Peter Bürger

Theory of the Avant-Garde

Translated by Michael Shaw

Foreword by Jochen Schulte-Sasse

Theory and History of Literature, Volume 4

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I. Modernism vs. The Avant-Garde: Preliminary Demarcations

A. Poggioli's Theory of the Avant-Garde *and Its Limits*

The title of Peter Bürger's book will recall to the American reader Renato Poggioli's study of 1968, which bears the same title. Although Poggioli's name is now rarely mentioned, the influence of his approach can still be seen in the most recent discussions of modernism, post-modernism, and the avant-garde. At least his approach is highly compatible with the discussion, at present largely determined by poststructuralist premises. For this reason, a systematic development of the radical differences between the two directions of thought represented by Bürger's and Poggioli's books may help determine those places where Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde* could positively influence the stagnating debate surrounding modernism and the avant-garde.

A rarely questioned assumption that underlies this debate is that

As one who up to now has written all his publications in that strange Teutonic language Mark Twain characterized so beautifully, it has been a humiliating experience trying to express my thoughts in Twain's very own medium. Therefore, I am all the more grateful for the extensive help I received from Linda Schulte-Sasse in translating and from Lindsay Waters in editing this text.

avant-garde literature derives from the dichotomy between conventional, clichéd language and experimental linguistic forms that dislodge those clichés. This explanation, of course, is not unique to the study of the artistic media using language, since a similar dichotomy of conventionality versus originality has dominated the critique of other arts. As early as 1939, Clement Greenberg's essay "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" was in both title and contents characteristic of this tendency within art criticism. Typically enough, Greenberg, probably America's best known art critic of the fifties and early sixties, chose this programmatic essay to introduce his book *Art and Culture* (1961).

Poggioli is no exception to this tradition. In his view, the tendency of "avant-garde" writing to concentrate on linguistic creativity is a "necessary reaction to the flat, opaque, and prosaic nature of our public speech, where the practical end of quantitative communication spoils the quality of expressive means." Thus the hermetic, dark language of modern fiction has a social task: It functions as "at once cathartic and therapeutic in respect to the degeneration afflicting common language through conventional habits."[1] The "cult of novelty and even of the strange"[2] in avant-garde art has for Poggioli definable historical and social causes in the "tensions of our bourgeois, capitalistic, and technological society."[3]

The "bourgeois, capitalistic, and technological society" of which Poggioli speaks did not, however, begin with the period of the historical avant-garde during the twenties, and certainly not with the period of postmodernism in the fifties and sixties. Poggioli's historical-social derivation of the avant-garde entangles him in a difficulty. He draws a parallel between bourgeois-capitalist society and the commercialization and dequalification of language on the one hand and the "avant-garde's" skepticism toward language on the other. If this parallel is valid, then a critical consciousness provoked by the degeneration of language as it was used in the marketplace must have already existed in the late eighteenth century. If, however, a connection between bourgeois, capitalist society and skepticism toward language can be found in the late eighteenth and in the entire nineteenth century, then it becomes highly questionable whether Poggioli's setting up of linguistic conventionality against the avant-garde can serve as a starting point for a "theory of the avant-garde." For then the term avant-garde would have to be stretched to apply to the late eighteenth century and would become an empty slogan, no longer able to help us distinguish romanticism, symbolism, aestheticism, the avant-garde, and postmodernism from each other.

I will begin with the first point, the question whether there was a skeptical consciousness about language around the year 1800. One can in fact cite numerous remarks dating back that far arguing that the clichéd character of language is a social and historical problem. Toward the end of the eighteenth century, Schiller and Goethe decided to begin preliminary studies for a project on dilettantism. The notes on the project (which was never completed) state: "All dilettantes are plagiarizers. They sap the life out of and destroy all that is original and beautiful in language and in thought by repeating it, imitating it, and filling up their own void with it. Thus, more and more, language becomes filled up with pillaged phrases and forms that no longer say anything; one can read entire books that have a beautiful style and contain nothing at all."[4] One could easily cull similar remarks from writers of the last quarter of the eighteenth century. These early attacks on the degeneration of language are pervaded by an awareness of the interrelation of various sociohistorical developments: bourgeois-capitalist society, mass culture, the poet's stance against this development, the consciously esoteric character of "high" literature, and the like. Rousseau in France, Karl Philipp Moritz and Schiller and the Romantics in Germany, and (somewhat later) Wordsworth and Coleridge in England discussed the division of labor and its influence on literature; the experience of alienation in modern societies; the dequalifying effect of the instrumentalization of reason; and the domination of social interaction by exchange value, expressed by the terms "self-interest," "interest," "amour-propre," and "economic egotism." The reason that these sociological themes immediately affected literature and aesthetic theory lies not so much in the sensitivity of great writers to sociohistorical changes, but rather in the significance of the book market for the national economy of the eighteenth century[5] and in writers' new experience of having to compete with the mass appeal of popular literature.[6] These developments led to a confrontation between writer and commercialism, between originality and conformism, between autonomous "high" literature and a literature given over to the ideological reproduction of society —all of which expressed themselves in a critical consciousness of language. Although Poggioli does not bother to go into any sociohistorical details, he nonetheless refers to these developments in general terms: "one might even claim that the creation of the alienated mentality (and avant-garde itself, for that matter) is a phenomenon at least notably conditioned by the practical, ideological, and

spiritual effects of the sudden, relatively recent transformation of the artist's economic position."[7]

Poggioli clearly sees that the sociohistorical changes he mentions and the reaction of writers to them were already developed in the late eighteenth century: "The cult of the novelty and even of the strange, which is the basis for avant-garde art's substantive and not accidental unpopularity, was an exquisitely romantic phenomenon even before it became typically avant-garde."[8] At another point, he even refers to the German Storm and Stress movement. He fails to consider, however, that if the characteristics he cites are applicable to the literature of such an extensive period, they cannot function as the basis for a theory of the avant-garde in the twentieth century. Poggioli's criteria are both historically and theoretically too unspecific; his arguments cannot accomplish what must be the primary task of a "theory of the avant-garde": to characterize with theoretical accuracy the historical uniqueness of the avant-garde of the 1920s (Futurism, Dadaism, Surrealism, the left avant-garde in Russia and Germany).

B. Bürger's Reconstruction of Art History Compared with Poggioli's

Where Poggioli is unspecific Bürger is by contrast historically concrete and theoretically exact. Bürger describes three qualitative changes that enable him to reconstruct three phases of art history in bourgeois society. The historical transition establishing the first phase of bourgeois art was determined by the loosening, and ultimately by the severing, of artists' dependence on patrons and their replacement by an anonymous, structural dependence on the market and its principles of profit maximization. This shift accounted for the replacement of courtly-representative culture by bourgeois culture in the course of the eighteenth century.[9] After a relatively short period of optimistic euphoria in the early Enlightenment, in which writers advocated centralized planning in an attempt to plan the future and to suppress what was spatially and temporally marginal, "high" bourgeois culture became determined by internal gestures of protest against and separation from economic commerce. At least ideologically, the artistic genius isolated himself or herself from the masses and from the market; art isolated itself in this first phase from society. At first, however, the autonomy of art established by this process was not conceived as a state of absolute separation. Rather, the art that regarded itself as autonomous during the

late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries continued to reflect critically upon society. Schiller's dramas exemplify this tendency: They derive their substance from a historical and philosophical tension between the present, perceived as negative, and the future, containing the hope for change. Thus the opposition between the negative and the positive, not an absolute but a question of time, determines the structure of the works themselves, whose protagonists aspire through their tragic demise to the principle of moral harmony —which cannot yet be realized as a principle applicable to society as a whole. Such literature is intended to have simultaneously a social and an aesthetic effect: its aesthetic and psychological force should elicit those conditions in the spectator or reader (harmony between "sensuality" and "morality") that supposedly are the individual and psychological preconditions for the construction of an ideal society.

In this phase, the artistic critique of society and language did not yet imply that it is impossible to influence society by communicating meaning. However, even here, the potential for the later development of an absolute confrontation between art and society existed, because of the autonomous status of art. As Herbert Marcuse argued in "The Affirmative Character of Culture" (1937), the autonomy of art had from the beginning a very ambivalent character. Individual works may have criticized negative aspects of society, but the anticipation of social harmony as psychic harmony, which is part of the aesthetic enjoyment for the individual, risks degenerating into a mere cerebral compensation for society's shortcomings, and thus of affirming precisely what is criticized by the contents of the work. In other words: The mode of reception undermines the critical content of the works. Marcuse maintains that even the most critical work inevitably exhibits a dialectical unity of affirmation and negation by virtue of its institutionalized separation from social praxis.

For Bürger this ambiguous status of art in bourgeois society provides the key to understanding the logic of recent art history. The contradiction between negation and affirmation, implicit in the autonomous mode in which art functioned, led to a feeling of impotence among writers, to a realization of the social *ineffectiveness* of their own medium, and thus to ever more radical confrontations between artists and society, especially as the elements of affirmation and compensation came increasingly to influence readers' responses.

This development greatly changed the effects artists aspired to

make, and also the means for making those effects—the techniques of narration and the artistic treatment of language. Traditional narrative modes portraying a finite number of social agents who move through a plot that takes them from one grouping at the beginning to a regrouping at the end of a story only make sense if the narratives refer critically or positively to norms and values essential to social interaction. Most critics of modernism perceive this correlation rather clearly.

In *The Decline of the New,* Irving Howe writes: "When a writer works out a plot, he tacitly assumes that there is a rational structure in human conduct, that this structure can be ascertained, and that doing so he is enabled to provide his work with a sequence of order. But in modernist literature these assumptions come into question. In a work written on the premise that there is no secure meaning in the portrayed action, or that while the action can hold our attention and rouse our feelings, we cannot be certain, indeed must remain uncertain, as to the possibilities of meaning."[10] From the mid-nineteenth century on—roughly from Flaubert on—this tendency becomes not merely common, but predominant. The only aspect of Howe's perspective one could criticize is that of transforming a sociohistorical development into a philosophical problem.

American literary criticism generally fixes the great artistic shift to a skepticism toward language and form in the middle of the nineteenth century, which becomes the important demarcation point in recent art history—the beginning of the phase usually referred to as modernism. The new skepticism, the doubt that artistic language can be a medium for discussing norms and values, results in the dissociation of language from the traditional forms of narration, a view that can at least partly solve the difficulties in Poggioli's approach. In other words, "high" literature's problematic status in commercial societies permeates its form. Such literature no longer refers positively to society by critically presenting norms and values, but rather attacks the ossification of society and its language in what amounts to intellectual guerilla warfare. The modernist writer, according to Howe, "chooses subjects that disturb the audience and threaten its most cherished sentiments. . . . Modern writers find that they begin to work at a moment when the culture is marked by a prevalent style of perception and feeling; and their modernity consists in a revolt against this prevalent style, an unyielding rage against the official order."[11] Flaubert's *Dictionnaire des idées reçues,* in which he collected the slogans and clichés of his era, was from this standpoint symptomatic for a new phase of art

history whose basic characteristics have supposedly determined art ever since.

Peter Bürger denies that the radical turning point conventionally set in the mid-nineteenth century exists. Bürger would find in our domestic debate about modernism an assumption that obscures the much more radical shift from Aestheticism to the historical avant-garde at the beginning of our century. For Bürger the developing skepticism toward language and the change in the relation of form and content characteristic of Symbolism and Aestheticism was from the beginning inherent in the developmental logic of the institution "art," i.e., the specific institutionalization of the commerce with art in bourgeois society. Even if the autonomous art of bourgeois culture in the late eighteenth century criticized society through its contents, it was separated by its form (which includes the institutionalization of the commerce with art) from the mainstream of society. According to Bürger the development leading to Symbolism and Aestheticism can be best described as a transformation of form into content. As art becomes problematic to itself, form becomes the preferred content of the works: "The apartness from the praxis of life that had always constituted the institutional status of art in bourgeois society now becomes the content of works" (p. 27). In other words, the development from the autonomy of art in the eighteenth century to the Aestheticism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is in Bürger's perspective an intensification of art's separation from bourgeois society. In arguing so, Bürger departs radically from the history of the avant-garde as it is perceived in this country. He insists that the tendency inherent in art's autonomous status drove both the individual work and the institution "art" to increasingly extreme declarations of their autonomy. What the debate about modernism generally refers to as the writer's skepticism toward language and meaning since the mid-nineteenth century Bürger considers to be an increasing consciousness on the part of the artist of writing techniques, how material is applied, and its potential for effect. This consciousness corresponds historically to the aesthetic sensitizing of art's audience. Bürger sees this development as logical and necessary, yet as negative, since it leads toward a state in which art works are characterized by semantic atrophy.

It is evident at this point that I must further discuss Bürger's implicit assumption that art has a socially consequential role only when it is somehow related to a socially relevant discussion of norms and values and thus to the cognition of society as a whole. For Bürger there is no point in valorizing the purely *aesthetic experience*

that motivates Aestheticist texts. In contrast to, for example, Julia Kristeva, Bürger does not provide a critical analysis of the potential that modernist texts possess for deconstructing ideological closures. According to him, aestheticist art severs itself consistently from *all* social relevance, establishing itself as a medium of purely aesthetic experience: "means become available as the category 'content' withers" (p. 20). In *Avant-Garde and Kitsch,* Clement Greenberg described the same phenomenon in these terms: "In turning his attention away from subject matter of common experience, the poet or artist turns it in upon the medium of his own craft."[12] Bürger sees this development as the historical precondition for the development of art at the beginning of our century. Aestheticism's intensification of artistic autonomy and its effect on the foundation of a special realm called aesthetic experience permitted the avant-garde to clearly recognize the social inconsequentiality of autonomous art and, as the logical consequence of this recognition, to attempt to lead art back into social praxis. For Bürger, then, the development of the avant-garde has nothing to do with a critical consciousness about language; it is not a continuation of tendencies already present in Aestheticism. Rather, for him the turning point from Aestheticism to the avant-garde is determined by the extent to which art comprehended the mode in which it functioned in bourgeois society, its comprehension of its own social status. The historical avant-garde of the twenties was the first movement in art history that turned against the institution "art" and the mode in which autonomy functions. In this it differed from all previous art movements, whose mode of existence was determined precisely by an acceptance of autonomy.

