INTRODUCTION

The problem of the autonomy of the work of art, which this dissertation addresses, has been an integral part of twentieth century aesthetic thought, whether thinkers are concerned to uphold the concept, or repudiate or deconstruct it. My own intention through the course of this research has not been an argument beginning with an a priori assertion of the autonomy of the work of art, nor has it been a refutation of this concept, but to consider the implications of both these positions, as well as several positions that oscillate in-between. My study has led to an engagement with the aesthetic thought of several thinkers across the ages, and I am inclined to see this work as a flow of dialogues across history, to which I have tried to contribute my own understanding and insights.

The concept of the autonomy of the work of art is closely related to the concept of the human individual as autonomous, of art in general as autonomous, and of a cultural complex as autonomous. I have included discussions of these concepts and their interrelations in this research, wherever these contributed to the elucidation of the implications of the main concept under consideration, the autonomy of the work of art.

The thinkers, Suzanne Langer, Ananda Coomaraswamy and Rabindranath Tagore were subjects of study for my M.Phil. research, but as will be observed, during this doctoral research, which includes a study of these thinkers, my knowledge and
understanding of their thought has deepened. My doctoral research does represent a continuation of the one undertaken at the M.Phil level, but I hope it will be evident that not only continuity but new investigation has taken place.

The Emergence of Modernism

The work of art may be said to acquire the status of autonomy within the discourse of modernity. Over a period of three hundred years, i.e. from about 1500 A.D. to 1800 A.D., European culture, by which I mean the whole way of life, underwent drastic changes. In this historical period, the medieval way of life gave way to modernist culture. Catholicism in Christianity was challenged by Protestantism. Religion in general was challenged by new scientific discoveries as well as new economic practices. Monarchy was threatened by popular uprisings with democratic leanings. New modes of industrial production and distribution unsettled traditional patterns of social organization. I refer here to John McGowan's work, "Postmodernism and its Critics", (McGowan, 1991, p.4). As part of this cultural dynamic, aesthetic thought also underwent change.

The new pattern of thought that came into being during this period had the concept of autonomy as an important motif, and this concept figured in various spheres of human activity. In the social sphere, it meant that a society determines its own course of development, free of control by any agency external to itself. In relation to individual human life, it denoted the individual's freedom to determine the course of his or her life.
In the aesthetic sphere, it meant the independence of art, or the work of art in particular, from the control of any agency extrinsic to itself.

**The Logic of Autonomy in Art**

I shall attempt to elaborate the logic of autonomy in relation to art, throughout this research, in concert with a number of thinkers who have reflected upon the nature of art. The autonomy of the work of art is generally accepted to mean that it stands apart from other objects on its own merit, that is, on the basis of certain special, distinguishing characteristics. All other objects have some utilitarian value, but in the case of works of art, the utilitarian value is absent, or if it present, it is accompanied by special characteristics, which are said to "exceed" the utility value.

The work art is set aside for aesthetic contemplation, and we are satisfied that it affords us the pleasure of this mental activity, and do not expect anything else from it. We even value it more than we do other objects, which serve some purpose. But here, in my view, a terminological clarification becomes necessary. The work of art when considered autonomous in the sense just explained has no utility in the practical sphere of human life, but does serve a purpose within its own domain, that of aesthetic experience. The enjoyment of an object for its aesthetic qualities usually means the enjoyment of its form. This may be pure form, or it may be content organized into form.
But the work of art is also, usually, part of a wider cultural complex, and then it generates an intellectual activity which is part of a wider intellectual activity, or "discourse", which in turn functions to organize a whole way of life. This draws the activity of aesthetic contemplation into relation with a whole form of life. Thus, how we look at a work of art determines how much participation in life we are willing to accord to it. In the second attitude towards art that I have touched upon, the distinction of the work of art is loosened, or breaks down.

On the other hand, the art-object may be said to be autonomous, not due to the way we look at it, but due to certain special characteristics inhering in it, which serve to define it. Those objects which have this characteristic(s) are to be included in the category of art, and those which do not, are said to fall outside it.

Throughout the history of aesthetics, there has been a debate regarding the defining characteristics of the work of art. It has been said to be beauty, truth, harmony of the parts forming an organic unity, and so on, or a combination of these. These qualities themselves need elaboration: what is meant by the term, truth? These concepts have meant different things to different people. Their meanings have varied in various societies, and have changed in various historical periods.

In fact, the study of aesthetics and literary criticism reveals that the concept of the autonomy of art is a historical phenomenon. It was not always a practice to keep some objects
apart in order that we may contemplate their beauty. Art-objects were not always regarded as autonomous. When they were, aesthetic theory also came to be seen as an independent enquiry. The aesthetic experience was also recognized as a separate and special realm of human experience.

**Essentialism and History**

K.G. Subramaniam points out that today we treasure and enjoy works of art from all periods of history. Every nation in the world prizes its cultural heritage, which includes innumerable works of art. I would add that we also attempt to understand the works of art of other cultures, find them beautiful and enjoy them. This points to an innate sense of beauty in humans, to my understanding, and this sense of beauty is, in fact, a sense of form. It is, as Suzanne Langer explains, as we shall see presently in this thesis, an intellectual capacity common to all human beings. It also points to the possibility of understanding that cuts across the boundaries, or a rigid, closed concept of the autonomy of each culture of the world. Subramaniam argues that the fact that we find all these works of art beautiful inspite of their different styles, points to some quality which is general or essential and eternal, for it seems to persist across history. (Subramaniam, 1978, p.1)

This persisting quality of beauty is said to be at the base of the argument that works of art are autonomous. It is this quality that makes possible the enjoyment of the plays of Shakespeare and Kalidas, Rajput and Mughal miniature paintings,
Greek and Gupta sculpture and so on. The lasting appeal of the Ajanta murals needs no comment.

