ISSN: 1562-384X
Year XXIX / Issue 88. July-December 2025
DOI: 10.32870/sincronia.axxix.n88

Revista Sincronía

Biannual Journal of Philosophy, Literary Studies and Humanities

Philosophy

Between the possible and the real. Autonomous Art as a Utopian Horizon .

Entre lo posible y lo real. El arte autónomo como horizonte utópico.

 DOI: 10.32870/sincronia.axxix.n88.1.25b

Marco Giusto
University of Guadalajara
(MEXICO)
CE: ignacioesro@gmail.com
https://orcid.org/0009-0001-3214-6675

Received: 03/01/2025 **Revised**: 20/02/2025 **Approved**: 21/03/2025

Abstract.
This study explores the concept of autonomy in art and its critical function in the face of the mercantile logic of capitalism. The objective is to show how, through artistic autonomy, the hint of utopia emerges: a projection towards what-could-be, which opens a horizon of criticism and transformation. Based on the approaches of Kant, Adorno and Bloch, it is argued that the autonomy of art not only opposes commodification, but also configures a space of active resistance to the dominant power structures. This analysis draws on the tradition of critical theory, whose theoretical interaction between these thinkers allows us to understand how the autonomy of art drives a transformative vision of culture.

Key words: Autonomy. Art. Critical Theory. Utopia.

Resumen:
El presente estudio explora el concepto de autonomía en el arte y su función crítica frente a la lógica mercantil del capitalismo. El objetivo es mostrar cómo, a través de la autonomía artística, emerge el indicio de utopía: una proyección hacia lo-que-podría-ser, que abre un horizonte de crítica y transformación. A partir de los planteamientos de Kant, Adorno y Bloch, se argumenta que la autonomía del arte no solo se opone a la mercantilización, sino que también configura un espacio de resistencia activa frente a las estructuras de poder dominantes. Este análisis se sustenta en la tradición de la teoría crítica, cuya interacción teórica entre estos

How to cite this article (APA):

In paragraph (parenthetical citation):
(Giusto, 2025, p. __).

In reference list:
Giusto, M. (2025). Between the possible and the real. Autonomous art as utopian horizon. *Revista Sincronía*. *XXIX*(88). 3-18
DOI: 10.32870/sincronia.axxix.n88.1.25b

ISSN: 1562-384X
Year XXIX / Issue 88. July-December 2025
DOI: 10.32870/sincronia.axxix.n88
Revista Sincronía
Biannual Journal of Philosophy, Literary Studies and Humanities

pensadores permite comprender cómo la autonomía del arte impulsa una visión transformadora de la cultura.

Palabras clave: Autonomía. Arte. Teoría Crítica. Utopía.

The concept of *autonomy*, widely analyzed in the fields of politics and ethics, acquires a particular dimension in the thought of Immanuel Kant, especially in works such as *Critique of Practical Reason* (1975). This study examines how autonomy, beyond its ethical and political roots, becomes an essential tool for understanding the critical and transformative activity of art in the contemporary context, especially in the face of the consumerist logic of capitalism in today's culture. It is argued that the Kantian concept of *autonomy*, originally conceived as a moral principle, is linked to the notion of *utopia* in the artistic field. It is proposed that artistic autonomy not only resists cultural commodification but also constitutes a space of resistance and active criticism in the face of capitalist impositions. As an autonomous act, art is configured as a manifestation that offers an alternative to the established, pointing to a potential utopia: a possibility of transformation that, although unattainable in its totality, orients the critical imagination towards alternative futures.

In this sense, autonomous art can be understood as a *hint of utopia*, a transformative impulse that projects itself toward the absent, opening a horizon of critique and change. This perspective indicates how art, in its independence, offers a constant projection of what could be, without ever reaching a final resolution. Throughout the article, the interrelationships between the concepts of *autonomy* and *utopia* are explored in depth, tracing a philosophical journey from Kantian ethics to the interpretations of Theodor Adorno and Ernst Bloch. In particular, these concepts are addressed in works such as Aesthetic Theory (2004) by the former author, and in *The Hope Principle* (2004) by the latter, where the meaning of utopia is extensively developed. In this framework, we examine how these thinkers expand and redefine these concepts, giving them a critical function in the face of the cultural homogenization promoted by capitalism.