Even from my hasty review of Bürger's historical reconstruction, I trust it is clear that Bürger accomplishes what was impossible for Poggioli, impossible because of Poggioli's sweeping criteria. Bürger gives us a historically concrete and theoretically exact description of the avant-garde. Poggioli's "theory" is at best a theory of modernism that explains certain basic characteristics of artistic production since the middle of the nineteenth century, and perhaps since Goethe and Wordsworth. His book is vulnerable, owing to his inability to determine the qualitative (and not just the quantitative) difference between romanticism and modernism. Yet, in his tendency to equate modernism and the avant-garde—and to subsume both under the label "modernism"—Poggioli typifies the Anglo-American tradition. It is no coincidence that John Weightman gave his book of 1973 on the subject the title, *The Concept of the Avant-Garde. Explorations in Modernism.*[13] And Irving Howe uses the two terms interchangeably ("The modernist writers and artists constitute . . . an avant-garde"[14]).

The equation of the two terms stems from an inability to see that the theoretical emphases of modernist and avant-garde writers are radically different. If the artistic strategies of modernism and the avant-garde could be reduced to strategies of purely linguistic negation, one might be justified in attempting to articulate an all-inclusive theory of modernism. Poggioli wrote that the "avant-garde looks and works like a culture of negation,"[15] and he chose to emphasize a strategy of negation in avant-garde writings concentrating on language, cultural boundaries, and the various ways culture had become ossified. At first glance, the attempt to develop a theory of the avant-garde that also functions as a theory of modernism seems perfectly acceptable. Evidence such as the surrealist manifestos, in which Breton made a "modernist" attack against the one-dimensionality of conventional forms of thought and language, appear to support the case. The first "Manifesto of Surrealism," for example, includes his criticism of Dostoyevsky's mania for realistic description, which is basically a "modernist" critique of realism's tendency to use conventional language patterns.[16] Although Bürger would concede these similarities, his major argument concerns the *differences* between Aestheticism and the avant-garde. If we focus on the precarious *status* of art in modern societies—the "institution" of "art"—we can see the radical difference between the strategies of negation within modernism and within the avant-garde. Modernism may be understandable as an attack on traditional writing techniques, but the avant-garde can only be understood as an attack meant to alter the institutionalized commerce with art. The social roles of the modernist and the avant-garde artist are, thus, radically different.

Up to this point I have been more descriptive than analytical. In the next section, I will analyze some of the social, historical, and philosophical presuppositions of the two most prevalent (and also most interesting) theories of modernism—those proceeding from Adorno and from French poststructuralism. In this way I will set the stage for my analysis of Peter Bürger's theory and what I see as its implications.

II. The Social and Political Implications of the Major Theories of Modernism

Two philosophical and historical modes of understanding the avant-garde can be distinguished. These modes have contrary anthropo-

logical, social, and philosophical implications. One proceeds from what seems to be an infinitely variable opposition between solidification and dissolution, representation and life, metaphysical closure and deconstruction, general and particular, quantity and quality. The other proceeds from the historical observation that the mass media and official, ideological discourses tend to destroy and expropriate individual "languages" in the interests of domination. This second mode of thought juxtaposes the state of expropriation with a utopian state, in which dominated social groups reappropriate language, allowing it once again to become a medium for expressing the needs and material, concrete experiences of individuals and groups. It could thus counterbalance the powers that strive to dominate socially. The first mode of thought can be associated generally with Breton, Artaud, Barthes, Adorno, and Derrida. The other can be associated with Brecht, Benjamin, and Negt and Kluge. The social implications of Peter Bürger's unique reconstruction of the history of modernism and the avant-garde can best be appreciated if he is arrayed against these two predominant theories of cultural politics. Thus, before proceeding with an analysis of Bürger, I will take a closer look at the two modes, suggesting that the first, represented by Adorno, Derrida, and (albeit in a less reflective manner) by critics like Poggioli—tends *necessarily* toward social and political pessimism.

A. Adorno's Theory of Modernity

Adorno's concept of the interrelation of art and society is determined by his view of the development of liberal high capitalism since the middle of the nineteenth century.

In the modern period, exchange value came to dominate society; all qualities had been reduced to quantitative equivalences. Adorno does not see this process as a fall from grace confined to the modern era only—the result of social, economic, and political decisions in the nineteenth century—or as one that might have been prevented. Rather this process, which started with the beginning of human history, inheres in man's drive for self-preservation and in the ambivalent character of reason resulting from and accompanying this drive. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment,*[17] Adorno together with Horkheimer reflected on "the difficulties in the concept of reason," namely, that it signifies on the one hand the general interest of man and "the idea of a free, human, social life," and is on the other hand "the court of judgment of calculation," "ratio of capital," instrument of domination, and means for the most rational exploitation of nature. The human necessity of material self-preservation

determines the elements of truth in instrumental reason (i.e., that mode of reason "which adjusts the world for the ends of self-preservation and recognizes no function other than the preparation of the object from mere sensory material in order to make it that material of subjugation"[18]). But from the necessary use of reason for the ends of self-preservation of humankind follows its equally necessary but dangerous ossification as an instrument. Instrumental reason takes two forms: as technological reason developed for purposes of dominating nature and as social reason directed at the means of domination aimed at exercising social power.

The desire to dominate nature led in the course of human history *at first* to the stripping of external nature of all qualities. In its attempts to use nature in technical and manipulative ways, instrumental reason comes to regard nature as the "other," as controllable, and subjects it to a conceptual scheme in which relations are reduced to being purely quantitative: "Enlightenment recognizes as being and occurrence only what can be apprehended in unity: its ideal is the system from which all and everything follows."[19]

This tendency, predetermined by the drive for self-preservation, comes to pervade in Adorno's view little by little *all* the spheres of human life, including the organization of society (in which the relationships of individuals to each other are determined by the power mentality) and the quantification of inner nature for the purpose of commercially exploiting standardized needs. While "high" or liberal capitalism was being established, this exploitation became the universal principle of a society that sought to subjugate everything to the same principle: "Bourgeois society is ruled by equivalence."[20]

These and similar considerations give a pessimistic cast to Adorno's "critical theory" as it pertains to social praxis. In *Negative Dialectics* he wrote that people's "overall condition moves toward apersonality in the sense of anonymity."[21] What individual subjects are faced with is not society as a determining context within which they preserve a relative freedom of action, but rather one "overall condition of living human beings," i.e., one general subject that (as the product of historical dialectics) is for the individual subjects the "functional context objectively preceding" them: "Dwelling in the core of the subject are the objective conditions."[22] Since the general subject "humankind" has in the course of history subjugated itself to the universal rule of quantifying thought and behavior, the subjects are already caught in the vicious circle of quantified forms of domination. Only in this subject-centered sense does Adorno speak

of the "capitalist system's increasingly integrative trend, [of] the fact that its elements entwine into a more and more total context of functions."[23]

The means by which this integration is attained for the mass public is the culture industry. Again and again in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* Horkheimer and Adorno refer to the increasingly "complete quantification"[24] of the public through the culture industry: "Under monopoly all mass culture is identical, and the lines of its artificial framework begin to show through." Manipulation of the masses succeeds relentlessly, according to Horkheimer's and Adorno's interpretation, since "the unity of the system grows ever stronger" in "the circle of manipulation and retroactive need."[25]

Consequently art can be understood as at best an endangered medium that resists the general tendency, but lacks any social influence derived from a communicable content. Only a few intellectual aristocrats remain positioned to counter the subjugating forces of the times, through an art that aids in resisting the conformity to society. Adorno adheres (as does Lukács) to the Hegelian axiom that art must be related to social totality. But for Adorno art does not reflect on and communicate with society; rather, it resists society. He sees the relation of art to reality no longer as one of the discerning critique, but as one of absolute negation. "Pure" art is a medium cleansed of all practical interests, in which (among other things) the individual can negate the ossified linguistic and mental clichés that are the results of instrumental rationality. Art thus becomes the medium of hibernation in bad times: "The asocial in art is the definite negation of the definite society. . . . What [art] contributes to society is not communication with society, rather something very indirect, resistance."[26]

Close reading of this theory reveals the futility of criticizing Adorno—as does Michael Ryan—for "attempt[ing] to substitute philosophical or ideological criticism for, among other things, the political-economic and the sexual-political struggles."[27] Adorno saw more clearly than Ryan and other left-tending deconstructionists that a philosophical theory claiming that progress may be realized in society must also be willing to name a social agency for this. Incapable of discovering such an agency within society and thus of securing progress philosophically, Adorno drew the pessimistic conclusion that he must develop philosophical strategies of hibernation. Herein lies the reason that Adorno's social analysis led to a periodization of modern art that places the "true" beginning of artistic modernism around the mid-nineteenth century, sees the essence and the unity

of modernism in mistrust for the word as bearer of meaning (that is, as a bearer of norms and values that can be mediated), and directs its entire energy toward the negation of ossified language and thought forms. In his essay "Looking Back on Surrealism," Adorno integrates the historical avant-garde of the twenties into this concept of a modernism breaking with society:

> The subject, freely controlling himself, free of all concern for the empirical world and having become absolute, exposes himself as lacking animation, virtually as dead in the face of the total reification which throws him back entirely on himself and his protest. The dialectical images of surrealism are those of a dialectic of subjective freedom in a state of objective unfreedom. . . . If today, however, surrealism seems itself to be obsolete, it is because people already deny themselves that consciousness of denial that is contained in the negativity of surrealism.[28]

Surrealism, like modernism in general, is reduced here to an artistic strategy of protest against society. Adorno's concept and periodization of modernism and his pessimistic social analysis are two sides of the same coin.

B. Derrida and Modernism

Questions of periodization and of social analysis can obviously not play the same role for Derrida as they do for Adorno, since Derrida's concern seems to be purely epistemological. Nevertheless, as soon as Derrida and his followers apply his method of reading for other than purely epistemological purposes, they display a conception of modernism that is basically congruent with Adorno's. In other words, as soon as Derrida goes beyond epistemological reflection to literary analysis, it becomes apparent that the theme of sociopolitical pessimism that Adorno expresses openly is implicit in Derrida's thought as well.

It is no coincidence that in the few cases where Derrida eulogizes the thought of a literary author his praise goes to two surrealist, avant-garde writers—Antonin Artaud and Georges Bataille. We can begin to see the significance of Derrida's attitude toward modernism by examining his reaction to this statement of Artaud about the Theatre of Cruelty: "I have therefore said 'cruelty' as I might have said 'life.' "[29] Derrida writes: Artaud's "theater of cruelty is not a *representation.* It is life itself, in the extent to which life is unrepresentable. Life is the nonrepresentable origin of representation. . . . This life carries man along with it, but is not primarily the life of man. The latter is only a representation of life, and such

is the limit—the humanist limit—of the metaphysics of classical theater."[30] Although life, as the origin of representation—that is, as that power and movement that predestines all structuring of artistic material and all differential articulation of meaning—cannot be thought of as the strict opposite of representation; nonetheless, it is significant that Derrida reveals here a clear and neat oppositional structure of thought.

Derrida's analysis of the modernist theater is based on a dichotomy. This is the case despite any dialectical gestures he may make in the direction of mediation. He shows the sharpness of this dichotomy by juxtaposing two forms of the theater, one positive for him and the other clearly negative. In his essay "The Theatre of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation," Derrida speaks disdainfully of "traditional" theater because it is "theological." It is dominated "by the layout of a primary logos which does not belong to the theatrical site and governs it from a distance. The stage is theological for as long as its structure, following the entirety of tradition, comports the following elements: an author-creator who, absent and from afar, is armed with a text and keeps watch over, assembles, regulates the time or the meaning of representation, letting this latter *represent* him as concerns what is called the content of his thought, his intentions, his ideas."[31] Derrida sets Artaud's theater in sharp contrast to this very exclusive theatrical form. In Artaud's theater "the *logical* and discursive intentions which speech ordinarily uses in order to ensure its rational transparency" are reduced and subordinated "in order to purloin [the theater's] body in the direction of meaning."[32] This kind of theater achieves the very *incorporation* of life, not the *representation* of life, and, in doing so, it "lays bare the flesh of the word, lays bare the word's sonority, intonation, intensity—the shout that the articulations of language and logic have not yet entirely frozen," and constructs a stage "whose clamor has not yet been pacified into words."[33]

In this essay and in others, Derrida contrasts Artaud and the avant-garde theater with the tradition of Western, theological theater with the same incisiveness he employs in contrasting his own philosophy with the "metaphysical" tradition of Western philosophy. He finds in the avant-garde praxis of the theater of cruelty an analogue for the praxis of deconstruction. The theater of cruelty is the undoing of the theater of representation in the way that deconstruction is the undoing of metaphysical closures.

To demonstrate the connection of Derrida's philosophy to modernism, I must set out some basic traits of that philosophy. Derrida's

stress is first on language, but language is emphasized as the means to unlocking other issues.

Derrida argues that language is a differential and material system—itself never closed or total, but in perpetual motion. Language as such not only structures thought, but is also engraved and imprinted in all thought. Our discursive cognition and evaluation of reality is, in other words, predetermined by a trans-subjective linguistic field, whose construction is effected by the constant but never fully successful effort of metaphysical or logocentric exclusions and closures. Derrida, however, is not so much interested in the simple fact that thought is determined by language as in the consequences that this thesis has for the conception of a perceiving and signifying subject. He begins by criticizing and moving beyond the structuralist thesis that posits automatic and closed language systems, universally determining human culture. Derrida shows that the structuralist assumption of such a system is caught in the snares of metaphysical thinking as well, since it proceeds from the notion of a totalized system of the *signified*. Although the positing of such a system is supposed to desubstantialize meaning and thus to deconstruct the concept of a subject as epistemological center, structuralism still works with the notion of a system of representation, a system that in principle can still be appropriated by a perceiving subject. By showing how the play of the signifier constantly undermines human efforts to arrest meaning (e.g., through the working of tropes and images), Derrida not only subjects to thorough criticism the notion of representation, but also that of a perceiving subject who can acquire systems of representation. The inevitable epistemological consequence of this is that the subject no longer can be conceived as a self-assured center of his opinions and perceptions. He is always lost in the chain and the texture of signifiers. In spite of all the self-glorifying intentionality he may display, the subject as a center of thought is necessarily disseminated in the field of language—and this means in the field of a language whose structure is determined by the structure of the signifiers, the differential articulation of phonetic material. This forces Derrida to constantly read the works of other thinkers in a critical manner, to prove that these works characteristically repress the constitutive import of the signifier—a repression that leads epistemologically to the hypostatization of the subject as the center of will and knowledge, and to the solidification of an allegedly objectifiable systematic knowledge in the form of logocentric or metaphysical closures.