On the other hand, an artist of today will usually not paint in a mode which belongs to the past, but work out an idiom which is integral to her own time. The same holds true for a writer. The mode in which works of art are produced is an integral part of a larger cultural whole - the society of the historical period they belong to. This points to a dependence, or interdependence, of art and society, which compromises the concept of the autonomy of art, as well as pointing to a historicity of art.

Thus, even if works of art have a lasting quality, when they are actually produced, they are part of a historical period, and differ in some ways from works of other historical periods. We have the paradox here that an object of eternal beauty belongs to a changing historical situation, exhibiting changing characteristics. We shall see, in this thesis, that one of Theodore Adorno's major concerns was this polemical character of the work of art.

I would point out here that in some cases, an artist or writer may engage in a mode of expression belonging to another period of history or society. We do have access to other realities, through memory and imagination. But in these cases, what is created is offered for relation to the present.

Bipolar Situation

The study of the problem of the autonomy of the work of art leads to a largely bipolar situation, with a spectrum of positions in-between. At one end is the view that the work of
art is autonomous, at the other, the view that it is part of a larger cultural whole, or the expression of realities other than aesthetic. Theories which hold the work of art as autonomous emphasize its formal qualities, as leading to aesthetic experience, and are termed formalistic theories.

The emphasis of form as aesthetic, and valuable in itself, in works of art, led to the minimization of content in arts such as painting, sculpture, music and dance, and eventually, to pure abstraction, as an extreme position. At the opposite end, the view that prevails may be called a reductionist one. Art is reduced to some other phenomenon, be it realities of the psyche, history, society or language. On this view, art criticism focuses on the content of a work, interpreting it in psychological terms, or social, and so on. However, the form of a work does not become entirely inconsequential on this view: the type of form engaged in a work is also said to reflect a historical period, and to change with socio-cultural changes occurring in history.

I present here a brief study of the concept of art through Western history, as divided broadly under three subtitles: (a) pre-Renaissance aesthetic thought, (b) Renaissance aesthetic thought; and (c) post-Renaissance aesthetic thought. As is evident in this scheme, I have considered the Renaissance important as marking a period of time when certain changes took place in Europe which were to affect, one may safely assert, the cultures of large parts of the world. But since this study must
necessarily be a limited one, I have attempted only to present some of the salient ideas of some representative thinkers in each period. A brief study of the Bengal Renaissance is presented in the fifth chapter.

a) Pre-Renaissance Aesthetic Thought

The Greek thinkers, Plato and Aristotle, are known to have influenced aesthetic thought in their own time as well as for the long ages that followed, and are taken into consideration in aesthetic study even today. I refer here to Bernard Bosanquet's "A History of Aesthetic" (1957).

Bosanquet explains that a certain metaphysical assumption may be discerned at the base of Greek thought in general about art: it was held that artistic representation is no more than a kind of commonplace reality presented to human perception and feeling in the same manner as are ordinary objects. So also, art-objects were said to relate to man and serve his purposes as other objects do, but were less real and less complete than ordinary objects. This view arose from the conception of the world as homogeneous, this homogeneity being thoroughly natural, as opposed to spiritual. There was no discussion here of the symbolic representation of reality in art, nor a reference to unseen reality underlying objects. Art was said to have a merely imitative relation to objects, that is, it produced images of things.

It must be noted, however, that Plato's cosmology was not monistic and naturalistic but is well-known for its dualism. The forms, or eternal essences of things, exist in a transcendental
realm, he held. He never drew a connection between these forms and art.

Plato and Aristotle did distinguish the activity of making art-objects from productive, or thing-making activities, and here I note the earliest awareness of art as different from other works of human beings.

Bosanquet continues to explain that Plato and Aristotle held that the resemblance of natural objects produced in art has the same effects on humans as normal objects. The distinction between image and object was inescapable to these thinkers, but is not fully explored. Plato had rather, a moralistic distrust of the simulacrum that imagination supplies. In the "Republic" he drew a close connection between imagination and emotion, and held that the images provided by art-works disturb the emotions more than real objects. (Bosanquet, 1957, p.16)

In "The Republic", book II, Chapter 9, Plato says:

"....... A child cannot distinguish the allegorical sense from the literal, and the ideas he takes in at that age are likely to become indelibly fixed; hence the greatest importance of seeing that the first stories he hears shall be designed to produce the best possible effect on his character." (Jacobus, [Ed.], 1989, p.46).

We see here how Plato insisted on the moral element in art.

Aristotle also applied moral categories to the understanding of art. In his "Poetics", he describes works of art which
represent morally good, bad or indifferent people. He holds that tragedy depicts characters better than real ones, and comedy presents characters worse. (Bosanquet, 1957, p.16).

To my understanding, in this thought a number of concepts relating to art are formulated, and the artistic-creative process is reflected upon, although the problem of the autonomy or otherwise of the work of art is not addressed. The aesthetic thought of these thinkers, though formulated so early in the history of Western civilization, cannot be said to be altogether naive, for already the concepts of emotion, imagination, simulacrum and mimesis of natural reality are discussed, concepts which were to engage aesthetic thought in all the following centuries upto the present. It is evident, of course, that while art does figure in this thought as somehow different from reality, it is subservient to natural representation and moral considerations.

Bosanquet holds that Aristotle erred in substituting subordination for co-ordination between the realms of beauty and morality. (Bosanquet, 1957, p.21). Bosanquet himself holds that beauty must lead only to aesthetic reflection and lies outside the realm of moral judgement.

Plato's theory of aesthetics was based on his classification of reality as that created by God, objects created by man, and images of things created by artists. In the "Republic", we find Plato's theory of art as imitation put forward with a fair degree of clarity. He holds that art gives us images which cannot be part of the real world. These images do not present ultimate
reality but only the appearances of things, and reality is to be preferred to these images. This aesthetic position can be seen to arise directly from Plato's metaphysical dualism of ultimate reality and appearances.

I note that if Plato recognized that the work of art was only a semblance incapable of participating in real human life, it was in his view already divorced from sensuous perception and sensuous gratification, aspects of the work of art which in later aesthetic theory came to be considered important characteristics of such works.