ISSN: 1562-384X
Year XXIX / Issue 88. July-December 2025
DOI: 10.32870/sincronia.axxix.n88
Revista Sincronía
Biannual Journal of Philosophy, Literary Studies and Humanities

The method combines a critical and comparative philosophical reading of key texts by Kant, Horkheimer, Adorno and Bloch. This approach integrates concepts of critical theory with an analysis of the social implications of art in the era of the culture industry. The theoretical framework is grounded in the Adornoian tradition, whose radical critique of capitalist society emphasizes the role of art as an alternative space in the face of mercantile logic.

The history of the term *autonomy*, particularly in philosophy, reveals that before Kant, this concept was largely confined to the political realm. With Kant, autonomy acquires a central role in ethical terminology, allowing it to be linked to the notion of *utopia* and thus establishing a key connection that will influence subsequent philosophical discussions. In Kant's philosophy, the autonomy of the will has its basis in *reason*, understood as the capacity to act independently of desire or the object of desire. For Kant, the will is independent of the empirical world: it is a *priori* faculty, guided by reason, which establishes in the subject itself its own law according to rational principles (Abbagnano, 1963).

In this way, Kant understands *autonomy* -in the ethical domain- as the capacity of the human being to self-regulate, that is, to establish and follow an internal moral law, guided by his rational principles. Etymologically, the term combines the Greek roots *autós* (by oneself) and *nómos* (law), referring to the faculty of an individual to give himself a regulation without depending on external influences or impositions. It is important to remember that the *will* is the fundamental motor of human action, and its functioning does not depend on external objects, but is based on an autonomous drive internal to the subject, as Kant explains in his *Critique of Practical Reason* (1975). Therefore, autonomy is a necessary condition for moral action oriented to the good (Gute), arising intrinsically from a will that is understood as free.[1]

[1] In order not to extend the present argument and to maintain the proportions of the article, I have chosen not to address in this context the essay *What is Enlightenment* (Kant, 2004), even though it offers an extremely interesting clue to the concept of *autonomy* in relation to the intellectual capacity of the human being. In the opening lines of the essay, Kant states: "Enlightenment means the abandonment by man of a minority of age whose responsibility is exclusively his own" (p. 83), and adds: "This minority of age means the inability to make use of his understanding without being guided by some other". These statements constitute a direct appeal to

ISSN: 1562-384X
Year XXIX / Issue 88. July-December 2025
DOI: 10.32870/sincronia.axxix.n88
Revista Sincronía
Biannual Journal of Philosophy, Literary Studies and Humanities

On the contrary, *heteronomy*, defined as the imposition of an external law, invalidates the morality of an action, since this comes from obedience to a norm to which the subject cannot oppose. In his *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant postulates the existence of God and the eternity of the soul as requisites for attaining the *Supreme Good* that leads to *happiness* (1975). Although Kant establishes a relation between the concepts of *good* and *happiness*, he does not establish a causal relation between these concepts, nor does he consider happiness as a reward for acting morally right.

In this context, the realization of the *Highest Good*, understood as full freedom, allows access to the noumenal world, a realm inaccessible to pure theoretical reason. Thus, the noumenal world, conceived as an *ou-topia* - a "non-place" -[2] is thinkable only in negative terms. In Kant's words "[...] the existence of noúmenos must be admitted in this merely negative sense [...]" (2018, p. 204).

Next, I propose a reinterpretation of the origin of the term utopia, understood as a combination of the roots *eu-* (good) and *-topos* (place), accompanied by the suffix *-ía*, comes from Latin. The root *eu-* denotes goodness and becomes *ev-* in Latin, from which it also derives *evangelium*, that is, "the good announcement". Similarly, the word *bonus* has its origin in the older term *duonus*, in which the consonantal stop *d* was replaced by the stop *b.* In turn, *duonus is* derived from the Latin word *duonus*. In turn, *duonus* goes back to the Sanskrit root *dve-*, which means "happy" and derives from *div-*, the meaning of which is associated with "brightness" or "splendor," giving rise to the concept of the divine.