Derridean terms such as 'repetition' and 'presence' have to be

understood in this context. The self-confident subject of idealistic cognition theory conceives of himself as self-present; i.e., his presence is allegedly determined by his own autonomous activities. Such a self regards language as merely the belated embodiment and representation of content previously present in his own consciousness but fails to recognize that every sign is a priori constituted by the possibility of its repetition, a repetition that implies that consciousness is a priori interwoven with the chain of signifiers. In his essay on Artaud, Derrida writes: "For us there is no word, nor in general a sign, which is not constituted by the possibility of repeating itself. A sign which does not repeat itself, which is not already divided by repetition in its first time, is not a sign. The signifying referral therefore must be ideal—and ideality is but the assured power of repetition—in order to refer to the same thing each time. This is why Being is the key word of eternal repetition, the victory of God and of Death over life."[34]

It is interesting that here a positive ideal takes shape: that of life and nonrepetition, whose realization is in the hands not only of poststructuralism's deconstructive praxis, but equally of the artistic praxis of the avant-garde. The writing practice of artistic modernism has always tended to deconstruct meaning by questioning the author as a center who provides meaning to the artistic process of creation and shifts the accent of creative praxis from the chain of the signified to the chain of signifiers. It has favored linguistically productive texts over representative texts. Artaud seems to best illustrate for Derrida the positivity of the avant-garde art program. Not only is he against "all ideological theater, all cultural theater, all communicative, *interpretive* . . . theater seeking to transmit a content, or to deliver a message," he works on the outline and foundation of a positive, constructive theater, since the "profound essence of Artaud's project, his historico-metaphysical decision" is: "*Artaud wanted to erase repetition in general* . . . Nonrepetition, expenditure that is resolute and without return in the unique time consuming the present, must put an end to fearful discursiveness, to unskirtable ontology, to dialectics."[35]

Derrida's praise of the avant-garde, just as his own praxis of philosophical and logical deconstruction of traditional texts, remains internally dependent on its adversary, the idealistic theory of cognition with its presumed concept of the self-assured subject. This dependency may be acceptable as long as Derrida stays within the field of epistemological reflection and as long as within this field he can demonstrate the universal predominance and influence of

idealistic cognition theories, as well as their shortcomings. But as soon as he goes beyond the realm of epistemology, this dependency opens itself to criticism. For example, discourses aimed at criticizing or organizing social praxis may be unable to avoid working with "metaphysical closures." The epistemological project of pointing out metaphysical closures in any discourse may be of epistemological import; it is not necessarily relevant for the philosophical reflection of social practice. Even in subverting idealist epistemology, deconstructive thinking remains dependent on the opposition "true versus false." By allowing this opposition to structure philosophical or theoretical reflection as a whole, it excludes theorizing centered on the (relative) opposition "right versus wrong." In other words, poststructuralist thought tends to subordinate the pragmatic question of the conceivable to the question of truth. By what means is this operation justified? Is it enough to assert that every thought working with "metaphysical closures" falls prey to the illusion of possessing truth? That the need for an answer to this question seems to be especially pressing within literary criticism is in itself a testimony to the poststructuralist tendency to expand beyond the realm of epistemology. This expansion determines, for example, which body of literary texts we find either especially valuable or paradigmatic for literature's potential in modern times. It determines our conception and assessment of modernism and the cultural-political choice between "representative" or linguistically productive texts; it influences the institutional commerce with literature in different spheres of public life. It thus is ensnared in social praxis without reflecting on this entanglement. Herein lie the limitations of Derrida's concept of modernism. His own philosophical praxis remains a strategy of negation. It remains dependent on what it deconstructs. The problem is that once Derrida gets beyond questions of epistemology—which may be subject to analysis in terms of truth and falsity—to questions of art, he fails to relate art to social praxis—where questions of truth and falsity must give way to questions of right and wrong. Derrida seems to subordinate the question of action solely to the question of truth.[36]

I want to return to Adorno as a way of coming to terms with both Derrida and Adorno and their notions of modernity. I want to work out here the idea I suggested at the beginning of this section, that is, that their conceptions of modernism are congruent. This is so although Derrida's philosophical critique of sameness and self-identity at first glance seems to be incompatible with the positive notion that Adorno attributes to the concept of particular and self-identical

qualities (he juxtaposes self-identical qualities with the logical hierarchy from the merely particular to the highest general that instrumental reason imposes upon reality and that subjects the elements of physical as well as social and human reality to a process of unification and quantification).

Nevertheless, the basic thought structures of the philosophies of Adorno and Derrida are identical in very interesting ways. This identity goes well beyond the theoretical similarities pointed out by Ryan and Hörisch.[37]

Both philosophies critique a system of metaphysical closures that for reasons of domination reduces differences or qualities to comparable identities and that eliminates heterogeneity in favor of exchangeable homogeneity. But neither philosophy is oriented toward social practice. I reject the notion that the "major difference" between Derrida and Adorno is "that the critical lever for Derrida is logical (or philosophical-historical), whereas for Adorno the lever is social."[38] Adorno faced the consequences of his pessimistic social analysis and refuted the possibility of a "lever" that could possess appreciable social relevance. Here precisely lies the reason that aesthetic theory (and art as a medium of its reflections) shifts to the center of Adorno's thought: it trains artists and recipients of art in the "power of reflection" that art "alone can scarcely accomplish"[39] and thus strengthens art's resistance to everything social, which must be regarded as a complete context of delusion. The sort of reflection that must take place for Adorno within the realm of art has an analogue in the practice of deconstruction that Derrida urges us to engage in within the realm of philosophy. Neither of these mental activities is conceivable as a practice oriented toward the institutionalization of social progress. The sole difference between Adorno and Derrida in this regard is that Adorno addresses as a theme the plight of the intellectual isolated in his ivory tower, and he connects this situation to his social analysis. Derrida, on the other hand, does not even raise the question of how his philosophical practice could be institutionalized or socially mediated. He sticks, simply, to the development of an esoteric intellectual practice.

The difference between Adorno and Derrida I have just touched upon is a significant one. If one wanted to refute Adorno's approach, one would have to start with his social analysis and prove its results to be inexact by, for example, discussing historico-politically and philosophically another social agency he overlooked; one that would permit progress (and political engagement) to be conceived of. Adorno himself was clearly aware of the significance of a social

agency for an "optimistic," progress-oriented social philosophy. His later sociopolitical pessimism arose, along with other ideas, from a development of his thought that in the course of the thirties made it impossible for him to continue seeing the proletariat as a historical subject whose existence guaranteed progress. Since he was unable to perceive any other social agent (which would not necessarily have to be a historical or general subject, but could, for example, be given with the structure of our psyche and its reaction to a reified "world"), his later philosophy centered on attempts at intellectual hibernation. If one wanted to refute Derrida's approach, one would have to start in an entirely different way. One could not base one's attack on the historical-political or philosophical discussion of social agency, because the question of the institutionalization of deconstruction as a social practice does not seem to interest Derrida. Therefore a discussion of his social and historical premises has to begin at an even earlier point. It must begin with the structure of his thought, with his procedure of analyzing concepts in terms of dichotomies (for example, his contrast between the self-glorifying subject of idealistic epistemology versus the notion of meaning as the effect of the play of the signifiers). The structure of his practice of thinking is based on the exclusion of other possibilities of thought without in any way legitimizing this exclusion. This procedure limits the possibility of expanding the practice of deconstruction beyond the realm of epistemological concerns. Even within this realm, I find Derrida vulnerable to criticism, because he does exactly what he accuses his adversary—the entire tradition of Western thought—of doing: He gains the thrust of his arguments only by arguing antithetically against the subject of idealistic epistemology and against epistemological closures, but in doing so he employs the same suspect strategies of exclusion.

Adorno's practice of negation in the medium of art and Derrida's philosophical deconstructions are both deficient as social practices, but for slightly different reasons. Adorno wrestled with the problem of agency but saw no solution for it at the time. Derrida doesn't even deal with the crucial matter of agency. In the following I can only hint at a possible answer to the question Adorno cannot answer and that Derrida simply does not address. I will, however, return to the matter in more detail at the end of the introduction.

Theories of social practice are not interested in what is universally "true," but in what is "right" in a specific historical situation. The discussion of social practice has to be concerned with action-oriented values. Since any possible action is always already entangled in

history or praxis, the values on which it is based can never be "absolute" or "true." It is in my opinion highly typical of the structuring and excluding effect of post-structuralist theorizing that even the most reflective colleagues trained in the deconstructive mode of thinking always hastily assume that the mere use of the term "value" implies some claim to the absolute validity of a position. The text's or our own entanglement in history or praxis allows valuations only within the framework of specific historical situations. These situations are not ideologically homogeneous. The divergence of ideological positions within any such framework is a result of ruptures, inconsistencies, and contradictions within single discourses and between discourses, which can be perceived as interpretive strategies competing for domination. But the divergence of positions and the process of competition open up the possibility of reflecting on these differences politically and historically, and of evaluating them comparatively. A reasoning that defines itself negatively, reveals forms of domination and exploitation in a specific historical context, and deals with the roles that texts play in this struggle will end up taking sides. In contrast to such a position, the deconstructive reading of literature will always be "self-locked . . . in the toils of endless demystification." [40]

C. Beyond Adorno and Derrida on Modernism: Literature and Experience

The question whether something is "right" or "wrong" in a given historical framework displaces the epistemological question whether something is "true" or "false." Thus it may very well be that a subject does not first "mean" something that it subsequently expresses through language (which thus would be reduced to a tool available to us). It may also be "that, rather than being master of an 'objective' world above which it stands, consciousness is instead an effect of social and unconscious processes which it could never fully 'know' or control; that all models that provide general explanations of the world are to a certain extent theoretical fictions."[41] But this does not contradict the necessity of discussing literary texts as representative texts, as models of human behavior, and as participants in the constant struggle for interpretive power within society. If anything, an overemphasis on epistemological questions prevents us from seeing that the literary media and the public spheres of cultural production are to be highly prized socially because they make it possible for individuals to work through their material experiences and understand them as "consciously" as they can. With

its focus locked on the text (as an order of signifiers preordained by the given historical situation) and on writing (as that which is engraved on us from this order), poststructuralism excludes from the start the possibility that there might exist a *material* organization of social reality external to language and imprinted on our psyche (and physical being), written into our existence via the mechanisms of material as well as cultural reproduction.

I don't mean to say that with the help of language we could "accurately" recognize the physical-psychic effect of the material organization of society on human beings. But what I have just posited could mean that this effect might cause a latent tension to develop between itself and the prevailing "text" of a period, that the prevailing ideology of a historical situation (organized in a "text") is designed to misinterpret those effects and, thus, to establish the precondition for illusory satisfaction, which in turn is not only designed to deflect those psychic tensions or contradictions, but to stabilize the prevailing system of ideological and economic reproduction in a given society. Just as the play of signifiers contradicts and undermines any claim of possessing a well-defined, conceptually unequivocal, logocentric discourse, so material experience may contradict and undermine the prevalent ideology of a historical situation. And just as the struggle for interpretive power by imposing metaphysical closures attempts to restrain the play of signifiers, the prevailing ideology limits the means by which individuals may more or less consciously understand their material experiences.

If what I have outlined is the case, then the predominant ideology of a period could be interpreted as a strategy of *textual domination,* with the goal of robbing the dominated groups, sexes, nations, and classes of the language necessary for interpreting their situation. The "complete quantification" of the public sphere by the culture industry that Horkheimer and Adorno refer to could be described as the expropriation of those heterogeneous languages with which individual experiences might remain interpretable, without the individual being subjected to a "complete identification with the generality."[42] The mass media for Adorno, however, block from the start the interpretation of our sensuous-material experiences through a dominating system of spectacles, images, and representations.

The question I would pose and emphasize is whether this attempt to thoroughly dominate cultural life is necessarily successful. This question receives affirmative answers from Adorno explicitly and Derrida and deconstructive literary criticism implicitly. However, if material, unarticulated experiences exist, and if their effect is a

psychic tension or contradiction of some kind, then different degrees of verbal approximation and, thus, of conscious understanding *are possible.* But where and how does this understanding take place? Whether these experiences remain on the subliminal level or are dealt with consciously depends on the access people have to a public sphere of production (*Produktionsöffentlichkeit*). This phrase means the "discourses" and "institutions" that can provide individuals or social groups with a medium in which to deal with subliminally felt experiences and learn to interpret these experiences on a more or less conscious and critical level. It may very well be that, to quote Paul de Man, in "the act of anthropological intersubjective interpretation, a fundamental discrepancy always prevents the observer from coinciding fully with the consciousness he is observing" and that the "same discrepancy exists in everyday language, in the impossibility of making the actual expression coincide with what has to be expressed, of making the actual sign coincide with what it signifies."[43] However, one should not allow this *one* element, this *one* aspect of how language works to be transformed into the only hermeneutically constitutive factor. We cannot dispense with the labor of approaching an understanding that can perhaps only fully unfold in a trial-and-error process and in an institutionalized "public sphere of production."

Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, who developed this concept of the "public sphere of production" in their book *Öffentlichkeit und Erfahrung* (Public Sphere and Experience), argue that *only* experience confirmed and corroborated through discussion and coped with as *collective* experience can be said to be truly experienced: "The public sphere only possesses use-value characteristics when social experience is organized in it."[44] Literature and, more generally, storytelling have important functions for Negt and Kluge. What counts for them is not the distinction between a "good" or a "bad" story, but rather between heterogeneity and homogeneity. "Tell your story" means you can deal with your experiences only by discussing them. Stories, of course, can easily be used for purposes of cultural domination as well, if they portray behavioral patterns detached from individual experiences. "Abstract" stories, such as the Horatio Alger myth, contribute just as much to the expropriation of language as do ideologically laden stereotypes. According to Negt and Kluge, the modern culture industry robs individuals of "languages" for interpreting self and world by denying them the media for organizing their own experiences. The consciousness industry *does* represent a public sphere of production, but one that takes

consciousness as "raw material" or that constantly tries to sever the connection between concrete experiences and consciousness.

A word about consciousness is in order. In such an approach as that of Negt and Kluge's, consciousness is neither conceived in the sense of idealistic epistemology as a static and self-sufficient center of a cognition striving for truth, nor in the poststructuralist sense of a text whose author is unknown. Consciousness rather is the historically concrete production of meaning that *approximates* an accurate articulation of sensuous-material experiences. From this perspective, a chance exists to escape from the dissemination of intentions into the chain of signifiers, because every historical situation contains ideological ruptures and offers alternatives of thought on which depends the *degree* of the greater or lesser approximation to an understanding of material experience. In my view, literary criticism's major theoretical alternative today is not between a deconstructive or an idealistic theory of cognition, but between the positions expressed in these two questions: First, is the self with its "historico-politico-economico-sexual determinations," i.e., with its intellectual and material identity, in fact "no more than an effect of a structural resistance to irreducible heterogeneity"?[45] Or, second, are there different degrees of conceptual understanding of material experiences, within which provisionally "unified concepts" are *more* "than textual ruses to postpone the possibility of a radical heterogeneity"?[46] If the answer to the first question is yes, then any form of a praxis-oriented understanding of a historical situation is impossible. I believe, however, that only the second of my two questions can be answered with yes and that we *can* escape the dissemination of intentions into the chain of signifiers. The ideological ruptures in every historical situation enable us to develop alternatives of thought that do approximate an understanding of experience.

D. Theories of Modernism and the Social and Political Assessment of Contemporary Societies: Artaud, Breton, Barthes

My two questions are relevant to a theory of the avant-garde because each question and answer corresponds to a different concept of the avant-garde. The poststructuralist text theory, which has been accurately characterized as an "answer to the conditions of modernist literary production,"[47] favors authors who "shift to the foreground precisely the 'textuality' of their production, their ambiguity and the plurality of meanings, the autonomous and distorting effect produced by the signifying material." This theory favors highly

organized texts in which it is futile to try and search for a meaning. Thus texts by Rimbaud, Lautréamont, Joyce, Robbe-Grillet, or Celan are stylized as paradigms of avant-garde work; an author like Brecht is praised for using avant-garde writing techniques for certain aims in his art, but these aims themselves are considered to be unessential for a theoretical and historical determination of the avant-garde.

Only by setting the avant-garde within the broad context of cultural politics and the consciousness industry—and only by seeing the chances to use the ruptures within this system—can we obtain a full understanding of the avant-garde. The limits to what Adorno and Derrida can do to help us understand the avant-garde have little to do with the differences one would think inherent in an idealistic versus a materialistic concept of the avant-garde. Both theories are limited because they take capitalist, bourgeois society to be closed, a monolith without ruptures that would allow intervening practice. Both theories attach themselves to a social and political pessimism in the face of the monolith.

We can see this pessimism in Derrida, Adorno, Kristeva, and clearly in Roland Barthes, who wrote of modernity in this way: "Our modernity makes a constant effort to defeat the exchange: it tries to resist the market for works (by excluding itself from mass communication), the sign (by exemption from meaning, by madness). . . . And even so, modernity can do nothing: the exchange recuperates everything, acclimating what appears to deny it."[48] If the "pressure of capitalistic language" were "paranoid, systematic, argumentative, articulated," which Barthes denies, then one could argue against this pressure concretely and with a language that posits new meaning. Capitalistic language, is, however, "an implacable stickiness, a *doxa,* a kind of unconscious: in short, the essence of ideology."[49]

Already the surrealists had seen language as dominated by the political and economic system, where it served a functionary role but became closed and static as a result of this role. What chance, then, was there that spheres of culture would be able to articulate experience in the way I have argued? Culture could provide this possibility only if there were a material organization of society that was inscribed in individuals but that was nevertheless independent of language, independent of what Breton calls the world of "superimposed images." The very concept of experience itself must change depending on whether society is identified with language or not. The Surrealists seem to lean toward an identification of social and

linguistic experience. So testifies Breton: "[E]xperience has found itself increasingly circumscribed. It paces back and forth in a cage from which it is more and more difficult to make it emerge."[50]

The idea that modern societies pen up and frustrate experience in general still determines the current discussion of the relation between experience and culture. Witness Rainer Nägele's recent statement: "The all-pervasive organization of experience by the bourgeois public sphere and its media apparatus prevents not only the articulation of new modes of experiences but the experience itself. If there is a potential for alternative forms of experience, they can appear only negatively in the text, in its gaps and ruptures." For Nägele the dominating power of late capitalist culture functions "through a totalizing, internalized structure of experience."[51]

Experience here is seen as the enemy of bloodless abstraction that has been impoverished because of the social order. Insofar as it is still possible as a positive mode of existence, it supposedly has been reduced to a mere idiosyncratic feeling of emotional intensity. Thus no mediation is possible that helps an individual move from a feeling of life's intensity to an understanding of society. The merely particular remains just that: It materializes momentarily and is never tied to anything general in society.

Still, as I argued above, it is possible to speak of a sensuous-material experience if an organization of society is inscribed in individuals in a way that is independent of language. I find even in the surrealists a fruitful ambivalence in the intentions they express with regards to language and experience. It is an ambivalence lost in the theory of modernism represented by Barthes, Derrida, Kristeva, and the like. Artaud dreamed of a language whose vocabulary is no longer characterized by "abstract quality": "It is a matter of substituting for the spoken language a different language of nature, whose expressive possibilities will be equated to verbal language."[52]

Artaud's efforts are most interesting as positive gambits that contrast to the pessimism we have seen expressed by Adorno, Derrida, and Barthes. The natural language Artaud dreamed of is intended to be equal to the expressive potential of the language of words, and not merely to provide deconstructive laughter. The language of abstraction that prevails in late capitalism is the expression as well as the precondition for alienated subjectivity. One cannot work one's way through individual experiences in and by means of such a language. It was for this reason that Artaud concerned himself with developing a kind of thinking that could digest *particular* experience inwardly: "By their nature and defining char-

acter, fixed once and for all, [words] arrest and paralyze thought instead of permitting it and fostering its development. And by development I mean actual extended concrete qualities, so long as we are in an extended concrete world."[53] Artaud's insistence on the concrete and particular as the object of thought must *also* be read in connection with his search for positive and affirmative forms of expression that not only escape the domination of the abstract ideological word in rare, privileged, and constantly endangered moments of freedom (for example, through the praxis of deconstruction), but that vigorously renew our capacity to perceive the particular experience: "what is important is that, by positive means, the sensitivity is put in a state of deepened and keener perception."[54]

Artaud and Breton were trying to reverse a process. They wanted to expropriate the expropriated language. But in emphasizing the particular—and here they resemble Adorno—they failed to consider the issue in the light of the dialectics of experience and language or heterogeneity and homogeneity. Engaging in this is only possible once we have stopped thinking of language and society as merged into one delusion-producing monolith. We must look for the ruptures. We must search for the possibilities that inhere in the slippage between society and language. The ambivalence observable in the surrealists' analysis of the connection between experience and language, society and subject is, as I have said, systematically and unfortunately excluded from the theory of modernism as represented by Barthes, Derrida, Kristeva.[55] Walter Benjamin, on the other hand, recognized the positive elements within the surrealist argument and developed the surrealist concept of experience further —a point to which I will return later.

III. The Problem of Historicity for a Theory of the Avant-Garde

A. Why Marxist Realism Does Not Provide an Answer

Marx states very well the context that fostered the traditional narrative form in his remarks in the *Grundrisse*: "The acquisition of the alien will is a prerequisite of any relation of domination."[56] As long as society's domination of *will* was the main necessity for maintaining the social order, the traditional narrative prospered. But once relations of domination that relied upon the subliminal colonization of human desires began to characterize society and once the dominating culture began to appropriate languages and desires in order to 'equate' and 'quantify' them, some sort of crisis that undermined the heretofore indigenous and work-determined relation of subjects to their own discourses was bound to strike the artform of traditional narrative. To the extent that the theories of modernism set forth by Adorno, Derrida, and others help us understand this crisis, their explanations are useful and, as far as they go, correct. But the predominant theories of modernism don't go far enough.

One approach that would seem to take us beyond the theories of modernism discussed so far is that represented by Georg Lukács, which has an articulate spokesperson today in Fredric Jameson. In the essay "The Ideology of the Text," written in 1975, Jameson objects to Roland Barthes' theory of modernism, because it gives too much weight to style.[57] Jameson explains the addiction modernism had for the new and the role of shock in modernistic literature in terms of modernism's connection with consumer capitalism. For Jameson, however, the critical stance of modernist literature toward the validity of norms and their transmission through narratives and toward the commodification of public language remains superficial. Jameson says: "For modernism—radical in its rejection of realistic discourse and of the bourgeois world to which the latter corresponds—imagines that if . . . seeing the world through the old 'bourgeois' categories is bad, a change in style will help us to see the world in a new way and thus achieve a kind of cultural or countercultural revolution of its own."[58]

How far does Jameson take us toward a solution of our problems about modernism? He argues that modernism was on the right track in breaking with the older narrative forms, but he objects that the resort to stylistic originality is only superficial as a strategy. What is his own suggestion? By referring to "experience" (p. 223), he seems to distance himself from the usual claim of orthodox Marxist aestheticians that literature should portray or reflect a social totality. However, he continuously falls back on Lukács's position. He stresses frequently in his writings that he considers Georg Lukács to be the greatest Marxist aesthetician of this century and implies repeatedly that it is the duty of art to search for possibilities of reproducing social totality.

Jameson's position is too close to that of Lukács and it is shaky as a result. Any theory modeled on that of Lukács compromises itself in two related ways. First, it cannot go beyond Lukács's demand for organic totality in the work of art. This demand severely limits an art intended to portray the contradictory nature of modern society, because it leads to a rejection of the sort of modernistic,

avant-garde literature that allows the ruptures and gaps of reality to show through in the fragmentary nature of the work itself. Second, Lukács's position is connected with an undemocratic overestimation of the political leadership role of a vanguard party. It cannot allow for aesthetic thinking proceeding from the concept of particular experience, which can be worked through in the medium of art, since the organized elite of the vanguard party is, thanks to its intellectual-analytical capabilities, allegedly in a position to recognize what political action is necessary as well as what developmental direction society is taking. If this were to hold true, art could in fact be reduced to the subsequent "beautiful" illustration of what the elite previously recognized to be correct.[59]

B. Bürger's Reflection upon the Historicity of his Own Historical Reconstructions

We cannot be satisfied with a theory of modernism that reduces liberating praxis in a gesture of resignation to the philosophical or artistic praxis of dislodging and breaking up ideologies. Nor can we be satisfied with leftist theories of progress in art made to center on notions of content. In other words: neither Derrida nor Lukács is satisfactory. It is precisely here, where we need help transcending a fruitless opposition, that Peter Bürger could make a valuable contribution to discussions of modernism and the avant-garde in the English-speaking world.

Bürger's approach too would be inadequate if its only contribution were a historical reconstruction of literary history from the development of autonomous literature in bourgeois culture during the period of classicism and romanticism in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries up through the turn to modernism/Aestheticism and on to the avant-garde. What makes Bürger so important is that his theory reflects the conditions of its own possibilities. His historical reconstruction would be open to attacks on its methodology and epistemology if it were simply a Hegelian-Marxist rewrite of history. What distinguishes Bürger's theory is the reflection behind his categories.

That Bürger's originality is in his reflection on the historicity of his categories is important, because the history as he reconstructs it has already been presented by Herbert Marcuse, Jürgen Habermas, and others. In *Legitimation Crisis* (1973), Habermas defines the social function of bourgeois-autonomous art as follows: "Only bourgeois art, which has become autonomous in the face of demands for employment extrinsic to art, has taken up positions on behalf

of the victims of bourgeois rationalization. Bourgeois art has become the refuge for a satisfaction, even if only virtual, of those needs that have become, as it were, illegal in the material life-process of bourgeois society."[60]

For Marcuse as well as Habermas and Bürger art holds a precarious, ambivalent position in bourgeois society. The classical-romantic art of modern society, on the one hand, protests against the alienation and reification in society and insists on the realization of certain ideals in the future. On the other hand, because it is detached and autonomous and is juxtaposed to society, the same art threatens to degenerate into a mere compensation for what society lacks and thus serves finally to affirm social conditions it sees no reason to protest against. Thus, art can both protest and protect the status quo. We can see now why Bürger sees no major change in the institutional role of art between classical-romantic and realistic art on the one hand and modernist art on the other. The predominant feature of modernist or aestheticist art is that it calls attention to its own material. This shift represents an incremental change only, because such a change was already a possibility, given the ambivalent status of the autonomous art in bourgeois society. Bürger sees only a quantitative, not a qualitative development in the move to aestheticism. Art dissociated itself from its communicative function in society and radically set itself against society. This change appeared on the level of artistic content; its function remained unchanged and led to refutation of the idea that literature was capable of mediating norms and values. Habermas puts it this way:

> The modern trend has radicalized the autonomy of bourgeois art vis-à-vis contexts of employment external to art. This development produces, for the first time, a counterculture, arising from the center of bourgeois society itself and hostile to the possessive-individualistic, achievement- and advantage-oriented lifestyle of the bourgeoisie. . . . In the artistically beautiful, the bourgeoisie once could experience primarily its own ideals and redemption, however fictive, of a promise of happiness that was merely suspended in everyday life. But in radicalized art, it soon had to recognize the negation rather than the complement of its social practice.[61]

Most theories of modernism current in American criticism exaggerate the significance of the shift from realism to aestheticism to such a degree that they neglect or insufficiently appreciate the important effort of the avant-garde praxis to destroy the "shell of the no-longer-beautiful illusion" and aim to make art "pass desublimated over into life."[62] As a result, most American criticism has lost sight of the goal the avant-garde set up for itself. Avant-garde

artists were not just reacting to society with feelings of ennui, angst, weltschmerz, and a host of other pseudoexistentialist passions of the soul. Avant-garde artists weren't merely reacting to society with last-ditch efforts at breaking up and dislodging prevalent styles. American theories of modernism—like their French models—have emphasized the pathos and not the praxis of the modern artist. We should come to see that avant-garde artists were actively attacking the institution of art. Their effort was not to isolate themselves, but to reintegrate themselves and their art into life. It is no accident that the active, even aggressive artistic manifesto—an address to fellow artists and society—became the preferred medium of expression for the avant-garde artist of the twentieth century.