Bosanquet explains that the synthesis of the one and the many was the central problem as well as achievement of Greek Philosophy. (Bosanquet, 1957, p.32). The conception of unity in variety, or the idea of system, or totality of interdependent parts, was the structure which modern Western thought erected on the definite foundation laid by Greek thinkers. The relation of parts to whole and whole to parts was already a major concern in the thought of Plato and Aristotle.

In relation to drama, Aristotle clarified that it must be a representation of a whole action, which has a beginning, middle and end. Beauty, he held, depends on size, so that its parts may be appreciated, and order. He clarifies, in "Poetics", that no part of a drama may be removed without disturbing the whole, in fact, even shattering it. If the removal of a part of a drama makes no difference to the whole, then it is not a part of the whole. Bosanquet explains Aristotle's poetics thus (Bosanquet,
1957, p. 24) and in my view this is the beginning of the concept of the work of art as an entity complete, therefore separate, in itself. It is not difficult to think of an entity with well-organized, inter-related parts, complete in itself, as autonomous.

Aristotle's cosmology took a turn away from Plato's transcendental dualism towards immanence. He held that Forms exist within the natural world, and thus he was inclined to speak about the form of works of art, without seeing them as incomplete, inadequate, shadowy resemblances of something transcendental.

In the beginning of "Poetics", Aristotle says:

"I propose to treat of poetry in itself and of its several species, noting the essential qualities of each: to inquire into the structure of the plot as requisite to a good poem; into the number and nature of the parts of which each species consists; .......

(Jacobus, [Ed.], 1989, p. 60).

Thus, unlike Plato, Aristotle is willing to treat of art in its own right, and is concerned with its own qualities and structure. We also note here Aristotle's systematizing tendency.

I shall refer to the aesthetic thought of St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas briefly, as important pre-Renaissance formulations, and as shedding some light on the medieval period of history in Europe. In this period Christianity came to dominate all aspects of thought in Europe. Nature and art were seen as signifying the Divine, and as may be expected on such a
religious or spiritual view, the sensuous aspects of both were denigrated. This meant that art could not be a source of sensuous pleasure. This, to my understanding, is a view that persisted in aesthetic theory up to the Renaissance, and in some strains of thought, up to present times. It helped towards the formulation of the autonomy of art. Thought about art was led away from naturalistic elements, towards form.

I refer to Rosanquet’s "A History of Aesthetics" (1957) for an understanding of the thought of St. Augustine. This thinker, who may be said to represent the early middle ages, had a notably aesthetic world-view. The whole world was good and beautiful because it was God’s creation, he held. But, he held art as man’s creations to be less important than natural reality which was Divine creation. However, he contributed to aesthetic theory by saying that in art, good and evil is represented in a balanced way – such as in the balance of light and shadow – and that proportion and symmetry are thus important in art.

To my understanding, none of the thought of mankind is lost or becomes irrelevant. The all-pervasive aestheticism of Augustine finds an echo across time, and across continents, in the thought of Ananda Coomaraswamy and Tagore. But it must be noted that this is not pure aestheticism, but a religious one.

Upto the time of St. Thomas Aquinas, Platonic idealism had by and large dominated Christian thought. Aquinas’ cosmology represents a shift in this thought towards the Aristotelian view. I refer here to George Dickie’s "Aesthetics" of 1971. Beauty for
Acquinas was something actually seen, in the existing, natural world. It inhered in the work of art, objectively, as well as gave rise to the subjective experience of "pleasing". Its objective qualities were perfection, harmony and clarity. The mind grasps form, in aesthetic experience, according to Aquinas, but this is not enough: the art-object itself must also be harmonious, etc.

It is most interesting to see in pre-Renaissance aesthetic thought these ideas which were later in history developed into full-fledged aesthetic theories.

b) Renaissance Aesthetic Thought

The European Renaissance is well-known for a great resurgence of intellectual activity in all spheres, much of which had been suppressed by the dominance of religion during the preceding, medieval period. I have referred to a work by Ernst Cassirer, "The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy", 1963, for an understanding of the phenomenon of the European Renaissance, but I am inclined to my own view of the same, somewhat at variance with Cassirer. The latter is known for his deep and voluminous scholarship on the Renaissance. But to my view, he tended to a romantic, or overly dramatic view of this period, momentous as it was for Europe and perhaps for the whole world.

Cassirer informs us that during the Renaissance a revival of learning took place which began with a renewed study of ancient Roman and Greek texts, but became eventually not a mere rediscovery of ancient ideas, but the forging of entirely new
thought systems and the exploration of new areas of knowledge. My own understanding is that Renaissance thought gradually moved away from the constraints of religion and turned to a scientific study of man, nature and the arts with increasing freedom, and self-assurance. Since it did take much inspiration from ancient Graeco-Roman thought, it was not as original a phenomenon as it is made out to be. Where it turned an increasingly freer attention to empirical reality, here too, its cosmological orientation was not a new conception. It is only a study of the mechanics of nature that began in this period, and continued in the following centuries, which gave man power over nature and a (false) sense of pride in his achievements.

The activity of mechanical study and invention that began in this period is, to my understanding, characterised not by beauty, but cancerous growth, which has endangered the only planet we have to live on.

The philosopher, Rene Descartes, greatly aided the growing humanism of the Renaissance. He placed man's reason prior even to his existence. I quote from his "Meditation II":

"....... what of thinking? I find here that thought is an attribute that belongs to me; it alone cannot be separated from me. I am, I exist, that is certain. But how often? Just when I think; for it might possibly be the case if I ceased entirely to think, that I should likewise cease altogether to exist."
(Smullyan, Dietrichson, Keyt and Miller [Eds.], 1962, p.86).

