

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The purpose of this chapter is to develop a theoretical background with which to help answer the research questions: To what extent and in what ways do the agents in the network of art production enable or confine art in Thailand? And what projections of cultural identity predominate in Thai art in the 1990s? It begins by introducing definitions of Culture and theories of cultural reproduction are explored with respect to ideas of dominant culture and class, and material and symbolic reproduction. The World-systems theories are presented, as they address the importance of the international arena in analyzing elements of society in individual countries. Theory and analysis of institutions of art patronage in the West as cultural experience is considered as a reference point for later analysis of the Thai situation. Commoditisation theory is outlined as a basis for viewing art as a cultural product situated within political, economic and social spheres. This leads to and investigation of the concepts of aesthetics, taste and value.

Cultural Reproduction

In discussing theories of cultural reproduction, definitions of 'Culture' must first be considered. A general dictionary definition of culture is given as follows:

1. *the ideas, customs, and art produced or shared by a particular society*
2. *a particular civilization at a particular period*
3. *activity or interest in the arts in general*

"Cultured" is regarded as: "showing or having good taste, manners, and education" (Collins English Dictionary, 1991). **Culture** has also been defined as: '...inherited artefacts, goods, technical process, ideas, habits and values'. (B. Malinowski, A Scientific Theory of Culture, 1944: 17). Further definitions to be considered include viewing **Culture** as:

'. . . the component of accumulated resources, immaterial as well as material, which a people inherit, employ, transmute, add to and transmit; it is all learned behaviour which has been socially acquired.'

(R. Firth, Elements of Social Organisation, 1971: 27).

Alternatively, it is seen as:

'. . . a context-dependent semiotic system i.e. implies a relationship with the accumulated shared symbols representative of and significant within a particular community. It is

not simply a residue, but is in progress; it processes and reveals and it structures and contains.'

(C. Jenks, Cultural Reproduction, 1993: 5). For the purposes of this thesis, a definition of culture is based on the above definitions. It emphasises the learned/inherited/ communicated aspects and resources (such as ideas, values, habits and capital) and the dynamic process of cultural production which creates and occurs within social structures. Chapter 4 deals with the specific and varying views of Thai culture in more depth.

Jenks' compilation of essays explores the theme of ideology and structural determinancy in cultural reproduction theory, explaining how all sociological explanations begin with some concept of structure (ultimately independent of will - including economic, political, moral, physical), process (the dynamic nature of culture and cultural reproduction) and social action (not in isolation but depends on context, therefore action relates to social structure). So it seems sociology has an ambivalent relationship with centrality and subjectivity (selves become movements within culture) and it appears to generate a causal chain, a circular explanation. Jenks suggests the patterning of these is not descriptive but metaphoric, seeing cultural signs or conventions as metaphors. The choice of metaphor and choice through metaphor expresses interests, intentions and moral relation to the world; reveals our vision and our traditions (Jenks, 1993: 3).

Cultural reproduction may be viewed in the dichotomies of 'copying' or 'generative': i.e. 'copying' as in repeating thereby affirming the status quo, or 'generative' which offers change and new combinations. This second approach is supported by the Durkheimian tradition which views reproduction with optimism and positivism, as a necessity of conformity through change, a realisation of 'collective consciousness.' Raymond Williams relates these views to other binary combinations in social theory such as continuity and change, consensus and conflict, structure and agency, and determinism and freewill, and notes that the space between the two pairs is seen as infinitely reproductive and the source of post modern theories. We may consider further the classical Marxist dichotomy between essence (continuity) and appearance (change). Although Marxist theory projects the possibility of freedom and authenticity as intellectual principles, the vision is one of pessimism, and as an economic and political policy, it has proven to produce structures which manifest oppression and despair. In his controversial work Das Kapital, Marx argues that wages produce a distorted and distorting image of the relationship between people in the marketplace. One group, the owners of means of production, offers wages to the working group in return for the exercise of its labour - labour is then treated as if it were like any other commodity; it is objective and can be assigned an exchange value. But labour is considered unlike any other commodity, it is subjective, part of being a human being, and generates a value in excess of its original

immobilised state - called 'labour power'. Thus despite the 'appearance' of wages as fair exchange for the consumption of labour, what is actually being appropriated is 'labour power' which is generating a 'surplus value' or profit for its consumer. The 'essence' of the wages relation is then considered 'exploitation' which is always reproduced. This Marxist example describes how the components of a market culture are reproduced such that the real relations that benefit the old order remain intact and hidden. The linking concept for this discrepancy between appearance and essence is ideology, a both conscious and unconscious process.

