A FREE ART CALLS FOR A FREE SOCIETY
ON THE FREEDOM OF ART AND AUTONOMY AS PROJECT

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, the far right "culture war" has to an increasing extent been allowed to set the terms for cultural policy debates, in Sweden and internationally. In the Swedish context, empty accusations against public cultural institutions of "wokeist" bias and "cancel culture" have found support in a public report from the governmental Agency for Cultural Policy Analysis, which claims that national public funding bodies are imposing politically correct demands on their applicants, with a "detrimental influence" on the freedom of art. This article shows that the ACPA lacks grounds for these claims. Taking its cue from the ACPA's report, it instead focuses on the fundamental and contested concept of the freedom or the autonomy of art. It seeks to outline what would need to characterise a critical concept of the autonomy of art today, and asks what the political implications would be of a rigorous understanding of such a concept. It argues that cultural policy should be understood as a project of *cultural democratization*, which should in turn be understood as a *project of autonomy*.

KEYWORDS

Freedom of Art, Autonomy of Art, Cultural Policy, Cultural Critique, Radical Democracy, Social Aesthetics, Cultural Democratisation, Project of Autonomy, Myndigheten för kulturanalys [Agency for Cultural Policy Analysis]

> “Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the World.”
> — Percy Bysshe Shelley, 1821

> “We are always already serving.”
> — Andrea Fraser, 1994

1. AN INQUIRY REACHES THE CONCLUSION THAT ITS PREMISE WAS TRUE

In April 2019, Lotta Finstorp, member of the Swedish parliament for the conservative party *Moderaterna*, directed an interpellation to Amanda Lind, then the Minister of Culture, representing the Green Party. The interpellation was titled “Political Governance of Culture”, and it expressed a concern that departments and institutions tasked with implementing the various objectives of Swedish cultural policy, were setting “politically biased” conditions for cultural and artistic practices, in a way that risked “limiting artistic freedom”. “It is very serious”, Finstorp wrote,

> when the Agency for Cultural Policy Analysis (*Myndigheten* för *kulturanalys*) decides to highlight the public debate initiated by cultural workers who experience that political governance limits artistic freedom. Such political governance is the most apparent in the demands to include a large number of cross-sector perspectives in applications for various cultural grants.[1]

Finstorp’s interpellation would go on to have far-reaching consequences, both directly and indirectly. Two things merit attention already in her introducing description. First: that Finstorp bases her argument on “observations” that can be inferred from an annual report from the Agency for Cultural Policy Analysis (ACPA). It is what lends her interpellation a certain weight. But the agency’s annual report, published in February of that same year, does not present any evidence or data that could have supported Finstorp’s argument. The agency’s own description is instead cautiously phrased, verging on the defensive: during the last couple of years, they write, it has in “the public debate” been “asserted that political governance […] is so strong that it limits the freedom of art”.[2] Both Finstorp and the ACPA, then, place themselves at a certain distance from the situation they are describing, as if to shift the responsibility for their assertions beyond themselves: they “decide to highlight” a “public debate” that is “initiated by cultural workers” who “experience” something.

Second point: both Finstorp and the ACPA are, in spite of this chain of mediations, immediately able to detail what is the core of the problem, namely that "cross-sector perspectives must be included in applications for different cultural grants", in a way that risks exerting a determining influence over artistic practices. "Cross-sector perspectives"—or, with a synonym, "horizontal perspectives"—is a Swedish bureaucratic expression that means that actors in one policy sector are expected to take into account policy targets that do not belong exclusively to that sector. For example: the Swedish government's national targets concerning equality or integration, which all Swedish government departments are required to observe. What "cross-sector perspectives" alluded to in the interpellation was therefore not unclear to anyone: Finstorp suggested that "politically correct" or "woke" demands were imposed on cultural practices that requested public support.

Finstorp's interpellation was debated in parliament on April 30, 2019, in accordance with the rules of the game. It was a polite exchange, characterised by a desire for mutual understanding between the conservative MP and the Cultural Minister, Amanda Lind. "I would also really like to emphasise", Lind offered, "that I stand behind what the ACPA highlights, that is, the need of possibly conducting an in-depth inquiry into this area."[3] Consequently, in November 2019 the ACPA was commissioned to conduct a "review of the effects of cultural policy governance on the freedom of art".[4] That work resulted in the agency's report, *This Is How Free Art Is: The Effects of Cultural Policy Governance on the Freedom of Art* (*Så fri är konsten: Den kulturpolitiska styrningens påverkan på den konstnärliga friheten*), published in June, 2021.

This Is How Free Art Is immediately attracted intense media attention. The inquiry's general conclusion was unambiguous and dramatic: that "cultural policy governance that has or could have a detrimental influence on artistic freedom does in fact occur."[5] In an opinion piece published in the daily newspaper *Svenska Dagbladet* the same day the inquiry was first made public, two of the agency's experts summarised the report's central findings. They stressed one point that they found especially serious: that the government "requires that state grantors integrate a number of so-called horizontal perspectives into their operations". For example: "that applicants to the Arts Council are asked to describe if and how they plan to integrate an equality, LGBTQ, multicultural, or intercultural perspective in their practice, their projects, or their publications".[6] The inquiry, then, seemed to have confirmed the initial concerns that the agency had indirectly

expressed in their annual report in 2019, and that Finstorp had referred to in her interpellation.

The publication of the inquiry, and the presentation of its alarming results, were commented on by journalists, critics, and op-ed writers in a large number of articles and comments in different media. The tone was often agitated. In these different texts, the dominant message was the one that had been established already in the agency's annual report in 2019 and in Finstorp's interpellation the same year: that there "did occur" excessive political governance of culture; that the reasons for this were the demands for "integrating cross-sector perspectives" into different practices and operations; and that these demands mainly—this was at least what was repeatedly emphasised—took the shape of calls for addressing "diversity and the rights of various groups", as one article phrased it.[7] Among a small number of more sceptical voices was the critic Maria Schottenius, who commented in the daily *Dagens Nyheter* that the concept of "artistic freedom" evoked by the report did not have an established, unequivocal significance. "Culture", she pointed out, "never exists exclusively in a vacuum".[8]

In any case, the media storm did not pass unnoticed in the political sphere. The state instances that were described as responsible for the most serious cases of cross-sector homogenisation—primarily the Swedish Film Institute and the Arts Council—were given sharp reprimands from the Cultural Department, admonishing them to revise their steering documents and their application forms so that they would adequately reflect the correct order of cultural policy priorities, where artistic freedom should stand over and above horizontal imperatives. In the regulation letter to the Arts Council for 2022, it is established that the department's primary objective should be to "defend artistic freedom, in accordance with the national cultural policy goals", and to "account for the measures the department has taken to secure artistic freedom within its funding arrangements".[9] For a cultural policy report, *This Is How Free Art Is,* appears to have had an unusually swift and large impact, as if its results could already have been predicted from the outset.

In the period following the initial debate and its repercussions—and especially since the campaigns for the Swedish general election in the fall of 2022—this version of the results of *This Is How Free Art Is* has gone on to attain the status of an established truth, the report regularly being invoked as incontrovertible evidence of the "leftist" and "woke" bias of Swedish state cultural

policy. For example, in September 2022, a spokesperson for the far-right Sweden Democrats, the largest party supporting the right-wing minority government coalition currently in power, stated that the greatest threat to the freedom of art is:

> the reigning leftwing cultural policy. Last year the ACPA released the report *This Is How Free Art Is*. Reading it is a saddening experience. It proves that the government's cultural policy has cut the arm's length between politics and culture.[10]

And to cite just one more example, in December 2022, Victor Malm, cultural editor of the conservative tabloid *Expressen*, wrote:

> In the spring of 2021 [sic] the report *This Is How Free Art Is* was published, a dry leaflet [*ett torrt häfte*] that showed conclusively that there does in fact occur political governance of art in Sweden. Bad, of course. Even though many would probably hold that the objectives toward which it was governed—intercultural, multicultural, and equality ones—are good and worth striving for, the governance in itself of course broke with the arm's length principle, to which politicians always pay lip service.[11]

A few things deserve to be noted concerning the relatively quick and somehow looped process through which this inquiry was proposed, advocated, commissioned, conducted, published, and is now being implemented.[12] First of all, that the ACPA's presentation of the inquiry—which set the tone and the framework for its reception—does not seem to give a correct image of the inquiry's actual results. The evidence it offers in support of its claim that state departments demand that "cross-sector perspectives" should be integrated into artistic practices, and that "cultural policy governance" therefore "limits the freedom of art", is weak and inconclusive at best. Concretely, the evidence is based on a handful of statements from application forms and information texts from the Film Institute and the Arts Council, and on comments in interviews with applicants and experts, some of whom express themselves critically concerning certain application forms and procedures.[13] It is difficult to see how these incidents could motivate the agitated rhetorics: the application forms can evidently be easily revised, and that there is criticism regarding application procedures among applicants—about half of whom have not been granted support—should of course prompt judicious review, but also appears almost inevitable.[14]

What the inquiry does unequivocally show, however—but which is played down both in the disposition of the report itself, and in the presentations of it—is that other types of governance occur on a regional and municipal level that have a more direct and apparent "effect on the freedom of art". For one, the decision-making structures in a number of these often small-scaled administrations are incompatible with the principle of "arm's length-distance" (for example, in several municipalities, individual politicians prepare as well as execute decisions concerning the funding of cultural organisations).[15] Furthermore, publicly supported cultural practices in different municipalities are regularly expected to fulfill a series of external objectives, related to local economic growth and city-planning, in a way that renders any concept of "artistic freedom" unclear.[16] Judging by the actual results of *This Is How Free Art Is,* the greatest threats to "artistic freedom" would therefore come from the particular form of Swedish political regionalisation, and from what we, to generalise, might call the paradigm of the "creative industries", which creates a lack of distinction regarding the purpose of artistic practices, and consequently makes it difficult to describe them as "free".

A second thing that deserves to be noted regarding *This Is How Free Art Is,* is that one fundamental premise for the inquiry and the "debates" surrounding it, was that there is a sharp and binary opposition between "the freedom of art" and "political governance", where the former gains its very integrity by being delimited from the latter, and where the latter always threatens to invade and contaminate the former. This premise was also confirmed by the results that the ACPA emphasised in their report—the negative effects of cross-sector homogenisation on artistic freedom—and that were then passed on in the reception. It is not so evident, however, that this premise is supported by the more serious results that the report presents, but which have not been prioritised in the following discussions: the problems of compromised decision-making structures and external objectives in cultural policy administrations on regional and municipal levels. On the contrary, those problems could just as well have been described as consequences of a *lack* of political governance, where inadequate resources and an absence of administrative safeguards give individual politicians and civil servants an unreasonable—and undemocratic—influence over practical artistic decisions, and the purposes they serve.

"It is important that culture stands free from political governance", Finstorp wrote in her initial interpellation.[17] It is an attitude

that has turned out to have a strong support, at least among prominent commentators and politicians. The report from the ACPA describes a number of incidents that appear to confirm its validity: the demands for "cross-sector perspectives", and so on. These results have been singled out in presentations of the report, with considerable media and then political impact. At the same time, what the inquiry actually shows is that this problem is relatively insignificant, especially when compared to other problems that the report describes in detail, but which have not been emphasised in either presentations or commentaries. How should we understand the logic of this prioritisation? Why insist so strongly on the sovereign value of "the freedom of art" (in relation to "political governance"), and at the same time ascribe secondary importance to evident examples of governance of art (in hybrid, private-public regional and municipal administrations) that *not only* take the form of "political" imperatives imposed by the public sector?