In his essay, "Juxtaposing Descartes and Wittgenstein: The Simple the Clear and the Distinct", S.S. Deshpande explains how the concept of the individual came to hold central importance in the discourse of modernity, and how Cartesian philosophy contributed to this thought process. (Indian Philosophical Quarterly, Eds: Bokil, Deshpande, Jan-Mar 1996, pp. 202-3). Descartes and other early modern thinkers were concerned to articulate limits between the "I" and the "non-I", the simple and the complex, the knowable and the unknowable, the autonomous and the heteronomous.

This overly great concern with delineating boundaries has been, to my understanding, a marked feature of modernism.

The eminent Renaissance scholar, Ernst Cassirer writes that the thought and practice of the Renaissance, though marked by great diversity, was at one in the systematic tendency, the common orientation of all its thinkers. This common trait is the attempt to give a new formulation to the universal and the particular, and the relation between them.

In this respect, the Renaissance represents the first stage in "the triumphal march of modern scientific thought" (Cassirer, 1964, p.VIII).

I dwell at some length on Renaissance thought, because though not at first discernible, it exerted a marked influence on the concepts of art, man and the whole culture of societies in Europe as well as many other parts of the world.
Cassirer demonstrates carefully how Renaissance thinkers arrived at their vision of cosmological orderliness, which they eventually came to hold as reducible to mathematical principles. The neo-Platonic view of the cosmos, at first upheld in the Renaissance, asserted a hierarchy of strata constituting the physical and spiritual universe. This gradually gave way, during the Renaissance, to a homogeneous view of the natural world, as well as of historical phenomena (by which I understand the history of socio-cultural phenomena). Humans now considered nature and human societies accessible to scientific investigation.

In Cassirer's view, the post-Renaissance developments in thought, that is, those of the seventeenth and eighteenth century, were not innovations but the resolutions of problems already formulated during the Renaissance and a development along a direction already marked out. In this respect, I would agree with Cassirer, for we do see a gradual, elaborate, self-conscious working out of a methodology of thought which was freeing itself of religion and laying the foundations of modern science during the Renaissance. Cassirer traces this development in the thought of a long line of thinkers from Nicholas Cusanus to Galileo Galilei.

I continue to refer to Cassirer's "The Individual and the Cosmos" (1964) to understand the aesthetic views of some Renaissance thinkers.
Cusanus argued that the Aristotelian logic of the excluded middle cannot be applied to questions relating to the Divine. He thus challenged the view prevalent in his time, formulated by Scholastics who used Aristotelian logic in relation to theological questions. The interlocking of a great many concepts through Aristotelian logic, cannot lead to the Divine, or Infinite, in Cusanus' view. The Absolute, he held was not a comparative or relative category, but beyond all comparison. In this view, his thought was clearly Platonic.

Cusanus held that the Divine and the earthly were two separate and autonomous realms, but they yet participate in one another. The Divine gives form and direction to the earthly. The earthly moves towards the Divine. The finite is related to the Divine in its striving towards the latter.

In Cusanus' view, the work of art stands at the border of the two worlds, the Divine and Infinite, and the finite, and partakes of both. It must have physical form, and it must have ideational import or significance. Furthermore, like the finite or sensible world, the work of art remains imperfect, he held. Perfection is a characteristic only of the Divine.

Cusanus argued that the medieval religious hierarchy was untenable, because all things were equally near or far from the Divine. No man was superior to another, and man was not superior to nature.

In Cusanus' thought, to my understanding, a balance of relations between the Divine, the human, the natural and the aesthetic was achieved, which was gradually lost as the
Renaissance advanced, and therefore Cusanus is, in my view, perhaps the greatest of the Renaissance thinkers.

Pico della Mirandola is interesting because, in my view, he represents an island of skepticism in the heart of the Italian Renaissance. In his early intellectual thought one sees a nearly unlimited faith in the human mind, and the humanistic ideals of culture that were developing during the Renaissance, that is, in man gaining equality in relation to the Divine, and power over nature. But later he withdrew into ascetism, developed a negative attitude to the sensible world, and returned to the Christian medieval conceptual form of life.

Both Cusanus and Marsilio Ficino held that man experiences an impulse towards the Divine not from without, but within himself. Man is important because he is a link between the Divine and the sensible worlds. He has a power of self-determination and innate capacities of reason and experiencing beauty.

This then, I would point out, is an early formulation of the value, and autonomy of man. In Ficino's thought, this autonomy and worth was extended to the realm of beauty. Ficino held that the Divine impresses its seal on the sensible world by making it beautiful and harmonious. He also held that there is a parallel between the creative activity of God and the creative activity of the artist. Both give form to the sensible world. Another important contribution of Ficino is the idea that the artist gives concrete form to what the philosopher speculates upon.
Ficino pointed out that both man and artistic creation hold endless possibilities within them. The concepts of man and art as autonomous were thus negotiated by the Renaissance within the prevailing medieval thought-system, but gradually the latter was abandoned. Among the forms of thought that the Renaissance aimed at overpowering were astrology, magic and ancient mythology.

The Renaissance came to place an increasing value on man's creative, exploring, rational mind, which produced scientific knowledge and culture. This capacity made him deserving of freedom and autonomy and was the basis of his value. This concept of man was also based on ethical consideration. Giordano Bruno held that man's ethics and philosophy, that is, his conscience and consciousness gave him great worth, and through ordering his own life, he can find great powers within himself, to create his own destiny.

Finally, the Renaissance saw a growing interest in mathematics along with that in natural science. The logic of mathematics and the theory of art advanced simultaneously during the Renaissance. There was an agreement in these spheres on the requirement and importance of form.

Leonardo da Vinci insisted that the study of nature was more important than that of thought-systems concerning the soul and Divinity. He gave importance to mathematics because it was based on reason, which he said was the distinguishing characteristic of man. Leonardo said the laws of nature, or the universal in nature, were simply ideal or mathematical, not Divine.
Da Vinci held that the natural object must be studied through mathematical measurement, and he applied the same methodology to art, thus developing a realistic or naturalistic perspective in art. This view, based on measurement, and the optical illusion of depicting reality in an artistic medium is known as chiaroscuro, and prevailed for centuries after da Vinci. Da Vinci held that science and art must produce forms which are clearly defined, free of subjective overtones which are arbitrary intrusions. In both these spheres, da Vinci nurtured the tendency to completely systematize the subject under study. He also emphasized that both science and art are the result of man's form-making activity.

