworks; the excitement with which reactionaries emphasize this danger speaks against its reality. It would be truly idealistic to locate the relation of art and society exclusively as mediated in problems of social structure. Art's double character—its autonomy and *fait social*—is expressed ever and again in the palpable dependencies and conflicts between the two spheres. Frequently there are direct socioeconomic interventions in artistic production, a contemporary instance of which is the long-term contracts between painters and art merchants who favor what is called work with a “personal touch,” or more bluntly, a gimmick. That German expressionism vanished so quickly may have its artistic reasons in the conflict between the idea of an artwork, which remained its goal, and the specific idea of the absolute scream. Expressionist works could not totally succeed without betraying themselves. Also important was that the genre became politically obsolete as its revolutionary impetus went unrealized and the Soviet Union began to prosecute radical art. Nor should it be concealed that the authors of that movement, which went unreceived until forty or fifty years later, had to make a living and were compelled, as Americans say, *to go commercial*; this could be demonstrated in the case of most German expressionist writers who survived World War I. What is sociologically to be learned from the fate of the expressionists is the primacy of the bourgeois profession over the need for expression that inspired the expressionists in however naïve and diluted a fashion. In bourgeois society artists, like all who are intellectually productive, are compelled to keep at it once they have taken on the trade name of artist. Superannuated expressionists not unwillingly chose marketably promising themes. The lack of any immanent necessity for production, coupled with the concurrent economic compulsion to continue, is apparent in the product as its objective insignificance.

Among the mediations of art and society the thematic, the open or covert treatment of social matters, is the most superficial and deceptive. The claim that the

sculpture of a coal miner a priori says more, socially, than a sculpture without proletarian hero, is by now echoed only where art is used for the purpose of "forming opinion," in the wooden language of the peoples' democracies of the Eastern bloc, and is subordinated to empirical aims, mostly as a means for improving production. Emile Meuniers' idealized coal miner and his realism dovetail with a bourgeois ideology that dealt with the then still visible proletariat by certifying that it too was beautiful humanity and noble nature. Even unvarnished naturalism is often of a part with a deformed bourgeois character structure, a suppressed—in psychoanalytic terms, anal—pleasure. It feeds on the suffering and decay it scourges; like *Blut-und-Boden* authors, Zola glorified fertility and employed anti-Semitic clichés. On the thematic level, in the language of indictment, no boundary can be drawn between aggressiveness and conformism. An agitprop chorus of the unemployed with the performance directive that it be performed in an "ugly" fashion, may have functioned around 1930 as a certificate of correct political opinion, though it hardly ever testified to progressive consciousness; but it was always uncertain if the artistic stance of growling and raw technique really denounced such things or identified with them. Real denunciation is probably only a capacity of form, which is overlooked by a social aesthetic that believes in themes. What is socially decisive in artworks is the content [*Inhalt*] that becomes eloquent through the work's formal structures. Kafka, in whose work monopoly capitalism appears only distantly, codifies in the dregs of the administered world what becomes of people under the total social spell more faithfully and powerfully than do any novels about corrupt industrial trusts. The thesis that form is the locus of social content [*Gehalt*] can be concretely shown in Kafka's language. Its objectivity, its Kleistian quality has often been remarked upon, and readers who measure up to Kafka have recognized the contradiction between that objectivity and events that become remote through the imaginary character of so sober a presentation. However, this contrast becomes productive not only because the quasi-realistic description brings the impossible menacingly close. At the same time this critique of the realistic lineaments of Kafka's form, a critique that to socially committed ears seems all too artistic, has its social aspect. Kafka is made acceptable by many of these realistic lineaments as an ideal of order, possibly of a simple life and modest activity in one's assigned station, an ideal that is itself a mask of social repression. The linguistic habitus of "the world is as it is" is the medium through which the social spell becomes aesthetic appearance. Kafka wisely guards against naming it, as if otherwise the spell would be broken whose insurmountable omnipresence defines the arena of Kafka's work and which, as its a priori, cannot become thematic. His language is the instrument of that configuration of positivism and myth that has only now become obvious socially. Reified consciousness, which presupposes and confirms the inevitability and immutableness of what exists, is—as the heritage of the ancient spell—the new form of the myth of the ever-same. Kafka's epic style is, in its archaism, mimesis of reification.

Whereas his work must renounce any claim to transcending myth, it makes the social web of delusion knowable in myth through the *how*, through language. In his writing, absurdity is as self-evident as it has actually become in society. Those products are socially mute that do their duty by regurgitating *tel quel* whatever social material they treat and count this metabolic exchange with second nature as the glory of art as social reflection. The artistic subject is inherently social, not private. In no case does it become social through forced collectivization or the choice of subject matter. In the age of repressive collectivization, art has the power to resist the compact majority—a resistance that has become a criterion of the work and its social truth—in the lonely and exposed producer of art, while at the same time this does not exclude collective forms of production such as the composers' workshop that Schoenberg envisioned. By constantly admitting into the production of his work an element of negativity toward his own immediacy, the artist unconsciously obeys a social universal: In every successfully realized correction, watching over the artist's shoulder is a collective subject that has yet to be realized. The categories of artistic objectivity are unitary with social emancipation when the object, on the basis of its own impulse, liberates itself from social convention and controls. Yet artworks cannot be satisfied with vague and abstract universality such as that of classicism. Rather, they are predicated on fissuredness and thus on the concrete historical situation. Their social truth depends on their opening themselves to this content. The content becomes their subject, to which they mold themselves, to the same extent that their law of form does not obscure the fissure but rather, in demanding that it be shaped, makes it its own concern.—However profound and still largely obscure the part of science has been in the development of artistic forces of production, and however deeply, precisely through methods learned from science, society reaches into art, just so little is artistic production scientific, even when it is a work of integral constructivism. In art, all scientific discoveries lose their literal character: This is evident in the modification of optical-perspectival laws in painting and in the natural overtone relations in music. When art, intimidated by technique, tries to conserve its miniature terrain by proclaiming its transformation into science, it misconceives the status of the sciences in empirical reality. On the other hand, the aesthetic principle is not to be played out as sacrosanct—as would suit irrationalism—in opposition to the sciences. Art is not an arbitrary cultural complement to science but, rather, stands in critical tension to it. When, for instance, the cultural and human sciences are rightly accused of a lack of spirit, this is almost always at the same time a lack of aesthetic discernment. It is not without reason that the certified sciences demand furiously to be left in peace whenever art, whatever they attribute to it, intervenes in their sphere; that someone can write is cause for suspicion on scientific grounds. Crudeness of thinking is the incapacity to differentiate within a topic, and differentiation is an aesthetic category as much as one of understanding. Science and art are not to be fused, but the categories that are valid in each are not

absolutely different. Conformist consciousness prefers the opposite, partly because it is incapable of distinguishing the two and partly because it refuses the insight that identical forces are active in nonidentical spheres. The same holds true with regard to morality. Brutality toward things is potentially brutality toward people. The raw—the subjective nucleus of evil—is a priori negated by art, from which the ideal of being fully formed is indispensable: This, and not the pronouncement of moral theses or the striving after moral effects, is art's participation in the moral and makes it part of a more humanly worthy society.

Social struggles and the relations of classes are imprinted in the structure of artworks; by contrast, the political positions deliberately adopted by artworks are epiphenomena and usually impinge on the elaboration of works and thus, ultimately, on their social truth content. Political opinions count for little. It is possible to argue over how much Attic tragedy, including those by Euripides, took part in the violent social conflicts of the epoch; however, the basic tendency of tragic form, in contrast to its mythical subjects, the dissolution of the spell of fate and the birth of subjectivity, bears witness as much to social emancipation from feudal-familial ties as, in the collision between mythical law and subjectivity, to the antagonism between fateful domination and a humanity awakening to maturity. That this antagonism, as well as the historicophilosophical tendency, became an apriori of form rather than being treated simply as thematic material, endowed tragedy with its social substantiality: Society appears in it all the more authentically the less it is the intended object. Real partisanship, which is the virtue of artworks no less than of men and women, resides in the depths, where the social antinomies become the dialectic of forms: By leading them to language through the synthesis of the work, artists do their part socially; even Lukács in his last years found himself compelled toward such considerations. Figuration, which articulates the wordless and mute contradictions, thereby has the lineaments of a praxis that is not simply flight from real praxis; figuration fulfills the concept of art itself as a compartment. It is a form of praxis and need not apologize that it does not act directly, which it could not do even if it wanted to; the political effect even of so-called committed art is highly uncertain. The social standpoint of artists may serve to interfere with conformist consciousness, but in the actual development of works they become insignificant. That he expressed abominable views when Voltaire died says nothing about the truth content of Mozart's works. At the actual time when artworks appear there is certainly no abstracting from their intention; whoever would attempt an assessment of Brecht exclusively on the basis of the artistic merit of his works would fail him no less than one who judges his meaning according to his theses. 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 located 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 is that aesthetics reflects the social critique of the ideological in artworks, rather than mechanically reiterating it. Stifter provides a model of the truth content of an oeuvre that is undoubtedly ideological in its intentions. Not only the conservative-restorative choice of thematic material and the *fabula docet* are ideological, but so is the objectivistic deportment of the form, which suggests a micrologically tender world, a meaningfully correct life that lends itself to narration. This is why Stifter became the idol of a retrospectively noble bourgeoisie. Yet the layers of his work that once provided him with his half-esoteric popularity have with time peeled away and vanished. This, however, is not the last word on Stifter, for the reconciling, conciliatory aspects, especially in his last works, are exaggerated. Here objectivity hardens into a mask and the life evoked becomes a defensive ritual. Shimmering through the eccentricity of the average is the secret and denied suffering of the alienated subject and an unreconciled life. The light that falls over his mature prose is drained and bleak, as if it were allergic to the happiness of color; it is, as it were, reduced to a pencil sketch by the exclusion of everything unruly and disturbing to a social reality that was as incompatible with the mentality of the poet as with the epic apriori that he took from Goethe and clung to. What transpires, in opposition to the will of his prose, through the discrepancy between its form and the already capitalist society devolves upon its expression; ideological exaggeration endows his work mediately with its nonideological truth content, with its superiority over all consoling, assiduously pastoral literature, and it won for it that authentic quality that Nietzsche admired. Stifter is the paradigm of how little poetic intention, even that meaning that is directly embodied or represented in an artwork, approximates its objective content; in his work the content is truly the negation of the meaning, yet this content would not exist if the meaning were not intended by the work and then canceled and transformed by the work's own complexions. Affirmation becomes the cipher of despair and the purest negativity of content contains, as in Stifter, a grain of affirmation. The iridescence that emanates from artworks, which today taboo all affirmation, is the appearance of the affirmative *ineffabile*, the emergence of the nonexistent as if it did exist. Its claim to existence flickers out in aesthetic semblance; yet what does not exist, by appearing, is promised. The constellation of the existing and nonexistent is the utopic figure of art. Although it is compelled toward absolute negativity, it is precisely by virtue of this negativity that it is not absolutely negative. By no means do artworks primarily develop this inwardly antinomial affirmative element as a result of their external attitude to what exists, that is, to society; rather, it develops immanently in them and immerses them in twilight. No beauty today can evade the question whether it is actually beautiful and not instead surreptitiously acquired by static affirmation. The antipathy to-