In order to be able to respond to these questions we must ask some more fundamental ones: is it possible to give a more clear, theoretical description of the understanding of the function of art in society that was first invoked to motivate the report from the ACPA, then confirmed by the way the report was publicised and received, and is now legitimated through the implementation of its recommendations? And is it possible to imagine another such understanding, of another politics of art or culture, that remains compatible with "the freedom of art"? What is the freedom of art?

2. THE POLITICS OF APOLITICAL FREEDOM

In *This Is How Free Art Is* the ACPA writes:

> Artistic freedom can be described as an ideal that is based on the notion that the art and culture that is produced in society should to the extent possible reflect free creative processes and be evaluated based on its artistic qualities.[18]

It is a convoluted, somewhat awkward definition, which at the same time leaves the concept open: "artistic *freedom*" is defined (in a circular manner) as something that should "reflect *free* creative processes"; its value is described with the (equally complex) concept of "artistic qualities". Later, more generally framed discussions about the concept implicitly refer back to this definition, or invoke political objectives or decisions of a higher order. Of course, an agency report such as *This Is How Free Art Is* cannot be criticised

for *not* being a treatise in philosophy or aesthetics: it is governed by pragmatic concerns, rather than by ideals of theoretical rigor.

But theoretical issues remain relevant, the more general conceptual dimensions essential. Even an ever so realist and pragmatic text must draw on some kind of internally coherent framework of theoretical principles, that guide its argument and support its conclusions: the alternative is arbitrariness. *This Is How Free Art Is* is also an unusual cultural policy report in the sense that it so evidently puts into play fundamental concepts of philosophy, aesthetics, cultural studies, and political science: art, culture, freedom, politics, governance, and the connections between them. The question, therefore, is if it might be possible to theoretically reconstruct the understanding of "the freedom of art" that informs *This Is How Free Art Is*, and its reception. What could "the freedom of art" be? Let us test three hypotheses, that together form one influential, contemporary idea of the nature of that freedom.

I. THE FREEDOM OF ART IS THE FREEDOM OF THE ARTIST

Is art free because the artist is free? Because the artist is a particular type of individual, who has a special capacity to engage in "free creative processes"? Someone who has access to a higher degree of independence, creativity, or even truth? Someone who has a unique ability to realise the individual's inherent freedom? Naive as they may sound, these are not unusual ideas. The figure of the artist remains a surface onto which visions of originality, authenticity, fantasy, and creativity are projected, even in a contemporary imaginary. This is proved not least by the persisting attractiveness of this figure for actors who want to integrate artistic practice into fields with which it was previously considered to be incompatible, such as scientific research ("artistic" or "practice-based research"). Complicating matters further, it is a notion that cannot be entirely dismissed: it can be argued that the work of an artist has—or should have—a logic that is not reducible to the logic of other forms of work, and that this relates to freedom, in a certain sense of the word.

But it is important not to confuse cause and effect here. Art is not free because the artist is free, but, if anything, the inverse: it is to the extent that the artwork can be described as free—or rather *autonomous*, we will return to this—that the practice through which the artwork was produced can also be ascribed a certain freedom. Art as we know it today cannot be defined as a delimited set of practices that are essentially different from other practices, and that could therefore be described as free in a particular way.

The emergence of the modern and contemporary concept of art is instead based on a rupture with all a priori technical, stylistic, thematic, etc. criteria for distinguishing artistic from non-artistic practices. The procedure through which Marcel Duchamp created his snow shovel (*In Advance of the Broken Arm,* 1915) cannot be described as essentially different from the procedure through which any other snow shovel was produced (in New York in 1915). This was one of Duchamp's points.[19]

The historical process that culminates, or at least reaches its most clear expression, with Duchamp's readymades, has often been discussed in terms of a transition from a *poetic* to an *aesthetic* concept of art.[20] Art ceases to be a practice that is defined by a set of poetic principles, rules, hierarchies, and ideals—such as, for example, the academic principle of the hierarchy of genres in the visual arts—and that is strictly reserved for a certain group of people, with certain skills and knowledges regarding those rules and ideals. Instead, art becomes something that is in principle accessible to everyone, the status and value of which are defined *aesthetically,* in and through its reception. This transition, which suspends the conditions for defining artistic practices as an essentially particular type of practices (free or not), has an inherently democratising aspect—to produce and to consume art ceases to be a privilege reserved in principle for a certain social group—and is connected to the establishment of the institutional system of modern and contemporary art: the public art exhibition, the public art museum, art criticism as a genre, art history as a discipline, etc.[21] The transition from *poetic* to *aesthetic,* through which the concept of art is democratised and demythologised, cannot be excised from this institutional system, without abolishing art as such.

II. THE FREEDOM OF ART IS A FORMAL FREEDOM

The argument would here instead be based on a sort of realism. No, artists are not a special category of people with a mystical capacity to engage in "free creative processes", in a way that other people cannot. The artwork is not some magical creation that embodies a higher degree of independence. "The freedom of art" is a freedom *de jure,* that is: it is a formal ideal according to which no one should in principle be excluded from having the possibility of becoming an artist, and according to which an artwork should in principle be able to treat any theme or motif. In modern, democratic states, this ideal is codified in the form of laws of freedom of expression, that give citizens the rights to—within certain minimal but essential

limits—express their opinions without risking censorship, persecution, etc.

Such *formal* freedom is a necessary and unconditionally valid precondition for all free creation, including artistic creation. But it is not a sufficient condition for a *de facto* exercise of freedom. Here too it is necessary not to confuse different conceptual levels and logical relations. A freedom *de jure* is not an actual freedom, it is a freedom that *can or should exist*. That everyone in principle has the freedom to be an artist, does not mean that everyone is actually free to devote their time to artistic practices. That every artist in principle has the right to create artworks of and about anything, does not mean that every artist can actually exercise her freedom to create artworks of and about anything. There is a plethora of factors that—without threatening the formal freedom—can prevent such practical exercise of freedom: relations of dominance, economic conditions, different types of prejudice and oppression (the things the "integration of cross-sector perspectives" is designed to counteract, in short).[22]

That a person is free does not mean very much if she does not have the ability to exercise her freedom. The whole history of the modern workers' movement, to name one example, is based on a simple truism: that human beings are free to sell their labour does not necessarily entail that they are free human beings.[23] Practical freedom, freedom *de facto*, can be achieved when the formal freedom, freedom *de jure*, the principle of freedom, is *invoked* as a valid principle *against* and *in order to change* an unfree reality, a reality characterised by injustice, exclusion, inequality, etc. From this a couple of consequences follow. First: that the transition from a formal to a practical freedom can be conflictual. There is often an opposition between the formal freedom and the actual conditions for exercising freedom in a given social context. If we understand "the freedom of art" as everyone's right to create art of and about anything, then such freedom can, for example, stand in opposition to a segregated city-planning, where some people lack access to the material, economic, and pedagogical resources that are needed in order to be able to assert that right. To invoke the validity of this principle can therefore imply a critical and potentially antagonist attitude towards broader social conditions and the interests that defend them.

Conversely: to equate freedom in general with the formal freedom, freedom *de jure*, is the same as asserting that there is no such potential opposition, that no such transition is needed, that no possible conflict exists. And to assert this is the same as giving

one's blessing to the society or the regime that upholds the formal freedom, regardless of whether it is an unfree society or an unfree regime. This is the simple lesson of the criticism that cultural sociologists have often directed against the rhetorics of art's inherent freedom and elevated value: that such "freedom" serves as an alibi for dominant interests.[24]

III. THE FREEDOM OF ART IS THE FREEDOM OF THE CREATIVE ENTREPRENEUR

This idea is a sort of synthesis of the previous two. The *artist* is (i) an individual with a special capacity to engage in "free creative processes", and who can therefore contribute to the creation of economic value. And artistic *freedom* is realised (ii) by the artist's formal freedom to sell her creations and services on a competitive market, where there is, under "post-industrial" conditions, a high demand for her special creativity and expertise.[25] Thus art can become "free from political governance".[26] So: by being free art can contribute to economic growth, which can in turn give art a higher degree of freedom. *Win win*.

This synthesis is embodied in the figure of the creative entrepreneur. What is a creative entrepreneur? It is someone who is innovative, imaginative, and affirmative, but who is at the same time irreverent, risk-taking, and transgressive. It is someone who contributes to the development of new business models, opens new markets, and makes cities and neighborhoods attractive, but who can at the same time treat her life or herself as an ongoing artwork.[27] Is this the figure in and through which art can finally be assigned a social and economic function, without having to compromise with its freedom?

The figure of the creative entrepreneur—with its aura of both hazy bohemian and cynical businessman, of both San Francisco's *flower power* and Silicon Valley's *"move fast and break things"*—can provoke disgust as well as admiration, depending on who one asks. But there is no doubt that the idea of the political economy of culture that it personifies enjoys a strong position in the Swedish cultural policy sphere. The notion that "free creative processes" are compatible with—if not equivalent to—innovation on a competitive market, has gradually gained foothold in Swedish state cultural policy documents, from the 1996 proposition, where it was occasionally wedged in quietly, as something self-evident, to the 2009 proposition, *Time for Culture* (*Tid för kultur*), where it was given a more prominent and determining role.[28] That this notion is today normalised is shown not least by *This Is How Free*

Art Is, which for example describes how "culture's importance for regional development, attractivity, competetiveness, and growth" is a "dominant theme" in regional cultural policy plans.[29]

The problems with this idea are apparent. First: that it is based on a sort of re-poeticisation or re-mythologisation of the artist role. In the rhetorics of the "creative industries" we encounter an affirmative artist, whose positively defined, *poetic* qualities—imaginative originality, avantgardist vitality, networked productivity, etc.—are strictly incompatible with the categorical openness that must characterise an *aesthetic* concept of art, and which forms the logical precondition for that concept's progressive, radically democratic implications. It is also, we might note, an image of the artist that corresponds poorly to serious artistic and cultural work today.[30]

Second: that the formal concept of freedom on which this idea is based remains compatible with all kinds of practical unfreedoms. It is evident that the artist's or the cultural worker's freedom to sell her products and services on a competitive market, does not exclude that the artist or the cultural worker is enmeshed in various relations of power, exploitation, repression, or discrimination, which may also negatively affect her possibilities of exercising her freedom to participate on that market. Furthermore, it is apparent that the exercise of such freedom may *in itself* entail unfreedom, since a capitalist market, on account of its fundamental structure, can by itself have limiting effects on the freedom of artistic or cultural practices, in the form of unreasonable working conditions, of homogenising ideals concerning themes, formal decisions, and modes of expression, of governing control over means of distribution and communication, etc. This has been proved conclusively by over two hundred years of critical cultural research, from Romanticism until today.[31]

But the decisive problem with this idea of the freedom of art, is the conceptual displacement or *refunctioning* that it performs, where "art" and "culture" cease to be understood as entities in themselves, with their own, irreducible logic, and are instead replaced onto a wider conceptual field, whose own conditions are now ascribed epistemological priority: the field of "creativity". It is difficult to overestimate the importance of this refunctioning, and of the structural transformation that it has served to legitimate. The price for art and culture's new *freedom* to enter into different "mutually beneficial" collaborations with other creative practices, is that an ambiguity sets in regarding which are the ultimate purposes of art and culture, and which

are the ultimate purposes of the creative practices, so that the conditions for sustaining a coherent concept of “the freedom of art” are suspended.[32]

What understanding of “the freedom of art” informs *This Is How Free Art Is* and its reception? What conception of art’s function in society does it imply?