In his discussions of the avant-garde's attack upon art as an institution Bürger goes beyond Habermas, who only touches upon this topic. Bürger elucidates the historical as well as epistemological import of the manifestos. He shows that the avant-garde's attack on the institution "art" in bourgeois society not only was designed to destroy this institution, but permitted its existence and significance to become visible and perceivable in the first place.

This last point is important. Pre-avant-garde modernist art was of necessity caught in the web of its own institutionalization, because the institution "art" was not defined enough historically to come into the view of the artists who practiced it. Thus, aestheticist modernism could not address thematically the social status of art in bourgeois society. It could only give body to social criticism by the stylistic weapons it tried to use to undermine the homogeneous ideology of bourgeois society. Its artistic practice could not free it from its restricted social status. What is more, its practice left it unable even to perceive this status.

In revealing how the avant-garde moved from the passive stance of modernism to a more aggressive stance and came to base its practice on a more reflective attitude toward the institution of art, Bürger moves in an operation that parallels the history that he analyzes. He makes his reconstruction of history reflect the philosophical conditions of its own possibility. Hegel and Marx stand behind Bürger, of course. In the preface to his *Philosophy of Law,* Hegel writes: "When philosophy paints its grey in grey, a form of life has become old, and with grey in grey it cannot be rejuvenated, but only recognized. Minerva's owl only begins its flight as dusk emerges."[63] In other words, philosophy can only comprehend an epoch adequately when that epoch is approaching its end and, thus, its sublation (*Aufhebung*). Marx elaborated this idea materialistically

and showed with the example of the category "labor" that the *perception* of the general validity of this category does not remain external to this general validity itself. Marx argues "that conditions must have unfolded historically for that perception to become possible." Bürger applies this idea to art history and thus convincingly demonstrates that the historical analysis of the social functioning of past art, i.e., its "institution," became possible only when, first, the historical unfolding of this institution had reached its end in the radical separation of aestheticist or modernist art from society, and second, when due to this development, the avant-garde could attack the institution of "art." In other words, Bürger reflects the historicity of his own theory along with the history he reconstructs.[64]

A literary or philosophical analysis that does not reflect its ties to history and society remains arbitrary. Even if such an analysis were "correct" (in some sense) or "true" to its object, it would still be important to recognize that the objects under the microscope of analysis *and this analysis itself* develop historically. By this I mean that any category that is meant to comprehend an object must be formulated on the basis of a concept of the development of the object. Bürger's categories are historical in a profound sense.

C. The Institution of Art

With its stress on the historicity of aesthetic categories derived from specific historical contexts, Bürger's theory is a strong counterargument to any theory lacking in historical awareness. He goes beyond those who insist that the key point in the development of modern art was the shift from realism to aestheticism. He profoundly highlights the importance of the avant-garde's attack on the institution of art. What is most important in Bürger is the way he uses this attack to gain a perspective for seeing the way in which art and society must always be mediated in some way. He is able to show that understanding this mediation will allow us to see that there is a historically specific institutionalization of aesthetic praxis in every era. He shows that this level of mediation is not something external to the concept of the work of art. It is essential, as it historicizes and makes relative the concept of the work of art itself.

Critics unaware of the institutional role of art formulate their criticism in terms of the classical concept of the *work* of art. A work of art inhabits for such critics inevitably a privileged domain apart from society. Even as astute and original a critic as Paul de Man repeats this gesture, as I see it, by laying such stress on the definition of literary language (cf. footnote 64).

What is most admirable in Bürger's book comes out in his reflection on how the concepts "institution," "autonomy," "work of art," "montage," and "collage" interrelate. By showing how the institution "art" mediates art with bourgeois society, Bürger makes clear that the institution itself, and no transcendental concept of the work of art, serves as the essence of art in precise, historical, and recoverable ways. Whatever concept of art we have, whatever sense we have of the status of art as autonomous, derives from the social function of art in modern society. Autonomous art has satisfied residual human needs of the bourgeois world by offering the "beautiful appearance/semblance (*Schein*)" of a better world, but it has also functioned in society by creating hope through its very existence for the realization of social ideals in the future. Art has had to balance the affirmative and the negative, and the balance has been precarious. Although historical development led to the gradual destruction of this balance, these basic features of the modern institution of art were preserved throughout the nineteenth century.

Because the concept of the work of art was institutional and that institution stayed in place, the ideological function of art was also preserved. The concept of the work of art was, in fact, the necessary means for art's becoming institutionalized as a medium for ideological reproduction. It is interesting to see why.

Romantic aesthetics speaks a great deal about the complexity, inexhaustibility, infinity of meaning in the work of art. This talk has a very clear ideological function, because "complexity" never means heterogeneity or plurality of meaning. Quite the opposite. "Complexity" and "unity" go together in the classical-romantic aesthetic. Coleridge puts it this way: "The Beautiful, contemplated in its essentials, that is, in kind and not in degree, is that in which the many, still seen as many, becomes one."[65] The aesthetic limits of the "organic" work of art as a unified totality are simultaneously ideological limits. Within these limits, art constitutes itself as an "infinite continuum of reflection" (Friedrich Schlegel). In other words, every artistic text is understood to contain a wealth of meanings, "connotations" as opposed to "denotations," that can elicit a possible endless and variable series of interpretations. In the American context, W. K. Wimsatt states the point this way: "Each reader will experience the poem at his own level of experience or at several. A good story poem is like a stone thrown into a pond, into our minds, where ever widening circles of meaning go out—and this because of the structure of the story."[66] We fail to understand the true nature of the romantic concept of art if we believe, as one

recent book states, that "conventional criticism aims at a closure of the troubling plurality: it aims at an interpretation, fixing a meaning, finding a source (the author) and an ending, a closure (*the* meaning)."[67] The conventional concept of art is more subtle than that. The ideological function of "organic" works of art depends on a balance between an internal semantic plenitude that escapes simple fixations and ideological demarcations that enclose the work of art from external considerations. Countless books on the aesthetics developed in line with the institution of art as autonomous give testimony to this point. The autonomous work of art simultaneously permits ideological exclusions and the subjective experience of fullness. To date, the function of such art has been discussed most perceptively only by Pierre Macherey.[68]

Bürger has much to say about collage and montage, as indeed he should, because the success of any theory of the avant-garde can be measured by how convincingly it can anchor the avant-garde formal principle of the collage and montage. Bürger illustrates how this formal principle necessarily follows from the avant-garde attack upon the institution of art. The autonomous status and the concept of the work of art operative in the bourgeois institution of art imply separation from social life. This is essential for an art intending to interpret the world at a distance. For such an aesthetic project, a concept of the work of art as being a closed, albeit "complex" unity is appropriate. Avant-garde aesthetic praxis, though, aimed to intervene in social reality.[69] The avant-garde saw that the organic unity of the bourgeois institution of art left art impotent to intervene in social life, and thus developed a different concept of the work of art. Its concept of art sees a chance to reintegrate art into social praxis if artists would create unclosed, individual segments of art that open themselves to supplementary responses. The aesthetic fragment functions very differently than the organic whole of romantic artwork, for it challenges its recipient to make it an integrated part of his or her reality and to relate it to sensuous-material experience. The quote of Brecht introduced by Bürger is especially enlightening in this context (see p. 91).

IV. A Critique of Bürger's own Sociopolitical Presuppositions and the Limitations They Place on the Potential of Post-Avant-Garde Art

A. A Critique of Bürger: The Potential for Post-Avant-Garde Art

By reflecting on the historiographical implications of the avant-garde's attack on the institution of art, Bürger succeeds in developing a materialist theory of the development of bourgeois art that is less vulnerable to criticism than his analysis of the avant-garde itself. He limits himself to a historical reflection on the avant-garde's attempt to create a clean slate and neglects attempting to discover a future function of art in a way that would carry through his rigorous analysis of the institution of art, and that would connect this future function with the fragment as aesthetic principle. Instead he takes flight in what I find unsatisfying statements about the disunity and plurality of current art practices. Since the avant-garde failed in its attempt to lead art back into social life, Bürger argues that post-avant-garde art has only the ability to dispose of all traditional stylistic and aesthetic forms. No new form emerging from the avant-garde is theoretically privileged over traditional forms.

Why is Bürger so pessimistic? He must have his reasons, but they are only hinted at in his book. His reflections on the history of art as an institution in bourgeois society have led him to the conclusion that this institution is itself historically specific and thus not applicable to other periods or societies. On the surface it may indeed seem as if this concept of art as institution merely enables one to grasp literature's social function by assessing aesthetic theories of a precise period, comments in author's letters and diaries, and reviews of primary literature and thus allows one to determine the specific social function of a literature in a certain period in a universally applicable way. Such a mechanical understanding would however falsify the significance of the concept. The institution "art" as Bürger intended it is a typically European and bourgeois phenomenon, since only in the bourgeois period from the eighteenth to the twentieth century did art constitute one of the numerous social institutions. In other periods, art may have been *part* of one of the social institutions, even an essential part, but it did not constitute that institution in itself.

This fact has had a major impact on the structure of scholarly

discourse in literary criticism, an impact not fully appreciated even now. Literary scholars too seldom understand that their disciplines are the result of the institutional role granted to literature in bourgeois society. It is not their own efforts that have given them an institutional role. If the discourse of literary studies was ever able to perceive itself as more or less independent from other scientific discourses—and it has strived to do so in the twentieth century—this ability depended directly on literary art itself having the status of an institution within society. I would argue, further, that the deconstruction of art as an institution by the avant-garde made obsolete the discourse of any literary criticism that would try to define itself as a *purely* literary science while at the same time claiming to be able to adequately describe the function of art in society. Literary criticism in Germany and the United States after World War II has developed in a way that reflects the bourgeois institution of art, without comprehending the degree to which avant-garde art practice has changed the situation. Peter Bürger's book is extremely valuable in showing why this is the case and why the collapse of the institution of art necessitates a change in literary science, for it can no longer remain autonomous when art is not autonomous. Precisely here lies one of the reasons literary science can only be practiced in the future in an interdisciplinary manner. This is clearly the case for current attempts to reflect on the possibilities of traditional narrative and on the moral function of narratives. We should no longer have to stress that the scientific status of literary science is not founded upon our ability to develop in good positivist fashion inventories of facts about literature. These facts are important, but we must reflect on them in historical and theoretical ways. Such reflection, of necessity, should include some thought about the future not only of art but of the institution of literary criticism as well.

To return to Bürger: His refusal to reflect on future possibilities of an art integrated into social life that were opened up by the avant-garde is striking, because he himself has helped us see the contours of a future determination of art's function and he has made apparent the paradigmatic significance of such precursors as Brecht and Alexander Kluge. To be sure, his refusal does not reflect the false modesty of a historian who habitually shrinks from the interdisciplinary approach and from consideration of the future per se.[70] Rather, Bürger's historical view proves, when closely examined, to be pessimistic as well. He is convinced that the avant-garde's intention of reintegrating art into life praxis cannot occur in bour-

geois society, except in the form of a false sublation or overcoming of autonomous art. The assumption that this reintegration is impossible implies either that history is determined solely by objective laws of development independent of human subjectivity (a view which, since Lenin, has been characteristic of so-called scientific Marxism and the vanguard party mentality associated with it), or a pessimism à la Adorno that is no longer capable of conceiving of intervention and progress, but endures and waits for change in a state of paralysis. At the very least it implies the conviction that even if a social agency of progress were conceivable, it would surely not be art (cf. the social philosophy of Habermas). That Bürger tends toward one of these positions, all three of which attest to the social impotence of all currently possible art forms, is indicated by the doubt he expresses as to whether the dismantling of the autonomy status is even desirable: "For the (relative) freedom of art vis-à-vis the praxis of life is at the same time the condition that must be fulfilled if there is to be a critical cognition of reality" (p. 50). It surely holds true that the ideals incorporated in bourgeois art in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries could only have been realized by the whole of society. But can one conclude from this that in order for bourgeois art to be overcome, bourgeois society must be overcome as well, and that today the only conceivable type of art is one advocating hibernation during bad times? An affirmative answer to these questions is implicit in Bürger's description of the possibilities of post-avant-garde art, a description that attempts to combine Marcuse's and Adorno's determination of art in capitalistic society.[71]

With this description, however, Bürger does not in my estimation pursue his own radical analysis of the bourgeois institution of "art" to its logical conclusion. By continuing to refer art to a social totality, whether this is meant in Adorno's negative sense or as the "beautiful appearance" of the classical-romantic tradition or as Marcuse's concept of redemptive memory, he remains bound to a constitutive category (i.e., totality) of the bourgeois institution "art." From this it follows logically that the recipient should only relate to art through meditation, reflecting its critical contents from a distance. But Bürger thus presumes a transcendental subject who is bound to forms of abstraction, and who experiences himself as a self-assured center of cognition. For the cognitive function of art determined by concepts such as totality, meditation, and distance can be accomplished only by a subject who thinks the contents of art independently from what is "engraved" on subjects, whether prelinguistic

material structures or chains of signifiers. Art as a medium for working through and organizing particular experiences cannot be conceived on the basis of such presuppositions. Moreover, such a hypostatizing of a transcendental subject runs the risk of affirming one of the essential traits of late capitalistic societies, the expropriation of languages geared toward understanding experience and their substitution by abstract representations, since language can only be seen as a neutral means in this perspective. I believe, however, that the avant-garde's attack on the institution of "art" so brilliantly analyzed by Bürger has opened up possibilities of both analyzing and institutionalizing art as a model for new modes of interaction and as a "public sphere of production" for the understanding of experience. If the narration of stories were to be utilized for the reappropriation of language and experiences, it could be integrated into different life praxes.