To my understanding, da Vinci and other Renaissance thinkers like him laid the foundations of the view that art is autonomous, through their objective attitude towards it, and their exclusion of subjectivity. Although in da Vinci's thought this meant that the mimetic function of art, in relation to nature was emphasized, leading to realism and naturalism in art which prevailed in the following centuries, the objective view of art was a step towards its autonomy.

As for the concept of the autonomy of man, this was the central concern of the Renaissance, its main emergent concept, which changed the whole cultural complex of Europe. Man no longer saw himself as subservient to the Divine, and in relation to nature, felt himself in a position of unlimited power, based on his capacity to reason.
The scientific attitude towards man, nature and art based on rationality dominated European culture in the following centuries. It meant, mainly, that man could control nature for his own benefit. It meant, also, a demystification of culture: the myths and legends, magic and traditions, which could not be explained scientifically were to be rejected. The growing confidence, or autonomy, of European man led him to conquer large parts of the world, and to impose his own scientific world-view on the societies he subjugated. Simultaneously, as he used nature, so he used his colonies in the world, to serve his own purposes. On the wealth gained thus, was built the modern civilization of the West.

The culture of modernity was built on the philosophy of humanism or the autonomy of man. Along with this concept was formulated a basis for the autonomy of art, in the sense, its objective ontology.

c) Post-Renaissance Aesthetic Thought

The strains of empiricism and rationalism which began during the Renaissance continued to develop in the post-Renaissance period. British thinkers of the eighteenth century played a particularly important role in the development of aesthetics as a separate and special realm of philosophical enquiry. The German thinkers, Alexander Baumgarten and Immanuel Kant, contributed no less importantly to this discipline. In 1750, Baumgarten coined the term 'Aesthetics' for the study of beauty.
Rudolf A. Makkreel's article on Baumgarten and other thinkers shows Baumgarten and other thinkers shows Baumgarten's understanding of art as valuable in its own right:

"Baumgarten defines beauty as 'the perfection of sensible knowledge' .... despite being a lower form of knowledge than conceptual knowledge, sensible knowledge nevertheless has its own perfection." (Alperson [Ed.], 1996, p.66).

I refer to George Dickie's work, "Aesthetics," of 1971, for an explication of eighteenth century aesthetics, and also, S.V.Bokil's essay, "Eighteenth Century British Aesthetics". The Third Earl of Shaftesbury is the first British thinker we consider here. He combined a Platonic theory of beauty with a theory of the faculty of taste in humans. This faculty in humans, Shaftesbury held, functions as a moral sense as well as a sense of beauty. The beautiful form which it apprehends is, however, transcendental, he held. He further contributed the category of the sublime which later helped in the formulation of the concept, 'aesthetic'. Yet another contribution he made was the notion of disinterestedness, which also helped the development of the concept of 'aesthetic' and even became central to it. For, the attitude of disinterested attention towards a work of art marks it as different from all other objects, in which we take a more or less selfish interest.

In Francis Hutcheson's aesthetic theory, not only are Platonic forms rejected, but beauty is said to come into existence within the human consciousness on the basis of some
perceived external object. Hutcheson, to my understanding, also helped to distinguish the aesthetic attitude and experience, for he held that the faculty of beauty operates automatically, in the sense that it is unmediated by thought and calculations. Such a faculty is naturally unselfish or disinterested.

Edmund Burke was greatly concerned with the category of the sublime, and even opposed it to that of beauty. This added to the growing strain on the prevailing theory of beauty, leading eventually to the necessity of formulating a theory of aesthetics, rather than beauty or taste. Burke also gave importance to disinterestedness in relation to beauty. We love the beautiful but do not desire to possess it, he held.

David Hume cannot be excluded from this brief explication. His importance lies in the fact that he

"makes explicit...........that the inquiry into the nature of taste is an empirical investigation of certain aspects of human nature." (Dickie, 1971, p.23).

Hume held that whether an object is beautiful or not can be decided on the basis of an empirical experiment in which a universal judgement is arrived at after consideration of the views of a number of subjects. But he also held that beauty occurs as a feeling, or a sense, in subjects, triggered by certain qualities in the work of art. He did not specify these qualities. To my understanding, Hume's view is the most empirical among the British thinkers.
Immanuel Kant consciously related to the thought of British empiricists, but, as is well-known, disagreed with them in their view that empirical knowledge lacks certainty. In his complex philosophy of reason, he argued that certain knowledge is possible because the human mind itself supplies the forms of knowledge.

Kant continued to refer to the aesthetic enquiry as the philosophy of taste, as did the British aestheticians. He argued that judgements of beauty are universal and necessary, even though subjective. We know the objective world dispassionately, but in the experience of the beautiful, the subjective element of pleasure enters.

But, even with the presence of pleasure, judgements of beauty are universal, Kant said, and unlike ordinary, sensuous pleasures. The judgement of beauty involves disinterested pleasure, that is, a pleasure derived from form rather than the existence and usefulness of the art-object. He argues on the basis of disinterestedness, that judgements of beauty are universal. Interest pertains to individual peculiarities of subject and object. This is absent in the experience of beauty.

The cognitive faculties in humans make objective, that is, universal knowledge possible. These same faculties, engaged in free-play during aesthetic experience, make judgements of taste universal. The sensory and conceptual faculties engaged in harmonious free-play, due to the perception of the art-object, give rise to aesthetic pleasure, Kant elaborated. Not sensory elements, but only forms, Kant held are beautiful.

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I quote Kant from the "Critique of Judgement":
"...........with the agreeable, therefore, the axiom holds good: Everyone has his own taste (that of the senses). The beautiful stands on quite a different footing. .... For if it merely pleases him, (an individual) he must not call it beautiful .... when he puts a thing on a pedestal and calls it beautiful, he demands the same delight from others. He judges not merely for himself, but for all men ... (Kant, 1952, p.52) (Second parenthesis mine).