We saw that the report was first advocated and has then been invoked to support demands for a stricter separation between “artistic freedom” and “political governance”. Since the report’s publication and the subsequent debate, such demands have also, been inscribed into steering documents and regulation letters for some concerned departments. What the long-term consequences of such adjustments will be remains to be seen, but there is an apparent risk that they will give rise to a sort of institutional unease, where it becomes more difficult to refer to “cross-sector” objectives in order to justify the mediation of art and culture that defend “diversity and the rights of different groups”, as one article phrased it. It would not be improbable to see this development as an indication of a more general, “politically colored” effort to equate artistic freedom with artistic *depoliticisation*, as if art’s freedom could be its freedom *from* the society in which it is created, and whose conditions and conflicts it unavoidably registers, intentionally or not.

Of course, the recent, regular—and, as we have seen, unfounded—references to the report as incontrovertible evidence of the “left-wing” bias of Swedish state cultural policy, leave little doubt as to what political interests are finding it the most useful to solicit the authority and the credibility of the ACPA.[33] *This Is How Free Art Is* has become an effective and convenient tool for arguments for a cultural policy reform from the right, that would aim to resolve the conflict between “artistic freedom” and “political governance” by enforcing a more strict separation between the two terms—or even, ultimately, by crossing out the latter. In this regard, the report belongs to a particular tradition within the history of modern cultural policy programs in the West, that promotes the value of a formal and “apolitical” concept of “artistic” or “cultural freedom”—codified in laws of the freedom of expression, realised through the artist’s participation on a capitalist market—while at the same time evoking the word “freedom’s” wider moral, existential, and adventurous connotations. For who can be against freedom?

To mention just one, major example here, research in critical cultural studies has over recent years directed much attention to how the concept of "cultural freedom" functioned as a slogan during the Cold War, when it served as a coordinating stratagem for a number of propaganda-like operations that aimed to naturalise the hegemony of North American, liberal capitalism, against the threat of socialism and communism.[34] The most famous example was the CIA-backed organisation, *The Congress for Cultural Freedom*, which had offices in thirty-five countries and funded a whole infrastructure of institutions and publications (in Sweden, among other places), all more or less explicitly devoted to promoting the "liberal" values of the Western bloc.[35] Among other things, the organisation invested considerable resources in canonising North American, high modernist, "apolitical" abstract expressionism as the dominant tendency in post-war visual arts, in order to counteract the connection between avantgarde art and socialism that had been prominent earlier in the century.[36]

Any opposition between "artistic freedom" and "political governance" of course remains false, a paralogism comparing incomparable entities, as long as it falls back on a formal and therefore partial concept of freedom. But as we have seen, *This Is How Free Art Is* is *not only* inscribed into such a tradition of ideological stratagems. It does not exclusively draw on a formal and partial concept of "the freedom of art", tendentiously pitting it against the "political governance" exerted by cultural policy bodies on a state level. If we recall the other aspects of the report—its discussions of governance at regional and municipal levels, its examples of blatant instrumentalisation in a number of local administrations—then it becomes clear that the report there instead operates with a stronger, *practical* concept of freedom: a concept that cannot be reduced to an abstraction, to a freedom *de jure*. That stronger concept stands in opposition to *all* possible limitations: economic ones, social ones, *not only* "political" ones. And on such terms it becomes conceivable in principle that political governance could, seen relatively, *facilitate* the freedom of art, by limiting more severe limitations. But if so it also becomes more difficult to uphold the binary opposition between "artistic freedom" and "political governance", which was the very premise of the agency's inquiry in the first place.

The question is therefore: is it possible to formulate that stronger concept of the freedom of art in a more coherent, critical way, which does not fall back on the partial understanding of the concept that haunts *This Is How Free Art Is*, and which could open

for another conception of the possible relation between the freedom of art and political governance?

3. AUTONOMY IS A VERB

> "Everyone is a free citizen and has the same rights as the most noble in the world of aesthetics, coercion may not take place *even for the sake of the whole* [...]."
> —Friedrich Schiller, 1793

In the modern aesthetic tradition, the question of the freedom of art has often been discussed with reference to the idea of art's *autonomy*. That is, the idea that art gives rise to a specific type of experiences irreducible to any other type of experiences. When we see a film, study a painting, read a novel, or experience a performance that successfully lays claim to be identified as art, we experience something that cannot be described in the terms of any other experience, that does not obey the logic of any other experience. Art is autonomous, self-governing: no external determinations can—or should—exhaustively define the artwork as an artwork. The experience of art contains a moment of irreducible alterity as compared to other experiences. Its principle can only be derived from within itself.

Paradoxically, the development of the idea of the autonomy of art is inseparable from the process through which the concept of art ceases to have a positive content. When art becomes *only itself* it also becomes *nothing*. Historically, this development is related to what we have discussed earlier as the transition from a *poetic* to an *aesthetic* concept of art in the social history of Western art, connected to the more general process of democratisation initiated during the period of the enlightenment and the bourgeois revolutions in Europe and the US. That is, the transition through which art was liberated from its ties to different religious, political, and social functional contexts, in which it was produced according to certain, specific techniques (for example, the French Academy's style rules for visual arts), for certain, determined recipients (for example, the French aristocracy), in order to serve certain determined purposes (for example, representing the status of the aristocracy).[37]

That art becomes autonomous means that it can no longer be defined according to such *poetic* criteria, but therefore also that it is deprived of its social locus and logic: its place and its function within the institutionalised spaces and practices that supported

those functional contexts. And the new social spaces within which an autonomous art can install itself *as autonomous*, are created on the one hand by the commercial markets that emerge for the different artforms (the dealer-gallery-system in the visual arts, etc.), and on the other hand, by the institutions and techniques that are developed for the public mediation and presentation of art (the art exhibition, the museum, etc.).[38] Autonomous art will, in its continued development, have a necessarily complex and conflicted relation to those forces and spaces—to the artwork's commodity form and to the institutional and technical systems for art's mediation—and the external, *heteronomous* determinations that they unavoidably entail.

In philosophical and aesthetic thought, the idea of the autonomy of art has a long prehistory, stretching from early Renaissance theories of the unique originality of the artist, across the *je ne sais quoi* of emerging salon culture, to Alexander Baumgarten's mid-eighteenth century attempts to establish a science of aesthetics.[39] But the modern concept of the autonomy of art can be traced back to two German thinkers, both active during the early phase of what Eric Hobsbawm called the "double revolution" (industrial and political).[40] In his famous third critique, the *Critique of the Power of Judgement* (1790), Immanuel Kant established the most influential philosophical account of aesthetics as a specific field of experience, with its own qualities and conditions of possibility. The aesthetic judgement—the judgement of taste, to describe something as beautiful—is, he there showed, a judgment that must be *disinterested*, must relate to its object as something other than a means to an end. A beautiful object is an object whose form can be seen as purposive, but only to the extent that it is at the same time perceived *without* reference to an *external purpose*.[41]

In the important *Kallias Letters* (1793), where art is for the first time explicitly associated with the concept of "autonomy", Friedrich Schiller developed this analysis of the specificity of the aesthetic experience by connecting it to Kant's understanding of the autonomy of the moral will, in a way that emphasised the connection between *beauty* and *freedom*—and thereby first announced the progressive, even utopian implications of the concept of the autonomy of art. An artwork, Schiller held, following Kant, is an object that actively demands to be experienced without reference to external ends. To experience an artwork as beautiful is therefore to see it as if it were an *end in itself*, that is, as if it were autonomous, had the freedom to determine itself. What is specific about art is therefore its capacity to create an *image* or a *figure of freedom*,

in a way that no other non-natural, sensible object can. "That", Schiller wrote, "is why the realm of taste is the realm of freedom—the beautiful world of the senses is the happiest symbol, as the moral ought to be, and every object of natural beauty outside me carries a guarantee of happiness which calls to me: be free like me."[42]

The idea of the autonomy of art therefore opens for two opposed but mutually constitutive readings: autonomy as *self-sufficiency*, as negative withdrawal from external determinations; and autonomy as *project*, as a promise of freedom that remains to be realised. To be extremely schematic, we might say that large parts of the history of modern art, from the late eighteenth century onwards, can be located at one or the other of these two poles.

On the one hand, there is the long tradition of attempts at creating an art that is completely self-referential, that folds in on itself, giving rise to an experience incompatible with all instrumental relations that characterise society in general—a tradition that stretches from the "anti-theatrical" tendency to emphasise the motif of absorption in French eighteenth-century painting, across the nineteenth-century bohemian ideals of *l'art pour l'art* across different artforms, to the medium specific formalism of postwar art history, associated with among others the American art critic Clement Greenberg—and beyond.[43] Such an idea of self-sufficiency and withdrawal, we might note, is also implicit in the more everyday notion that the experience of art can *in itself* offer a sort of critical distance to the "normal" order of society.

On the other hand, the idea of autonomy as project becomes essential to the Romantic thinkers, poets, and artists, who in different ways seek to transgress and sublate art's autonomy, in order to realise it at a higher level: to transform society by making the principle of freedom—self-determination dominating external determinations—which is inherent in the idea of autonomy, into a governing principle for society as a whole. Such a utopian vision then becomes central to the historical avantgardes and their attempts to "dissolve the border between art and life", during the twentieth century.[44] A less dramatic, less messianic, decidedly non-utopian variation of the same figure also recurs, as we will see, in the tradition of modern cultural policy.

The idea of the autonomy of art is therefore developed in a certain historical context, in relation to a specific set of social, political, and economic forces, to which its institutional spaces, its theoretical articulations, and its practical forms stand in a relationship of irreducible tension. If "the freedom of art" is anything it is the name of the possibilities that are opened in and through

this contradictory process. In which ways does the concept of the autonomy of art remain relevant for thinking "the freedom of art" today, in relation to the forces—political and economic, but also institutional and media-technical—that define today's social world? And which are the implications of that concept for how art's "social institutionalisation" *could be* conceived? Let us look at three fundamental principles for the concept of the autonomy of art, that together form a necessary condition for the practical significance of "the freedom of art".

I. THE AUTONOMY OF ART IS SET AGAINST ALL HETERONOMIES

This is a simple principle, but it has far-reaching implications. The autonomy of art, art's self-governance (*autos:* self; *nomos*: law), is—if the concept is to have any meaning—set in a relation of opposition to *all heteronomies*, all determinations that are based on other, external factors (*heteros*: other). It is not possible to choose one heteronomy over another, to assert that one limitation is determining while another is not. And it is not possible to think the problem of autonomy *starting from* a "selective" or "relative autonomy", just as a freedom with certain limitations is not a good starting point for defining the concept of freedom. The autonomy of art is—to refer to *This Is How Free Art Is*—not only set in opposition to "political governance", just as it is not only incompatible with the functionality of the commodity form, or with some other instrumentalising relation. It is set in opposition to all forces that contribute to giving art a purpose, an aim, a determination outside of itself. What is essential, as we will soon see, is that "autonomy" does not denote a static *quality* of art, but is the name of an open, unavoidably antagonistic *activity*.