In this sense, the Kantian place-the realm of the eternal soul-is presented as the realm in which the moral human being attains *happiness* and approaches the concept of *noúmeno*.

---

the autonomy that the human being acquires when he overcomes his minority of age. Kant stresses the importance of an understanding free from external influences, in which the subject reasons for himself. For his part, Adorno frequently takes up the notion of coming of age in his reflections when referring to the great art of the bourgeois era, pointing out that it is precisely this transit out of the minority of age -characterized by non-autonomy-, which makes possible the passage and becoming of art towards its autonomous condition.

[2] This interpretation remains faithful to the origin of the term, coined by Thomas More in 1516 in his work *Utopia*, where he describes a fictitious island that houses an ideal society based on equality, justice and rationality. Through this narrative, More questions the political and economic structures of Renaissance Europe.

ISSN: 1562-384X
Year XXIX / Issue 88. July-December 2025
DOI: 10.32870/sincronia.axxix.n88
Revista Sincronía
Biannual Journal of Philosophy, Literary Studies and Humanities

This place, understood as a *non-place* from the perspective of reason, also constitutes the realm of God, whose existence is postulated as a necessary condition for the realization of *happiness*. Thus, the two interpretations, far from being contradictory, are equivalent from the Kantian perspective.

Kant, in the second chapter of his *Critique of Practical Reason*, reflects on the term *bonus*, which in German can be expressed as *Gute* or *Wohl*. According to the philosopher "[w]*ohl* or *[ü]bel* [evil] always and only signify a relation to our state of *liking* or *disliking*," and he continues "[t]*he good* (*Gute*) or *evil (Böse)* however always signifies a relation to the *will*" (1975, p. 91). Although this topic will not be dealt with in depth here, it is worth noting that, in Kant, happiness, far from being the ultimate end of moral action, is rather an intrinsic compensation for acting morally. This happiness is somehow linked to the attainment of the supreme good (*das höchste Gut or summum Bonum*), but this good has no place in the actual realm of mortal life, unlike Ernest Bloch, who transfers this utopian horizon to a historical plane, as we will explore below.

Consequently, the need arises to postulate another world, as defined in Kantian postulates, which, however, is only accessible from this world. As Kant points out "[t]he moral law led [...] to the necessary completeness of the first and foremost part of the supreme good, *morality*, and, how that problem can only be completely solved in an eternity, to the postulate of *immortality*" (1975, p. 174).

In Kantian ethics, as Ernest Bloch points out, the field of action of the future is presented as an open horizon. What in Kant possesses a metaphysical valence, in Bloch acquires a dialectical character: utopia is not conceived as a transcendental end, but as a process intrinsically linked to the transformation of material and social reality (Rampini, 2018). Thus, two planes are distinguished: one corresponds to what is found in the Kantian postulates, which establishes a normative framework for moral action; and the other refers to the present, in which the infinite tendency towards morality is constantly on its way. This present, although not fully realized, contains within itself the power of its own realization. In this sense, Kant points out that "pure reason, if accompanied by the physical faculty

ISSN: 1562-384X
Year XXIX / Issue 88. July-December 2025
DOI: 10.32870/sincronia.axxix.n88
Revista Sincronía
Biannual Journal of Philosophy, Literary Studies and Humanities

adequate to it, would produce the supreme good [...]" (1975, p. 68). Thus, the present, although marked by human limitations, harbors within itself the possibility of attaining the supreme good, which is projected as a task towards the future, in a continuous process of ethical realization.

As previously mentioned, for Kant, truly moral action originates in pure will, understood as a rational will. This moral action, not depending on external incentives, arises because of the autonomous exercise of reason. In this sense, the reason which Kant conceives as essentially human property, is the ultimate cause of moral action. Freedom, then, constitutes the foundation of such action, since only through freedom is the human being capable of acting in accordance with rational and universal principles, instead of yielding to heteronomous or contingent impulses.