ward applied arts is, indirectly, the bad conscience of art as a whole, which makes itself felt at the sound of every musical chord and at the sight of every color. There is no need for social criticism of art to investigate this externally: It emerges from the inner-aesthetic formations themselves. The heightened sensitivity of the aesthetic sensorium converges asymptotically with the socially motivated irritability toward art. — In art, ideology and truth cannot be neatly distinguished from each other. Art cannot have one without the other, and this reciprocity in turn is an enticement toward the ideological misuse of art as much as it is an enticement toward summarily finishing it off. It is only a step from the utopia of the self-likeness of artworks to the stink of the heavenly roses that art scatters here below as do the women in Schiller's tirade. The more brazenly society is transformed into a totality in which it assigns everything, including art, to its place, the more completely does art polarize into ideology and protest; and this polarization is hardly to art's advantage. Absolute protest constrains it and carries over to its own *raison d'être*; ideology thins out to an impoverished and authoritarian copy of reality.

In the culture resurrected after the catastrophe, art—regardless of its content and substance [*Inhalt* and *Gehalt*—has even taken on an ideological aspect by its mere existence. In its disproportion to the horror that has transpired and threatens, it is condemned to cynicism; even where it directly faces the horror, it diverts attention from it. Its objectivation implies insensitivity to reality. This degrades art to an accomplice of the barbarism to which it succumbs no less when it renounces objectivation and directly plays along, even when this takes the form of polemical commitment. Every artwork today, the radical ones included, has its conservative aspect; its existence helps to secure the spheres of spirit and culture, whose real powerlessness and complicity with the principle of disaster becomes plainly evident. But this conservative element—which, contrary to the trend toward social integration, is stronger in advanced works than in the more moderate ones—does not simply deserve oblivion. Only insofar as spirit, in its most advanced form, survives and perseveres is any opposition to the total domination of the social totality possible. A humanity to which progressive spirit fails to bequeath what humanity is poised to liquidate would disappear in a barbarism that a reasonable social order should prevent. Art, even as something tolerated in the administered world, embodies what does not allow itself to be managed and what total management suppresses. Greece's new tyrants knew why they banned Beckett's plays, in which there is not a single political word. Asociality becomes the social legitimation of art. For the sake of reconciliation, authentic works must blot out every trace of reconciliation in memory. All the same, the unity that even dissociative works do not escape is not without a trace of the old reconciliation. Artworks are, a priori, socially culpable, and each one that deserves its name seeks to expiate this guilt. Their possibility of surviving requires that their straining toward synthesis develop in the form of their irreconcilability. Without the synthesis, which confronts reality as the autonomous artwork, there would be nothing external to reality's

spell; the principle of the isolation of spirit, which casts a spell around itself, is also the principle that breaks through the spell by making it determinate.

That the nominalistic tendency of art toward the destruction of all preestablished categories of order has social implications is evident in the enemies of modern art, right up to Emil Staiger. Their sympathy for what they call a *Leitbild*, a guiding principle, is precisely their sympathy for social, particularly sexual, repression. The bond between a socially reactionary posture and hatred for the artistically modern, which the analysis of the obedient character makes apparent, is documented by new and old fascist propaganda, and it is also confirmed by empirical social research.² The rage against the purported destruction of sacrosanct cultural goods, which for that reason alone can no longer be experienced as such, serves to mask the real destructive wishes of the indignant. For the ruling consciousness, any consciousness that would have the world other than it is always seems chaotic because it deviates from a petrified reality. Inevitably those who rail loudest against the anarchy of modern art, which for the most part hardly exists, convince themselves of what they presume to be the nature of their enemy on the basis of crude errors at the simplest level of information; indeed, there is no responding to them, because what they have decided in advance to reject they are not willing to experience in the first place. In this the division of labor incontestably bears part of the blame. The non-specialist will no more understand the most recent developments in nuclear physics than the lay person will straightaway grasp extremely complex new music or painting. Whereas, however, the incomprehensibility of physics is accepted on the assumption that in principle its rationality can be followed and its theorems understood by anyone, modern art's incomprehensibility is branded as schizoid arbitrariness, even though the aesthetically incomprehensible gives way to experience no less than does the scientifically obscure. If art is capable of realizing its humane universality at all, then it is exclusively by means of the rigorous division of labor: Anything else is false consciousness. Works of quality, those that are fully formed in themselves, are objectively less chaotic than innumerable works that have orderly facades somehow slapped on while underneath their own structure crumbles. Few are disturbed by this. Deep down and contrary to its better judgment, the bourgeois character tends to cling to what is inferior; it is fundamental to ideology that it is never fully believed and that it advances from self-disdain to self-destruction. The semi-educated consciousness insists on the "I like that," laughing with cynical embarrassment at the fact that cultural trash is expressly made to dupe the consumer: As a leisure-time occupation, art should be cozy and discretionary; people put up with the deception because they sense secretly that the principle of their own sane realism is the fraud of equal exchange. It is within this false and at the same time art-alien consciousness that the fictional element of art, its illusoriness, develops in bourgeois society: *Mundus vult decipi* is the categorical imperative of artistic consumption. This taints all supposedly naïve artistic experience, and to this extent it is not naïve. The dominant consciousness is objectively led to this dank

attitude because the administered must renounce the possibility of maturity, including aesthetic maturity, that is postulated by the order that they cling to as their own and at any price. The critical concept of society, which inheres in authentic artworks without needing to be added to them, is incompatible with what society must think of itself if it is to continue as it is; the ruling consciousness cannot free itself from its own ideology without endangering society's self-preservation. This confers social relevance on apparently derivative aesthetic controversies.

That society "appears" in artworks with polemical truth as well as ideologically, is conducive to historicophilosophical mystification. Speculation all too easily falls prey to the idea of a harmony between society and artworks that has been preestablished by the world spirit. But theory must not capitulate to that relationship. The process that transpires in artworks and is brought to a standstill in them, is to be conceived as the same social process in which the artworks are embedded; according to Leibniz's formulation, they represent this process windowlessly. The elements of an artwork acquire their configuration as a whole in obedience to immanent laws that are related to those of the society external to it. Social forces of production, as well as relations of production, return in artworks as mere forms divested of their facticity because artistic labor is social labor; moreover, they are always the product of this labor. In artworks, the forces of production are not in-themselves different from social productive forces except by their constitutive absencing from real society. Scarcely anything is done or produced in artworks that does not have its model, however latently, in social production. The binding force of artworks, beyond the jurisdiction of their immanence, originates in this affinity. If artworks are in fact absolute commodities in that they are a social product that has rejected every semblance of existing for society, a semblance to which commodities otherwise urgently cling, the determining relation of production, the commodity form, enters the artwork equally with the social force of production and the antagonism between the two. The absolute commodity would be free of the ideology inherent in the commodity form, which pretends to exist for-another, whereas ironically it is something merely for-itself: It exists for those who hold power. This reversal of ideology into truth is a reversal of aesthetic content, and not immediately a reversal of the attitude of art to society. Even the absolute commodity remains salable and has become a "natural monopoly." That artworks are offered for sale at the market—just as pots and statuettes once were—is not their misuse but rather the simple consequence of their participation in the relations of production. Thoroughly nonideological art is indeed probably completely impossible. Its mere antithesis to empirical reality does not suffice to make it so; Sartre³ rightly accented that the principle of *l'art pour l'art*, which has prevailed in France since Baudelaire, just as in Germany the aesthetic ideal of art prevailed as an institution of moral reform, was taken up by the bourgeoisie as a means for the neutralization of art with the same willingness with which in Germany art was appropriated as a costumed ally of social control and order. What is ideological in

the principle of *l'art pour l'art* does not have its locus in the energetic antithesis of art to the empirical world but rather in the abstractness and facile character of this antithesis. The idea of beauty advocated by *l'art pour l'art*, at least as it has developed since Baudelaire, was not to be classical formalism, yet it did indeed exclude all content [*Inhalt*] as disruptive that did not, before undergoing the law of form and thus precisely anti-artistically, submit to a dogmatic canon of beauty: It is in this spirit that George in a letter excoriates Hofmannsthal for having allowed the painter in the *Death of Titian* to die of the plague.⁴ *L'art pour l'art's* concept of beauty becomes at once strangely empty and imprisoned by thematic material, a sort of *Jugendstil* arrangement as revealed in Ibsen's formulaic descriptions of vine leaves entwined in locks of hair and of dying in beauty. Beauty, powerless to define itself and only able to gain its definition by way of its other, a sort of aerial root, becomes entangled in the fate of artificial ornamentation. This idea of beauty is limited because it sets itself up as directly antithetical to a society rejected as ugly rather than, as Baudelaire and Rimbaud did, extracting this antithesis from the content [*Inhalt*]*—*from the imagery of Paris, in Baudelaire's instance*—*and putting it to the test: Only in this fashion could sheer distance become the intervention of determinate negation. It is precisely the autarchy of neoromantic and symbolist beauty, its timidity vis-à-vis those social elements in which form exclusively becomes form, that accounts for its rapid transformation into something so easily consumable. This beauty deceives about the commodity world by setting it aside; this qualifies it as a commodity. Their latent commodity form has inner-artistically condemned the works of *l'art pour l'art* to kitsch, as which they are today ridiculed. In Rimbaud it would be possible to show that bitterly sarcastic opposition to society cohabits uncritically with a submissiveness comparable to Rilke's rapture over cabaret songs and the fragrance of an old chest; ultimately it was affirmation that triumphed, and the principle of *l'art pour l'art* was not to be saved. It is for this reason that socially the situation of art is today aporetic. If art cedes its autonomy, it delivers itself over to the machinations of the status quo; if art remains strictly for-itself, it nonetheless submits to integration as one harmless domain among others. The social totality appears in this aporia, swallowing whole whatever occurs. That works renounce communication is a necessary yet by no means sufficient condition of their unideological essence. The central criterion is the force of expression, through the tension of which artworks become eloquent with wordless gesture. In expression they reveal themselves as the wounds of society; expression is the social ferment of their autonomous form. The principal witness for this is Picasso's *Guernica* that, strictly incompatible with prescribed realism, precisely by means of inhumane construction, achieves a level of expression that sharpens it to social protest beyond all contemplative misunderstanding. The socially critical zones of artworks are those where it hurts; where in their expression, historically determined, the untruth of the social situation comes to light. It is actually this against which the rage at art reacts.