This in itself unreasonable radicality—which is a logically necessary precondition for the coherence of the concept of autonomy—is essential to many of the utopian visions and critical ideals with which art has been associated since its status as autonomous was first institutionalised. Among the early theorists of the autonomy of art, it was *because* the judgement of taste must relate to its object as disinterested and without external ends, in a way that allowed for no concessions, that the experience of the artwork could be a promise of freedom, or a "prefiguration of free praxis", as one contemporary thinker has phrased it.[45] The Romantic idea of the artwork as an aesthetico-political, all-encompassing *Gesamtkunstwerk*, whose experience would transcend the fragmenting division of labour that limited the human being in modern societies,

can be derived from the same, boundless claims inherent to the concept of art's autonomy. And the strong ideas of the critical theorists, according to which art is *in itself* resistance, "criticizes society by merely existing",[46] is an "indictment of the established reality",[47] and so on, gain their rhetorical force and their philosophical validity from this principle of the autonomy of art, given which they are evidently true. It is also, we might note, on account of this principle that art can be something more than simply one of the different activities in which citizens in liberal societies are free to engage: that it can be an image of *freedom as such*, so that it has been possible to invoke "the freedom of art" as a sort of index of the degree of democratic openness in different states and power blocs.[48]

II. THE AUTONOMY OF ART MUST BE ASSERTED

This principle is more complex, and yet is a necessary qualification of the former one. The autonomy of art is set in opposition to all heteronomies—that is a precondition for the concept's coherence. But that does not mean that we should mistake this idea for a fantasy of art's objective independence. Artworks are not magical creations that exist outside of the world. They do not inhabit some special zone of reality, separated from society's fabric of ends, dependencies, and economic conditions. Artists are not persons who live outside of society's reality of interests and demands, forms of dominance and relations of production. How could they be? Artworks are things in the world, commodities exchanged on different markets, objects integrated into different social practices and rituals. Artists are persons who work and relate to life's contingencies and demands. Art, said the critical theorist Theodor Adorno—whose *Aesthetic Theory* remains an unavoidable reference for any discussion of the autonomy of art—has a double character: it is both autonomous and a social fact.[49]

The autonomy of art is therefore not a quality that belongs to a certain class of objects, and which they can simply assume, take for granted. An autonomous art is instead, as both historical and contemporary theorists have argued, an art that has the capacity to produce an *appearance* of autonomy. Like all social forms and practices, art is determined by an open multiplicity of factors. Such factors may relate to the artform or the genre to which an artwork belongs, to its material supports, to the conditions under which it has been produced, to the different social, political, cultural, or religious codes it relates to, to the institutions, techniques, and media forms through which it is mediated, to the expectations

and prescriptions that are inherent to the different markets on which it is sold—and so on. An autonomous artwork is an artwork whose inner determinations, whose specific properties of formal construction, *dominate* its external, heteronomous determinations. That is, whose form, whose inner, immanent logic can be understood as more fundamental than the logic of the external determinations—*at the same time* as the external determinations remain effective.

And effective *both* at the level of the actual, empirical conditions of artistic practice, *and* at the level of the artwork's inner, formal definition, where they can be set in more or less open opposition to the form-giving determinations, in a way that renders the very boundary between "internal" and "external" problematic. This is a central argument in Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*: that the artwork, in its inner, formal organisation, registers its external, social conditions; that the artwork's form is generated through the conflict between those different forces. The artwork is the site of a structural contradiction, that takes place and can only approach resolution at the level of form. It is in this way, and not by communicating some edifying or critical message, that the autonomy of art can relate to autonomy in the ethical and political sense of the word. "The unsolved antagonisms of reality return in artworks as immanent problems of form", Adorno wrote, with a famous phrase. "This, not the insertion of objective elements, defines the relation of art to society."[50]

Autonomy, then, has to do with the artwork's form. The autonomy of art is not its objective independence, but its capacity to produce an appearance of self-determination in relation to the forces upon which it is dependent. It was precisely in this way that Schiller understood the artwork's "promise of freedom". An artwork is a sensible, material object, and as such it cannot be free, that is, self-determining—only the rational will can determine itself, according to the humanist tradition to which Schiller belongs. The artwork is therefore autonomous when its "*mass is completely dominated by [its] form*", in such an elaborate way that it, "in its objective constitution", gives an appearance of being self-determining, that is, "invites us, or rather requires us to notice its quality of not-being-determined-from-the-outside".[51] It is also in this way—*mutatis mutandis*—that modern and contemporary theorists understand the autonomy of art, and its critical, even political implications. When the artwork successfully gives an illusion of having a "self-legislating form", in relation to whose logic the logic of the heteronomous determinations is derivative

or incompatible—and not the other way around—the artwork enters into a relation of critique and contradiction to all of the instrumental demands that limit self-determination in society in general. In this way it can function as a "prefiguration of free praxis". "[T]he appearance of self-legislating form", the philosopher Peter Osborne writes, "positions the work critically in relation to the demand for social functionality [...], thereby allowing it to *figure* freedom."[52]

This in turn means that the autonomy of art is something that must be *asserted*. It cannot be taken for granted. It is not the name of a quality that characterises a certain, given ontological category. On the contrary, it is something that must be actively achieved, in relation to the historically mutating complex of heteronomous determinations, such that it is actualised in specific situations. There is therefore a dynamic, contextual aspect of the autonomy of art. This is something that the art theorist Nicholas Brown has emphasised, in an important, recently published study of the "social ontology" of the autonomy of art: that an artwork cannot presuppose the autonomy of art, but must lay claim to it, assert it against its heteronomies; that such work is complicated if art is integrated more strongly in different means-ends relationships, for example by being subsumed more fully under the logic of the commodity form.[53] The more dominant the heteronomies are, the more difficult they become to identify, the more self-evident and unavoidable they appear, the more it takes for the artwork to be able to assert autonomy.

The conditions of such autonomy are, to take one example, evidently limited if the artwork is created for and mediated through media systems that, as regard their functional structure, are organised according to a logic of profitability, and, as regard their technical structure, are hypercomplex and lack—or even actively counteract—transparency, which is the case with nearly all influential digital platforms today.[54] And, to take another example, it is just as evident that a cultural policy paradigm that defines art as one creative practice among other creative practices—all inscribed into more or less convoluted means-ends-complexes—does not create conditions favourable for an artwork to assert autonomy. A public artwork commissioned by an individual politician with the express purpose of generating surplus value for a municipal urban development scheme, will in all likelihood not produce a "promise of freedom".[55]

Brown's argument clarifies two things. On the one hand, that the autonomy of art is a historical phenomenon, which also means

that it is finite: it is possible to imagine a situation where it can no longer be asserted effectively. There is nothing improbable, Brown writes, with "a scenario in which artworks as such disappear, to be entirely replaced by art commodities, and in which the study of artworks would have to be replaced with the study of the reception and uses of art, of desires legible in the market, and so on."[56] On the other hand, his argument at the same time shows the opposite: that there is something misguided about the desire to dismiss the idea of the autonomy of art as an obsolete hypothesis about art's exclusive social status or a romantic dream of independence and freedom—in the name of the death of art, the end of history, postmodernism's transformation of everything into image, or the apodictic *win-win* pragmatism of the creative industries—because such arguments refer to a static and essentialising understanding of the function of autonomy.[57] But the autonomy of art is only meaningful when it is set to work.

III. THE AUTONOMY OF ART FUNCTIONS AS A REGULATIVE IDEA

The autonomy of art is therefore, first, set in opposition to all heteronomies. And second, it is something that cannot be taken for granted, but must be asserted. Combined, this means, third, that the autonomy of art can be said to function as a *regulative idea* for the understanding of art's social logic. The concept "regulative idea" is mainly associated with Kant's critical philosophy. With it, Kant described an idea that does not correspond to reality such that we may experience it, but such that it must be in order for our search to understand it rationally to be possible.[58] A regulative idea is therefore an idea whose validity we must assume experimentally in order for reason to be able to perform its work, and which is only meaningful when it is invoked in the performance of that work. Regulative ideas, one commentator writes, "therefore present us, not with objects corresponding to them, but rather with a task: the never ending progress of empirical enquiry whose ideal terminus [...] can only be approached asymptotically."[59]

If we borrow Kant's concept and adapt it to our discussion, we can say that "the autonomy of art" functions as a regulative idea of art's complete self-determination—the autonomy of art is set in opposition to all heteronomies—but where that idea has no validity or meaning outside of the in principle interminable, "asymptotic" process through which it is asserted. The autonomy of art is not some distant condition that could be achieved once and for all. Nor is it some abstract ideal, valid outside of the contradictions and antagonisms that emerge when it is invoked by an

artwork. Instead, the autonomy of art is only meaningful in and through the dynamic, historically specific practice with which artworks, in their formal construction, assert autonomy, that is—as we have seen—seek to dominate their heteronomies, in order to produce an appearance of self-determination.

The autonomy of art, we might say, is not a noun, the name of a quality or a state, but a verb: it denotes an activity, a form of work. To defend "the freedom of art" is nothing more and nothing less than giving art the best possible conditions for pursuing that work.

4. THE PROJECT OF AUTONOMY

Let us recapitulate. In the first part of this text we showed that the ACPA's report *This Is How Free Art Is* was based on, and has been invoked to legitimate, a binary opposition between "the freedom of art" and "political governance". At the same time, parts of that report described strong limitations of art's freedom which could not be accounted for in the terms of that opposition.

In the second part, we showed that "the freedom of art" cannot be understood on the basis of the freedom of the artist, nor as an abstract value, valid outside of the practical limitations—social, economic, etc.—that unavoidably constrain any possibility of exerting that freedom. "The freedom of art" is not a given, extra-historical fact that can be sustained merely through formal laws of the freedom of expression, and that, as long as such laws are respected, is compatible with different instrumentalising contexts, such as the paradigm of the "creative industries".

In the third part, we have now replaced "the freedom of art" onto the more fundamental conceptual terrain of the "autonomy of art", and shown that such autonomy is set in opposition to *all heteronomies*, all internal and external determinations, not only "political governance", and that it is something that must be *asserted* and cannot be taken for granted. "The autonomy of art"—the condition *sine qua non* of "the freedom of art"—can be said to function as a regulative idea for the understanding of art's social logic, and as such it is only meaningful when it is asserted in opposition to its determining heteronomies.

But what does this signify, politically? What are the cultural policy implications of such an understanding of the autonomy of art? What does it mean for how we can, no, better, for how we *could* think the relation between "the freedom of art" and "political governance"? Is it possible to imagine a "social institutionalisation"

of art's autonomy not set in direct opposition to that autonomy, and therefore to the freedom of art? A type of institutionalisation that would instead seek to *realise* the ideal of autonomy? In some respects, we will argue, the modern cultural policy tradition can be seen as such a search; in those respects we can understand it as a *project of autonomy*.

I. THE DOUBLE CONCEPT OF CULTURE

In discussions about cultural policy—both academic and realpolitik ones—it is customary to refer to two senses of the concept of culture, separate but interconnected: one *aesthetic* and one *sociological* or *anthropological*. "Culture" in the aesthetic sense denotes the arts, in a positive and limited regard: visual arts, literature, music, theatre, dance, film, etc. "Culture" in the sociological sense is more difficult to circumscribe, but is normally said to denote something like the system of signs and signifying practices through which a society or a community understands, imagines, and defines itself.[60] It is in this latter respect that we can talk of an "North American culture", an "online culture", a "drug culture", and such like.