Like Kant, Aristotle considered that beings capable of acting rationally, by moderating their irrational desires, are equally autonomous. For him, autonomy is linked to the capacity to exercise reason to dominate the passions and guide moral action, understood as a balance between extremes. Therefore, true freedom and morality arise from the conscious and *rational* exercise of the will, which allows individuals to orient themselves towards the good. In short, the above suggests that moral actions must be reasonable, since they derive from an autonomous will and are based on rational principles that seek the good. This approach raises the central question: what, then, do we mean by reasonable in the context of moral action?

Horkheimer, in *Critique of Instrumental Reason* (1973), points out that the "common man," if asked for an answer, would probably associate the reasonable with the useful, arguing that rational persons should identify what is beneficial or advantageous to them (pp. 9-10). According to Horkheimer there are two types of reason: a *subjective* one, which, close to the perception of the average man, is oriented towards the relationship between ends and means, that is, the adequacy of the methods used to achieve the objectives; and an *objective* one, which hierarchically organizes living beings and objects, subordinating individual reasons to their capacity to harmonize with the whole, a conception to which the

ISSN: 1562-384X
Year XXIX / Issue 88. July-December 2025
DOI: 10.32870/sincronia.axxix.n88
Revista Sincronía
Biannual Journal of Philosophy, Literary Studies and Humanities

great philosophers of the past have recourse (pp. 9-10). In the modern world, however, the ability to formulate an objective truth understood as a force beneficial to the whole has disappeared, especially in Western societies. In its place, reason has been reduced to a subjective reality, often marked by egoism. In this context, the vacuum left by the loss of objectivity has been opportunistically filled by public opinion acting as objectifying forces.

Up to this point, we have analyzed how autonomy is constituted as the fundamental condition for generating the good, and how this good, specifically the Kantian *Highest Good*, is linked to the concept of not-yet-being, that is, to the realm of the utopian.

The concept of *autonomy*, when transferred to the sphere of art, allows us to reconfigure the relationship between the terms *autonomy* and *utopia* from an aesthetic perspective. In this context, autonomy in art refers not only to freedom of creation, but also to the capacity to represent non-concrete realities, that is, possible worlds that, although they do not exist in the present, are projected into the future. Thus, art, as autonomous, becomes a space where creative freedom and utopian aspiration converge.

During the process of rationalization of Western society, humanity, by moving away from the search for an objective reason, lost the capacity to orient its action towards collective well-being. This transformation, promoted by capitalist societies, consolidated an instrumental reason that prioritizes the mastery of nature and technical efficiency over any humanistic purpose, as analyzed by Adorno and Horkheimer in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (2018). This instrumental logic, by reducing everything to its economic functionality, not only affects the relationship between humans and nature, but also profoundly transforms the place of art in society. Under this dynamic, the art, previously considered a means of expression and critical reflection, is subsumed by the logic of the market, compromising its autonomy and critical capacity. It is here where the resistance of autonomous art becomes relevant, opposing capitalist co-optation by preserving a space for imagination and criticism in the face of utilitarian impositions. This paradigm shift confronted one of the most relevant meanings of happiness for the ancients: access to general knowledge, considered until a few decades ago as a positive value. In contemporary society,

ISSN: 1562-384X
Year XXIX / Issue 88. July-December 2025
DOI: 10.32870/sincronia.axxix.n88
Revista Sincronía
Biannual Journal of Philosophy, Literary Studies and Humanities

however, the sphere of knowledge has fragmented: on the one hand, technical and utilitarian knowledge, valued for its functionality; and on the other, knowledge detached from utility, which could now be seen as a lewd and even immoral attitude due to its lack of productivity. Culture, in general terms, finds a restricted space in this sphere, where everything is subjected to the judgment of the efficiency of the process, in function of the fulfillment of the proposed ends, whose values are calculated on a utilitarian basis.

Although Adorno and Horkheimer's critique of modernity, which denounces the limits of instrumental reason, continues to have a significant resonance, authors such as Jürgen Habermas have sought to overcome this pessimism. Habermas proposes his theory of communicative action as an alternative that orients reason towards emancipatory ends, thus overcoming the obscurantism inherent in the negative vision of modernity (Sánchez Félix, 2024).