Marxist Adolfo Sanchez Vazquez projects that even artistic work comes under the general law of capitalist production and becomes regarded as merchandise. Many artists will work as wage labourers, while the rest resort to the art market to sell work. The latter will be 'freer' to pursue their own creative inclination but the artist is subject to the tastes, preferences, ideas and aesthetic notions of those who influence the market. This often affects the content as well as the form of a work of art, thus placing limitations on the artist, stifling creative potential and individuality. This reflects the Marxist claim that artistic work loses its quality as free, creative activity under capitalism (Vasquez, 1979). The Marxist emphasis on art-as-ideology locates the painter in social and political environment, but there is a lack of interest in institutional factors involved in the production of art, in the actual processes through which art and its ideology are constructed (i.e.

processes and institutions.) Ideological forms are not only ideas, cultural values and religious beliefs, but also their embodiment in cultural institutions (schools, art galleries, legal systems, political parties) and in cultural artifacts (paintings).

Another source of cultural reproduction theory is ethnomethodology which sees reproduction as necessary, intentional and integrative - a constant reaffirmation of collective life, following the spirit of Durkheim's theory of 'binding morality' which projects reproduction as a form of solidarity in the face of change. Structuralism combines these previous approaches using terms of 'depth' and 'surface' instead of 'essence' and 'appearance'. Levi-Strauss likens the formation of cultural phenomenon in terms of excavation. That elements of culture, as we experience them, are the surface appearance or manifestations of underlying patterns at a deeper level - both within time and through time (Jenks, 1993: 9). In this structural light, Saussure projects that we come to know the structures that comprise a culture as if they were a language. He sees items of vocabulary as symbols, and suggests that language is the continuous and habitual act of signification, creating an arbitrary relation between the signifier and the signified. In this study, we are considering the language and symbolism of art as a cultural form.

The phenomenon of reproduction can be seen as both material and symbolic; as both a mode of production and a mode of domination. By enabling a work of art to physically reach the masses, reproduction contains

democratic potential, and can lead to new aesthetic possibilities due to the form of reversibility which evolves where works of art are designed for reproducibility. In Walter Benjamin's view, this form of reproduction has destroyed the authority of art; causing the issue of exclusivity to give way to the issue of authenticity. Benjamin refers to the 'aura' of an authentic original work and suggests that this 'aura' is withered by being reproducible i.e. technological advances produce a fundamental change in the aesthetic quality of the work of art and a new status of the 'original'. He suggests that this leads to an alternative form of authority of the expert i.e. prestige and status are attached to those able to recognise the authentic, and there is competition and collaboration between experts (Benjamin, 1973: 237). Advancement of technological options such as reproduction, has also radically affected the position of the artist as producer, and Raymond Williams notes that the changes correspond to the stages of overlap and transition between patronal and market relations, dealt with in the next section (Williams, 1981: 98).

In Distinction, Pierre Bourdieu discusses class distinction, authority and power in capitalist societies, as evident in aspects of education and art. Looking from a structural rather than an ideological level, Bourdieu begins with an analysis of the education system and the part that its institutions play in the constitution and transmission of what counts as legitimate knowledge and forms of communication. He links the symbolic order and

the state of the social structure, considering the class-based variety of aesthetic preferences in France. From his findings that teachers in higher education prefer the music of "The Well-Tempered Clavier" to "The Blue Danube", whereas labourers prefer the latter, Bourdieu projects that taste is related to the field of education and inherited cultural capital. Bourdieu suggests that the dominant class does not dominate overtly, but rather as the beneficiary of economic, social and symbolic power; that power is embodied in economic and cultural capital and society's institutions, and is reproduced by these institutions and practices. Certain members of society, by virtue of their location within the class system, are the 'natural' inheritors of cultural capital. Using the term 'habitus' to suggest background or membership of a community and to symbolise the particular group (e.g. certain ways of speech, style etc.), Bourdieu suggests the habitus of the dominant group carries with it the self-structuring sense of good taste, appropriate style, and expressiveness. Forms and patterns of communication are found to reflect and perpetuate particular communities. Symbolic systems are seen to reinforce class relation, and as societies struggle to maximise interests, reproduction is used a means to legitimise power through the creation of an economy of taste. Bourdieu refers to the historical safety of tradition and we may extend this to include the safe taste of traditional art. This raises the question of the cultural differences in the usage of such terms as 'taste' and how the Thai usage compares with the French.