The distinction between the aesthetic and the sociological understanding of culture is often traced back to the British cultural theorist Raymond Williams. In a series of influential studies written between the late 1950s and the early 1980s, Williams investigated the emergence of the modern concept of culture in relation to the development of industrialism, above all in the UK.[61] What he showed was that "culture" came to serve as both a counterimage against, and as an alternative to, the "fragmented" world created by industrial capitalism's division of labour and violent, social and geopolitical effects. "Culture" acquired a double sense: it was both the name of a—more or less idealised—"lived whole" of shared languages, meanings, rituals, and practices, that were set against the fragmented reality of factory labour and new social relations; and of a limited set of forms and practices that, in a more authentic way, could express the human being's creative powers, but to which only a select few had access and could practice. In a famous text, "Culture is Ordinary", Williams wrote: "We use the word culture in these two senses: to mean a whole way of life—the common meanings; to mean the arts and learning—the special processes of discovery and creative effort."[62]

This division between culture as both "the arts and learning" and "a whole way of life", both aesthetic and sociological, has been criticised, nuanced, developed, and updated by a great number of

cultural theorists since Williams first introduced it—not least by Williams himself.[63] At the most general level, "culture" in the sociological sense tends to become a limit concept, at the outer rim of semantic coherence: it becomes synonymous with "civilisation", or it refers to social organisation in general, or it can only be defined negatively, as that which is *not* nature.[64] But almost all discussions of the concept of culture and its possible politics, still relate to some version of the distinction between "aesthetic" and "sociological"—for pragmatic reasons, if nothing else. Funding a museum of contemporary art and giving economic support to a taxidermic study circle remain different things; being able to dance classical ballet is not the same as having basic language skills; a painting by Klee and a model railway do not function according to the same logic, even though they are both cultural objects.

Much is also at stake in the relation between these two senses of "culture". The key document of modern, Swedish state cultural policy, the 1972 public inquiry *New Cultural Policy* (*Ny kulturpolitik*), refers directly to the "sociological concept of culture", and argues that cultural policy should "be seen as a part of society's environmental policy commitments at large". "The general goal of cultural policy", the commissioners wrote, "is to contribute to creating a better social environment and facilitate equality."[65] The latest state cultural policy proposition, *Time for Culture* from 2009, refers to the same distinction, but concludes that a more narrow delimitation of the cultural policy field is necessary, that now excludes media policy and popular education.[66] The proposition's general—and still valid—statement of objectives emphasises the aesthetic rather than the sociological or "environmental" understanding of culture, but at the same time assigns a certain social function to culture, although phrased in more vague terms: "Culture should be a dynamic, challenging, and unbounded force grounded in the freedom of expression. [...] Creativity, diversity, and artistic quality should characterize society's development."[67]

How should we understand this distinction? And which are its implications? We can establish two things. The first is unproblematic: that the concept of "culture" in the *aesthetic* sense simply denotes the domain of elements onto which the concept of "the autonomy of art" can be applied in a meaningful way. "Aesthetic culture" is another name of those artforms that directly or indirectly assert autonomy. The second thing is less apparent, more like a working hypothesis, namely, that we can understand culture in its *sociological* sense as what we might call a *social aesthetics*.

That is, as the symbolic organisation of the sensible world—of that which is in a meaningful way available to sensible experience, *aisthesis*—which makes it possible for certain subjects and certain objects to be identified, and to identify themselves, as belonging to that "aesthetic" organisation, so that it defines a social community. Such an idea of a "social aesthetics" has been developed by, among others, the French philosopher Jacques Rancière, who describes it as a "distribution of the sensible" (*partage du sensible*): as "the system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it."[68]

Such an interpretation of "culture" in the sociological sense has certain advantages. First, it is not based on some notion of a latent or underlying consensus. Unlike Williams' "whole way of life", the "distribution of the sensible" does not suggest that there is some natural, harmonic accord at the basis of a social community. On the contrary, Rancière underlines that the word "*partage*" (insufficiently rendered as "distribution" in English) should be understood in its double sense: both as sharing in common, and as division, separation; each social community is unavoidably based on both inclusion and exclusion. Second, such a concept opens for an understanding of the system of techniques—in a wide sense of the word—through which such a "*partage*" of the sensible can be mediated and given institutional form, of the material and symbolic infrastructure that regulates such inclusion and exclusion. In that regard, we can understand what in contemporary media theoretical research is called "cultural techniques" as those techniques through which the definition of and access to a "social aesthetics" is administered, so that certain individuals can identify as participating in a social community.[69]

Third, such a conception can make it possible for us to address more clearly the *relation* between culture in the aesthetic sense and culture in the sociological sense, between an "autonomous art" and a "social aesthetics".

II. A NORMATIVE RELATION

Throughout the history of modern cultural critique, the distinction between an aesthetic and a sociological culture—or some version of it—has not only had a descriptive value, but has also carried with it an essentially *normative* dimension. The cultural theorist Terry Eagleton explains it clearly, in a discussion about German Romantic *Kulturkritik*: "For this Romantic humanist tradition,

culture in the sense of art"—culture in the aesthetic sense—"is precious not only in itself, but because it offers an image of how culture in the sense of civilization"—sociological culture—"might be refurbished." The task for a politics of culture therefore becomes, he continues, "to project one sense of culture into another—to extend a creative power currently confined to a minority to social existence as a whole."[70]

Culture in the limited, aesthetic sense, then, is understood as something that has an intrinsic value (that is, without external determinations, autonomous). *Because* it has such a value, it offers an "image" of or an ideal for how culture in the wider, sociological sense should be restructured. This figure, which Francis Mulhern has called simply the "cultural principle", is Romantic in origin, and is essential to the modern concept of culture as such.[71] As many theorists have noted, it can be connected to the word's etymology. "Culture" derives from the Latin *colere*, meaning *grow*, or *nurture*, or, closer to the word's wider connotations today, *cultivate*.[72] Culture has to do with ensuring the development of something, with guiding something from one stage to another, more complete, stage. In the word itself, the normative relation between the aesthetic and the sociological sense is, if not inherently present, then at least prefigured.

The political significance of this relation depends on how we understand the social logic of "aesthetic" culture. The idea that art and culture have a specific value, and that the citizens in a society should be "cultivated" in accordance with that value, has had a long and often devastating influence throughout the history of modern culture. "Culture" has been invoked as a principle both for conservative ideals of *Bildung* and for romantic nationalisms; has served to legitimate "civilising" projects in the name both of the intellectual elevation of patriarchal aristocracy, and of the spiritual community of a mythologised nation state. The idea of an elevated and unitary culture that should be infused into and thereby civilise a population of loyal subjects, also has a vast and violent colonial legacy. These aspects of the tradition of the modern concept of culture have been mapped by generations of critical, feminist, and postcolonial cultural theorists.[73] We can establish that the understanding of the social logic of "aesthetic" culture operative in these contexts is fundamentally uncritical, since it is based on the naturalisation of different heteronomous determinations: the nation, the aristocracy, the West, etc.

Imbricated with such tendencies, but also set in opposition to them, is the long tradition of cultural policy projects where the

relation between the two senses of "culture" is understood as a relation of *democratisation*. It is a tradition whose roots can be found in the early history of the workers' movement and of popular education, from the 1830s onward.[74] In the first steps toward developing a comprehensive state cultural policy—for example in France in the 1930s, or in the UK and the Nordic countries during the postwar decades—the governing principle was one of *access*. Culture—in the aesthetic sense—should be democratized, should cease to be a privilege for a limited social stratum: libraries should be opened in all towns, theatre companies should tour to all parts of the country, museums should stay open after working hours, etc. This was, to name one example, the content of a number of the reforms initiated by the French Popular Front government during its tumultuous period in power between 1936–38.[75] But such democratisation *of* culture was never an end in itself. Making culture accessible to all was only necessary *because* culture *in itself* was considered to have a democratising function, because it was through cultural activities and experiences that citizens could learn to realise self-determination, which is to say freedom, in a fuller way. The democratisation *of* culture was necessary in order to facilitate a democratisation *through* culture.

Such an idea may appear untimely today, in spite of all political rhetorics about the relation between culture and questions of democracy. A whole school of cultural theorists studying problems of power have also shown to what extent there was a connection between the process of "democratisation" through which public cultural institutions were established in modern, liberal societies, and an increasing, "biopolitical" disciplining of the population in those societies.[76] But we can note two things. First, that any cultural policy program that claims to defend the freedom of art unavoidably invokes some version of the idea of a democratisation *through* culture: the freedom of art would not be worth defending if it did not contain the promise of some wider freedom.[77] Second, that such an idea—as we have seen—unavoidably falls back on a concept of the autonomy of art. The search for democratisation through culture inherently implies a search to realise the autonomy of art at some kind of larger, social scale. Without such an ambition, a cultural policy that seeks to defend the freedom of art has no meaning.

How should we understand such a relation of *democratisation through culture*, if we accept that "culture" in the aesthetic sense denotes the artforms that assert *autonomy* and that "culture" in the sociological sense can be described as a *social aesthetics*? We

saw that "the autonomy of art" is a dynamic and contextual concept, functioning as a "regulative idea", which is only meaningful when it is practically asserted. And we saw that the conception of sociological culture as a "*partage* of the sensible" made it possible to think the system of techniques through which such a "*partage*" is mediated and given institutional form. What are the best possible conditions for an artwork to assert autonomy? An autonomous artwork, we have established, is an artwork that produces an appearance of autonomy, when the logic of its immanent, formal determinations dominates the logic of its heteronomous determinations. Phrased as a simple formula, autonomy and heteronomy are in an inverted or negative relationship to one another. The conditions for a successful assertion of autonomy are better the weaker the grip of heteronomous determinations placed upon it, that is, the more effectively the different techniques through which art is mediated—in the wide sense of the term—facilitate self-determination.

Another way of describing "democratisation through culture", from the perspective of a more strict understanding of the autonomy of art, would therefore be: a search to secure the conditions for self-determination in the system of techniques through which "aesthetic culture" is mediated, in order thereby to contribute to *extended self-determination* at the level of "social aesthetics" in general. Such a principle of extended self-determination throughout all mediations of cultural practice—from the social reproduction of relations of production, to means of production, distribution, and reception—has, combined with a general project of radical democratisation, been a guiding idea for a strong tradition of artistic, intellectual, and cultural policy work, forming a progressive, often experimental, often critical lineage through the history of modern culture. We can call it *the project of autonomy*.

Elements of such a project can, to name one example, be found in the early "maisons de culture"- movement in France during the Popular Front years, when popular movements, organisations of popular education, and political groups collaborated to set up a nation-wide network of self-organised cultural institutions, where citizens could exercise and enjoy a wide range of artistic practices.[78] This early movement then became an important model for the coordination of state interventions and popular organisations in the French and, by extension, the Swedish "new cultural policy" programs in the 1970s.[79] It is, furthermore, a movement that has a new life in Sweden today, in different endeavours to reactivate the institutions of the workers' movements and popular education in order to set up more or less self-organised cultural centres.[80]

Another, more specific example could be the photo collective The Image Activists (*Bildaktivisterna*) who, during some turbulent years around the end of the 1960s, created a sort of alternative, self-organized photo agency, responsible not only for the artistic and technical aspects of photographic practice, but also for the presentation and distribution of its images through light-transportation, easy-installation, and reproducible exhibitions and publications.[81] The Image Activists, in turn, can be seen as one actor in an international ecosystem of artists' collectives and editorial groups, whose branches and offshoots stretch far into the present, and which have seen—and continue to see—their practice not simply as the production of a certain kind of cultural objects, but as the creation of independent, integrated media systems, where every link in the chain of production and distribution is placed under artistic control.[82]

III. AN UNFINISHED PROJECT

How should we understand the relation between "the freedom of art" and "political governance"? The principle is simple. "Political governance"—any kind of governance—is only legitimate in relation to art to the extent that it contributes to creating the best possible conditions for art to assert autonomy, by extending self-determination in its mediating links. This is also what "political governance" can learn from art: that it answers to the principle of self-determination for which an autonomous art is a means and an expression. A free art calls for a free society. This is not a new idea, but it is important to remind ourselves of its continued validity and necessity today. "The pressure now, in a wide area of our social life", Raymond Williams wrote in 1961, about the challenge that culture's modern development posed to any society that claims to be democratic, "should be towards a participating democracy, in which the ways and means of involving people much more closely in the process of self-government can be learned and extended."[83]

For Williams it was essential that this idea about what he called an "educated and participatory democracy" was connected to how—and according to which logic—a society organised the different techniques through which culture, information, and, to an increasing extent, social relations in general were mediated. The primary idea, he held, must be a principle of their social utility, which must ultimately have to do with facilitating individual and collective self-determination for the greatest number of people. This radically democratic idea was political, that is, potentially antagonist, from the outset. Williams asserted it in explicit op-

position to the powers in society that instead sought to integrate those techniques into different heteronomous arrangements, where their social utility was secondary to profit motives, or other, external objectives.