B. Experience and Narrative

The concept of experience plays a clear role in Bürger's work. The concept of the shrinkage of experience that he borrows from Walter Benjamin, and that can be traced back to bourgeois society's ever stronger division of labor and specialization of function, could be understood in the sense of the process of "abstraction." It is questionable, however, whether experience itself can shrink or even disappear, or whether the means for consciously working through experience can be withdrawn from us. Bürger tends to a concept of experience that at times signifies merely an intensive experience as in the surrealistic concept of intoxication (*Rausch*). This definition does not, however, allow for a concept of experience that proceeds from the discrepancy between concrete experience and socially prefabricated schemes of interpretation. Bürger's own use of this term is especially clear in his book on French surrealism that appeared in 1971 and that can be considered a preliminary study to his *Theory of the Avant-Garde.*[72] In the book on surrealism, the concept becomes central to an understanding of surrealism: "What the surrealist self is aiming at can best be characterized with the term experience. . . . The more bourgeois society merges to a single context of functioning in the monopolistic phase of its development, the less it allows one to make individual experiences that could be mediated, and in turn could lead to a meaningful praxis. In a society that tendentially eliminates the possibility of experience, the surrealists seek to regain this experience."[73] At first glance this sounds harmless enough, since in both books Bürger defines experience as

"a bundle of perceptions and reflections that have been worked through" (cf. below, p. 33). However, it becomes clear that even here the definition of experience as worked-through experience (which does not allow the distinction between previously "inscribed" and worked-through experience) proceeds from a premise leading back to Adorno, and that he believes that the subject in mass society is *entirely* determined by the conditioning social context. This definition prevents Bürger from focusing on the discrepancies between sensuous-material experiences and general interpretation patterns that create contradictions and tensions of the psyche as *ruptures* in the union of subject and society (which in turn must have consequences for the determination of art's social function in post-avant-gardist times). The lack of readiness to allow concrete and heterogeneous experience to play a role in determining the social function of post-avant-gardist art is again related to Bürger's concept of totality (and the role this is intended to play in what determines art). According to Bürger, worked-through experience can in the final analysis only be the consequence of an adequate total understanding of society:

> It was possible for the great bourgeois writers of the 18th century like Voltaire or Diderot to have an overview of the society, art, and science of their time; Balzac was the last one who could attempt to portray the totality of society. The specialization that developed as a result of the rapid economic and technological development in the course of the 19th century no longer permitted the individual to recognize the totality of society. Shrinkage of experience is the loss of a vantage point, from which society can be grasped as a whole.[74]

From such a vantage point literature cannot be grasped as a public sphere of production within which the discrepancies between particular experiences and "official" languages can be diminished through the efforts of a theoretically reflective exchange of "stories."

Bürger's concept of totality may be responsible for his comprehension of the surrealistic concept of experience solely as a search for immediacy and intensity of experience. If one comprehends the social function of art as a cognitive understanding of the total society, then the "pure immediacy" aspired to by the surrealists is in fact incapable of constituting any socially relevant form of experience.[75] But in his essay on surrealism, Walter Benjamin already interpreted the avant-garde concept of experience, insofar as it meant intoxicating-immediate life intensity, differently: the "loosening of the self by intoxication is, at the same time the fruitful, living experience that allowed these people to step outside the

domain of intoxication."[76] Benjamin believes that "the religious ecstasies or the ecstasies of drugs" lead to a "profane illumination, a materialistic, anthropological inspiration" for which intoxication itself can only "give an introductory lesson." The intense experience of intoxication sharpens the senses for those "materialistic inspirations"—a term meaning nothing other than the sudden transformation of sensuous-material experiences into forms of awareness. Avant-garde works capable of such inspirations "bring the immense forces of 'atmosphere' concealed in these [concrete] things [of our life world] to the point of explosion." Benjamin, who touches here upon the sociopolitical implications of a thinking of the concrete, logically associates this thought immediately with the expropriation of language through the universality of ideological patterns of interpretation: "What form do you suppose a life would take that was determined at a decisive moment precisely by the street song last on everyone's lips?"[77] He opposes the smothering of the concrete by an abstract pretending itself to be concrete, with a "profane illumination" making possible that "body and image," that is, the material experience imprinted on the physical being and the concrete language of its acquisition "so interpenetrate that all revolutionary tension becomes bodily collective innervation, and all the bodily innervations of the collective become revolutionary discharge."[78] The "innervation," that is, the "circuit" of the stimuli (here: of material experiences) through the nerves to the organs, is aimed at the connection of image and collective experience. A comment Benjamin made about his surrealism essay clearly illustrates that he shares the concept of experience I outlined above: "A constructive case of revelation of an experience. The scene of this revelation is the memory. The related experiences (*Erlebnisse*) do not constitute, when they occur, revelation, but remain concealed to the one experiencing. They only become revelation when more and more people become conscious of their analogy in retrospect. Herein lies an important distinction from religious revelation."[79]

Thus Benjamin's surrealism essay finds its place in a train of thought surrounding the terms 'the lived', 'experience', and 'narrative' (*Erlebnis, Erfahrung, Erzählung*) that recur in numerous works by Benjamin. It is most significantly articulated in a longer excursus within the Baudelaire essay, whose importance for this topic I elaborated more extensively elsewhere.[80] 'The lived' (Erlebnis) means for Benjamin the not-yet-worked-through experience (what I termed the sensuous-material experience) that is redeemed

from the sphere of the unconscious and the "raw" experience by the genuine narration (Erzählung). The sociopolitical program derived from the avant-garde concept of art that Benjamin describes with the terms 'the lived', 'experience', and 'narrative' is often overlooked or muddled because the crisis of narration of which he repeatedly speaks is interpreted too starkly on the background of a Hegelian philosophy of history: "What for Hegel means the end of art is its sublation in knowledge. Knowledge no longer needs art in order to be represented. This, however, means concretely that the organizational forms to which knowledge was bound when it was not yet knowledge in the real sense are no longer necessary. Thus in the epoch of (scientific) knowledge those narrative, organizational forms become obsolete which previously were necessary for the articulation of experience. At least in this way one could explain the premise on which Benjamin's thesis at the end of the narration depends."[81] Such an interpretation overlooks Benjamin's own undermining of his historical-philosophical statements on the crisis of narration and experience by using the same concepts in a more ahistorical, emphatic, counterpoising sense, thus turning their meaning into a demand for future societies.

In my view, Benjamin's work and the more recent, cooperative works of Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge document a theory and praxis of modern literature that takes us beyond Bürger's pessimism and reluctance to deal with future possibilities of aesthetic practice after the avant-garde.[82] These ideas will take us much farther than other recent discussions of modernism, the avant-garde, and postmodernism.[83]

To conclude my interminable and digressive introduction with a general assessment of Bürger's undertaking: In its accurate and historically reflected definition of the avant-garde, Peter Bürger's *Theory* can hardly be overestimated. In its implicit opposition to the currently popular modernist theories based on French poststructuralism, it can make an invaluable contribution to the understanding of the shortcomings of these movements. Only when confronted with the potential of post-avant-garde art does Bürger apparently fail to putsue the logical conclusions of his own analysis and relate it to a body of texts that has begun exploring this potential (e.g., leftist radical literature of the twenties; Brecht; broad sectors of contemporary Latin American literature; the films and stories of Alexander Kluge; or literature emerging from feminist movements in the United States). By partially returning to the

aesthetic theories of Adorno, Lukács, and Marcuse, Bürger hesitates to elaborate on those aspects of the avant-garde expressed most precisely by Walter Benjamin and to use them for a theoretical and historical understanding of possible determinations of post-avant-gardist art.

Preliminary Remarks

If one assumes that aesthetic theory has substance only to the degree that it reflects the historical development of its subject, a theory of the avant-garde becomes a necessary element in the thought that is devoted today to the theory of the arts.

The present work follows from my book on Surrealism. To avoid individual references in what follows as much as possible, I here call attention to the individual analyses presented in that book.[1] The focus of the present work, however, is a different one. It is not meant to replace essential individual analyses but to offer a categorical frame within which such analyses can be undertaken. Correspondingly, the examples from literature and the fine arts to be found here are not to be understood as historical and sociological interpretations of individual works but as illustrations of a theory.

The study is the outcome of a project *Avantgarde und bürgerliche Gesellschaft* (*avant-garde and bourgeois society*) that was carried out at the University of Bremen and spanned the period from the summer semester 1973 to the summer semester 1974. Had it not been for the interest of the students who collaborated in the project, this study would not have been written. Certain chapters were discussed with Christa Bürger, Helene Harth, Christel Recknagel, Janek Jaroslawski, Helmut Lamprecht, and Gerhard Leithäuser. I thank them for their critical comments.

Introduction: Theory of the Avant-Garde and Theory of Literature

Those who have always avoided the labor of the concept say they are tired of debates about theories, that one should finally get down to the thing itself, to the texts. This kind of talk is the symptom of a scientific crisis marked by the disjuncture of literary theory and the practice of interpretation. The dilemma of literary scholarship is not least that of this divergence. The abstractness of theory formation is often matched only by the blind concreteness of individual interpretations. And that is the reason that it is not by playing theory off against interpretation, or vice versa, that the crisis can be dealt with. What would be more helpful would be the kind of criticism that attempts to distinguish theory from mere talk, and the reflected appropriation of a work from its paraphrase. But such activity requires criteria, and those only theory can furnish.[1]

It may be useful to sketch, however provisionally, a clarification of what theory can mean in literary science. The discussion my *Theory of the Avant-garde* gave rise to in Germany has shown that in many instances, the expectations it raised were not of the kind a theory can fulfill. I do not mean to make theory immune from criticism but wish to suggest that criticism can produce new knowledge only when it involves itself with what it criticizes.[2] And that is possible only when criticism respects the scientific and logical

status of what is being criticized. That literary theory cannot be equated with individual interpretation is less obvious than may at first appear. A theoretical discussion that wants to avoid becoming abstract must also refer to individual works. But such references do not have the status of interpretations. They serve to give concreteness to statements that make a more sweeping claim to general validity. Nor should one confuse the theory of a given field with a description of the way it presents itself. A theory of the novel is not a history of the novel, a theory of the avant-garde no history of the European avant-garde movements.

If one views Schiller's "On Naive and Sentimental Poetry," Hegel's *Aesthetics,* and Lukács's *Theory of the Novel* as examples of significant literary theory, or theory of art, certain common criteria can be deduced. A connection is established between a historical construction of social development (classical versus modern bourgeois society) and a corresponding development in the field of literature (or art, in Hegel's case). At the same time, an ensemble of concepts is proposed that permits one to grasp the field in its contradictoriness. In a general way, one might say that theories of the kind considered here are characterized by the linkage between historical construction and the systematic study of a field.

If this kind of theory is used to understand processes of change within bourgeois society, the historical construction that rests on the contrast between antiquity and modernity loses its foundation. The problem is this: how can the development of art/literature in bourgeois society be reconstructed? Lukács applied the model of Hegelian aesthetics to bourgeois society, and linked it to a Marxist construction of history. During the ascent of the bourgeoisie, literature (classicism and realism) then occupies the same place Greek art occupies in Hegel's system. Although historically conditioned, it is posited as an atemporal norm. To the extent that post-1848 literature moves away from the model of classical realism, Lukács views it as a symptom of the decay of bourgeois society. The avant-garde movements are a major example of such decay. Adorno, by contrast, attempted to construct the development of art in bourgeois society after the model of an increase in rationality, a growing command of man over his art. The vanishing point of this theory is a view of the avant-garde movements as the most advanced stage of art in bourgeois society.

Lukács's and Adorno's theories, which are polemically related to each other, both have the avant-garde movements as a point of reference. It is striking that both authors assign a value to this

point: Adorno a positive one (the avant-garde as the most advanced stage of art), Lukács a negative one (the avant-garde as decadence). These judgments that came out of the cultural-political struggle of the twenties and thirties are not external to the theories. Because the disputes are no longer contemporary, it should be possible to make the avant-garde movements the hub of a theory of art in developed bourgeois society that can avoid the burden of an anterior decision about their value. The statement that the avant-garde movements represent the logical point in the development of art in bourgeois society from which that art can be grasped implies neither a positive nor a negative evaluation of the avant-garde phenomenon. My attempt to shift the problem away from the question of evaluation, and toward the break the avant-garde movements made with art as an institution, has not always been understood. Thus some critics have read my book as a mere return to Adorno's theses (as a sort of theory *for* or in favor of, the avant-garde), whereas others have interpreted it as a critique of the avant-garde.[3]

What I call a shifting of the problem is one of the few strategies for solving aporias that are available to us. But to be conceived, the possibility for such a shift must inhere in the objective situation. In this respect, I differ from Louis Althusser, whose concept of *décalage* [epistemological break] I adopt here. Althusser has interpreted Marx's introduction to the *Grundrisse* as a radical *separation* of scientific object and reality and advocated the view that science develops in its own temporal continuum, which is not the same as society's.[4] In contrast, I understand the identical text by Marx to mean (and the Hegelian Marxists Lukács and Adorno, who agree here, understand it in the same way) that it gives us an insight into the *connection* between the development of the object and the possibility of cognition (in Althusser's terminology, of reality and scientific object).[5] It must be underscored that no exegesis of Marx is involved here but that we are dealing with two seemingly diametrically opposed views about the nature of theory.