In the field of art, especially in music, there is evidence of a growing separation between art and society. Before the 19th century, art was an integral part of social life, playing a role directly linked to the community. However, over the course of that century, this relationship began to transform. Although some bourgeois families continued to cultivate art out of passion and resourcefulness, it began to be increasingly influenced by the production and consumption processes of capitalist society (Adorno, 2011). With the elimination of this sphere, which although mostly private fulfilled an immediate social function, music (and art in general) became subject to the logic imposed by the production process of the capitalist system. This scenario leads to the commodification of artistic results, with commodification being the intermediary between the system of production and the system of distribution and ultimately the consumption of the artistic object. By entering this sphere, music is objectified and subjected to the same process of rationalization that characterizes the production of other commodities. In *On the Social Situation of Music*,[3] Adorno points out that "[a]t present, however, rationalized music is a victim of the same dangers as rationalized society" (p. 763). According to the German philosopher, music that

[3] Own translation. Original title: *Zur gesellschaftlichen lage der musik*

ISSN: 1562-384X
Year XXIX / Issue 88. July-December 2025
DOI: 10.32870/sincronia.axxix.n88
Revista Sincronía
Biannual Journal of Philosophy, Literary Studies and Humanities

escapes the process of commodification loses its "social responsibility" (p. 763). Moreover, the lack of awareness of the social and economic dimensions of the music sector, particularly on the part of composers, has given rise to self-blame regarding the distance that separates them from society; however, it is rarely recognized that it is society itself, in debt to culture, that should recognize the profound changes that *great art* proposes. This is the only way to gain access to autonomous art, which is often presented as inaccessible or detached from the conventional processes of production and consumption; or, at least, this could be an alternative.

In *Philosophy of the New Music*, Adorno states that "[s]ince the middle of the nineteenth century great music has been completely divorced from consumption" (2003, p. 17); although it is also true that autonomous art cannot completely escape the influence of capitalism. This, however, acts as a form of resistance, manifesting itself in art's ability to maintain a critical space outside the logic of the market. Consequently, *great music*, being autonomous from the norms of cultural consumption, develops antagonistic characteristics that describe the incongruities of capitalist society. However, as autonomous, it divorces itself from society, since it ceases to fulfill a function directly linked to it, so as not to be mediated by the laws of the cultural industry. Its social function, should it possess one, would be limited to that of any other commodity. In this sense, Max Paddison, interpreting Adorno, points out that:

> [...] autonomous music, from the beginning of the bourgeois epoch, was isolated from society [...]. Its autonomy has allowed music to develop separately from society, reflecting its antagonism, and at the same time to diverge from it, developing an independent dynamic of its own[4] (Paddison, 1993, p. 98).

[4] "Yet autonomous music, since the beginning of the bourgeois period, has been cut off and separated from society [...]. Its autonomy has allowed music to develop parallel to society, mirroring its antagonisms, and at the same time to diverge from it, developing an independent dynamic of its own" (Author's translation).

ISSN: 1562-384X
Year XXIX / Issue 88. July-December 2025
DOI: 10.32870/sincronia.axxix.n88
Revista Sincronía
Biannual Journal of Philosophy, Literary Studies and Humanities

Paddison adds: "[a]s a result of its autonomous status, music no longer possesses a function in society or serves direct (i.e. immediate) needs"[5] (p. 93).

Previously, the origins of the separation between serious art and society were explored, taking up Adorno's argument about the distinction between musical production, the musician and the limited private sphere of the patron. In this context, it is pertinent to reflect on the subject in question: the artist. How can one understand the role of the artist as an intruder in a capitalist world, where the cultural industry seems to have integrated and reconciled artistic production with the logic of commodification? In this regard, Jacques Attali offers an enlightening answer, as can be seen in the following excerpt:

> Thus, the money-creating productive workers are the performers, as well as those who have produced the instruments and the scores. The composer, for his part, when he receives royalties on the work sold and performed, remains strangely external to the wealth he implies because, as an independent artisan, he is outside the capitalist mode of production. Therefore, good sense leads us to recognize that he participates in the production of wealth, indirectly,[6] [...] for this very reason, the composer's work is not, in itself, productive work, a creator of commercial wealth. He is thus outside capitalism, at the origin of its expansion, unless he is also a wage-earner who sells his labor to the capitalists (as is sometimes the case with film musicians,). In general, remunerated with a part of the surplus value obtained from the sale of the commercial object (score) and its use (the performance), he is reproduced in each copy and, in each performance, thanks to copyright legislation. Its remuneration is then assimilated to an income. [...] This situation is not innocent. It is even essential to understand the originality of music, as well as its prophetic character in economic imitations (1995, pp. 62-63).