But Williams also had many allies. The idea that the technical infrastructure for extended self-determination in culture could and should be further developed, as a strategically important phase in a more general effort to create a radically democratic society, was a recurring theme in cultural policy endeavours—in a wide, not only governmental sense of the term—during what Eric Hobsbawm called the postwar "golden age" in the West, but also beyond.[84] In a Swedish context, forces from different sectors and fields coalesced around such attempts, from state actors who wanted to open new channels and networks for public service media, to new social movements who experimented with alternative models for the technical design and modes of operation of cultural institutions; and from techno-utopian artist collectives who sought to employ advanced communication networks to create new modes of social organisation, urban planning, and ecological production models, to the "music movement's" exploding network of self-organised groups, scenes, and festivals.[85] This work was aligned with a search for extended codetermination and democratisation in a number of other social fields, from working place organisation to economic redistribution policies.[86]

One weakness that haunted much cultural policy work in this context was that the concept of culture that was both its origin and its *telos*, was often uncritically formulated. This vagueness regarding both beginnings and ends in many cases made such work defenseless in the face of forces that sought to integrate its structures into functional contexts which were at their core incompatible with the logic of cultural democratisation. This is something that is apparent in the early Williams. In spite of his rigorous historicisation of the concept of culture—his own, early books create the very tradition of cultural theory within which they would later be criticised, as he himself noted—it is evident that his general theory of the politics of culture, at least in texts until the late 1960s, drew on a more or less idealized understanding of culture as something that *in itself* offered an alternative to the instrumentalised social relations of modern, industrial society.[87] Such an understanding is clearly insufficient when culture itself is to an ever increasing extent produced and distributed according to industrial methods, and is integrated as an ever more central component in a profit-driven and competitive market economy—which is the

development that the concept of the "culture industry" was coined to describe, already in the mid-1940s.[88]

What Williams offered as qualification of the critical status of the concept of culture was the idea of an original, non-alienated human "creativity", that could find expression in a privileged way in cultural activities and experiences.[89] How the concept of "creativity" has served as a stratagem for the project of "refunctioning" aesthetic culture, undermining its irreducible otherness–its autonomy–in relation to other functional contexts, is something that we have already discussed, in relation to the cultural policy paradigm of the "creative industries" and the "creative entrepreneur".

All of this is the reason that a project for *democratisation through culture* must today be based on a stronger conception of the social logic of "aesthetic culture". We can understand *the project of autonomy* as the name of such an endeavour—of the historical and contemporary attempts at creating the conditions for extended self-determination in the techniques through which art is mediated—that can be referred back to a more strict, critical concept of the autonomy of art. Such an endeavor is only coherent if its *telos*, which can only be approached asymptotically, is the absence of *all* heteronomies, which also means that it has an irreducible political dimension, pointing beyond the specific, empirical definition of culture as a delimited sector in society. In this respect we can establish that a cultural policy *must* also be an "environmental policy", as the commissioners of the 1972 cultural policy inquiry phrased it, or, to refer to *This Is How Free Art Is*, that *the concept of the "freedom of art" is empty if it is abstracted from its "cross-sector" implications*. This is the fundamental contradiction of the autonomy of art, as Adorno held: in so far as a social function can be predicated for artworks, it is their functionlessness.[90] In the problem of the freedom of art, not only the freedom of art is at stake. In this regard, reconstructing the tradition of the project of autonomy means reclaiming the elements of a progressive cultural policy for a radically democratic future.

For such a project there can be no sharp demarcation between "high" or "low" cultural expressions, between a popular culture and a "serious" culture, or something similar. "Autonomous" is—this must be clear—not a qualification that can only be attributed to a certain kind of "high" or "formalist" art, which would be the righteous heir to those noble artforms that had their prescribed domiciles in aristocratic halls and academic salons. Upholding the association between the autonomy of art and social distinction is, regardless of whether the intention is critical or supportive,

today—over half a century into the age of the mass university—the same as giving credence to the myth of a sort of patrician concord, according to which a person's level of sensibility to advanced cultural and intellectual expressions would correspond to her rank in a social and economic hierarchy. *The autonomy of art is ordinary*, it is no longer necessarily coded in class terms: it is the name of a principle that can be asserted by all art- and cultural forms, but under radically different conditions, depending on what social contexts they are created in, what institutional and media technical arrangements they are mediated through, what economic and juridical systems they are inscribed into, what different markets they are sold or shared on, etc.

In this respect—to name just a couple of examples, among any number of possible ones—it is worth noting that many of the artworks that in recent decades have in the most advanced way asserted autonomy, have originated from artistic production and distribution systems that, as regards their historical constitution, are thoroughly "industrial" and "popular", such as international "art film" or "auteur cinema", and contemporary, experimental dance music.

The "art film's" hybrid economy of national, often to a large extent publicly financed film industries and of global, profit-driven market forces, creates, together with the technically anachronistic aspects of its distribution system, a set of open possibilities and pronounced limitations for artistic practice.[91] In the best cases, this has resulted in a cinema that, from within a both restrictive and form-giving historical space, braces against and supersedes the contradictions of the social, economic, and technical world in which it is produced, displaying those contradictions as an unresolved, living conflict. In terms of formal fantasy and intellectual integrity, films such as Wang Bing's *Coal Money* (2009), Alice Rohrwacher's *Happy as Lazarro* (2018), or Jean-Luc Godard's *The Image Book* (2018) surpass most of the audiovisual art that has been created in the contemporary artworld since the beginning of the century.[92]

In experimental dance music's social and economic system, a comparable set of possibilities and limitations can be found in the combination of a profit-driven market, strict genre demands, technically advanced and near-universally available means of production and distribution, and an ecosystem of more or less self-organised scenes and clubs, connected to a culture of hedonist, transgressive experiments with the human body's physical and psychic constitution, whose most apparent historical predecessor

was the psychedelic effort of the 1960s and 1970s.[93] These contradictions are fundamental to, transcended by, and reflected in some of the most important albums and EPs of recent decades, such as Aphex Twin's *Windowlicker* (1999), Burial's *Kindred* (2012), The Knife's *Shaking the Habitual* (2013), or Holly Herndon's *Proto* (2019).

IV. AN UNRESOLVED CONFLICT

The contradictions that in these cases are at work at the level of specific artworks and artforms, can also be described at a more general level. We can understand the *project of autonomy* as an essential component of a more comprehensive *project of democratisation*, which is the former's political expression, operative at the level of society's political economy as a whole.[94] At its horizon is the ideal of a social system in which all mediations—all social relations, all relations of production, all collective establishments, all media technical arrangements—are characterised by self-determination to the highest possible degree, with the ultimate aim of creating a society where the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all. The principle of the project of democratisation is *the extension of the domain of individual and collective self-determination*.

During the period of Williams' "educated and participatory democracy" this was still a living ideal, which could be pursued by actors in different social fields and at different political levels, in the form of state-financed experimental ventures for the democratization of culture's infrastructures, party programs advocating direct-democracy reforms, the egalitarian institutional experiments of various social movements, or the critical and visionary practices of individual artists.[95] It was also an ideal that, more or less explicitly, informed much of early internet culture, from its techno-utopian roots in 1960s *counterculture*, to the tactical media and peer-to-peer networks of the late 1990s and early 2000s.[96] It can be claimed that the technical preconditions for realising such a project of radical democratisation at a large scale are today more developed than ever. But related ideals are today mainly promoted by movements and parties with a marginalised position on the political arena, while speculative thinking concerning the socially progressive, even emancipatory potentials of new technical means is almost exclusively present in science-fiction literature.[97]

What has instead achieved hegemonic status, and has consequently exorcised what Mark Fisher, after Marcuse, called "the spectre of a world which could be free,"[98] is an opposed project, whose aim is to transform all social mediations into relations of

dominance, within the framework of the universal equivalence of economic exchange value. We can call this project *the project of plutocratisation*, and it is based on the fundamental idea that the model for an ideal—that is, maximally effective—social organisation can be found in the ability of the capitalist "free market" to organise "itself" through the regulative function of the price mechanism and through competition as a motivating relational form.[99] Its principle is *the contraction of the domain of individual and collective self-determination*, in favour of a situation where every social relation is a relation of competition, every interaction is a transaction, every action is an investment or a credit advance.

In Western liberal democracies, the governing model for this project today is not some *laissez-faire* anarchy, which would be categorically opposed to state regulation or redistribution. The project of plutocratisation instead seeks to integrate all public establishments, all social and political institutions that could serve as structures for democratic organisation, and ultimately the state apparatus as such, as support mechanisms for the "self-organising" system of the "free" market. It is a project that takes different forms: *New Public Management*'s restructuring of public administrations; the refunctioning of cultural policy bodies on the part of the "creative industries"; "profit-driven welfare" as a program for an inverted, economic redistribution policy, etc. In Swedish state administration it is today a normalised view that the purpose of the public sector is to intervene where "the market completely or partially malfunctions", as one cultural policy expert phrases it.[100]

But it is the process that is usually described with the euphemism "digitisation" that, at least since the deployment of "internet 2.0" around the mid-2000s, has been the strongest driving force in this project. If the digital networks in earlier, techno-utopian and progressive contexts could seek to extend the sphere of the commons, by making advanced communication means available to new social groups, big tech today aims to do the opposite, by integrating ever new social behaviors, relations, and exchanges into their mediating platforms, so as to format them strictly and turn them into objects of private economic speculation.[101] It is evident that the polarisation generated by the business models of "social media" has devastating political implications; it proves the necessity of restoring confidence in the idea of the project of autonomy, from the perspective of which alternative media systems and networks could be developed that, as regards their technical, functional, and administrative structure, could be held accountable to democratic ideals.

Democracy or plutocracy: what does a *free art* do in relation to this meta- or perhaps rather infrapolitical opposition? It can remind us of its existence and confront us with the possibility of its resolution. When an artwork successfully asserts autonomy, it breaks with the naturalisation of the project of plutocratisation, showing how that project is engaged in an open, ongoing conflict with the project of democratisation, which seeks an extension rather than a contraction of the domain of self-determination.