Including all semiotic systems within his definition of culture, Bourdieu suggests education and socialisation function to transmit cultural capital in the form of particular valued signs and the styles of their presentations. Art is seen as a marker and reinforcer of class relations due to the rejection of use value; some kind of superiority is exacted through its distance from everyday material reality and it is governed by the logic of distinction. To be appropriated, it requires an aesthetic disposition and specific competences i.e. time is needed (to invest in education) and high levels of consumption time are required (Bourdieu, 1986).

The concept of 'status' fosters the questionable categories of 'levels' or boundaries between 'high' and 'low' (in art or social groups) and these divisions should be regarded as historically created and sustained. Jenks suggests that particular status groups who confer cultural legitimacy, like teachers and critics, conduct their professional roles and distribute merit with reference to an 'absolute index of intrinsic worth' (Jenks, 1993: 14). As a strategy of investment, cultural capital can be converted (reproduced) into economic capital through certification (at an educational institution), which is valuable in the (labour) market and convertible into economic capital. The benefits go to those who know how to work the patronage system and how to use the inherited privileges of cultural capital.

World Systems

Combining neo-Marxist thought with concepts developed by the French Annales school, World-systems theories such as Immanuel Wallerstein's focus on the economic and political processes of the world economy, and project how these may extend into the social and cultural domains. As a reaction to the Marxist analysis of culture which sees culture simply as a reflection of economic factors, there is a tendency to ignore economic determinants altogether, in a desire to avoid such economic reductionism. However, economic analysis is considered relevant in studies such as this which involve modern capitalist cultural organisations.

In her research on the development of Thai music, Kate Bond considers World-systems theories and their use in discussing the historical macro-developments in Thailand's political-economy, summarising that the economic analysis addresses the division of labour, capital accumulation and class structure, while the political analysis addresses social movements, state formations, state systems and ethnic groupings. The terms 'core', 'periphery', 'semi-periphery' are used by Wallerstein to describe the world-economy's division of labour, and Bond suggests that Thailand's position is ambiguous; while not directly and officially colonised at the end of the nineteenth century, it played a subordinate role to hegemonic powers in order to maintain independent status. In economic terms, Thailand is the 'periphery' since core powers have and continue to take advantage of Thai raw materials and labour. In political terms Thailand can be seen as 'semi-periphery' since

sovereignty has been maintained (Bond, 1987). This 'core-periphery' paradigm may also be used to explain the central focus on Bangkok throughout Thailand's development.

Wallerstein's world-systems theory also outlines the trends of the world-economic system including commodisation and nationalism, and relates these to the groups which he sees as having a deep-seated connection to the world-economy - class, status groups and the state.

In economic expansion, higher status groups extend beyond the economic realm, bettering their position through cultural forms of legitimation (Wallerstein 1984: 20).

Wallerstein projects that classes exist on the basis of their role in the division of labour, but also as a cultural identity, conscious of the class itself and of the need to maintain its interests. The state defines classes, status/ethnic groups and households, which in turn create, shape and transform the state. It holds and maintains power with wealth and ideology. The culture of class and status groups includes tastes, which though not reducible to, reflect economic and ideological interests (Wallerstein, 1984).

We are therefore interested to examine the development of these groups in Thailand, their interaction with art, and the role of art in maintaining interests. The notion of hegemony which Wallerstein describes, draws on the works of Italian Marxist of the

1920s, Antonio Gramsci, who developed a theory that successful leaders established a dominance (hegemony) of the political scene by controlling the discourse.

Within the market system, a more open exercise of material class power is described by World-system theorists, noting modern market domination by corporates. A complexity of culture, which Homi Bhabha calls "hybrid", has resulted from the convergence of markets and the interaction of national structures (Bhabha, 1990: 295).