Artworks are able to appropriate their heterogeneous element, their entwinement with society, because they are themselves always at the same time something social. Nevertheless, art's autonomy, wrested painfully from society as well as socially derived in itself, has the potential of reversing into heteronomy; everything new is weaker than the accumulated ever-same, and it is ready to regress back into it. The *We* encapsulated in the objectivation of works is not radically other than the external *We*, however frequently it is the residue of a real *We* that is past. That is why collective appeal is not simply the original sin of artworks; rather, something in their law of form implies it. It is not out of obsession with politics that great Greek philosophy accorded aesthetic effect so much more weight than its objective tenor would imply. Ever since art has come within the purview of theoretical reflection, the latter has been tempted—by raising itself above art—to sink beneath art and surrender it to power relations. What is today called situating a work involves exiting from the aesthetic sphere; the cheap sovereignty that assigns art its social position, after dismissing its immanence of form as a vain and naïve self-delusion, tends to treat the work as if it were nothing but what its social function condemns it to. The good and bad marks Plato distributed to art according to whether or not it conformed to the military virtues of the community he confused with utopia, his totalitarian rancor against real or spitefully invented decadence, even his aversion to the lies of poets, which are after all nothing but art's semblance character, which Plato hoped to summon to the support of the status quo—all this taints the concept of art in the same moment in which it was first consciously reflected upon. The purging of the affects in Aristotle's *Poetics* no longer makes equally frank admission of its devotion to ruling interests, yet it supports them all the same in that his ideal of sublimation entrusts art with the task of providing aesthetic semblance as a substitute satisfaction for the bodily satisfaction of the targeted public's instincts and needs: Catharsis is a purging action directed against the affects and an ally of repression. Aristotelian catharsis is part of a super-annuated mythology of art and inadequate to the actual effects of art. In return, artworks have realized in themselves, by spiritualization, what the Greeks projected on their external effect: They are, in the process they carry out between the law of form and their material content, their own catharsis. Sublimation, even aesthetic sublimation, incontestably participates in civilizational progress and even in inner-artistic progress itself, but it also has its ideological side: Art, as a surrogate satisfaction, by virtue of the fact that it is spurious, robs sublimation of the dignity for which the whole of classicism made propaganda, a classicism that survived for more than two thousand years under the protection of Aristotle's authority. The doctrine of catharsis imputes to art the principle that ultimately the culture industry appropriates and administers. The index of its untruth is the well-founded doubt whether the salutary Aristotelian effect ever occurred; substitute satisfaction may well have spawned repressed instincts.—Even the category of the new, which in the artwork represents what has yet to exist and that whereby the work

transcends the given, bears the scar of the ever-same underneath the constantly new. Consciousness, fettered to this day, has not gained mastery over the new, not even in the image: Consciousness dreams of the new but is not able to dream the new itself. If the emancipation of art was possible only through the appropriation of the commodity character, through which art gained the semblance of its being-in-itself, then in the course of that development the commodity character was dropped from the artworks; *Jugendstil* played no small role in this, with its ideology of the reintroduction of art into life as well as with the sensations of Wilde, d'Annunzio, and Maeterlinck, who served as preludes to the culture industry. Progressive subjective differentiation, the heightening and expansion of the sphere of aesthetic stimuli, made these stimuli manipulable; they were able to be produced for the cultural marketplace. The attunement of art to the most fleeting individual reactions was bound up with the reification of these reactions; art's growing similarity to subjective physical existence distanced it—as far as the majority of artistic production was concerned—from its objectivity and at the same time commended it to the public; to this extent the watchword *l'art pour l'art* was the mask of its opposite. What is true in the uproar over decadence is that subjective differentiation has an aspect of ego-weakness, an aspect shared with the mentality of the culture industry's customers and something the culture industry knew how to exploit. Kitsch is not, as those believers in erudite culture would like to imagine, the mere refuse of art, originating in disloyal accommodation to the enemy; rather, it lurks in art, awaiting ever recurring opportunities to spring forth. Although kitsch escapes, implike, from even a historical definition, one of its most tenacious characteristics is the prevarication of feelings, fictional feelings in which no one is actually participating, and thus the neutralization of these feelings. Kitsch parodies catharsis. Ambitious art, however, produces the same fiction of feelings; indeed, this was essential to it: The documentation of actually existing feelings, the recapitulation of psychical raw material, is foreign to it. It is in vain to try to draw the boundaries abstractly between aesthetic fiction and kitsch's emotional plunder. It is a poison admixed to all art; excising it is today one of art's despairing efforts. The vulgar is related in a complementary fashion to the manufactured and bartered-off feeling, and indeed vulgarity is an aspect of every salable feeling. It is as hard to say what is vulgar in artworks as to answer Erwin Ratz's question⁵ how it is that art, whose a priori gesture protests against vulgarity, is yet capable of being integrated with the vulgar. Only in a mutilated fashion does the vulgar represent the plebeian that is held at a distance by the so-called high arts. When art has allowed itself, without condescension, to be inspired by a plebeian element, art has gained in an authentic weightiness that is the opposite of the vulgar. Art becomes vulgar through condescension: when, especially by means of humor, it appeals to deformed consciousness and confirms it. It suits domination if what it has made out of the masses and what it drills into them can be chalked up to their own guilty desires. Art respects the masses by presenting itself to them as what

they could be rather than by adapting itself to them in their degraded condition. Socially, the vulgar in art is the subjective identification with objectively reproduced humiliation. In place of what is withheld from them, the masses reactively, resentfully, enjoy what is produced by renunciation and usurps the place of what has been renounced. It is ideology that low art, entertainment, is socially legitimate and self-evident; it is solely that condition that expresses the omnipresence of repression. The model of aesthetic vulgarity is the child in the advertisement, taking a bite of chocolate with eyes half-closed, as if it were a sin. The repressed returns in the vulgar, bearing the marks of repression; it is the subjective expression of the failure of that sublimation that art praises so overzealously as catharsis and for which it gives itself credit because it senses how little sublimation, like all culture, has actually turned out to date. In the age of total administration, culture no longer needs to humiliate the barbarians it has created; it suffices that by its rituals it strengthens the barbarism that has subjectively been sedimenting over centuries. That art stands as a reminder of what does not exist, prompts rage; this rage is transferred to the image of that otherness and befouls it. The archetypes of the vulgar that the art of the emancipatory bourgeoisie held in check, sometimes ingeniously—in its clowns, servants, and Papagenos—are the grinning advertisement beauties whose praise of toothpaste brands unites the billboards of all lands; those who know they are being cheated by so much feminine splendor blacken out the all too brilliant teeth of these archetypes and in total innocence make the truth visible above the gleam of culture. This, at least, is perceived by the vulgar. Because aesthetic vulgarity undialectically imitates the invariants of social degradation, it has no history; its eternal return is celebrated by graffiti. No subject matter is ever to be taboo and excluded from art as vulgar; vulgarity is a relation to the material and to those to whom the appeal is made. The expansion of the vulgar to the totality has meanwhile swallowed up what once laid claim to the noble and sublime: This is one of the reasons for the liquidation of the tragic. It succumbed in the denouement of the second act of Budapest operettas. Today, everything that goes under the name of “light” art is to be rejected; that also applies, however, to what is noble, the abstract antithesis to reification and at the same time its booty. Ever since Baudelaire, the noble has been associated with political reaction, as if democracy as such, the quantitative category of masses, and not the perpetuation of oppression were the source of the vulgar. Fidelity to the noble in art should be maintained, just as the noble should reflect its own culpability, its complicity with privilege. Its refuge remains exclusively the unflinching power of resistance in the act of forming. The noble becomes spurious and itself vulgar when it extols itself, for to this day there has not been anything noble. Contradiction gnaws at the noble ever since Hölderlin’s verse that nothing sacred is any longer fit for use,⁶ the same contradiction that an adolescent might have sensed who read a socialist journal with political sympathy and at the same time was put off by the language and mentality and the ideological undercurrent of a culture for all. What that paper in

fact promoted, of course, was not the potential of a freed people but rather people as the complement of class society, the statically conceived universal of voters who must be reckoned with.

The counterconcept to aesthetic comportment is, quite simply, the concept of the philistine, which often overlaps with the vulgar yet remains distinct from it by its indifference or hatred, whereas vulgarity greedily smacks its lips. Socially implicated in the guilt of those who lay claim to aesthetic nobility, the philistine's disdain grants intellectual labor an immediately higher rank than manual labor. That art benefits from certain advantages becomes, for art's self-consciousness and for those who react aesthetically, something better in-itself. This ideological element in art stands in need of permanent self-correction. Art is capable of this because, as the negation of practical life, it is itself praxis, and indeed not simply on the basis of its genesis and the fact that, like every artifact, it is the result of activity. Just as its content is dynamic in itself and does not remain self-identical, in the course of their history the objectivated artworks themselves once again become practical comportments and turn toward reality. In this, art and theory are allied. Art recapitulates praxis in itself, modified and in a sense neutralized, and by doing so it takes up positions toward reality. Beethoven's symphonic language, which in its most secret chemistry is the bourgeois process of production as well as the expression of capitalism's perennial disaster, at the same time becomes a *fait social* by its gesture of tragic affirmation: Things are as they must and should be and are therefore good. At the same time, this music belongs to the revolutionary process of bourgeois emancipation, just as it anticipates its apologetics. The more deeply artworks are deciphered, the less their antithesis to praxis remains absolute; they themselves are something other than their origin, their fundament, that is, this very antithesis to praxis, and they unfold the mediation of this antithesis. They are less than praxis and more: less, because, as was codified once and for all in Tolstoy's *Kreutzer Sonata*, they recoil before what must be done, perhaps even thwart it, although they are less capable of this than is suggested by Tolstoy's renegade asceticism. Their truth content cannot be separated from the concept of humanity. Through every mediation, through all negativity, they are images of a transformed humanity and are unable to come to rest in themselves by any abstraction from this transformation. Art, however, is more than praxis because by its aversion to praxis it simultaneously denounces the narrow untruth of the practical world. Immediate praxis wants to know nothing of this as long as the practical organization of the world has yet to succeed. The critique exercised a priori by art is that of action as a cryptogram of domination. According to its sheer form, praxis tends toward that which, in terms of its own logic, it should abolish; violence is immanent to it and is maintained in its sublimations, whereas artworks, even the most aggressive, stand for nonviolence. They are a constant indictment of the workaday bustle and the practical individual, back of which is concealed the barbaric appetite of the species, which is not human as long as it permits itself