We see here the distinctions Kant made, as well as his assertion of the universality of aesthetic judgement, not as empirical but innate in humans.

To my understanding, Plato had already recognized that the artist creates a form or image of something, though he did not give much importance to this ability. Aristotle too had recognized that in drama a unified, complete form is created. But Kant developed this insight into a full-fledged philosophical system and firmly placed the form-making activity of man in all spheres of life, within his mind, as an innate faculty. Thus he strengthened the humanist philosophical position that was growing in the post-Renaissance period, and his thought is linked to the much later post-modern thinkers who hold that all forms of language and culture are man's own creations, and knowledge is always formulated within the framework of such forms.
When all forms of knowledge-scientific, philosophical and aesthetic are seen to originate in human faculties themselves, the concept of the autonomy of man is considerably strengthened. The empiricism of the British aestheticians nurtured an objective attitude towards art. These philosophical conceptualizations constitute what is referred to as the modernist culture.

**Romanticism**

During the nineteenth century the kind of aesthetics initiated by Hutcheson and others declined and an interest emerged in the creative artist and his relationship with society. This grew into the intellectual movement of the first half of the nineteenth century called Romanticism. August Schlegel developed the concept of the romantic as opposed to classic art and poetry in his Vienna lectures of 1809-11, as Beardsley informs (Beardsley, 1982, p.245).

Romanticism, Beardsley explains, grows out of a longing in the human spirit for the infinite, and is thus related to religion. It often presupposes a schism in the psyche between the ideal and the real, and a tragic, unfulfilled yearning. It inaugurated changes in values, including aesthetic values, as well as a change in epistemology: an "emotional intuitionism", as Beardsley calls it, was now considered more important than the preceding rationalist and empiricist approaches to aesthetics. Thirdly, organic unity was an important concept to Romantics.

With romanticism a new freedom to enjoy feeling or emotion emerged, as against the enjoyment of reason, found in well-ordered form. Works of art could now be more poignant in
expressing human feeling, though the form was no longer carefully ordered, or perhaps, I would suggest, precisely because of this. I shall refer only to William Blake's words for a glimpse of the romantic spirit:

"One power alone makes a Poet: Imagination, the Divine Vision", (Annotations to Wordsworth's Poems)

and "This world of Imagination is an Eternity: it is the divine bosom into which we shall go after the death of the Vegetated body." (A Vision of the Last Judgement) (quoted by Beardsley, 1982, p.254).

Formalism

Formalism may be termed the "art for art's sake" movement, which most clearly recognized the work of art in its own right, intelligible and valuable as such. It was a resistance to dissolve the work of art into other phenomenon. It spans approximately the latter half of the nineteenth and early half of this century. Eduard Hanslick wrote about the objective qualities of works of art, which he held have nothing to do with the artist's inner world or any other phenomenon, in his work, "The Beautiful in Music" of 1854. He pointed out that in a piece of music, it is not the composer's heart-beats one hears, but the drum beats in the music itself. Clive Bell and Roger Fry in this century developed this view further. Bell introduced the term "significant form" in art, as meaning unified organization, with vital regional qualities, Beardsley explains (Beardsley, 1982, p.364).
A.C. Bradley strongly defended the autonomy of the work of art in an essay, "Poetry for Poetry's sake" of 1909. Certain phenomenologists, like Roman Ingarden used the phenomenological method of "bracketting" out irrelevances and paying full attention to a present experience, in understanding works of art, a method which acknowledged them as independent, autonomous entities.

Modern and Post-Modern Dialectics

For an understanding of the dialectical relation between modern and post-modern forms of culture, I refer here to John McGowan's "Post-modernism and Its critics" (1991).

Autonomy has been so central a characteristic of the culture of modernity, that McGowan makes it the defining characteristic of modernity. Modernity must legitimize itself by falling back upon itself, "without appeal to external verities, deities, authorities, or traditions". (McGowan, 1991, p.3). Though McGowan doesn't pursue this line of thought further, "falling back upon itself, without appeal to external verities", in fact points to "going by Reason". In fact, the dominance of rationality is a marked feature of modernity.

Again, when McGowan says, "Society, in Viconian fashion, is understood as the realm of human making. Autonomy names the new conviction that society must forge its own practices and grounds apart from any external determinants or influences", (McGowan, 1991, p.4) what is being implied is rationality. "Human making" implies "making on the basis of reason", and so does "Autonomy" in the next sentence.
Autonomy, McGowan acknowledges, is a major characteristic of humanism. It indicates the human capacity and will, and the mental competence of reason, required by humans to create their own individual lives, and their society. Post-modern thought has had a distinct antihumanist orientation and directs much of its criticism to its dominant feature of autonomy, arguing that this is something humanists aim at achieving but is an impossibility, and whenever achieved to some extent, has undesirable consequences.

Jurgen Habermas points to a process of fragmentation within modern societies, as McGowan explains. The economic, legal-administrative and the aesthetic become separate spheres within modernity, all opposed to the social whole or the "life world" in which human social interactions take place. People belonging to the aesthetic realm, or system, artists and intellectuals, protest against this fragmentation, or the domination of their lives by any one of these fragments.

There appears to have been an undercurrent of opposition to modernity almost from its beginnings, in the form of romanticist art movements. Romanticism attempts to create or recreate a world as an alternative to modernity, seeking sometimes to revive mythology and communicating it through the arts. Romantics do not reject autonomy, but distinguish its types, and uses. In fact, like other modernists they see in autonomy, certain possibilities of liberation.
McGowan includes postmodern thinkers in the category of romanticists, and holds postmodernism to represent a new vision of autonomy.

Early romantics were at pains to recreate social unity. William Blake, turning away from reason and Hegel taking it to be the legitimate foundation on which to build society, both were aiming at overcoming modernist fragmentation, McGowan explains.