This study questions how the interests of status groups are reinforced through the cultural realms and how dominant groups employ culture, in the form of art, to maintain power, wealth and ideology. The historical background covered in more depth in Chapter 3 will relate these hegemonic theories to the situation in Thailand in the past. We shall see how, though not officially colonised, Thailand appears to have been voluntarily, culturally colonised at the turn of the century, as a strategy to maintain sovereignty, and the subsequent nationalistic movements to this movement and the internationalisation during the 1960s, which Wallerstein suggests are a response to such developments are explored for their relation to the contemporary situation. Thai writers such as Kukrit Pramoj and social critic, Sulak Sivaraksa (1990) discuss the changes within Thai culture and society as a result of hegemonic forces in operation during historical and modern periods in Thailand. Much current debate among Thai academics, including Theerayuth Boonmee, Prawase Wasi, Ammar Siamwalla and Chaianan

Samudvanij, regarding the causes and effects of the 1998 economic crisis in Thailand has been related to the cultural realm. In this study we are interested in how art may be employed as a cultural tool by agents/actors in the social network.

Patronage

The relationships between individual subjects/actors and social, ideological and economic structures cannot be dealt with in a simple way by structural/functional analysis, as Weber or Durkheim propose. In moving towards an understanding of these relationships we are led to investigate the patronage system in relation to art and culture production. A general dictionary definition of **patronage** refers to:

1. *financial support of artists - the support or custom given by a patron*
2. *in politics, the practice of making appointments to office (Collins English Dictionary, 1991).*

Raymond Williams asserts that the defining characteristic of all patronal social relations is the privileged situation of the patron who can give or withhold commission or support and whose power and resources are derived from social order (Williams, 1981: 44).

In the Thai context, the term 'patronage' is commonly discussed in connection to the system of social and political relations whereby a generous patron pays/supports/takes care of a client in return for

support from the client. Within the patron-client relationship, favours are exchanged, which may extend the patron's influence and power and thereby improve the client's position. Shifting alliances are noted. When a more capable/generous patron comes along, loyalty is not seen as a confining factor. This social system has substantially interfered with the development of democracy in Thailand with, for example, widespread accusations of 'vote-buying' during elections. One politically-connected interviewee was taken aback at the use of this term 'patronage' in reference to art, describing it as "19th century terminology." Sensitive to the negative political connotations (with suggestions of corruption in the Thai political context), the respondent did not want this term used in connection with his role as arts administrator at the Bangkok Metropolitan Authority (BMA). The patron-client relationship in Thai society is analysed in depth by Akin Rabhibadana and noted as one of the most important relationships in Thai society. Akin describes the various forms of this relationship, from the older-younger in local community, to that of *phu yai-phu noi* in administrative hierarchies, and how behaviour in interaction is related to this status mechanism (Akin: 1969).

By tracing the evolution of various systems of patronage of art in the West; from fully instituted artist to the arrangements between artists and patrons, artists and markets, and post market institutions, we may find points of comparison to apply when considering the Thai situation. Due to a lack of indigenous Thai or Asian

theory on art patronage, these Western models may provide some useful insights, however Jean Boisselier notes in his research on Thai Painting that early Thai commissions should not be considered patronage as this does not fully correspond to the organisation of early Thai society (Boisselier, 1976: 27). Akin's research also outlines how within the Thai feudal system, subordinates (*phrai*) were obliged to perform unpaid service, known as 'corvee', indicating flows of influence and art production which do vary from the Western patronage model. The historical chapter in this study further investigates this view in relation to religious production of art and the role of the monarch and the elite as major instigators of official art production. Saran Tongbahn's thesis on early (pre-twentieth century) Thai artists details the groups of artisans (*chang*), their positions and movements. The Thai researcher notes that although *chang* were affiliated to formal official departments, networks of personal relations such as family, kinship and patron-client relations conditioned their lives, internal relationships and social mobility. In order to obtain a favoured position as a royal artist/artisan (*chang luang*), a *chang* needed a suitable reference, which entailed some degree of dealing. Owning works of art at that time represented prestige, merit and power, which was competitively sought by members of the elite. Artists and craftsmen with good reputations were in demand, however with the increase of commercialism and major economic, social and cultural changes in the late eighteenth century, a new system of relationships which involved 'payments' and

transformations in the functions of art, evolved (Saran:1992).

In this examination of institutional structures, we are also interested in how they can enable and confine creative activity. Giddens reminds us of the duality of structure, that structures are both the product of human agency and the conditions for human agency (Giddens,1984).