to be ruled by this appetite and is fused with domination. The dialectical relation of art to praxis is that of its social effect. That artworks intervene politically is doubtful; when it does happen, most often it is peripheral to the work; if they strive for it, they usually succumb to their own terms. Their true social effect is an extremely indirect participation in spirit that by way of subterranean processes contributes to social transformation and is concentrated in artworks; they only achieve such participation through their objectivation. The effect of artworks is not that they present a latent praxis that corresponds to a manifest one, for their autonomy has moved far beyond such immediacy; rather, their effect is that of recollection, which they evoke by their existence. If the historical genesis of artworks refers back to causal contexts, these do not disappear tracelessly in them; the process enacted internally by each and every artwork works back on society as the model of a possible praxis in which something on the order of a collective subject is constituted. However little the external effect matters in art, and however important its form is, its intrinsic form nevertheless has an effect. Therefore the critical analysis of the effect of artworks has a great deal to say about what artworks, in their character as things, have sealed up in themselves; this could be demonstrated in the ideological effect of Wagner's music. It is not social reflection on artworks and their inner chemistry that is false but rather the subordination of artworks to abstract social correlations determined from above that are indifferent to the tension between the historical causal nexus and the content of the work. Just how far artworks intervene on a practical level is incidentally determined not only by them but far more importantly by the social moment. Beaumarchais's comedies were certainly not politically committed in the style of Brecht or Sartre, yet they in fact had a certain political effect because their tangible content [*Inhalt*] harmonized with a social movement that relished finding itself flattered in them. Because it is second-hand, the social effect of art is obviously paradoxical; what is attributed to its spontaneity in fact depends on the general social tendency. Conversely, Brecht's work, which, beginning with *Saint Joan of the Stockyards*, wanted to provoke social change, was probably socially powerless, and the astute Brecht by no means deceived himself on this score. Its effect is captured by the English expression of *preaching to the saved*. His theater of alienation intended to motivate the viewer to think. Brecht's postulate of a thinking comportment converges, strangely enough, with the objective discernment that autonomous artworks presuppose in the viewer, listener, or reader as being adequate to them. His didactic style, however, is intolerant of the ambiguity in which thought originates: It is authoritarian. This may have been Brecht's response to the ineffectuality of his didactic plays: As a virtuoso of manipulative technique, he wanted to coerce the desired effect just as he once planned to organize his rise to fame. Nevertheless, it is not least of all due to Brecht that the artwork gained self-consciousness of itself as an element of political praxis and thus acquired a force opposed to its ideological blindness. Brecht's cult of practicality became an aesthetic constituent

of his works and it is not to be eliminated from what in his work stands at a remove from the realm of causal contexts, namely their truth content. The acute reason today for the social inefficacy of artworks—those that do not surrender to crude propaganda—is that in order to resist the all-powerful system of communication they must rid themselves of any communicative means that would perhaps make them accessible to the public. Artworks exercise a practical effect, if they do so at all, not by haranguing but by the scarcely apprehensible transformation of consciousness; in any case, agitative effects dissipate rapidly, presumably because even artworks of that type are perceived under the general category of irrationality: Their principle, of which they cannot rid themselves, stalls the immediate practical impulse. Aesthetic cultivation leads away from the preaesthetic contamination of art and reality. The distance acquired, which is its result, not only reveals the objective character of the artwork. It also affects the subjective component, in that it severs primitive identifications and puts the recipient qua empirical psychological person out of action, which benefits his relation to the work. Subjectively, art requires self-exteriorization; this is what was meant by Brecht's critique of empathic aesthetics. This exteriorization is, however, practical insofar as it determines the person who experiences art and steps out of himself as a *ξῶον πολιτικόν*, just as art itself is objectively praxis as the cultivation of consciousness; but it only becomes this by renouncing persuasion. Whoever takes up an objective stance vis-à-vis the artwork will hardly allow himself to become enthused by it in the fashion prescribed by the idea of a direct appeal. This would be incompatible with the comprehending attitude appropriate to the cognitive character of artworks. By the affront to reigning needs, by the inherent tendency of art to cast different lights on the familiar, artworks correspond to the objective need for a transformation of consciousness that could become a transformation of reality. The moment they hope to achieve the effect under whose absence they suffer by adapting to existing needs they deprive people of precisely that which—to take the jargon of needs seriously and turn it against itself—they could “offer” them. Aesthetic needs are fairly vague and unarticulated; the practices of the culture industry have not changed this as much as they would like the world to believe and, indeed, as much as many like to claim. That culture failed implies that there actually are no subjective cultural needs independent of supply and the mechanisms of distribution. The need for art is itself largely ideological: Life would be possible without art, too, not only objectively but also with regard to the psychological economy of consumers who in modified circumstances are easily moved to changing their taste, in that their taste follows the line of least resistance. In a society that has disaccustomed men and women from thinking beyond themselves, whatever surpasses the mere reproduction of their life and those things they have been drilled to believe they cannot get along without, is superfluous. What is true in the most recent rebellion against art is that—in the face of the absurdly incessant scarcity, the expanding and self-reproducing barbarism, the ever present threat of total

catastrophe—phenomena that are not preoccupied with the maintenance of life take on a ridiculous aspect. Whereas artists can afford to be indifferent to a cultural mechanism that in any case swallows up everything and excludes nothing, not even what is relatively good, this mechanism nevertheless tinges everything that thrives within it with something of its objective indifference. What Marx was still able to presuppose, to some degree innocently, as cultural needs in the concept of a society's general level of achievement, has its dialectic in the fact that in the meantime one does culture a greater honor by forgoing it and not taking part in its festivals than by agreeing to be force-fed. Aesthetic motifs are no less critical of cultural needs than are empirically real ones. Artworks want to break up the eternal exchange of need and satisfaction, instead of doing injustice to unfulfilled needs by supplying them with substitute satisfactions. Every aesthetic and sociological theory of need makes use of what bears the characteristically old-fashioned name of lived aesthetic experience.⁷ Its insufficiency is evident in the constitution of lived artistic experiences themselves, if such exist. The supposition of lived artistic experiences is based on the assumption of an equivalence between the content of experience—put crudely, the emotional expression of works—and the subjective experience of the recipient. A listener is, in other words, to become excited when the music seems to do so, whereas to the extent that one understands anything, one should become emotionally all the more disinterested the pushier the work's gesticulations become. Science could hardly think up anything more alien to art than those experiments that presume to measure aesthetic effect and aesthetic experience by recording the heartbeat. The fount of any such equivalence remains murky. What purportedly is to be lived or relived in the work—according to popular assumption, the feelings of the author—is itself only a partial element in works and certainly not the decisive one. Works are not depositions of impulses—in any case such depositions are always much disliked by listeners and least likely to be empathically “reexperienced”; they are, rather, radically modified by the autonomous nexus of the artwork. The interplay of the constructive and the mimetically expressive elements in art is simply suppressed or distorted by the theory of lived experience: The equivalence it posits is not an equivalence at all; rather, one particular aspect is abstracted. This aspect, again removed from the aesthetic nexus of the work and translated back into the empirical world, for a second time becomes an other of what in any case it is in the work. The shock aroused by important works is not employed to trigger personal, otherwise repressed emotions. Rather, this shock is the moment in which recipients forget themselves and disappear into the work; it is the moment of being shaken. The recipients lose their footing; the possibility of truth, embodied in the aesthetic image, becomes tangible. This immediacy, in the fullest sense, of relation to artworks is a function of mediation, of penetrating and encompassing experience [*Erfahrung*]; it takes shape in the fraction of an instant, and for this the whole of consciousness is required, not isolated stimuli and responses. The experience of art as that of its truth

or untruth is more than subjective experience: It is the irruption of objectivity into subjective consciousness. The experience is mediated through subjectivity precisely at the point where the subjective reaction is most intense. In Beethoven many situations are *scènes à faire*, perhaps even with the flaw of being staged. The entrance of the reprise in the Ninth Symphony, which is the result of the symphonic process, celebrates its original introduction. It resonates like an overwhelming "Thus it is." The shudder is a response, colored by fear of the overwhelming; by its affirmation the music at the same time speaks the truth about untruth. Non-judging, artworks point—as with their finger—to their content without its thereby becoming discursive. The spontaneous reaction of the recipient is mimesis of the immediacy of this gesture. In it, however, artworks are not exhausted. The position that this musical passage, once integrated, achieves by its gesture is subject to critique: It poses the question whether the power of being thus-and-not-otherwise—at the epiphany of which such moments in art are aimed—is the index of its truth. Full comprehending experience [*Erfahrung*], which terminates in judgment on the nonjudging work, demands a decision and, by extension, the concept. The lived experience [*Erlebnis*] is exclusively an element of such comprehending experience and faulty because it is subject to persuasion. Works such as the Ninth Symphony exercise a mesmerizing effect: The force they achieve through their structure becomes the force of their effect. In the development of music after Beethoven the suggestive force of works, initially borrowed from society, has been shunted back to society and become agitative and ideological. Shudder, radically opposed to the conventional idea of experience [*Erlebnis*], provides no particular satisfaction for the I; it bears no similarity to desire. Rather, it is a memento of the liquidation of the I, which, shaken, perceives its own limitedness and finitude. This experience [*Erfahrung*] is contrary to the weakening of the I that the culture industry manipulates. For the culture industry the idea of the shudder is idle nonsense; this is probably the innermost motivation for the deaestheticization of art. To catch even the slightest glimpse beyond the prison that it itself is, the I requires not distraction but rather the utmost tension; that preserves the shudder, an involuntary compartment, incidentally, from becoming regression. In his *Aesthetic of the Sublime* Kant faithfully presented the power of the subject as the precondition of the sublime. True, the annihilation of the I in the face of art is to be taken no more literally than is art. Because, however, what are called aesthetic experiences [*Erlebnisse*] are as such psychologically real, it would be impossible to understand them if they were simply part and parcel of the illusoriness of art. Experiences are not "as if." The disappearance of the I in the moment of the shudder is not real; but delirium, which has a similar aspect, is nevertheless incompatible with artistic experience. For a few moments the I becomes aware, in real terms, of the possibility of letting self-preservation fall away, though it does not actually succeed in realizing this possibility. It is not the aesthetic shudder that is semblance but rather its attitude to objectivity: In its imme-

diacy the shudder feels the potential as if it were actual. The I is seized by the unmetaphorical, semblance-shattering consciousness: that it itself is not ultimate, but semblance. For the subject, this transforms art into what it is in-itself, the historical voice of repressed nature, ultimately critical of the principle of the I, that internal agent of repression. This subjective experience [*Erfahrung*] directed against the I is an element of the objective truth of art. Whoever experiences [*erlebt*] artworks by referring them to himself, does not experience them; what passes for experience [*Erlebnis*] is a palmed-off cultural surrogate. Even of this surrogate one's conceptions are simplifications. The products of the culture industry, more shallow and standardized than any of its fans can ever be, may simultaneously impede the identification that is their goal. The question as to what the culture industry inflicts on men and women is probably all too naïve: Its effect is much more diffuse than the form of the question suggests. The empty time filled with emptiness does not even produce false consciousness but is an exertion that leaves things just as they are.