[5] "As a result of its autonomy status, music no longer has a direct function in society, nor does it serve direct (i.e. unmediated) needs" (Author's translation).

[6] Attali comments that it participates indirectly in two ways: first, insofar as its work will be performed in a publishing house, through salaried employees who will produce a commercial product, i.e. the score, or in a second moment the disc; second, when the score will be bought and performed by salaried employees of a philharmonic orchestra or with a similar profile.

ISSN: 1562-384X
Year XXIX / Issue 88. July-December 2025
DOI: 10.32870/sincronia.axxix.n88
Revista Sincronía
Biannual Journal of Philosophy, Literary Studies and Humanities

Thus, the artist is assigned a role situated on the margins of productive society; by definition, he or she is an antagonistic subject within the system. In this context, great music - that which without isolating itself into a dangerous, weak and ahistorical ideal of *art for art's sake* - plays a role in the dialectic with society, even if this role is defined negatively. "That art is, on the one hand, a product of the social work of the spirit, a *social fait*, becomes explicit when art is boring" (Adorno, 2004, p. 298), Adorno notes, and continues:

> [...] but art is social neither only because of the mode of its production [...] nor because of the origin of its social content. Rather, art becomes social by its counterposition to society, and this position it does not adopt until it is autonomous (2004, p. 298).

The negation of bourgeois society by autonomous art is manifested in the work itself, which, by refusing to become a commodity, declares itself socially non-functional, that is, devoid of utility; "the social in art is its immanent movement against society, not its overt taking of a position" (p. 300). Thus, the essential social relation of art is reflected in its contents, which, although common to society, do not derive from its belonging to it, but from its capacity to oppose it. Art that conforms to society becomes commodified art, a fetish that, although superficially art, denies it in its essence.

So far, *autonomy* has been defined as the capacity of an agent to establish its own laws. In art, this autonomy is related to its resistance to the heteronomous laws of society. However, art also possesses an immanent social content. The true content of a work of art lies in the balance between not being an end in itself - an *art for art's sake* - and not becoming a commodity at the service of commercial ends. What is crucial at this point is to understand that: (1) autonomy makes it possible to define the antagonistic character of art; (2) by virtue of its antagonistic nature, art is not completely dissociated from the world, since its antagonism towards society constitutes a necessary condition for its existence; and (3) that art, by being antagonistic, rejects a real and existing condition, establishing through its presence, the possibility of an alternative condition.

ISSN: 1562-384X
Year XXIX / Issue 88. July-December 2025
DOI: 10.32870/sincronia.axxix.n88
Revista Sincronía
Biannual Journal of Philosophy, Literary Studies and Humanities

The autonomy of art does not imply a total rupture with society, but a constant antagonistic attitude that opens space for the possible. This is linked to Adorno's reflection on the new and utopia:

> The new is the longing for the new, but hardly the new itself: this is what everything new suffers from. What feels itself to be utopia is something negative in the face of the existing, and is subject to the existing. Of today's antinomies, central is the one that art must be and wants to be utopia, and all the more decidedly the more the real functional nexus hinders utopia; but that it must not be utopia if it does not want to betray utopia in appearance and consolation. If the utopia of art were fulfilled, the temporary end of art would have come (p. 50).

It follows from the above that, if the new is conceived only as a goal which, when achieved, loses its essential character, then the movement towards the new cannot be considered an impulse towards a final station. In this sense, the negative stance of autonomous art implies the remembrance of something that transcends the existing, something that belongs neither to this world nor to art itself. If reached, that *something* would represent the end of art as a human phenomenon, for its raison d'être lies precisely in its capacity to transcend the given.