Contrasting the cultural relations of the 'market' with those of the 'patron', Raymond Williams suggests that the important concept of the patron indicates at least four or five distinct social relationships in cultural production, and he insists it is important to retain the full range of classifications of institutions and types of relations during analysis, due to the overlap and concurrent nature of the relations (Williams, 1981: 33). In relatively early western societies, an artist (often a poet) was officially recognised as an integral part of the central social organisation itself. The social position of this kind of cultural producer was instituted and part of the social definition of the patronising household. Official recognition was given as an element of a structured aristocratic society. Artists had a duty to serve the past and present glory of the ruling class thus creating legitimation of power and versions of history (Williams, 1981: 36). In the Thai case, early patrons of art were members of the royal and elite lineages, frequently monarchs, concerned with supporting religious expression on temple walls. The forms and themes, outlined later in

this paper, were consistent to perpetuating ruling positions.

Following the transition from the instituted court artists to the artists of the nobility, artists were still highly regarded, but more occasionally dependent. They may have been attached to a household, or increasingly travelled between households, performing work and looking for hospitality and support. According to Willliams, this is the beginning of the transition from the social relations of a regular institution to the social relations of conscious exchange, though not yet full exchange. The artist was part of the social self-definition of the patronising household which took on a responsibility and an honour. A second, more general form of patronage saw individual artists retained, often with titles and official recognition. This was extremely important in painting and lasted for many centuries. The artist was typically retained or commissioned as an individual professional worker. Artists were also themselves a specific form of social organisation. During the middle ages in Europe when art was supported by royal families and churches, the elite and aristocratic class played a dominant role in politics, economics and culture. The Medici family of Italian bankers and merchants, and the ruling house of Florence and Tuscany from 1434 to 1737, is noted as famous for its patronage of learning and the arts. Medicis spent lavishly on religious foundations and family palaces, commissioning works from Donatello, Michelangelo, Botticelli, Raphael, Rubens and many more. They started the famous Uffizi

collection, and within the family, two sons became popes and a daughter became Queen of France by marriage. Janet Wolff notes the outrageous degree of interference by European patrons up to the fifteenth century, to the extent of specifying what colours (particularly gold, silver and ultramarine) the painter should use, as a status and economically-motivated development (Wolff, 1981: 44). During the Renaissance, the concept of 'artist as individual creative worker' emerged, with the idea that art was a supra-human special task. This was the beginning of the 'high'/'lesser' arts division and the historic base of the notion of 'artist as genius'. A large amount of art at that time was produced within the variable social relations of the Christian church, mostly commissioned by the Vatican. This situation was analogous to that of court patronage where artists devoted themselves to religious art not only, and sometimes not primarily, because it was the willed commission of their immediate patron, but because they could identify themselves with the religious purpose. It was a willing and independent service of a social and religious kind. In the case of early Thai mural artists involved in temple decoration commissioned by the monarch, work was undertaken as a form of 'merit-making' and left unsigned following the Buddhist concept of ego elimination.

Protection and social support in uncertain social and legal conditions was appreciated by artists, leading to the association of particular works with particular powerful names and the patron as dedicatee. This arrangement often did not involve economic exchange

relations; mutual reputation and honour was being exchanged. Regarding the recruitment and training of artists, Williams refers to the origin of the 'Academy', a title which highlights art education rather than craft training. In the western examples this has always been a very structured affair with parental/familial values and pressures, although differently applicable in different art forms in different periods. Complaints against authority, the embodiment of 'academicism' in art, and the teaching of the rules and principles as being against the practice of original art, are mentioned by Williams (Williams, 1981: 51). In Thailand, Silpakorn University is recognised as the historical centre for art education and has faced much of the criticism Williams raises and this is considered in more detail later in this study. White and White's study of the rise of Impressionism in nineteenth century France, referred to by Janet Wolff, indicates the formative role of mediators, suggesting Impressionism may not have found acceptance with the entrenched and traditional ideology of the existing Academic system but succeeded largely due to a situation of numerous painters and a growing new market of buyers who were interested in financial speculation in art as well as possessing fine works. These new buyers were more adventurous than traditional aristocratic buyers and the critic's role became one of legitimising the new work (Wolff, 1981).