The element of objective praxis inherent in art is transformed into subjective intention when, as a result of society's objective tendency and of the critical reflection of art, art's antithesis to society becomes irreconcilable. The accepted term for this subjective intention is commitment. Commitment is a higher level of reflection than tendency; it is not simply out to correct unpleasant situations, although the committed all too easily sympathize with the idea of solving problems by means of "appropriate measures."⁸ Commitment aims at the transformation of the preconditions of situations, not at merely making recommendations; to this extent it inclines toward the aesthetic category of essence. The polemical self-consciousness of art presupposes its spiritualization; the more sensitized art becomes toward that sensual immediacy with which it was formerly equated, the more critical its posture becomes toward raw reality, which—an extension of the rank growth of first nature—reproduces itself socially in ever expanded form. It is not only formally that the critically reflexive tendency toward spiritualization sharpens the relation of art to its subject matter. Hegel's break from sensualist aesthetics was of a part both with the spiritualization of the artwork and with the accentuation of its subject matter. Through spiritualization the artwork is transformed, in itself, into what was once blindly attested to be its effect on other spirits.—The concept of commitment is not to be taken too literally. If it is made the yardstick of censorship, it recapitulates in its attitude toward artworks that element of dominating supervision to which they stood opposed prior to all supervisable commitment. This does not amount, however, to jettisoning categories such as that of a program or its crude progeny according to the whim of an aesthetics of taste. What they register becomes their legitimate subject matter in a phase in which they are motivated by the longing and the will that the world be other than it is. But this gives them no dispensation from the law of form; even spiritual content [*Inhalt*] remains material and is consumed by the artworks, even when their

self-consciousness insists that this subject matter is essence. Brecht taught nothing that could not have been understood apart from his didactic plays, indeed, that could not have been understood more concisely through theory, or that was not already well known to his audience: That the rich are better off than the poor; that the way of the world is unjust; that repression persists within formal equality; that objective evil transforms private goodness into its own opposite; that—admittedly a dubious wisdom—goodness requires the masks of evil. But the sententious vehemence with which he translates these hardly dew-fresh insights into scenic gestures lends his works their tone; the didacticism led him to his dramaturgical innovations, which overthrew the moribund theater of philosophy and intrigue. In his plays, theses took on an entirely different function from the one their content [*Inhalt*] intended. They became constitutive; they made the drama anti-illusory and contributed to the collapse of the unitary nexus of meaning. It is this, not commitment, that defines their quality, yet their quality is inseparable from the commitment in that it becomes their mimetic element. Brecht's commitment does for the work what it gravitates toward on its own: It undermines it. As often occurs, in commitment, something that is sealed up in art becomes external by means of growing control and practicability. Artworks became for-themselves what they previously were in-themselves. The immanence of artworks, their apparently a priori distance from the empirical, would not exist without the prospect of a world transformed by self-conscious praxis. In *Romeo and Juliet* Shakespeare was not promoting love without familial guardianship; but without the longing for a situation in which love would no longer be mutilated and condemned by patriarchal or any other powers, the presence of the two lost in one another would not have the sweetness—the wordless, imageless utopia—over which, to this day, the centuries have been powerless; the taboo that prohibits knowledge of any positive utopia also reigns over artworks. Praxis is not the effect of works; rather, it is encapsulated in their truth content. This is why commitment is able to become an aesthetic force of production. In general, the bleating against tendentious art and against commitment is equally subaltern. The ideological concern to keep culture pure obeys the wish that in the fetishized culture, and thus actually, everything remains as it was. Such indignation has much in common with the opposing position's indignation that has been standardized in the phrase about the obsolete ivory tower from which, in an age zealously proclaimed an age of mass communication, art must issue. The common denominator is the message; although Brecht's good taste steered him away from the word, the idea was not foreign to the positivist in him. The two positions are intensely self-contradictory. *Don Quixote* may have served a particular and irrelevant program, that of abolishing the chivalric romance, which had been dragged along from feudal times into the bourgeois age. This modest program served as the vehicle by which the novel became an exemplary artwork. The antagonism of literary genres in which Cervantes's work originated was transformed, in his hands, into an antagonism of historical eras of,

ultimately, metaphysical dimension: the authentic expression of the crisis of immanent meaning in the demystified world. Works such as *Werther*, which have no programmatic aspect, contributed significantly to the emancipation of bourgeois consciousness in Germany. Goethe, by giving shape to the collision of society with the feelings of an individual who, finding himself alone and unloved, is driven to suicide, protested powerfully against a hardened petty bourgeoisie without even naming it. However, what the two basic censorial positions of bourgeois consciousness hold in common—that the artwork must not want to change the world and that it must be there for all—is a *plaidoyer* for the status quo; the former defends the domestic peace of artworks with the world and the latter remains vigilant that the sanctioned forms of public consciousness be maintained. Today, hermetic and committed art converge in the refusal of the status quo. Interference is prohibited by reified consciousness because it reifies the already reified artwork; for reified consciousness the work's objectivation in opposition to society appears as its social neutralization. That side of artworks that faces outward is falsified as their essence without any regard to the process of their formation or, ultimately, their truth content. No artwork, however, can be socially true that is not also true in-itself; conversely, social false consciousness is equally incapable of becoming aesthetically authentic. Social and immanent aspects of artworks do not coincide, but neither do they diverge so completely as the fetishism of culture and praxis would like to believe. That whereby the truth content of artworks points beyond their aesthetic complexions, which it does only by virtue of that aesthetic complexions, assures it its social significance. This duality is not a stipulation that rules abstractly over the sphere of art. It is art's vital element and lodged within each and every work. Art becomes something social through its in-itself, and it becomes in-itself by means of the social force of production effective in it. The dialectic of the social and of the in-itself of the artwork is the dialectic of its own constitution to the extent that it tolerates nothing interior that does not externalize itself, nothing external that is not the bearer of the inward, the truth content.

The dual nature of artworks as autonomous structures and social phenomena results in oscillating criteria: Autonomous works provoke the verdict of social indifference and ultimately of being criminally reactionary; conversely, works that make socially univocal discursive judgments thereby negate art as well as themselves. Immanent critique can possibly break through this rigid alternative. Stefan George certainly merited the reproach of being socially reactionary long before he propounded the maxims of his secret Germany, just as the poor-peoples' poetry of the late 1880s and 1890s, Arno Holz's, for instance, deserves to be criticized as being crudely unaesthetic.⁹ Both types, however, should be confronted with their own concept. George's self-staged aristocratic posturings contradict the self-evident superiority that they postulate and thereby fail artistically; the verse "And—that we lack not a bouquet of myrrh"¹⁰ is laughable, as is the verse on the

Roman emperor who, after having his brother murdered, gently gathers up the purple train of his toga.¹¹ The brutality of George's social attitude, the result of failed identification, appears in his poetry in the violent acts of language that mar the purity of the self-sufficient work after which George aspired. In programmatic aestheticism, false social consciousness becomes the shrill tone that gives it the lie. Without ignoring the difference in quality between George, who was a great poet in spite of everything, and the mediocre naturalists, they have in common the fact that the social and critical content of their plays and poems is almost always superficial. It lags far behind what was already fully elaborated by social theory, in which they were scarcely interested. Arno Holz's parody of political hypocrisy, *Social Aristocrats*, suffices to prove this. Because artistically they overwhelmed society with verbiage, they felt duty bound to a vulgar idealism, as for instance in the image of the worker who dreams of something higher, whatever it may be, and who through the fate of his class origin is prevented from achieving it. The question of the provenance of his solidly bourgeois ideal of upward mobility is ignored. Naturalism's innovations—the renunciation of traditional categories of form, the distilling of the self-contained plots and even, as at points in Zola, the abandonment of the continuity of empirical time—are more advanced than its concept. The ruthless, effectively aconceptual presentation of empirical detail in *Savage Paris* destroyed the familiar surface coherence of the novel in a fashion not unlike that of its later monadic-associative form. As a result, naturalism regressed except when it took the most extreme risks. Carrying out intentions contradicts its principle. Yet naturalist plays abound in passages whose intention is plain: People are to speak plainly, yet in following the author's stage directions they speak as no one would ever speak. In the realist theater it is already inconsistent that even before they open their mouths people know so precisely what it is they are going to say. Perhaps it would be impossible to organize a realistic play according to its conception without its becoming, *à contre coeur*, dadaistic; through its unavoidable minimum of stylization, however, realism admits its impossibility and virtually abolishes itself. Taken in hand by the culture industry, it has become mass deception. The spiritedly unanimous rejection of Sudermann¹² may be because his box office successes let out of the bag what the most talented naturalists hid: the manipulated, fictive aspect of every gesture that lays claim to being beyond fiction when, instead, fiction envelops every word spoken on stage, however it resists and defends itself. These products, a priori cultural goods, are easily coaxed to become a naïve and affirmative image of culture. Even aesthetically there are not two types of truth. How the contradictory desiderata can reciprocally interpenetrate without being averaged out as a mediocre compromise between a purportedly good form and an appropriate social content [*Inhalt*] can be learned from Beckett's dramatic art. Its associative logic, in which one sentence draws after it the next sentence or the reply, just as in music a theme motivates its continuation or its contrast, scorns all imitation of its empirical appearance. The result is that,