My attempt to ground the condition of the possibility of sociological insight in social development could be criticized as empiricism from Althusser's perspective. Althusser uses that term to characterize those theoretical positions which assume that cognition is already given in reality and thus need only be discovered.[6] He counters this view with a conception of cognition as production. The thrust of his argument is clear: it is directed against the mimesis theory. In the context that concerns us here, however, it is not the opposition between cognition as copy and cognition as production that is at

stake but the question regarding the preconditions of cognition that are embedded in social development, and that Althusser apparently subsumes under the empiricism problematic. For Marx (as for Hegel before him), bourgeois society is the logical place from which a systematic cognition of society (or reality) becomes possible.[7] This is certainly not the same as the assumption that reality produces categories that the scientist need merely make use of, a notion Althusser justly criticizes. The insight into the nexus between actual development and the development of categories merely means that the possibility of the cognition of a field depends on its development.[8]

In what follows, I should like to attempt to present the previously mentioned shift in the way the problem is defined but do so without anticipating the argument presented in the *Theory of the Avant-garde.* Only because my point of departure was that today the avant-garde movements should be seen as historical could I bracket the value judgments that are central to the theories of Lukács and Adorno, and hope to pass beyond the theoretical level they attained. A view of the "works" of the avant-garde that is no longer either positive or negative can perceive something in them that the Hegelian Marxists cannot, and that is the proposed break with what is called art in bourgeois society. The category *art as institution* was not invented by the avant-garde movements (to that extent, one must agree with Althusser). But it only became recognizable after the avant-garde movements had criticized the autonomy status of art in developed bourgeois society.[9]

What does this category accomplish? At first glance, it might seem as though we were simply renaming the classical autonomy doctrine. Here also, the decisive element is a shift in the way the problem is defined. To formulate in a highly schematized way: Lukács and Adorno argue within the institution that is art, and are unable to criticize it as an institution for that very reason. For them, the autonomy doctrine is the horizon within which they think. In the approach I propose, by contrast, that doctrine as the normative instrumentality of an institution in bourgeois society becomes the object of the investigation.[10] By virture of the shift in the problem suggested above, one question moves to the center of literary interest, the question concerning the social function of literary works. Because definitions of function are not inherent in individual works but are socially institutionalized, that question could not be at the center of scholarly work in literature as long

as art/literature as an institution was not made the object of investigation.

The example of the dichotomy between high and low literature can serve to illumine the shift in perspective.[11] For Lukács, what does not function within art as an institution is no object of analysis. Adorno devoted ingenious analyses to the problem of popular art, and research owes them important stimuli. But in his studies, he almost always viewed serious and pulp literature as radically distinct spheres, thus making the separation that is established in the institution of art/literature his own. Because pulp literature is not part of the sphere that is art, Adorno invariably sees it as what is bad, what encourages the recipient to give his dismal consent to inhumane conditions.[12] Decisive in this connection is not so much the judgment (art as social criticism versus the culture industry as affirmation of the bad conditions that prevail), which is probably generally accurate in late-bourgeois society, but the fact that the relation between serious and pulp fiction is barely thematized, precisely because both are assigned to distinct spheres from the very beginning.[13] Although it is true that the question regarding the institutionalization of art in bourgeois society cannot abolish this separation either, it does make its investigation mandatory. For once the institution of art/literature has been thematized, the question about the mechanisms that make it possible to exclude certain works as pulp literature necessarily arises.[14]

Is the introduction of the category 'institution art/literature' a break in the history of the discipline that banishes the theories and analyses of Lukács and Adorno to the hell of a prescientific status and at most admits them as expressions of aesthetic experience?[15] Such a model would be tempting but can hardly claim stringency. If it is true that sociological theories are a function of the level of development of the field to which they pertain, then the end of the historical avant-garde movements makes possible the shift in the problem suggested above. This does not mean that results arrived at when the problem was defined differently simply become invalid. The relation between Lukács's and Adorno's approaches and the one that examines the theory of the institution can be sketched as follows: the ideology-critical procedure Lukács and Adorno applied to individual works is now brought to bear on the normative framework that governs the functioning of works of art in bourgeois society. The ideology-critical analysis of works and the approach that deals with the theory of the institution thus complement

each other and the dialectical method of the discovery of contradictions within the object (or field) constitutes their common foundation.[16]

What my various studies owe to the tradition of dialectical theory that extends from Hegel via Marx, Lukács, Bloch to Adorno and Habermas can be explained most easily by the concept of dialectical criticism, to which they are indebted. Dogmatic criticism sets its own theory against the one it criticizes and infers from the claim to truth of the former the untruth of the latter. Such criticism remains external to its object. As a refutation of the other theory, it asks for no more than the proof or the mere statement that its own theory is true. Dialectical criticism, by contrast, proceeds immanently. It enters into the substance of the theory to be criticized and derives decisive stimuli from its gaps and contradictions:

> It does not help if I prove my system or my proposition and then conclude that thus the opposite is false; to this other proposition the first always seems to be foreign and external. Falsity must not be demonstrated through another, and as untrue because the opposite is true, but in itself.[17]

For dialectical criticism, the contradictions in the criticized theory are not indications of insufficient intellectual rigor on the part of the author, but an indication of an unsolved problem or one that has remained hidden. Dialectical criticism thus stands in a relation of dependency to the criticized theory. That also means, however, that it reaches its limit where such a theory cannot validate its claim to be a theory. All that remains to it is "rejection," as Hegel called it, whereby it also renounces its own claim to being a theory, for it can oppose the nontheory only as opinion.[18]

A further motif from the Hegel-Marx tradition is the previously discussed nexus between the development of the object and that of the categories. By inducing us to inquire into the scope and limit of theories, the question concerning the state of development of art that gives rise to a given theory might possibly contribute to eliminating the abstract confrontation of positions when theories are discussed. If it can be shown, for example, that what corresponds to reception aesthetics (*Rezeptionsästhetik*) is that stage of the development of art in bourgeois society that we call Aestheticism, then a theory of literary evolution formulated on this basis will have to be problematized as an inadmissible meta-historical generalization.[19] Critical science does not succumb to the illusion that it can establish a direct relationship to its objects. On the contrary, it is precisely the appearance that its objects are directly given to it that it attempts

to destroy. The commonly held view that one need only look closely to grasp the peculiarity of poetic texts, for example, does not take into account that this "looking" already rests on certain assumptions (such as the assumption that there is a difference between poetic and nonpoetic texts) and ideas, however vague they may be. Elements of theory, whether raised to consciousness or not, are contained in such beliefs and ideas. The immediacy of the glance that believes it is focusing on phenomena is self-deception. The objects with which the literary scholar deals are always given him as mediated ones. And it is with the uncovering of this mediation that literary theory should be concerned.

Theory of the Avant-Garde

Chapter One
Preliminary Reflections on a Critical Literary Science

The world of traditional meaning discloses itself to the interpreter only to the extent that his own world becomes clarified at the same time.

Jürgen Habermas[1]

1. Hermeneutics

Critical science differs from traditional science because it reflects the social significance of its activity.[2] This difference creates certain problems that must be recognized if a critical literary science is to be fashioned. I am not referring to that naive equation of individual motivation and social relevance that we encounter occasionally today on the Left, but to a theoretical problem. The definition of what is socially relevant depends on the interpreter's political stand. This means that the question whether a topic is relevant or not cannot be *decided* by discussion in an antagonistic society, though *discussion* is possible. I believe it would already be a significant step forward in scholarly and scientific discussion if it became a matter of course for every scholar and scientist to advance reasons for the choice of his topic and the problem to be dealt with.

Critical science understands itself as part of social praxis, however mediated it may be. It is not "disinterested" but guided by interest. In a first approximation, that interest may be defined as an interest in reasonable conditions, in a world without exploitation and unnecessary repression. This interest cannot express itself directly in literary scholarship. Where it *is* attempted, and materialistic literary science is measured according to "whether and in what form this

venture is both a necessary and useful component of praxis aimed at change in a given concrete historical situation,"[3] we are involved with a direct instrumentalization of science that can be of little advantage either to science or to a praxis attempting to change society. The interest that informs and guides cognition can express itself only indirectly in the study of literature, namely, by defining the categories with whose help literary objectifications are understood.

Critical science does not consist in inventing new categories to then set them against the "false" ones of traditional science. Rather, it examines the categories of traditional science to discover what questions they permit one to ask, and what other questions are already excluded at the theoretical level (precisely as a consequence of the choice of categories). In the study of literature, the following question is important: are the categories such that they make possible the investigation of the nexus between literary objectifications and social conditions? It is necessary to insist on the significance of the categorial frame the researcher uses. The Russian formalists described literary work as the solution of certain artistic problems, for example, which are the result of the level of technique in the period of its origination. But when this is done any question about the social function is already blocked at the theoretical level unless the presence of a social element in the seemingly purely art-immanent problematic can be shown.

To be able to criticize adequately the literary theory of formalism, one needs a categorial frame that allows the relationship between interpreter and literary work to be thematized. Only a theory that fulfills this requirement is capable of making the social function of even one's own action the object of its scientific activity. Within traditional science, hermeneutics has made the relationship between work and interpreter the center of its efforts. To it we owe the insight that the work of art as the object of possible cognition is not merely given to us *tel quel.* To identify a text as a poem we must fall back on a knowledge we already possess and that is handed down by tradition. Scientific analysis of literature begins the moment one recognizes that the immediacy with which we perceive a poem as a poem is illusory (*Schein*). Mental objectifications do not have the status of facts; they are mediated by traditions. Hence cognition of literature can be achieved only by dealing critically with tradition. Since we owe the insight that mental objectifications are mediated through tradition to hermeneutics, it is logical to begin our reflections with a critique of traditional hermeneutics.

The two important basic hermeneutical concepts that Gadamer

developed in his *Truth and Method* are *prejudice* and *application.* Gadamer uses the term *prejudice* in a broader sense than is common in colloquial language and without a pejorative meaning. With reference to the process of understanding unfamiliar texts, prejudice means that the interpreter is not merely a passive recipient who assimilates himself to a text, as it were, but someone who brings with him certain ideas that necessarily enter into the interpretation of the text. *Application* is every interpretation prompted by a specific contemporary interest. Gadamer emphasizes that "understanding always involves something like the application of the text to be understood to the present situation of the interpreter."[4] In the case of a judge's interpretation of a legal text or the interpretation of a biblical text in a minister's sermon, the element of application can be directly recognized in the act of interpretation. But the interpretation of a historical or literary text also does not occur without reference to the situation of the interpreter, and it is immaterial for the cognition of the process whether the interpreter is conscious of this, or not. The interpreter, in other words, approaches the text to be understood with prejudices, he interprets it with respect to his own situation, and applies it to that situation. To this extent Gadamer is correct. But the content he gives the concepts has been justifiably criticized, especially by Jürgen Habermas: "Gadamer turns his insight into understanding as a structure of prejudice into a rehabilitation of prejudice as such."[5] This happens when Gadamer defines understanding as "the placing of oneself within a process of tradition" (*Truth and Method,* p. 258). For the conservative Gadamer, understanding ultimately comes to mean submission to the authority of tradition. In contrast, Habermas has called attention to the "power of reflection" that makes transparent the structure of prejudice in understanding, and thereby can also break the power of prejudice (*Logik der Sozialwissenschaften,* p. 283f). Habermas makes clear that to an autonomous hermeneutics, tradition appears as an absolute power only because the systems of labor and domination do not enter its field of vision (*Logik der Sozialwissenschaften,* p. 289). He thereby defines the point where a critical hermeneutics would have to start.

"In the human sciences," Gadamer writes, "the interest in tradition is motivated in a special way by the present and its interests. The theme and area of research are actually constituted by the motivation of the enquiry" (*Truth and Method,* p. 253). That historical-hermeneutic sciences are related to the present is a significant insight. But the formulation "the present and its interests"

implies that the present is something uniform whose interests can be defined and this is absolutely false. Up to this moment in history, the interests of the rulers and those of the ruled have hardly ever been the same. Only because he posits the present as monolithic unity can Gadamer equate understanding and the "placing of oneself within a process of tradition." Not the view that makes the historian a passive recipient, but Dilthey's, who insists that "he who investigates history is the same that makes history,"[6] gains our assent. Whether they want to or not, historians or interpreters hold a position in the social disputes of their time. The perspective from which they view their subject is determined by the position they occupy among the social forces of the epoch.

2. Ideology Critique

Hermeneutics whose goal is not the mere legitimation of traditions but the rational examination of their claim to validity passes over into the critique of ideology.[7] That the concept of ideology comprises a multiplicity of partly contradictory meanings is well known. It is indispensable to a critical science nonetheless, because it permits one to think the *contradictory* relationship of intellectual objectifications and social reality. Rather than attempt a definition here, we will discuss the critique of religion that Marx develops in the introduction to the *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right,* where this contradictory relationship is elucidated. The young Marx denounces as false consciousness an intellectual construct to which he yet does not deny truth—and therein lies the difficulty but also the scientific fruitfulness of his concept of ideology[8]:

> Religion is, in fact, the self-consciousness and self-esteem of man who has either not yet gained himself or has lost himself again. But man is no abstract being squatting outside the world. Man is the world of man, the state, society. This state, this society, produce religion, which is an inverted world-consciousness, because they are an inverted world . . . It is the fantastic realization of the human being because the human being has attained no true reality. Thus, the struggle against religion is indirectly the struggle against that world of which religion is the spiritual aroma.
>
> The wretchedness of religion is at once an expression of and a protest against real wretchedness. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people.
>
> The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is a demand for their true happiness. The call to abandon illusions about their condition is the call to abandon a condition which requires illusions. Thus, the critique of religion is the critique in embryo of the vale of tears of which religion is the halo. . . .[9]

It is in religion that this twofold character of ideology is brought out. 1. Religion is an illusion. Man projects into heaven what he would like to see realized on earth. To the extent that man believes in God who is no more than an objectification of human qualities, he succumbs to an illusion. 2. But religion also contains an element of truth. It is "an expression of real wretchedness" (for the realization of humanity in heaven is merely a creation of the mind and denounces the lack of real humanity in human society). And it is "a protest against real wretchedness" for even in their alienated form, religious ideals are a standard of what ought to be.