With the rise of the European middle-class in this period, museums were constructed, institutionalising access to art. The cultural elite used museums as places

for education and presentation of art objects and collections. During the long period of overlap between patronal and market social relations, qualitatively new social relations of art developed, determined by the increasingly regular production of works of art as commodities for general sale. As the systems of direct patronage declined, the artist's life became more precarious, with economic uncertainties. Patrons and the central role of the Academy were displaced by the dealer-critic system, thereby people and institutions (mediators) became crucial for economic survival and this is seen as a rise in the influence of gatekeepers. Although there was a decline of secure commissions and reliable patrons, Wolff notes new forms of patronage and employment for artists were developed as they integrated into various branches of capitalist production; for example, industry, advertising, community arts (Wolff, 1981: 45) .

Both Janet Woolf and Theodor Adorno, a post-Marxist from the Frankfurt school, note the development of individualism associated with the capitalist system. Adorno projects that in the capitalist market system, artists began to gain power to control production and sell its usage, in opposition to the feudal system which owned and determined artists' product. The result was a new independence on the part of the creator, but Adorno suggests popular art becomes the product when use is determined by market relations. However, Williams points to claims by artists in the west that they were "free" to "create as they wish" after the institution of dominant

market relations (Williams, 1981: 45). In the production of art for the market, the artist can be seen as a commodity producer for a simple monetary exchange. The social relations of artists are highly variable and closely related to technical means of production of each specific art. Adorno's sociological perspective on the arts denies the Marxist emphasis on the economy as determinate and the notion that there is a universal class. Adorno spent time developing ways of escaping a reductive view of the individual as 'socialised' and his studies of relativism and reification of commodities in a capitalist world emphasise the material development of art's production. Rejecting the superficial nature of appearance in modern capitalist society and the homogenising effects of the commercialisation (reification) of art where art objects are reduced to the exchange-value, Adorno theorises that we must preserve the sanctity of subjectivity embodied in the art market against the onslaught of the market where value is equated with price. This supports the view of the specificity of art and has been criticised as supporting the boundaries between 'high' and 'low', 'pure' and 'utilitarian' art.

As markets become more organised and complex, dependency on intermediaries increases. In analysis of intermediaries, Williams refers to the independent producer who is wholly dependent on the immediate market but her/his work remains under her/his own direction at all stages, as distinct from the producer who sells her/his work to a distributive intermediary and becomes a

factual if occasional employer, or the producer who sells to a productive intermediary and typically capitalist social relations continue which can in the end be offering labour to produce works of a certain known type. The arrangement may depend on how the producer/artist defines him/herself, the nature of his/her work, and the relations between the artist's responsibility to the work or 'obligation or 'subjugation to a 'market'. Williams notes there are many examples of producers struggling against or effectively ignoring market trends. He also posits that it would be seriously reductive to say that the general market order has transformed all cultural production into a market-commodity type and refers to the distinctions between 'commercial' and other (creative, authentic) forms.

In the latest phase of market relations, social relations are typical of the integrated professional market, but there is also significant development of new social relations. 'Ideas' for artwork are coming from new professional intermediaries, leaving the artist to execute them. Here the effective origin of cultural production is now focused within the corporate market and the scale of capital makes an impact. Some industrial and commercial corporations enter into patronage, commissioning works for their own use or ownership, analogous to earlier courts and households. With this larger degree of input from corporate 'clients', the works of art are indeed collective productions and can result in the artist offering labour to produce works of a certain type. Some are involved with market conditions

as a form of investment or as a form of prestige advertising. The Thai examples of corporate showrooms and bank walls featuring neo-traditional Thai artworks produced following consultation between artist and corporate management regarding concept, seem to fit this model. Through taxation and general public policy, the public at large become art patrons, instituted art is supported and certain cultural institutions become departments of state. The growth of government patronage of the arts is seen by some as nationalisation of the arts, due to the subordination to public policy (Wolff, 1981: 45). The operations of the government bodies in Thailand, such as the office of the National Cultural Commission (ONCC) and the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) are investigated later in this study, with regard to public policy and the impact on art production, distribution and reception.