hooded, the empirically essential is incorporated according to its exact historical importance and integrated into the play character of the work. The latter expresses the objective condition both of consciousness and of the reality that shapes it. The negativity of the subject as the true form of objectivity can only be presented in radically subjective form, not by recourse to a purportedly higher reality. The grinning clowns, childish and bloody, into which Beckett's subject is decomposed, are that subject's historical truth; socialist realism is, by comparison, simply childish. In *Godot* the relation of domination and servitude, along with its senile lunatic form, is thematic in a phase in which control over others' labor continues, even though humanity no longer needs it for its self-preservation. This motif, truly one of the essential laws of contemporary society, is taken further in *Endgame*. In both works Beckett's technique hurls it to the periphery: Hegel's chapter is transformed into anecdotes with sociocritical no less than dramaturgical function. In *Endgame* the tellurian partial catastrophe, the bloodiest of Beckett's clown jokes, is presupposed both thematically and formally in that it has obliterated art's constituent, its genesis. Art emigrates to a standpoint that is no longer a standpoint at all because there are no longer standpoints from which the catastrophe could be named or formed, a word that seems ridiculous in this context. *Endgame* is neither a play about the atom bomb nor is it contentless; the determinate negation of its content [*Inhalt*] becomes its formal principle and the negation of content altogether. Beckett's oeuvre gives the frightful answer to art that, by its starting point, by its distance from any praxis, art in the face of mortal threat becomes ideology through the harmlessness of its mere form, regardless of its content. This explains the influx of the comic into emphatic works. It has a social aspect. In that their effectively blindfolded movement originates exclusively in themselves, their movement becomes a walking in place and declares itself as such, just as the unrelenting seriousness of the work declares itself as frivolous, as play. Art can only be reconciled with its existence by exposing its own semblance, its internal emptiness. Its most binding criterion today is that in terms of its own complexion, unreconciled with all realistic deception, it no longer tolerates anything harmless. In all art that is still possible, social critique must be raised to the level of form, to the point that it wipes out all manifestly social content [*Inhalt*].

With the continuing organization of all cultural spheres the desire grows to assign art its place in society theoretically and indeed practically; this is the aim of innumerable *round table* conferences and symposia. Once art has been recognized as a social fact, the sociological definition of its context considers itself superior to it and disposes over it. Often the assumption is that the objectivity of value-free positivistic knowledge is superior to supposedly subjective aesthetic standpoints. Such endeavors themselves call for social criticism. They tacitly seek the primacy of administration, of the administered world even over what refuses to be grasped by total socialization or at any rate struggles against it. The sovereignty of the topographical eye that localizes phenomena in order to scrutinize their function

and right to exist is sheer usurpation. It ignores the dialectic of aesthetic quality and functional society. A priori, in conformist fashion, the accent falls, if not on art's ideological effect, then at least on the consumability of art, while dismissing all that in which today social reflection would have its object: This is decided in advance, in conformist fashion. Because the expansion of technical administrative procedures is fused with the scientific apparatus of investigation, it appeals to those sorts of intellectuals who indeed sense something of the new social necessities but nothing of the necessities of art. Their mentality is that of an imaginary sociological lecture on culture whose title should be: "The Function of Television for the Adaptation of Europe to the Developing Countries." Social reflection on art has nothing to contribute in this spirit other than to make it thematic and thereby resist it. Then, as now, Steuermann's¹³ comment holds good that the more that is done for culture, the worse it turns out.

For contemporary consciousness, and especially for student activists, the imminent difficulties of art, no less than its social isolation, amount to its condemnation. This is a sign of the historical situation, and those who want to abolish art would be the last to admit it. The avant-gardist disruptions of aesthetically avant-garde performances are as chimerical as the belief that they are revolutionary and that revolution is a form of beauty: Obtuseness to art is below, not above, culture, and commitment itself is often nothing but a lack of talent or concentration, a slackening of energy. Their most recent trick, which was admittedly already practiced by Fascism, revalorizes ego-weakness, the incapacity for sublimation, as a superior quality and sets a moral premium on the line of least resistance. It is claimed that the age of art is over; now it is a matter of realizing its truth content, which is facilely equated with art's social content: The verdict is totalitarian. What today lays claim to having been read solely out of the material, and what in its dullness indeed offers the most compelling reason for the verdict on art, in fact does the greatest violence to the material. The moment art is prohibited and it is decreed that it must no longer be, art—in the midst of the administrative world—wins back the right to exist, the denial of which itself resembles an administrative act. Whoever wants to abolish art cherishes the illusion that decisive change is not blocked. Exaggerated realism is unrealistic. The making of every authentic work contradicts the *pronunciamento* that no more can be made. The abolition of art in a half-barbaric society that is tending toward total barbarism makes itself barbarism's social partner. Although their constant refrain is concreteness, they judge abstractly and summarily, blind to the precise and unsolved tasks and possibilities that have been repressed by the most recent aesthetic actionism, such as the tasks and possibilities of a truly freed music that traverses the freedom of the subject rather than being abandoned to thing-like alienated contingency. Yet there is no arguing over the question whether art is necessary. The question itself is falsely posed because the necessity of art—if the idea must be maintained when the issue is the realm of freedom—is its nonnecessity. To evaluate art according to

the standard of necessity covertly prolongs the principle of exchange, the philistine's concern for what can be gotten for it. The verdict that it is no longer possible to put up with it, the obedient contemplation of a purportedly given state, is itself a shop-worn bourgeois gesture, the wrinkled brow that worries, "Where is this all going to end?" Yet precisely this type of teleology is inimical to art insofar as art stands as plenipotentiary for the in-itself that does not yet exist. In terms of their historicophilosophical significance, works are all the more important the less they coincide with their stage of development. The question is a surreptitious form of social control. Many contemporary works can be characterized as an anarchy that effectively implies a wish to be quit of it all. The summary judgment passed on art, which is itself inscribed on those works that would like to substitute themselves for art, resembles the verdict pronounced by Lewis Carroll's Queen of Hearts: "Off with their heads." After these beheadings to the sound of a pop, in which the sound of *Popular Music* resonates, the head grows back. Art has everything to fear but the nihilism of impotence. By its social proscription, art is degraded to precisely that role of *fait social* that it refuses to resume. The Marxist theory of ideology, which is ambiguous in itself, is falsified as a total theory of ideology in Mannheimian fashion and blindly applied to art. If ideology is socially false consciousness, it does not follow that all consciousness is ideological. Beethoven's last quartets are consigned to the underworld of obsolete semblance only on the basis of ignorance and incomprehension. Whether art is still possible today cannot be decided from above, from the perspective of the relations of production. The question depends, rather, on the state of the forces of production. It encompasses what is possible but not yet realized: an art that refuses to let itself be terrorized by positivist ideology. As legitimate as Herbert Marcuse's critique of the affirmative character of culture was,¹⁴ its thesis requires the investigation of the individual artwork: Otherwise it would become an anticulture league, itself no better than any cultural asset. Rabid criticism of culture is not radical. If affirmation is indeed an aspect of art, this affirmation is no more totally false than culture—because it failed—is totally false. Culture checks barbarism, which is worse; it not only represses nature but conserves it through its repression; this resonates in the concept of culture, which originates in agriculture. Life has been perpetuated through culture, along with the idea of a decent life; its echo resounds in authentic artworks. Affirmation does not bestow a halo on the status quo; in sympathy with what exists, it defends itself against death, the telos of all domination. Doubting this comes only at the price of believing that death itself is hope.

The double character of art—something that severs itself from empirical reality and thereby from society's functional context and yet is at the same time part of empirical reality and society's functional context—is directly apparent in the aesthetic phenomena, which are both aesthetic and *faits sociaux*. They require a double observation that is no more to be posited as an unalloyed whole than aesthetic autonomy and art can be conflated as something strictly social. This double char-

acter becomes physiognomically decipherable, whether intentionally so or not, when one views or listens to art from an external vantage point, and, certainly, art always stands in need of this external perspective for protection from the fetishization of its autonomy. Music, whether it is played in a café or, as is often the case in America, piped into restaurants, can be transformed into something completely different, of which the hum of conversation and the rattle of dishes and whatever else becomes a part. To fulfill its function, this music presupposes distracted listeners no less than in its autonomous state it expects attentiveness. A medley is sometimes made up of parts of artworks, but through this montage the parts are fundamentally transformed. Functions such as warming people up and drowning out silence recasts music as something defined as mood, the commodified negation of the boredom produced by the grey-on-grey commodity world. The sphere of entertainment, which has long been integrated into production, amounts to the domination of this element of art over all the rest of its phenomena. These elements are antagonistic. The subordination of autonomous artworks to the element of social function buried within each work and from which art originated in the course of a protracted struggle, wounds art at its most vulnerable point. Yet someone sitting in a café who is suddenly struck by the music and listens intensely may feel odd to himself and seem foolish to others. In this antagonism the fundamental relation of art and society appears. The continuity of art is destroyed when it is experienced externally, just as medleys willfully destroy it in the material. Heard in the corridors of the concert hall, little remains of one of Beethoven's orchestral works than the imperial kettle drum; even in the score the drums represent an authoritarian gesture, which the work borrowed from society in order to sublimate it in the elaboration of the composition. For art's two characters are not completely indifferent to each other. If a work of authentic music strays into the social sphere of background music, it may unexpectedly transcend that sphere by the purity that is stained by social function. On the other hand, the derivation of authentic works from social functions, as in the case of Beethoven's kettle drums, cannot be washed away; Wagner's irritation with those vestiges of *divertissement* in Mozart has since been sharpened into a *soupçon* even against those works that voluntarily bid farewell to entertainment. After the age of aesthetic autonomy, the position of artists in society, to the extent that it is significant with regard to mass reception, tends to revert into heterogeneity. If prior to the French Revolution artists were lackeys, they have since become entertainers. The culture industry calls its *crack* performers by their first name, just as head waiters and hair dressers chummily refer to the *jet set*. The demolition of the difference between the artist as aesthetic subject and the artist as empirical person also attests to the abolition of the distance of the artwork from the empirical world, without however art's thereby returning to a realm of freedom, which in any case does not exist. This deceptively manufactured proximity of art serves profit. From the vantage point of art, its double character clings to each of its works as a flaw of its

dishonest origin, just as socially artists were once treated as dishonest persons. This same origin, however, is also the locus of its mimetic essence. Its dishonesty, which contradicts the dignity laid claim to by its autonomy, which puffs itself up out of guilt over its participation in society, redounds to its honor as mockery of the honesty of socially useful labor.