1 Interpellation 2018/19:189 Politisk styrning av kulturen. All translations mine unless otherwise noted.
2 Myndigheten för kulturanalys, *Kulturanalys 2019: En lägesbedömning i relation till de kulturpolitiska målen. Rapport 2019:1*, p. 80. The ACPA states that this ”debate” is mainly based on ”observations by artists and cultural policy commentators”, but does not refer to any sources.
3 Protocol 2018/19: 83, Tuesday April 30, comment 40.
4 Myndigheten för kulturanalys, *Så fri är konsten: Den kulturpolitiska styrningens påverkan på den konstnärliga friheten. Rapport 2021:1*, p. 30.
5 Ibid., p. 20. In English in the original.
6 Mats Granér & Pelle Amberntsson, ”’Politisk styrning påverkar konsten’”, Svenska Dagbladet, June 10, 2021.
7 Philip Ramqvist, ”Årets Oxenstierna: Tydliga direktiv gör konsten fri”, Fokus, January 26, 2022.
8 Maria Schottenius, ”Vem ska hålla vakt vid luftslottet där konstnärlig frihet bor?”, Dagens Nyheter, June 15, 2021.
9 Government decision I:6, Ku2021/01113.
10 Bo Broman, in Marcus Bornlid Lesseur & Kristofer Ahlström, ”Så vill partierna förändra kulturpolitiken”, Dagens Nyheter, September 8, 2022.
11 Victor Malm, ”Den här gången kan SD göra nytta”, Expressen, December 29, 2022. *This Is How Free Art Is* is a 312-page book.
12 This process would deserve its own, rigorous critical analysis, which is outside the scope of this text. Such an analysis would need to clarify how the institutional definition of the ACPA affects what inquiries are commissioned from the agency, how it executes them, and how it presents them. The ACPA is a relatively young institution in Swedish cultural administration (it was established in 2011). “The establishment of the ACPA”, Jenny Johannisson writes, “can be considered a decisive reform, since it means that, for the first time in Swedish history, departmental responsibility for general review of the effects of cultural policy are separated from departmental responsibility for the distribution of means.” (”Kulturpolitisk styrning och kulturpolitiska reformer i Sverige”, in *Kulturpolitisk styrning: Ansvarsfördelning och reformer inom de nordiska ländernas kulturpolitik under 2000-talet* [Stockholm: Kulturanalys Norden, 2018], p. 72.) The implications of this reform are difficult to gauge. One possible effect is that the ACPA is to a higher degree compelled to compete with other instances for commissions from the government, for example through lobbying or media campaigns, so that the difference between, on the one hand, internal review, evaluation, inquiry, and audit, and on the other hand media-friendly, opinion-forming operations, risks becoming blurred. Only issues with a potential for gaining media attention can become subjects of inquiry, and the presentation and the reception of inquiries are adapted to the prevalent terms of various debates and interests in dominant media discourses.
13 Myndigheten för kulturanalys, *Så fri är konsten*, p. 86, p. 118f. & p. 136ff. The report’s single, most important example of how cultural policy governance at state level “limits artistic freedom” – its “smoking gun”, with an essential evidentiary value for the case it builds – is a phrase that exists in some application forms from the Arts Council. The phrase reads: “Describe if and if so how you plan to integrate an equality, LGBTQ, multicultural, or intercultural perspective in the project. Describe if and if so how you plan to facilitate access for persons with disabilities.” (Ibid., p. 85.) We may note that the question is posed as an open one (“if and if so how”). We may also note – and this is something that the report’s authors themselves point out – that “answering the question is not mandatory”: you can choose not to respond to it. (Ibid.) Moreover, it is remarkable that the report’s authors never discuss to what extent the “cross-sector” demands posed by public policy bodies may have been established in response to situations of existing bias or inequality, so that they in fact aim to *counteract* special interests.
14 The report’s authors also establish: “The group of applicants whose applications have been rejected are strongly over-represented among those who are critical to how funding bodies live up to the ideal of the freedom of art [*lever upp till den konstnärliga friheten*].” Ibid., p. 129.
15 Ibid., p. 200ff.
16 Ibid., p. 216ff.
17 Interpellation 2018/19:189 Politisk styrning av kulturen.
18 Myndigheten för kulturanalys, *Så fri är konsten*, p. 8.
19 See Thierry de Duve, *Kant after Duchamp* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996).
20 See e.g. Jacques Rancière, “Aesthetics as Politics”, in *Aesthetics and its Discontents*, trans. Steven Corcoran (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009).
21 See e.g. Sven-Olov Wallenstein, ”Kants gränslinje”, in *Bildstrider: Föreläsningar om estetisk teori* (Göteborg: AlfabetaAnamma, 2001).
22 The distinction between “formal” and “practical” freedom (or similar terms) is of course a gigantic issue in the history of ethics and political philosophy. I here refer to a minimal definition, where one point is precisely that a simple understanding of this distinction is sufficient for showing that the unclear concept of freedom which is often evoked in contemporary debates – where “the freedom of art” and “freedom of expression” sometimes appear to become indistinguishable – is both philosophically and politically untenable. For a classic discussion of the relation between “abstract” and “positive” freedom, see Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). In the recent, important *Freedom: An Unruly History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2020), Annelien de Dijn shows that the “formal” concept of freedom, often set in direct opposition to democratic state organization (freedom *is* freedom *from* the state), emerges in the early nineteenth century, as a conservative and anti-democratic response to the egalitarian forces unleashed by the Atlantic Revolutions of the late eighteenth century, and, more generally, to the notion of freedom as self-government and as popular control over political organization – a notion with its roots in antiquity.

23 Karl Marx, ”Critical Notes on ‘The King of Prussia and Social Reform’”, trans. Rodney Livingstone & Gregor Benton, in *Early Writings* (London: Penguin, 1992), p. 411.
24 See e.g. Pierre Bourdieu & Alain Darbel, *The Love of Art: European Art Museums and Their Public*, trans. C. Beattie & N. Merriman (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991). For a seminal Swedish example, see Harald Swedner, *Om finkultur och minoriteter* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1971).
25 The idea of ”post-industrial society” was popularized by Daniel Bell in an influential book first published in 1973, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society: A Venture in Social Forecasting* (New York: Basic Books, 1999). Bell describes a macrohistorical social, technical, and economic shift, where the classical, heavy manufacturing industries lose their former, central position in the economy, in favor of the service sector and various industries more or less clearly related to culture, and where the technical rationalisation of different means of production, distribution, and communication entails an increasing automatisation of different professional sectors. One consequence of this is that well-educated and “creative” social groups get a stronger position in society’s economy.
26 Interpellation 2018/19:189 Politisk styrning av kulturen.
27 See Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class, Revisited* (New York: Basic Books, 2012). See also, for a critical account of a related idea, Richard Barbrook & Andy Cameron, “The Californian Ideology”, *Mute*, vol. 1, no. 3, 1995.
28 See Government propositions 1996/97:3, *Kulturpolitik* and 2009/10:3, *Tid för kultur*. See also Carl-Johan Kleberg & Torbjörn Forsell, *Har kulturpolitiken lyckats?* (Stockholm: Kulturkontoret Stockholm, 2019), ch. 11–12.
29 Myndigheten för kulturanalys, *Så fri är konsten*, p. 183.
30 See e.g. Kenneth Goldsmith, *Uncreative Writing: Managing Language in the Digital Age* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011) and Marjorie Perloff, *Unoriginal Genius: Poetry by Other Means in the New Century* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2010).
31 See e.g. Percy Bysshe Shelley, “In Defence of Poetry” [1840], in *Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006 [1869]), Max Horkheimer & Theodor Adorno, “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception”, in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).
32 See Justin O’Connor, “After the Creative Industries: Cultural Policy in Crisis”, *Law, Social Justice and Global Development*, no. 1, 2016. Philippe Urfalino describes a similar development in a French context, where the operative concept has not been “creativity” but a Deleuzean “vitalism”, in *L’Invention de la politique culturelle* (Paris: Fayard, 2010), ch. 11.
33 See above, notes 10 and 11.
34 See Anselm Franke, Nida Ghouse, Paz Guevara & Antonia Majaca (eds.), *Parapolitics: Cultural Freedom and the Cold War* (Berlin: HKW/Sternberg Press, 2021) and Jonas Staal, *Propaganda Art in the 21st Century* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2019), p. 68–71.
35 See Giles Scott-Smith, *The Politics of Apolitical Culture: The Congress for Cultural Freedom, the CIA and Post-War American Hegemony* (London: Routledge, 2002), Frances Stonor Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper?* (London: Granta Books, 1999), Rhea Dall, “Neutrality, a Battlefield of Minds: The Congress for Cultural Freedom in Scandinavia”, in *Parapolitics*, and Karen Paget, “From Stockholm to Leiden: The CIA’s Role in the Formation of the International Student Conference”, in Giles Scott-Smith & Hans Krabbendam (eds.), *The Cultural Cold War in Western Europe 1945–1960* (London: Frank Cass, 2003).
36 See Serge Guilbaut, *Comment New York vola l’idée de l’art moderne* (Paris: Hachette, 2006).
37 See e.g. Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), ch. 3, for a schematic account of this shift.
38 See e.g. Harrison C. White & Cynthia A. White, *Canvases and Careers: Institutional Change in the French Painting World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993) and Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London: Routledge, 1995).
39 Concerning early aesthetics and the prehistory of the concept of the autonomy of art, see Christoph Menke, *Force: A Fundamental Concept of Aesthetic Anthropology*, trans. Gerrit Jackson (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010).
40 Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution: 1789–1848* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996).
41 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, trans. Paul Guyer & Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 89–127 (“Analytic of the Beautiful”).
42 Friedrich Schiller, ”Kallias or Concerning Beauty: Letters to Gottfried Körner”, trans. Stefan Bird-Pollan, in J. M. Bernstein (ed.), *Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 173. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511803734.008
43 See Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), for an explicitly Greenbergian reading of the motif of absorption in French eighteenth-century painting.
44 Anders V. Munch, *Fra Bayreuth til Bauhaus: Gesamtkunstwerket og de moderne kunstformer* (Aarhus: Aarhus Universitetsforlag, 2012), provides a comprehensive account of this development.
45 Peter Osborne, “Theorem 4. Autonomy: Can It Be True of Art and Politics at the Same Time?”, in *The Postconceptual Condition* (London: Verso, 2018), p. 68.
46 Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Continuum, 1997), p. 226.
47 Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension: Toward a Critique of Marxist Aesthetics* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), p. xi.