Post market institutions are classified by Williams as modern patronal, the intermediate and the governmental. Modern patronal, found in advanced capitalist societies, recognise that certain arts are not profitable or viable in market terms but are sustained by specific institutions such as foundations, by organisations of subscribers or by private patronage. Intermediate bodies are wholly or significantly financed from public revenue but direct their own production. In some capitalist societies and in most post-capitalist societies, cultural institutions have become departments of state (Williams, 1981: 55). Wolff notes that funding bodies are no more neutral than any social organisation

and gives evidence of research into the preference of British sponsors and patrons which shows less to do with political content than with aesthetic conformity (Wolff, 1981: 45).

Commoditisation

The underlying assumption within the commoditisation theory is that economic exchange creates value; that value is embodied in commodities that are exchanged; and that the link between exchange and value is politics (referring to the general relations, assumptions and contests pertaining to power). Arjun Appadurai believes that commodities, like people, have social lives, and that by following the 'things' themselves, we can discover the meanings inscribed in their forms, uses and paths, hence a better understanding of the human and social context (Appadurai, 1986: 4). Georg Simmel emphasises exchange (of sacrifices) as the source of economic value, theorising that economic objects exist in a space between pure desire and immediate enjoyment and that economic exchange, in which the value of objects is determined reciprocally, overcomes this distance. He suggests we call objects 'valuable' when they resist our desire to possess them, and notes the calculative dimension in all forms of exchange (Simmel, 1978: 67). From this, we are stimulated to study the ways in which desire and demand, reciprocal sacrifice and power interact to create economic value in

specific social situations, drawing attention to the relations between politics and production.

Also acknowledging that we live in a world of commodities, Edward Said agrees that commodity production, circulation, history and interpretation are the very elements of culture, and suggests that by putting these in full political context, the struggle between interests is revealed (Said, 1994: 66). In considering the relationship of culture to commodities, it is not useful to separate the cultural sphere and the political sphere. Politics is the link between what Appadurai refers to as 'regimes' of value and specific flows of commodities, seeing the creation of value as a politically-mediated process pertaining to relations of privilege and social control, with the understanding that not all parties share the same interests of values. Commodities move in and out of phase giving a temporal perspective, and history is central to value. They may be diverted from their path and new paths created. The example of royal monopolies illustrates how 'tributes' and 'kingly things' can influence flows of certain commodities. Historical close links between rulers and traders are noted by Appadurai. In the Thai context, we see in the historical chapter (Chapter 3) early evidence of art as religious expression under royal command and the exchange of traditional arts (e.g. trees of gold and silver) as gifts or tributes to neighbouring kingdoms such as Srivijaya, Nakhon Srithammaraj, and including China. The hazy lines of demarcation between what is and what is not sacred in the modern world creates a tension

between sacra and commodity exchange. With this awareness, we may ask what meaning is contained in the traditional and religious-based mural art decorating the walls of Thai banks, hotels and other modern commercial spaces today?

Tourist art is another situation of commodities being diverted from their paths. This international phenomenon involves influence from the western taste for things 'other', 'exotic' and from the past. With more than six million visitors coming to Thailand each year, and a prominent *Amazing Thailand 1998-99* campaign underway, the impact of tourism on art in the country is a question which is addressed in Chapter 4.

Those in power may 'freeze' the flow of commodities by establishing inflexible rules and restricting the field in which they move. The Thai law which forbids the taking of Buddha images out of Thailand is such a case. The flow of commodities is also determined by socially regulated paths and competitively-inspired diversions. 'Tournaments of value', limited in participation, are played by privileged levels of society and may be seen as expressions of power and status. Appadurai notes the specialised arenas for such tournaments in which specialised commodities may be created. Edmond Leach's study of the Kula system in the Western Pacific describes the process of status enhancement through shell trading and concludes that, although men appear to be the agents in defining shell value, in fact, without shells, men cannot define their own value; shells and men are reciprocally agents of each

other's value definition. Kula trade is aristocratic, reserved for chiefs, and is the vehicle of great inter-tribal trade in Melanesia. It is distinguished from the straightforward exchange of useful goods, which involves most tenacious bargaining on both sides, a procedure unworthy of Kula. The trade is carried out in noble fashion, disinterestedly and modestly. In this case, the men practise their specific powers of acquisition (oratory) whilst endeavouring to protect/build their reputations. The underlying motives are competition, rivalry, showmanship and a desire for greatness and wealth (Leach, 1983: 530). Art auctions can be seen as tournaments of value or rituals which are performed according to interests and influence of the players. The largest ever exhibition of Thai art, organised to mark the Golden Jubilee of H.M. King Bhumibol's reign, held at the Queen Sirikit National Convention Centre in December 1996, culminated in an auction of donated artwork to raise funds for a proposed Rama IX Art Museum. Members of the Art Museum Committee, mostly made up of prominent businessmen and bankers, purchased the bulk of the auctioned pieces in a show of status, financial power, and patriotic citizenry.