The relation of social praxis and art, always variable, may well have changed radically once again over the last forty or fifty years. During World War I and prior to Stalin, artistic and politically advanced thought went in tandem; whoever came of age in those years took art to be what it in no way historically had been: a priori politically on the left. Since then the Zhdanovs and Ulbrichts have not only enchained the force of artistic production with the dictate of socialist realism but actually broken it; socially the aesthetic regression for which they are responsible is transparent as a petty bourgeois fixation. By comparison, during the decades after the Second War, with the world divided into two political blocs, the ruling interests in the West have signed a revocable peace with radical art; abstract painting is subsidized by heavy German industry, and in France de Gaulle's minister of culture is André Malraux. Avant-garde doctrines, if their opposition to *communis opinio* is grasped with sufficient abstractness and if they remain to some degree moderate, are sometimes susceptible to elitist reinterpretation, as has been the case with Pound and Eliot. Benjamin already noted the fascist penchant in futurism, which can be traced back to peripheral aspects of Baudelaire's modernism.¹⁵ All the same, when Benjamin in his later work distanced himself from the aesthetic avant-garde at those points where it failed to toe the Communist Party line, Brecht's hatred of Tui intellectuals may well have played a part. The elitist isolation of advanced art is less its doing than society's; the unconscious standards of the masses are the same as those necessary to the preservation of the relations in which the masses are integrated, and the pressure of heteronomous life makes distraction compulsory, thus prohibiting the concentration of a strong ego that is requisite to the experience of the nonstereotypical. This breeds resentment: the resentment of the masses toward what is denied them by the education that is reserved for the privileged; and—ever since Strindberg and Schoenberg—resentment of the aesthetically progressive toward the masses. The yawning schism between their aesthetic *trouvailles* and a political posture that is manifest in the content [*Inhalt*] and intention of works, significantly damages artistic consistency. The social interpretation of older literature in terms of its political content [*Inhalt*] is of uncertain value. The interpretation of Greek myths, such as Vico's interpretation of that of Cadmus, was ingenious. Yet the reduction of Shakespeare's plays to the idea of class struggle, as Brecht meant to do, goes too far and misses what is essential, except in those dramas where class struggle is clearly a theme. This is not to claim that what is essential is indifferent to society and, in human terms, timeless: That is drivel. Rather, the social element is mediated by the objective formal posture of the plays, what Lukács called their "per-

spective." What is social in Shakespeare is categories such as those of the individual and passion: traits such as Caliban's bourgeois concreteness and the corrupt Venetian merchants, the conception of a semimatriarchal world in *Macbeth* and *King Lear*; the complete disgust for power in *Antony and Cleopatra* as well as Prospero's gesture of resignation. By contrast, the conflicts of patricians and plebeians drawn from Roman history are merely cultural goods. In Shakespeare, the more literally the Marxist thesis is held that all history is that of class struggle, the more dubious it appears. Class struggle objectively presupposes a high level of social integration and differentiation, and subjectively it requires class consciousness, which first developed rudimentarily in bourgeois society. It is nothing new to note that class itself, the social subsumption of atoms to a general concept that expresses their constitutive as well as heterogeneous relations, is structurally a bourgeois reality. Social antagonisms are as old as the hills; only desultorily did they become class struggles: where market economies related to bourgeois society began to take shape. For this reason the interpretation of everything historical as class struggle has a slightly anachronistic *air*, just as the model of all of Marx's constructions and extrapolations was that of liberal entrepreneurial capitalism. True, social antagonisms shimmer through Shakespeare's plays at every point, yet they are manifest in individuals and are collective only in crowd scenes that follow topoi such as that of the suggestibility of mobs. From a social perspective it is at least evident that Shakespeare could not have been Bacon. That early bourgeois dialectical dramatist beheld the *theatrum mundi* not from the perspective of progress but from that of the victims of progress. Severing this ensnarement through social as well as aesthetic maturation is made prohibitively difficult by the social structure. If in art formal characteristics are not facily interpretable in political terms, everything formal in art nevertheless has substantive implications and they extend into politics. The liberation of form, which genuinely new art desires, holds enciphered within it above all the liberation of society, for form—the social nexus of everything particular—represents the social relation in the artwork; this is why liberated form is anathema to the status quo. This is confirmed by psychoanalysis. It holds that all art, the negation of the reality principle, protests against the image of the father and is to this extent revolutionary. This objectively implies the political participation of the unpolitical. So long as social imbrication was not yet so agglomerated that form itself became subversive protest, the relation of artworks to existing social reality was less contentious. Without altogether surrendering to this reality, art was able to appropriate social elements without any great to-do, to continue clearly to resemble society, and to communicate with it. Today the socially critical aspect of artworks has become opposition to empirical reality as such because the latter has become its own self-duplicating ideology, the quintessence of domination. Whether art in turn becomes socially irrelevant—empty play and decoration of social bustle—depends on the extent to which its constructions and montages are simultaneously de-montages, destroying while receiving

the elements of reality and shaping them freely as something other. The unity of art's aesthetic and social criteria is constituted by whether, in transcending empirical reality, it succeeds at concretizing its relation to what it has transcended; in doing so it gains a sort of prerogative. Without letting itself be put upon by political activists to provide the messages that suit them, art would then harbor no doubt as to what it is after. Fearless of any contradiction, Picasso and Sartre opted for a politics that disdained what they stood for aesthetically and only put up with them to the extent that their names had propaganda value. Their attitude is impressive because they do not subjectively dissolve the contradiction, which has an objective justification, by the univocal commitment to one thesis or its opposite. The critique of their attitude is pertinent only as one of the politics for which they vote; the smug assertion that they only hurt themselves misses the point. Hardly last among the aporia of the age is that no thought holds true that does not do damage to the interests, even the objective interests, of those who foster it.

Today the nomenclature of formalism and socialist realism is used, with great consequence, to distinguish between the autonomous and the social essence of art. This nomenclature is employed by the administered world to exploit for its own purposes the objective dialectic that inheres in the double character of each and every artwork: These two aspects are severed from each other and used to divide the sheep from the goats. This dichotomization is false because it presents the two dynamically related elements as simple alternatives. The individual artist is supposed to choose. Thanks to an ever present social master plan, inclination is always encouraged in the antiformalistic directions; the others are pronounced narrow specializations restricted to the division of labor and possibly even susceptible to naïve bourgeois illusions. The loving care with which apparatuses lead refractory artists out of their isolation tallies with the assassination of Meyerhold.¹⁶ In truth the abstract antithesis of formalistic and antiformalistic art cannot be maintained once art wants to be more than an open or covert *pep talk*. Around the time of World War I, or somewhat later modern painting polarized into cubism and surrealism. But cubism itself revolted, in terms of its actual content [*Inhalt*], against the bourgeois idea of a gaplessly pure immanence of artworks. Conversely, important surrealists such as Max Ernst and André Masson, who refused to collude with the market and initially protested against the sphere of art itself, gradually turned toward formal principles, and Masson largely abandoned representation, as the idea of shock, which dissipates quickly in the thematic material, was transformed into a technique of painting. With the intention to unmask the habitual world in a flash of light as semblance and illusion, the step toward nonrepresentational art has teleologically already been taken. Constructivism, officially the antagonist of realism, has by virtue of its anti-illusory language deeper relations with the historical transformation of reality than does a realism long overlaid with a romantic varnish because its principle—the sham reconciliation with the object—has gradually become romantic. With regard to

content, the impulses of constructivism were those of the ever problematic adequacy of art to the disenchanted world, which could no longer be achieved by traditional realism without becoming academic. Today whatever proclaims itself *informelle*¹⁷ becomes aesthetic only by articulating itself as form; otherwise it would amount to no more than a document. In the case of such exemplary artists of the epoch as Schoenberg, Klee, and Picasso, the expressive mimetic element and the constructive element are of equal intensity, not by seeking a happy mean between them but rather by way of the extremes: Yet each is simultaneously content-laden, expression is the negativity of suffering, and construction is the effort to bear up under the suffering of alienation by exceeding it on the horizon of undiminished and thus no longer violent rationality. Just as in thought, form and content are as distinct as they are mediated in one another, so too in art. The concepts of progress and reaction are hardly applicable to art as long as the abstract dichotomy of form and content is acceded to. This dichotomy is recapitulated in assertion and counterassertion. Some call artists reactionary because they purportedly champion socially reactionary theses or because through the form of their works they supposedly aid political reason in some admittedly discreet and not quite graspable fashion; others dub artists reactionary for falling behind the level of artistic forces of production. But the content [*Gehalt*] of important artworks can deviate from the opinion of their authors. It is obvious that Strindberg repressively inverted Ibsen's bourgeois-emancipatory intentions. On the other hand, his formal innovations, the dissolution of dramatic realism and the reconstruction of dreamlike experience, are objectively critical. They attest to the transition of society toward horror more authentically than do Gorki's bravest accusations. To this extent they are also socially progressive, the dawning self-consciousness of that catastrophe for which the bourgeois individualistic society is preparing: In it the absolutely individual becomes a ghost as in *Ghost Sonata*. In counterpoint to this are the greatest works of naturalism: the unmitigated horror of the first act of Hauptmann's *Hannele's Ascension* causes the reversal of faithful reproduction into the wildest expression. Social criticism of a politically decreed resuscitation of realism is important, however, only if it does not capitulate vis-à-vis *l'art pour l'art*. What is socially untrue in that protest against society has become socially evident. The carefully chosen words, for instance, of a Barbey d'Aureville have since dulled to an old-fashioned naïveté hardly befitting any artificial paradise; Aldous Huxley was already struck by the emerging comicalness of Satanism. The evil that both Baudelaire and Nietzsche found to be lacking in the liberalistic nineteenth century, was for them nothing more than the mask of drives no longer subject to Victorian repression. As a product of the repressed drives of the twentieth century, evil broke through the civilizatory hurdles with a bestiality compared to which Baudelaire's outrageous blasphemies took on a harmlessness that contrasts grotesquely with their pathos. Despite his preeminence, Baudelaire presaged *Jugendstil*. Its lie was the beautification of life with-

out its transformation; beauty itself thereby became vacuous and, like all abstract negation, allowed itself to be integrated into what it negated. The phantasmagoria of an aesthetic world undisturbed by purposes of any kind became an alibi for the subaesthetic world.