48 See e.g. Anselm Franke, Nida Ghouse, Paz Guevara & Antonia Majaca, "Introduction", in *Parapolitics*.
49 See Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 5 and p. 229.
50 Ibid., p. 6.
51 Schiller, "Kallias or Concerning Beauty", p. 161.
52 Osborne, "Theorem 4. Autonomy", p. 68.
53 Nicholas Brown, *Autonomy: the Social Ontology of Art under Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), p. 22f. https://doi.org/10.1215/9781478002673
54 See e.g. Adam Greenfield, *Radical Technologies* (London: Verso, 2017) and Jonathan Crary, *Scorched Earth* (London: Verso, 2022).
55 Cf. *Så fri är konsten*, p. 200f.
56 Brown, *Autonomy*, p. 20.
57 Ibid., p. 21.
58 See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer & Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. A670/B698f.
59 Michael Friedman, "Regulative and Constitutive", *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. XXX, Supplement, 1990, p. 73.
60 See e.g. the overview in Anders Frenander, *Kulturen som kulturpolitikens stora problem: Diskussionen om svensk kulturpolitik fram till 2010* (Möklinta: Gidlunds förlag, 2014), p. 34–47.
61 The central texts are Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society: 1780–1950* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983 [1958]), *The Long Revolution* (Parthian: Cardigan, 2011 [1961]), *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Fontana, 1983 [1976]), and *The Sociology of Culture* (London: Fontana, 1981).
62 Raymond Williams, "Culture is Ordinary" [1958], in *Resources of Hope* (London: Verso, 1989), p. 4.
63 Important objections came from, among others, Edward Said, who in *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993) noted that Williams, in his detailed study of the development of the concept of culture in the UK in the nineteenth century, almost completely neglected to address the problem of colonialism and imperialism, an especially egregious omission since it, at a fundamental level, compromised the validity of his idea of culture as a "whole way of life"; and Terry Eagleton, who accused Williams of underestimating the ideological function of culture, in *Criticism and Ideology* (London: Verso, 1978). Williams responded to such objections in several texts, e.g. *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), where he, with higher degree of theoretical rigour, sought to develop his conceptual scheme with reference to structuralist ideology critique; and *The Sociology of Culture*, where he relativized his understanding of the polyvalence of the concept of culture in relation to the developments of the culture industry. For more recent discussions, see Tony Bennett, "Culture", in Tony Bennett, Lawrence Grossberg & Meaghan Morris (red.), *New Keywords: A Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Blackwell, 2005) and Daniel Hartley, "On Raymond Williams: Complexity, Immanence, and the Long Revolution", *Mediations*, vol. 30, nr. 1, 2016.
64 In *The Long Revolution*, Williams writes that an analysis of culture in the "social" sense must relate to elements such as: "the organisation of production, the structure of the family, the structure of institutions which express or govern social relationships, the characteristic forms through which members of society communicate" (p. 62). Concerning the nature-culture-distiction, see Daniel Hartley, *The Politics of Style: Towards a Marxist Poetics* (London: Haymarket Books, 2018), p. 14, and "Anthropocene, Capitalocene, and the Problem of Culture", in Jason W. Moore (ed.), *Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism* (Oakland: PM Press, 2016). In order to avoid confusion, we might note that, in the German tradition of cultural critique, "culture" and "civilization" have often been understood as opposed concepts. But fundamentally, the argument remains the same: "civilization" is in this tradition the name of a culture fully determined by the social relations of industrial capitalism. See e.g. "Culture and Civilization", in The Frankfurt Institute for Social Research, *Aspects of Sociology*, trans. John Viertel (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972).
65 SOU 1972:66, *Ny kulturpolitik, del 1: Nuläge och förslag*, p. 168ff.
66 Government proposition 2009/10:3, *Tid för kultur*, p. 12.
67 Ibid., p. 26.
68 Jacques Rancière, "The Distribution of the Sensible", in *The Politics of Aesthetics*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London: Bloomsbury, 2004), p. 7. It is worth noting that the English translation here employs a positivistic vocabulary not found in the original French, where the corresponding sentence reads: "ce système d'évidences sensibles qui donne à voir en même temps l'existence d'un commun et les découpages qui y définissent les places et les parts respectives." *Le Partage du sensible: esthétique et politique* (Paris: Fabrique, 2000), p. 12. It is also worth noting that Raymond Williams in some passages expresses himself in ways not unsimilar to Rancière, both as regards choice of words and level of abstraction: "I would then define the theory of culture as the study of relationships between elements in a whole way of life. The analysis of culture is the attempt to discover the nature of the organisation which is the complex of these relationships." *The Long Revolution*, p. 67.
69 See here Reinhold Martin, *The Urban Apparatus: Mediapolitics and the City* (Minneapolis : Minnesota University Press, 2016), p. 3f, who understands cultural techniques as the "operators" that organize the aesthetic arrangements of social forms. On "cultural techniques" as a research field, see Cornelia Vismann, "Cultural Techniques and Sovereignty", trans. Ilinca Iurascu, *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 30, no. 6. But let me note that I do not accept the nominalist idealism of Vismann's notion of the "agency" of cultural techniques. See also Vismann, *Files: Law and Media Technology*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), and Bernhard Siegert, *Cultural Techniques: Grids, Filters, Doors, and other Articulations of the Real*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015).

70 Terry Eagleton, “From Herder to Hollywood”, in *Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), p. 120f.
71 Francis Mulhern, *Culture/Metaculture* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. xviff.
72 Williams, *Keywords*, p. 87ff.
73 See e.g. Juliet Mitchell, *Women's Estate* (London: Verso, 2014), Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, and Stuart Hall, *Selected Writings on Race and Difference*, red. Paul Gilroy & Ruth Wilson Gilmore (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021).
74 For the Swedish development, see here Per Sundgren, *Kulturen och arbetarrörelsen: Kulturpolitiska strävanden från August Palm till Tage Erlander* (Stockholm: Carlssons, 2007), ch. 1 & 2.
75 See e.g. Pierre Gaudibert, “The Popular Front and the Arts”, trans. David Buxton, in Armand Mattelart & Seth Siegelaub (eds.), *Communication and Class Struggle, vol. 2: Liberation, Socialism* (New York: International General, 1983), and Pascal Ory, *La Belle illusion: Culture et politique sous le signe du Front populaire* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2016).
76 See e.g. Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, and ”Putting Policy into Cultural Studies”, in Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson & Paula Treichler (eds.), *Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge, 1992). Bennett's power/knowledge-analysis refers to Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), and *Security, Territory, Population*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).
77 In the recent, important *The Art of Freedom: On the Dialectics of Democratic Existence*, trans. Joseph Ganahl (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016), Juliane Rebentisch argues that the “aestheticization of politics” should not be understood as a populist corruption that distorts politics proper, but as a necessary precondition for the radical contingency of subject-formation that must be at the heart of a truly democratic society.
78 See Ory, *La Belle illusion*, p. 118ff. See also my ”Kulturens hus är jämlikhetens infrastruktur”, *Stockholmstidningen*, no. 4, 2020.
79 See Pierre Gaudibert, *Action Culturelle: Intégration et/ou subversion* (Paris: Casterman, 1977) and “De l'episode socialiste dans les beaux-arts”, in *L'arène de l'art* (Paris: Galilée, 1988).
80 I am for example thinking of the art center Mint at the ABF (*workers' education association*) in Stockholm, of Hägerstensåsens Medborgarhus, and of the “self-organized and egalitarian” culture house Cyklopen in Högdalen, to name just three current initiatives in my own local context. Associated projects are of course in operation in numerous places, in Sweden and abroad.
81 See e.g. Cecilia Grönberg, Jonas (J) Magnusson & Kim West, “'...sprängkilar för en ny bildålder...' (ur ett samtal med Tommy Tommie Luleå 8–10 januari 2016)”, OEI, no. 71/72, 2016. See also Cecilia Grönberg & Jonas (J) Magnusson, *Bildaktivisterna: Aktioner i bild i svenskt 1960- och 1970-tal* (Stockholm: OEI Editör, 2023).
82 Such an ambition is today especially evident in the networks of small publishing houses and magazines of contemporary, formally advanced poetry. I am here for example thinking – another local example – of the different publishing houses, magazines, editorial groups, and authors' collectives that coordinate around the Stockholm-based publishing house Chateaux and the poetry festival Ny gås (*new goose*).
83 Williams, *The Long Revolution*, s. 362.
84 See Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: A History of the World, 1914–1991* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996). Hans Magnus Enzensberger talked about cultural mass media's ”leading” role in social and economic development, in his influential attempt to develop a theory for an egalitarian media structure, ”Constituents of a Theory of the Media”, trans. Stuart Hood, in *Critical Essays*, eds. Reinhold Grimm & Bruce Armstrong (New York: Continuum, 1982 [1969]).
85 See e.g. Felicity Scott, “Woodstockholm” and “Battle for the Earth”, in *Outlaw Territories: Environments of Insecurity/Architectures of Counterinsurgency* (New York: Zone Books, 2016) and Johan Fornäs, *Musikrörelsen – en motoffentlighet?* (Göteborg: Röda bokförlaget, 1979).
86 See e.g. Lars Ekdahl, “Svensk arbetarrörelse under demokratins århundrade: en essä”, in Håkan Blomqvist & Werner Schmidt (eds.), *Efter guldåldern: arbetarrörelsen och fordismens slut* (Stockholm: Carlssons, 2012).
87 Raymond Williams, *Politics and Letters: Interviews with New Left Review* (London: Verso, 2015), p. 99.
88 Adorno & Horkheimer, ”The Culture Industry”. See also Theodor Adorno, ”Culture Industry Reconsidered”, in *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture* (London: Routledge, 1991).
89 See Williams, *The Long Revolution*, ch. 1: “The Creative Mind”.
90 Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 227.
91 See e.g. Thomas Elsaesser, *European Cinema: Face to Face With Hollywood* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005). https://doi.org/10.5117/9789053565940
92 See Wang Bing, “Filming a Land in Flux: Interview”, *New Left Review*, no. 82, July/August 2013 and Erika Balsom, “Happy as Lazarro: Alice Rorhwacher Holds a Holy Mirror to the Persistence of Injustice”, *Sight & Sound*, May 2019. See also my “Summa: Jean-Luc Godard's *Le Livre d'image* and the Histories of the Histories of Cinema”, *Walden*, no. 13/14, 2019.
93 See Mark Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2014) and “Acid Communism (Unfinished Introduction)”, in *K-Punk: The Collected and Unpublished Writings of Mark Fisher (2004–2016)* (London: Repeater Books, 2018).
94 In this regard there is a connection between “the project of autonomy” in our sense here, and Cornelius Castoriadis's philosophico-political “project of autonomy”, which, he writes, “aims at transforming society through the autonomous action of people and at establishing a society organized to promote the autonomy of all its members”. *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Malden: Polity Press, 1997), p. 95.

95 See e.g. Öyvind Fahlström, “Pleasure Houses”, in Jean-François Chevrier (ed.), *Öyvind Fahlström: Another Space for Painting* (Barcelona: MACBA, 2001).
96 Claiming this is not to underestimate the importance of the fact that today’s digital systems and networks find one of their origins in the postwar “military-industrial complex”, but merely to point out that the technical definition of these networks once opened for socially progressive uses which are under contemporary conditions rendered nearly unthinkable. See e.g Peter Galison, “War Against the Center”, *Grey Room*, no. 4, 2001, Fred Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), and Diedrich Diedrichsen & Anselm Franke, *The Whole Earth: California and the Disappearance of the Outside* (Berlin: Sternberg/Haus der Kulturen der Welt, 2013). On “tactical media”, see David Garcia & Geert Lovink, “The ABC of Tactical Media”, in Sven Lütticken (ed.), *Art and Autonomy: A Critical Reader* (London: Afterall Books, 2023), p. 334ff.
97 See Carl Neville, *Eminent Domain* (London: Repeater Books, 2020), and Kim Stanley Robinson, *The Ministry for the Future* (London: Orbit, 2020), for two recently published examples.
98 Fisher, ”Acid Communism”, s. 753.
99 This is for example the argument in Friedrich Hayek’s ”The Use of Knowledge in Society”, *The American Economic Review*, vol. XXXV, no. 4, September 1945, one of the foundational texts of neoliberalism.
100 Kleberg & Forsell, *Har kulturpolitiken lyckats?*, s. 122.
101 See e.g. Jonathan Crary, *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (London: Verso, 2014) and Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power* (London: Profile Books, 2019). On the “commons”, see e.g. Pierre Dardot & Christian Laval, *Commun: Essai sur la révolution au XXIe siècle* (Paris: La Découverte, 2015).