It will be discerned that post-modern thought both opposes the universalism, the total-systematization, the classification within whole systems that science attempts, and hopes to restore a unity. Then, to my understanding, this must be a unity different from the one science attempts. It is perhaps a unity of life prior to science, which the latter interferes with or disrupts. The unity science creates is seen here as a dead, rigid structure.

The romantic is constantly discovering the things that modern society, in its exercise of autonomy, neglects, fails to perceive and destroys. Usually, what the romantic artist or intellectual values is a matter of indifference to modern society. The early romantic spoke of the "natural" as opposed to the modern. But postmodern thinkers are averse to naturalism, and attempt instead to refer to everything that modernity excludes.

It is evident that autonomy requires a dichotomous relation: an entity separates itself from something, from which it holds itself to be independent. The next step need not to be but often has been, a domination of the sphere from which the entity in
question separated itself or a suppression of, or an indifference, an inattention, towards the realm separated off by the now-autonomous entity.

The economic-commercial-technological spheres of human activity have been accorded pre-eminence by modernity. The world as constituted by these spheres is termed "real" by modernists. Post-modernists challenge this use of the term "real". They either extend its connotation as Hegel did, or insist that the irrational too is real, as Blake did. In either case, the effort is to deconstruct the boundaries of terms used by modernists.

McGowan distinguishes two streams of romantic thought, both having in common the aim of transforming modernity through aesthetics. The first stream is concerned with values, ideas, perceptions, consciousness, and may be termed spiritual. The second is the realist stream, more concerned with the everyday world, and direct political action.

We can see that autonomy has existed in world history as an attribute of modern society, and has generated, and therefore co-existed uneasily with, an oppositional current of thought as well as action, whether successful or not. This current, now termed postmodern, may be identified in an earlier period of history as romanticism.

Paradoxically, the romantic artist also stakes claims to autonomy. As I note elsewhere in this thesis, autonomy then may be said to have a positive and a negative form, a desirable and
undesirable one, and a tyrannical, aggressive and a non-aggressive form.

From the romantic point of view then, art may claim a benevolent autonomy for itself. Perhaps it is of critical importance that it does, for in this lies the hope of social change, the hope of all creative, constructive activity.

The artist insists that artistic vision is not answerable to the various, fragmentary agencies of modernity, which attempt to exercise control over culture, for instance the economic sphere, through advertising. But in his (relative) autonomy the artist is in danger of isolation. This isolation is not wholly of his own making, for modern society also tends to reject him, for his potential as well as his being an active agent of an alien vision. Although spiritual, the artist is also in conflict with orthodox religion.

The autonomy of the work of art means here an alienation, an absence of shared values and viewpoint, and perhaps an absence of any common ground where communication and mediation could take place. It holds the possibility of confrontation, in which modernity sees itself reflected, as in a mirror.

McGowan mentions the writers, George Eliot, Émile Zola, Flaubert and Tolstoy as people who have been at odds with the culture of modernity, with its emphasis on commercial values (McGowan, 1991, p.7). Artists and intellectuals have offered transformative visions as alternatives to modernity, over the last two hundred years or so. But later alternatives, in McGowan's view, have only been a reconstruction of earlier, that
is, nineteenth century romantic ones or radical political utopias. They have shown a decreasing conviction in the power of transformation residing in their visions.

The art that came into being in the last hundred years or so, in opposition to commercial or bourgeois, culture has been termed modernist. It has found an autonomy, which McGowan describes as "negative", which severs its links with traditions, social environment and eventually reality itself. By virtue of its autonomy it is also condemned to impotence, finding all routes to the realization of its dreams closed. Postmodern aesthetic thought and practice has been severely critical of such an impotent autonomy. To my understanding, it has therefore chosen a polemical engagement with the world, and been at pains to deconstruct the autonomy of fragments on both the sides of the divide.

The modernist/romantic aesthetic, opposed to modernity as a predominantly commercial culture, developed from the quest for autonomy into a quest for purity. Artists formulated a concept of art untainted by the pettiness and brutality of modern society. In this concept all ethical, social, historical and psychological links between art and society are severed, leaving the artist free of responsibility to society. It is a concept of art as completely autonomous.

Reacting against modern society's glorification of the utilitarian principle, artists came to believe that the completely useless object can alone be beautiful. One of the
well-known proponents of this view was Oscar Wilde. Hence was created the theory that "pure" works of art refer to nothing extrinsic to themselves and must remain outside the circulation of objects in a utilitarian culture. Allied to this concept of autonomy as purity is the concept of disinterested aesthetic enjoyment of form. This is a strong formalist position.

McGowan holds that this theory about art was a fabrication of modern American thought, to be specific, the New criticism, attempting to domesticate the revolt of artists. McGowan favours in its place a political theory of art, which interprets even abstract, formal or "pure" art as expressing, or holding the potential for creating a real socio-political world which would be an alternative to the modern one and would have the competence of replacing it. He holds the view that the great abstract painters, Kandinsky and Mondrian, did not see their work as merely embodying abstract forms but as spiritual and imaginative alternatives to the utilitarian world.

These artists believed that change would be effected through analogy. A beautiful, pure world would be created in reality, analogous to the beautiful, pure work of art. Wilde held that life imitates art, and the useless, autonomous work of art would, in the course of time, influence the world.

Later, such avant-garde art-movements as Dadaism and Surrealism questioned this position, that is, the formalist one. Thus, within the realm of art, even an art opposed to commercial, modern society, a disintegration of autonomy began. This may be
said to mark the beginning of post-modernism. Dada art hoped to shock and deconstruct the earlier modernist art, which had become socially irresponsible. Surrealism explored new realms, portraying a strange, frightening yet beautiful external world, as well as realms of the unconscious mind.

Postmodern thought proper, developing later, found even avant-garde art inadequate for socio-political transformation. All modernist art, by this new view, had attempted changes in the ideational, rather than the material world, and had failed, on both fronts.