It can be said that philosophy, and theoretical thought as a whole, suffers from an idealist prejudice insofar as it disposes solely over concepts; only through them does it treat what they are concerned with, which it itself never has. Its labor of Sisyphus is that it must reflect the untruth and guilt that it takes on itself, thereby correcting it when possible. It cannot paste its ontic substratum into the text; by speaking of it, philosophy already makes it into what it wants to free itself from. Modern art has registered dissatisfaction with this ever since Picasso disrupted his pictures with scraps of newspaper, an act from which all montage derives. The social element is aesthetically done justice in that it is not imitated, which would effectively make it fit for art, but is, rather, injected into art by an act of sabotage. Art itself explodes the deception of its pure immanence, just as the empirical ruins divested of their own context accommodate themselves to the immanent principles of construction. By conspicuously and willfully ceding to crude material, art wants to undo the damage that spirit—thought as well as art—has done to its other, to which it refers and which it wants to make eloquent. This is the determinable meaning of the meaningless intention-alien element of modern art, which extends from the hybridization of the arts to the *happenings*.¹⁸ It is not so much that traditional art is thereby sanctimoniously condemned by an arriviste judgment but that, rather, the effort is made to absorb even the negation of art by its own force. What is no longer socially possible in traditional art does not on that account surrender all truth. Instead it sinks to a historical, geological stratum that is no longer accessible to living consciousness except through negation but without which no art would exist: a stratum of mute reference to what is beautiful, without all that strict a distinction between nature and work. This element is contrary to the disintegrative element into which the truth of art has changed; yet it survives because as the forming force it recognizes the violence of that by which it measures itself. It is through this idea that art is related to peace. Without perspective on peace, art would be as untrue as when it anticipates reconciliation. Beauty in art is the semblance of the truly peaceful. It is this toward which even the repressive violence of form tends in its unification of hostile and divergent elements.

It is false to arrive at aesthetic realism from the premise of philosophical materialism. Certainly, art, as a form of knowledge, implies knowledge of reality, and there is no reality that is not social. Thus truth content and social content are mediated, although art's truth content transcends the knowledge of reality as what exists. Art becomes social knowledge by grasping the essence, not by endlessly talking about it, illustrating it, or somehow imitating it. Through its own figuration, art brings the essence into appearance in opposition to its own semblance. The

epistemological critique of idealism, which secures for the object an element of primacy, cannot simply be transposed to art. Object in art and object in empirical reality are entirely distinct. In art the object is the work produced by art, as much containing elements of empirical reality as displacing, dissolving, and reconstructing them according to the work's own law. Only through such transformation, and not through an ever falsifying photography, does art give empirical reality its due, the epiphany of its shrouded essence and the merited shudder in the face of it as in the face of a monstrosity. The primacy of the object is affirmed aesthetically only in the character of art as the unconscious writing of history, as anamnesis of the vanquished, of the repressed, and perhaps of what is possible. The primacy of the object, as the potential freedom from domination of what is, manifests itself in art as its freedom from objects. If art must grasp its content [*Gehalt*] in its other, this other is not to be imputed to it but falls to it solely in its own immanent nexus. Art negates the negativity in the primacy of the object, negates what is heteronomous and unreconciled in it, which art allows to emerge even through the semblance of the reconciliation of its works.

At first glance one argument of dialectical materialism bears persuasive force. The standpoint of radical modernism, it is claimed, is that of solipsism, that of a monad that obstinately barricades itself against intersubjectivity; the reified division of labor has run amok. This derides the humanity that awaits realization. However, this solipsism—the argument continues—is illusory, as materialistic criticism and long before that great philosophy have demonstrated; it is the delusion of the immediacy of the for-itself that ideologically refuses to admit its own mediations. It is true that theory, through insight into universal social mediation, has conceptually surpassed solipsism. But art, mimesis driven to the point of self-consciousness, is nevertheless bound up with feeling, with the immediacy of experience; otherwise it would be indistinguishable from science, at best an installment plan on its results and usually no more than social reporting. Collective modes of production by small groups are already conceivable, and in some media even requisite; monads are the locus of experience in all existing societies. Because individuation, along with the suffering that it involves, is a social law, society can only be experienced individually. The substruction of an immediately collective subject would be duplicitous and would condemn the artwork to untruth because it would withdraw the single possibility of experience that is open to it today. If on the basis of theoretical insight art orients itself correctively, according to its own mediatedness, and seeks to escape from the monadic character that it has recognized as social semblance, historical truth remains external to it and becomes untruth: The artwork heteronomously sacrifices its immanent determination. According to critical theory, mere consciousness of society does not in any real sense lead beyond the socially imposed objective structure, any more than the artwork does, which in terms of its own determinations is itself a part of social reality. The capacity that dialectical materialism antimaterialistically ascribes to

and demands of the artwork is achieved by that artwork, if at all, when in its objectively imposed monadologically closed structure it pushes its situation so far that it becomes the critique of this situation. The true threshold between art and other knowledge may be that the latter is able to think beyond itself without abdicating, whereas art produces nothing valid that it does not fill out on the basis of the historical standpoint at which it finds itself. The innervation of what is historically possible for it is essential to the artistic form of reaction. In art, substantiality means just this. If for the sake of a higher social truth art wants more than the experience that is accessible to it and that it can form, that experience becomes less, and the objective truth that it posits as its measure collapses as a fiction that patches over the fissure between subject and object. They are so falsely reconciled by a trumped-up realism that the most utopian phantasies of a future art would be unable to conceive of one that would once again be realistic without falling back into unfreedom. Art possesses its other immanently because, like the subject, immanence is socially mediated in itself. It must make its latent social content eloquent: It must go within in order to go beyond itself. It carries out the critique of solipsism through the force of externalization in its own technique as the technique of objectivation. By virtue of its form, art transcends the impoverished, entrapped subject; what wants willfully to drown out its entrapment becomes infantile and makes out of its heteronomy a social-ethical accomplishment. It may be objected here that the various peoples' democracies are still antagonistic and that they therefore preclude any but an alienated standpoint, yet it is to be hoped that an actualized humanism would be blessedly free of the need for modern art and would once again be content with traditional art. This concessional argument, however, is actually not all that distinct from the doctrine of overcoming individualism. To put it bluntly, it is based on the philistine cliché that modern art is as ugly as the world in which it originates, that the world deserves it and nothing else would be possible, yet surely it cannot go on like this forever. In truth, there is nothing to overcome; the word itself is *index falsi*. There is no denying that the antagonistic situation, what the young Marx called alienation and self-alienation, was not the weakest agency in the constitution of modern art. But modern art was certainly no copy, not the reproduction of that situation. In denouncing it, transposing it into the image, this situation became its other and as free as the situation denies the living to be. If today art has become the ideological complement of a world not at peace, it is possible that the art of the past will someday devolve upon society at peace; it would, however, amount to the sacrifice of its freedom were new art to return to peace and order, to affirmative replication and harmony. Nor is it possible to sketch the form of art in a changed society. In comparison with past art and the art of the present it will probably again be something else; but it would be preferable that some fine day art vanish altogether than that it forget the suffering that is its expression and in which form has its substance. This suffering is the humane content that unfreedom counterfeits as positivity. If in fulfillment of

the wish a future art were once again to become positive, then the suspicion that negativity were in actuality persisting would become acute; this suspicion is ever present, regression threatens unremittingly, and freedom—surely freedom from the principle of possession—cannot be possessed. But then what would art be, as the writing of history, if it shook off the memory of accumulated suffering.

11. Charles Baudelaire, "To Arsène Houssaye," in *The Poems in Prose*, trans. F. Scarfe (London, 1989), p. 25.

Society

1. See Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Theories of Surplus Value*, vol. I (Moscow, 1968), p. 389.

2. [See Adorno et al., *The Authoritarian Personality* (New York, 1982).—trans.]

3. Jean-Paul Sartre, *What Is Literature* (New York, 1965), p. 21.

4. See *Briefwechsel zwischen George und Hofmannsthal*, ed. R. Boehringer (Munich and Düsseldorf, 1953), p. 42.

5. [Erwin Ratz (1893–1973), the Austrian musicologist, a student of Schoenberg and later of Webern, best known for his *Einführung in die musikalische Formenlehre* (1968).—trans.]

6. See Friedrich Hölderlin, "At One Time I Questioned the Muse," in *Friedrich Hölderlin: Poems and Fragments*, trans. Michael Hamburger (Cambridge, 1966), pp. 537–539.

7. [This discussion is based on the distinction between "Erlebnis," or lived experience, and "Erfahrung," or comprehended experience, a distinction for which there is no comparable pair of succinct English concepts.—trans.]

8. [See Brecht's play *The Measures Taken*, in *Collected Plays*, ed. R. Mannheim and John Willett (New York, 1971), in which spontaneous human sympathy is sacrificed to the ostensibly higher good of party discipline.—trans.]

9. [Arno Holz (1863–1929), a leading German naturalist writer who in poems, plays, and essays ironically and satirically criticized contemporary politics and religion.—trans.]

10. See Stefan George, "Neuländische Liebesmahle II," in *Werke*, ed. R. Boehringer, vol. I (Munich and Düsseldorf, 1958), p. 14.

11. "O mutter meiner mutter und Erlauchte," *ibid.*, p. 50.

12. [Hermann Sudermann (1857–1928), a leading naturalist writer best known for plays that are often melodramatic and remote from the political reality they claim to treat.—trans.]

13. [Edward Steuermann (1892–1964), the pianist, composer, and longtime friend and teacher of Adorno.—trans.]

14. [See Marcuse, "Über den affirmativen Charakter der Kultur," in *Schriften*, vol. 3 (Frankfurt, 1979), pp. 186–226.—trans.]

15. See Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York, 1968).

16. [Karl Theodor Kasimer Meyerhold (1874–1940), the Russian actor and director whose theater, charged with formalism, was closed in 1938, after which he was arrested and probably executed.—trans.]

17. ["Art informelle," the European art movement that paralleled American abstract expressionism. See Adorno's "Vers une musique informelle," in *Quasi una Fantasia*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London, 1992), pp. 269–322.—trans.]

18. [Here Adorno to some extent presupposes familiarity with his description of the hybridization or fragmentation of the arts, the "Verfransung" of art, which is the topic of his essay "Die Kunst und die Künste," in *Ohne Leitbild, Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 10.1 (Frankfurt, 1977), pp. 432–453—trans.]

Paralipomena

1. See Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York, 1968), pp. 217ff.

2. [See David Riesmann, *The Lonely Crowd* (New Haven, 1958)—trans.]