In philosophical terms, this conception of art as an unfinished process is related to the notion of the *incomplete* or the *unfinished* in the history of philosophy, where the past is not a closed fact, but remains open to new interpretations and transformations. Like history for Benjamin (2008),[7] autonomous art does not pursue a definitive end; rather, it is understood as a dynamic process that connects the given with the to come, always in a state of potentiality. Thus, autonomous art represents, more than an achieved destiny, a dialectic between the given and the to come, between the existent and the possible.

In this context, Adorno, with a pessimistic tinge regarding the future of art, approaches the position of Ernest Bloch, who conceives utopia as a mobilizing force towards

[7] Benjamin argues that the unfinished reflects the constant openness of history, challenging the conception of a closed past and highlighting its transformative potential: "[h]istoricism raises the 'eternal' image of the past; the historical materialist a unique experience of it that stands in its uniqueness" (2008, p. 53).

ISSN: 1562-384X
Year XXIX / Issue 88. July-December 2025
DOI: 10.32870/sincronia.axxix.n88
Revista Sincronía
Biannual Journal of Philosophy, Literary Studies and Humanities

a better world, a positive utopia that drives human beings towards its realization. According to Bloch, art has the particularity of generating positive utopias. In *The Hope Principle* he writes: "[and] thus we are shown that the whole of art is full of manifestations driven toward symbols of perfection, toward an essential utopian end" (2004, p. 38); furthermore, he points out that "[t]he daydream, as a preliminary stage of art, tends, therefore, all the more clearly toward the perfection of the world" (p. 126).

Ontologically, Bloch identifies this utopia with *not-yet-being*, a state of potentiality in becoming that points to a reality not yet present. The positive function of utopia resides in its capacity to project the absent as something momentary, but with a transforming power towards the future. Utopia, far from constituting a static or idealistic concept, is presented in Bloch's work as a critical force. In this sense, the dynamics of *not-yet-being* can be interpreted as analogous to the Kantian will, which, in its practical dimension, guides human action toward that which has not yet been achieved.

Returning to Adorno's reflection and, in conclusion, an interpretation of the term *utopia* is proposed. First, it is redefined as a *hint of utopia*; this hint, inherent in art and ought to be, is by nature incomplete, since art does not exhaust its existence. Art acts as a *hint* because, instead of revealing a full utopian reality, it suggests the possibility of another world. In Blochian terms, art communicates that *another world is possible*, opening the door to the hope of the net unrealized. As mentioned above, this concept of *utopia* should not be understood as an unattainable ideal, but as a horizon toward which art points without ever fully reaching it. Its presence is not a *happy place*, but its *hint*: utopia is precisely this *happy place*, art the promise of its possibility.

It has been shown that *great art* is characterized by its autonomy, but it has also been emphasized that this does not imply art for art's sake. Great art is, instead, in a delicate balance between *non-commerciality* and *non-pure-abstraction*; it is not reduced to either of these two conditions but is configured in a transcendental field where autonomy does not mean an absolute separation from the social world, nor a submission to mercantile logic. The negation of this autonomy is evidenced in the cultural industry, characteristic of the capitalist

ISSN: 1562-384X
Year XXIX / Issue 88. July-December 2025
DOI: 10.32870/sincronia.axxix.n88
Revista Sincronía
Biannual Journal of Philosophy, Literary Studies and Humanities

system, where art dwells only as a temporary resident. Despite this resistance, the capitalist system of production and reproduction, in its eagerness to perpetuate itself, tends to absorb everything, transforming it into merchandise or into an object functional to the market.

In this contrast -which is presented as an aporia-,[8] the relationship between art and the capitalist world is configured as an indissoluble contradiction. However, from this aporia emerges an element of overcoming, which should not be interpreted as reconciliation, since it does not point to a positive reality. Instead, it emerges precisely from the contradiction itself. Thus, the overcoming that emanates from autonomous art, by refusing to be absorbed by the culture industry, is, of course, utopia, or more precisely, its *hint*: the promise of something that is not yet, the *not-yet-being* contained in being. It is a future that only *great art* can point to but not realize. Nevertheless, its power incites to action, that is, to change. Art points to utopia as a horizon: an ongoing vision that drives transformation.