McGowan clarifies that the modern artist, in opposition to modern society, also upholding autonomy of the self and the work of art, valued the will and had faith in it, for it was the manifestation of the autonomous self, and had the potential to make choices and act in the face of an undesirable culture.

McGowan distinguishes modernist, spiritual, romanticist opposition to modern society, from the realist-modernist one in aesthetics, in that the former was a rightist and conservative critique of capitalism while the latter a radical, leftist critique of the same phenomenon.

My own view is that, whether rightist or leftist, these critiques of capitalism were interrelated, and each was equally valuable. It is also my view that change in society cannot be effected only on the ideational or only on the material plane, but must be attempted on both levels. Therefore, I do not discredit these intellectual critiques of capitalism.
The romantic vision of a unified world came to be actualized in the camp they were opposing, in a disastrous development. A monolithic, commerce-dominated culture has spread to almost all parts of the world in the second half of the twentieth century. Capitalism has made unrestrained advances throughout the world. In such a situation, the autonomy of the modern artist is nothing but an illusion.

The postmodern intellectual (artist, writer or thinker) points to these realities. He or she holds that nothing can maintain autonomy or distance in the given historical situation.

Fragmentation and perpetual conflict have resulted from the disappearance of religious and philosophical moorings, or certainties. Rightist intellectuals attempted to preserve the foundations or the traditions of societies, while leftist intellectuals attacked these foundations. While they were locked in conflict, their common enemy, capitalism, maintained an ascendancy. This is an important and crucial observation on the part of McGowan, as I understand his position, for it points towards a need for intellectuals to find common ground, and to such a possibility. It points to the need to bridge the gap caused by autonomy between the ideational and the practical.

McGowan says further that the deterioration of foundational principles in modernist, capitalist society has led to a kind of unity, or rigid autonomy, in which differences within the whole are tolerated less and less. Capitalism survives without need of fundamental values or principles; it survives by providing a
framework for action, (which, to my understanding, is most often unscrupulous.)

It also survives through its introduction and maintenance of the fungibility or replaceability of individuals and services.

R. C. Pradhan writes that even for Ludwig Wittgenstein, who is widely understood to have held an analytical-linguistic approach to philosophy

"......... science and modernity stand for decadence in the true understanding of the existence of man and his world. ..... It is, of course, not the case that science cannot explain the large bulk of the empirical world, but from this it does not follow that science alone can reveal the truth. Wittgenstein is not against science as such, but he condemns the so-called scientism of our age." (Krishna, [Ed.], 1996, p.27).

Postmodern theories, which we consider in this thesis, have been at pains to develop new aesthetic, and political strategies to dismantle the monolithic structure of high capitalism which wrecks havoc with individual and social and life as well as the natural environment. However, it is with hesitation that I use the word "theory", for post-modern thinkers are aware of the historical fact that theories failed to liberate humanity, and attempt to steer clear of them. Thus, at the point when they may be grasped as a system of ideas, they attempt to deconstruct themselves.

McGowan is critical of postmodern strategies which have arisen out of the failure of aesthetic and intellectual autonomy.
He writes:

"In contrast to anarchistic heterogeneity, I argue that only political and ethical principles already inherent in the society can serve as curbs on the rule of fungibility and as safeguards of pluralism within society." (McGowan, 1991, p.15).

To my understanding, McGowan is right in pointing to already existing ethical and political and I would add, aesthetic values in societies as harbouring the potential for a beneficient, post-modern autonomy, in various spheres of human life. To still posit the possibility of a beneficient autonomy or a partial autonomy after a research of deconstructionist thought, is not necessarily to discredit the latter. To my understanding the wide range of post-modern discourse is invaluable for the explication of the many dimensions of the problem of autonomy and its possible solutions, not necessarily as well-defined formulae, but in fact, as precisely as avoiding the fixity of definitions, formulae and rigid systems.

In the post-colonial situation, as obtains in our country, the above explicated problems are compounded by tensions, both political and cultural, between an alien, once-ruling power and a once-colonized one. I have been unable to devote equal research to the history of art in our sub-continent as I have to that of European art. The former will require a full-scale, separate research. But I have attempted to take into account the relevant
tensions and problems from the period of the Bengal Renaissance onwards.

Along with my study of the work of an Indian painter of this century, I have included two plates of his works, at the end of this thesis.

The following is a brief outline of the problems relating to the autonomy of the work of art as they are addressed in each of the five chapters of this thesis.

Chapter-I is titled "The Defense of the Autonomy of Art: Formalism in the Twentieth Century". In this chapter, I have taken up for detailed discussion two philosophers, Suzanne Langer and Theodore Adorno, who represent the formalist viewpoint on the theme of autonomy in aesthetics. While Langer takes a purely objective view of art, Adorno explores the historicist view, while at the same time defending the autonomy of art.

Chapter-II, "From Formalism to Post-Modernism: An Overview", presents a survey of the movement of twentieth century thought, from the formalist position, through a number of viewpoints, to the one known as post-modernism.

Chapter-III titled, "A Clear Transition: Roland Barthes", shows as the title suggests, a transition from the structuralist position in literary criticism to the post-modern position, which acknowledges that works of art may have loose structures and rather than being autonomous may flow into other works and texts, and be related to other spheres of life.
Chapter-IV titled, "Further Assaults on Autonomy", examines the views of twentieth century literary theorists whose work contains implicit or explicit arguments against the autonomy of the work of art.

Chapter-V titled, "Indian Aesthetics: Two Twentieth Century Aestheticians and an Artist", examines the views of the Indian aestheticians, Ananda Coomaraswamy and Rabindranath Tagore, on the subject of the autonomy of art, and finally presents an essay on the work of an Indian artist, K.K. Hebbah.

The conclusion sums up various observations made throughout this research and presents my understanding of the concept of the autonomy of the work of art as a fulcrum of the dual relationship between the text and the context, as well as my view that while a form of partial autonomy of the work of art is necessary and defensible, recent deconstructionist thought provides a fecundity of insights into the problem taken up by this doctoral research.