Agents involved in the flow of commodities have differences in knowledge, interest and role. Therefore variations in the knowledge of production, particularly of luxury commodities which are influenced by taste, judgment and individual experience, (such as art) lead to mediation at many levels. Gaps in the knowledge of production between the producer, the market, the

consumer, or the destination have historically been bridged by the trader/merchant (dealer), with high profits in trade. Expertise is required to determine authenticity and becomes a taste-making mechanism. Thus Appadurai suggests the politics of value is in many contexts a politics of knowledge; the 'experts' from the art world; dealers, producers, consumers are all part of the political economy of taste in the contemporary West. This raises yet again the question of how these social and cultural dynamics may apply in the case of Thailand? Some Thai social commentators such as Sulak Sivaraksa and Kukrit Pramoj have expressed concern about the influence of the 'foreign expert' in Thai society, recognising the benefits of exchanges of cultures and skills, but warning of conflicting world-views and undermining of local tradition.

In analysing commoditisation in relation to art, Adorno addresses two issues: that art has become a commodity when it takes on exchange value, first when the artist receives wages in exchange for labour, and then when the product of labour is used as capital; and as a commodity it is distributed throughout networks to create or perpetuate an ideology which supports capitalism. In this light, aesthetic codes become mediating influences between ideology and particular works of art, thereby shaping cultural products. The ideas and values of artists, themselves socially formed, are mediated by conventions of style and aesthetic vocabulary (Adorno, 1984).

Aesthetics, Taste and Value

The discipline of traditional aesthetics prescribed by Immanuel Kant is concerned with the rules and principles of art, including study of the concepts of beauty and taste. 'Pure aesthetics' explicitly excludes the functional or extrinsic from judgment, supporting the historical separation of art from craft and other forms of work. In our broader view of art as a form of social production, it is not possible to separate 'pure aesthetics' from a sociological understanding of the arts (i.e. consideration of the structure and institutions, the social relations, practices and objects.) The discourse of art and aesthetics does facilitate the determination of the relative value of different works, however a sociological dimension adds valuable perspective on the origins and development of this criteria. The question, 'What is art?' is interpreted as, 'What is taken to be art by society?' i.e. by certain key members? The question of taste requires investigation into the ideological construction of criticisms and evaluations and the ways in which they are perpetuated, therefore attention must be given to the historical specificity of the rise of aesthetics.

While the relative value of different works is determined within the discourse of art and aesthetics, Janet Wolff concludes that there is no such thing as the 'pure' operation of the aesthetic consciousness; that it is thoroughly permeated with the experiential and ideological features of social existence; that any

aesthetic judgement is the product of other, non-aesthetic values (Wolff, 1981: 142). In The Aristocracy of Taste, Bourdieu also sees the category of the aesthetic as arbitrary and situated in certain historical and social conditions (Bourdieu, 1986). Although any aesthetic judgement is the product of other extra-aesthetic elements, for example the values of class, the influence of moral ideas, etc. created through political, social or ideological factors, it is not entirely reducible to these. Hence, there is no simple answer to the problem of defining 'beauty' or 'artistic merit'. The history of art is also the history of fluctuations in taste and evaluation. Great art was not always valued as such. Janet Wolff refers to Francis Haskell's 1963 research of Patrons and Painters: Art and Society in Baroque Italy which shows that changes in tastes from 1790 to 1870 in France and England were related to wider social factors - religion, politics, museums and techniques of reproduction (Wolff 1981). If aesthetic value is not 'unpacked', i.e. reconsidered in the light of political or moral value, then a position of defending the specificity of art is taken (i.e. that art must be treated as an 'uncommon activity'), as Marx projected. The past practice of isolating cultural and aesthetic realms from the worldly domain is considered outdated and Edward Said suggests it is now time to rejoin them, but acknowledges that this is not simple.

Towards this end, the next chapter looks at the historical development of art in Thailand, with regard to the wider socio-economic-political environment.