Throughout the analysis, it has been highlighted how the autonomy of art functions as a space of critical resistance to the mercantilist dynamics of capitalism. Far from implying an absolute disconnection with society, this autonomy is configured as a constant dialogue, in which art denounces and confronts the contradictions inherent to the capitalist system. Like Kantian ethics, autonomous art does not seek reward; it is oriented towards a reality that is unattainable. In this way, art is configured as a space of critique and transformation, projecting a utopia that is not an idealized end, but a force that points to the absent and opens a horizon toward the *not-yet-realized*. In line with the reflections of Adorno and Bloch, this utopia neither consoles nor offers definitive solutions, but incites action and critique, guiding the imagination toward a transformative future.

Autonomous art thus presents itself as a hint of utopia, pointing to the possibility of change that, although uncertain, stands as a critical force against established social structures. The culture industry, by integrating art into the logic of capitalist consumption, reinforces its commodification, generating a contradiction inherent to the system. While

[8] From the Greek *a-porós*, "without exit" or "without passage". A statement that contains a logical difficulty that seems unsolvable, impracticable.

ISSN: 1562-384X
Year XXIX / Issue 88. July-December 2025
DOI: 10.32870/sincronia.axxix.n88
Revista Sincronía
Biannual Journal of Philosophy, Literary Studies and Humanities

capitalist culture turns art into merchandise, autonomous art resists this co-optation, acting as a critical space that points out this contradiction without offering easy reconciliations. Autonomous art maintains its capacity to project transformative alternatives, without definitively resolving the social contradictions inherent to the system.

Finally, this study proposes new lines of research on the role of autonomous art in the context of global cultural homogenization. Likewise, it is part of the growing demand for reflection on critical theory in Mexico, a resurgent interest in the last three decades, as Karla Sánchez Félix (2024) points out, especially towards the approaches of Karl Marx and other thinkers of this tradition. In an increasingly technified and controlled world, where superficial consumption predominates, autonomous art remains one of the few spaces capable of offering genuine alternatives. Far from conforming to the quick solutions imposed by the system, autonomous art maintains a critical distance, challenging the dominant logics and projecting a transforming horizon. Although art does not offer definitive solutions, its capacity to generate critical tensions and keep alive the possibility for change makes it a vital resource in the struggle for a more transformative future less conditioned by the dynamics of consumption and control.

References

Abbagnano, N. (1963). *Dictionary of philosophy*. FCE.

Adorno, T. W. (2003). *Philosophy of the new music*. Akal.

Adorno, T. W. (2004). *Aesthetic theory*. Akal.

Adorno, T. W. (2011). The social situation of music. In *Collected works (*Vol. 18, Musical writings V). Akal.

Adorno, T. W., & Horkheimer, M. (2018). *The dialectic of enlightenment*. Trotta.

Attali, J. (1995). *Noises: Essay on the political economy of music*. Siglo XXI.

Benjamin, W. (2008). *Theses on history and other fragments*. Ediciones Itaca.

Bloch, E. (2004). *The principle of hope*. Vol. 1. Trotta.

Horkheimer, M. (1973). *Critique of instrumental reason*. Editorial Sur.

Kant, I. (1975). *Critique of practical reason*. Austral.

ISSN: 1562-384X
Year XXIX / Issue 88. July-December 2025
DOI: 10.32870/sincronia.axxix.n88
Revista Sincronía
Biannual Journal of Philosophy, Literary Studies and Humanities

Kant, I. (2018). *Critique of pure reason*. Porrúa.

Kant, I. (2004). *What is the Enlightenment? And other writings on ethics, politics and philosophy of history*. Alianza.

Paddison, M. (1993). *Adorno's Aesthetics of Music*. Cambridge University Press.

Rampini, F. (2018). *Musica e Utopia. Ernest Bloch e la Filosofia della Musica*. Mimesis.

Sánchez, K. (2024). Bolívar Echeverría's critique of capitalist modernity. Actualidad de la teoría crítica. *Protrepsis*. *13*(26). 91-106. http://protrepsis.cucsh.udg.mx/index.php/prot/article/view/449/604