In the text Marx does not differentiate explicitly between consumers of ideology ("Volk") and critics of ideology. But only this distinction permits the special element of the dialectical mode of observation to be grasped. For the devout (the consumer of ideology), religion is an experience in which the self as a human being is realized ("man's self-consciousness and self-awareness"). For the atheistic emissary of enlightenment, religion is the result of a conscious deception with whose help an illegitimate domination is insured. The accomplishment of these representatives of the "doctrine of deception by the priests" is that they have posed the question in terms of the *function* of religious views. Their answer, however, does not solve the problem, for it simply negates the experience of the consumers of ideology. It considers them mere victims of an externally imposed manipulation. The ideology critic also seeks to determine the social function of religion, but in contrast to the advocate of the doctrine of deception by the priests, he attempts to explain it by the social lot of the pious. He locates the cause for the persuasive force of religious views in "real wretchedness." In this analysis, religion is unveiled as contradictory: Despite its untruth (there is no God), it is truthful as an expression of misery and as protest against this misery. Its social function is equally contradictory: by permitting the experience of an "illusory happiness," it alleviates the existence in misery; but in accomplishing this, it simultaneously prevents the establishment of "true happiness."

The model is significant because it does not definitively establish at the theoretical level the relation between intellectual objectifications and social reality but that it views this relation as a contradictory one. It thus allows individual analysis the necessary cognitive

scope that will prevent it from becoming a mere demonstration of an already established schema.

It should also be noted that in this model, ideologies are not simply understood as a copy, that is, a duplication of social reality but as its *product.* They are the result of an activity that *responds* to a reality experienced as inadequate (the human being from whom "true reality," that is, the possibility of a humane unfolding in reality, is withheld is forced into a "fantastic realization" of himself in the religious sphere). Ideologies are not the mere reflex of certain social conditions; they are parts of the social whole: "Ideological factors do not merely "mask" economic interests, they are not merely banners and slogans: they are the parts, the components of which the real struggle is made."[10]

The concept of critique on which the Marxian model is based deserves to be emphasized as well. Criticism is not regarded as a judgment that harshly sets one's own views against the untruth of ideology, but rather as the *production* of cognitions. Criticism attempts to separate the truth of ideology from its untruth (the Greek word for criticism, *krinein,* means 'to part,' 'to separate'). Although the element of truth is present in ideology, criticism is needed to expose it. (When the critique of religion destroys the illusion of God's real existence and the hereafter, it simultaneously permits one to perceive religion's element of truth, namely its character as protest.

George Lukács and Theodor W. Adorno, among others, have applied the Marxist model of dialectical ideology critique to the analysis of single works and groups of works.[11] Lukács, for example, interprets Eichendorff's novella *Memoirs of a Good-For-Nothing* as the expression of a revolt against the "inhumane officiousness of modern life, against the 'efficiency,' against the 'diligence' of the old and the new philistine." By using Eichendorff's terms here, Lukács wants to suggest that Eichendorff's protest remains at the level of appearance and does not grasp the essence of conjunction, which would be necessary for an understanding of these appearances:

> Every gushing opposition is characterized by the fact that on occasion it perceptively exposes the contradictions of capitalist society, that it combats them with genuine embitterment and apt mockery, but also by the fact that it is incapable of comprehending the essence of this society. In most cases this results in an exaggerating distortion of the problems and leads to a point where true criticism turns into a social untruth. Thus the exposure of the contradictions of the capitalist division of labor is converted to an uncritical glorification of those social conditions that this division of labor has not yet known; here lies the source of the enthusiasm for the Middle Ages.[12]

Insofar as Eichendorff criticizes the alienation phenomena of (bourgeois) working life because it allows its aims to be prescribed from outside, and adheres through the reward of leisure time to the image of a life of self-determination, *Memoirs of a Good-For-Nothing* has elements of truth. The romantic criticism of the principle of bourgeois means-end rationality becomes untrue, however, when it turns into a blind glorification of prebourgeois conditions.

For a long time the polemics between Lukács and Adorno disguised what the two Hegelian Marxists have in common, which is above all the method of dialectical criticism. Despite a cutting remark about Lukács, who characterized Eichendorff as a "feudal romantic," the following quote makes clear that Adorno also perceived in Eichendorff's work the contradictory structure that Lukács calls romantic anticapitalism:

> It is so obvious how much in Eichendorff stems from the perspective of the depossessed feudatory that it would be silly to criticize it from a social point of view. Not only the restoration of the sunken order but resistance to the destructive tendency of the bourgeois itself was in his interests.[13]

What Lukács and Adorno adopt from the Marxist model is the dialectical analysis of the ideological object. It is seen as contradictory and it is the task of criticism to spell out this contradictory nature. At least two essential differences from the procedure of the early Marx can be identified, however. For Marx, the critique of religion and the critique of sôciety belong together. Criticism destroys the religious illusions (not the elements of truth in religion) in order to make man capable of action: "The critique of religion disillusions man so that he will think, act, and fashion his reality as a man who has lost his illusions and regained his reason" (Marx, *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right,* p. 132). In applying this model to individual literary works and groups of works, this goal cannot be taken over *tel quel,* because literature does not have the same status as religion (a point to which we will return). For Lukács and Adorno the relationship between ideology critique and the critique of society is clearly different from what it is for the early Marx. The analysis that criticizes ideology presupposes a reconstruction of history. The contradictory character of Eichendorff's work only becomes comprehensible when it is confronted with the social reality to which it responds, i.e., with the transition from feudal to bourgeois society. The ideology critical analysis of a work

is a critique of society as well, but only in a mediated manner. By exposing the social contents of works, it opposes other attempts of interpretative appropriation that either suppress the elements of protest in works or completely eradicate contents by reducing the aesthetic to an empty form.

3. Analysis of Functions

The ideology critical analysis of individual works differs from the Marxian model in yet another respect: by and large, it does not deal with the social function of the ideological object. Whereas Marx discusses both the contradictory nature of religion's social function and its contradictory character (being consolation, it prevents any action that would promote social change), Lukács's and Adorno's analysis largely excludes the problem of function. This exclusion requires an explanation, especially since the functional aspect is inherent in the Marxist model. Lukács's and Adorno's avoidance of any discussion of the social function of art becomes understandable when one realizes that it is the autonomy aesthetic, which, in however modified a form, is the focal point of their analysis. The autonomy aesthetic, however, contains a definition of the function of art:[14] it is conceived as a social realm that is set apart from the means-end rationality of daily bourgeois existence. Precisely for this reason, it can criticize such an existence:

> What is social about art is its intrinsic movement against society, not its manifest statement. . . . Insofar as a social function can be ascribed to art, it is its functionlessness.[15]

Adorno obviously uses the term *function* here with different meanings: first as a neutral category of description, then with negative connotations, in the sense of subjection to the reified aims of bourgeois life. Adorno also foregoes a functional analysis because he suspects that behind it lies the attempt to subject art to externally determined purposes. This becomes clear in his dispute with positivistic reception research.[16] Adorno sees effects as something external to works of art:

> The interest in the social decipherment of art must turn to art itself, instead of letting itself be fobbed off by the discovery and classification of effects that for social reasons often radically diverge from the works of art and their objective social content. (*Ästh. Theorie*, p. 338f.)

Work and effect are juxtaposed here in an unmediated manner. Whereas one tells the truth about society, the other is rooted in the sphere of reification, against which authentic art protests. In a society in which all interhuman relations are radically reified, commerce with art is also subject to this principle. At best, reception research is therefore capable of grasping the universal reification, but nothing that is essential to the works of art.[17]

Thus much will have become clear: Adorno's exclusion of the functional aspect has systematic reasons that can be found in his aesthetic theory and its sociotheoretical basis. Striking in the quote above is Adorno's juxtaposition of a speculative concept of the work of art for which he is indebted to the aesthetics of idealism, and a positivistic conception of effect. But in this juxtaposition, he foregoes the possibility of mediating work and effect with each other. According to Adorno, there are social reasons why bourgeois culture has failed to be egalitarian, as it should be. Only in the isolated form of monad-like works of art can truth still be spoken about this society. This is the function of art that Adorno can refer to as "functionlessness" because it can no longer be hoped that art will provoke change.

If it is true that in the ideology-critical analysis of single literary works as practiced by Lukács and Adorno, the functional aspect retreats into the background, one may ask whether the Marxist model of dialectical criticism can be applied to artistic objectifications and the problem of function not be ignored. Herbert Marcuse's essay "The Affirmative Character of Culture" can be read as an attempt at such an application.[18] Marcuse outlines the global determination of art's function in bourgeois society, which is a contradictory one: on the one hand it shows "forgotten truths" (thus it protests against a reality in which these truths have no validity); on the other, such truths are detached from reality through the medium of aesthetic semblance (*Schein*)—art thus stabilizes the very social conditions against which it protests. It is not difficult to recognize that Marcuse is guided by the Marxist model of the critique of religion: just as Marx shows that religion stabilizes undesirable social conditions (as consolation it immobilizes the forces making for change), so Marcuse demonstrates that bourgeois culture exiles humane values to the realm of the imagination and thus precludes their potential realization. As Marx perceives a critical element in religion ("Protest against true wretchedness"), so Marcuse views the

humane demands of great bourgeois works of art as a protest against a society that has been unable to live up to them:

> The cultural ideal assimilated men's longing for a happier life: for humanity, goodness, joy, truth, and solidarity. Only, in this ideal, they are all furnished with the affirmative accent of belonging to a higher, purer, nonprosaic world. (p. 114)

Marcuse calls bourgeois culture affirmative because it banishes these values to a sphere that is distinct from daily life:

> Its decisive characteristic is the assertion of a universally obligatory, eternally better and more valuable world that must be unconditionally affirmed: a world essentially different from the factual world of the daily struggle for existence, yet unrealizable by every individual for himself "from within," without any transformation of the state of fact. (p. 95)

The term *affirmative* therefore characterizes the contradictory function of a culture that retains "remembrance of what could be," but is simultaneously "justification of the established form of existence" (p. 98).

> Certainly, it [the affirmative culture] exonerated "external conditions" from responsibility for the "vocation of man," thus stabilizing their injustice. But it also held up to them as a task the image of a better order. (p. 120)

Marcuse's definition of the function of culture in bourgeois society does not relate to individual artistic works, but to their status as objects that are set apart from the struggle of everyday existence. The model provides the important theoretical insight that works of art are not received as single entities, but within institutional frameworks and conditions that largely determine the function of the works. When one refers to the function of an individual work, one generally speaks figuratively; for the consequences that one may observe or infer are not primarily a function of its special qualities but rather of the manner which regulates the commerce with works of this kind in a given society or in certain strata or classes of a society. I have chosen the term "institution of art" to characterize such framing conditions.

In addition to the insight that the function of cultural objectifications is institutionally determined, Marcuse's essay tells us something about the function(s) of works of art in bourgeois society. A distinction between the level of the recipient and that of the social totality is in order here. Art allows at least an imagined satisfaction of individual needs that are repressed in daily praxis. Through the

enjoyment of art, the atrophied bourgeois individual can experience the self as personality. But because art is detached from daily life, this experience remains without tangible effect, i.e., it cannot be integrated into that life. The lack of tangible effects is not the same as functionlessness (as an earlier ambiguous statement of mine suggests), but characterizes a specific function of art in bourgeois society: the neutralization of critique. This neutralization of impulses to change society is thus closely related to the role art plays in the development of bourgeois subjectivity.[19]

The attempt to derive from Marcuse's critical theory of culture the insight that social determinations of the function of art are institutionalized and, secondly, to arrive at a global determination of the function of art in bourgeois society is open to two objections: discourse about art this procedure equates with the actual commerce with it; and whereas the ideology of art in bourgeois society may be comprehended, this does not hold for what this ideology conceals—the real function of art. In general terms the question is this: to what extent does the institutionalized discourse about art determine the actual commerce with works? There are three possible asnwers. One can assume that the institution of art/literature and the actual commerce with art coincide tendentially—in which case a problem would not exist. Alternatively, one can assume that the institutionalized discourse about art reveals nothing about the actual commerce with works. In that case, the literary-sociological approach suggested here would not promote the comprehension of the function of works of art. Behind this assumption lies the empiricistic illusion that an endless number of interpretations can make us understand the function of art, and that no theory is necessary. Whereas the first answer has the disadvantage of making the problem disappear instead of solving it, the second can establish no relation between the institutionalized discourse about art and the commerce with works. Hence one will have to seek a third answer that does not predetermine the problem at a theoretical level. It might be that the relationship between the institution of art and the actual commerce with works must be examined as a historically changing one. Here, however, the difficulties inherent in the term "actual commerce" must be clearly understood. For the term generates the illusion that this "commerce" as such is accessible to the researcher. Anyone who has been seriously concerned with historical reception research knows that this is untrue. What we analyze are mostly discourses about the contact with literature. Yet the distinction is not meaningless,

especially where the comprehension of the function of art in bourgeois society is concerned. For if it is true that art is institutionalized as ideology in bourgeois society, then it does not suffice to make the contradictory structure of this ideology transparent; instead, one must also ask what this ideology may conceal.[20]

Chapter Two
Theory of the Avant-Garde and Critical Literary Science

History is inherent in esthetic theory. Its categories are radically historical (Adorno).[1]

1. The Historicity of Aesthetic Categories

Aesthetic theories may strenuously strive for metahistorical knowledge, but that they bear the clear stamp of the period of their origin can usually be seen afterward, and with relative ease. But if aesthetic theories are historical, a critical theory of art that attempts to elucidate what it does must grasp that it is itself historical. Differently expressed, it must historicize aesthetic theory.

It will first have to be made clear what historicizing a theory may mean. It cannot mean the application to present-day aesthetic theorizing of the historicist perspective, which understands all the phenomena of a period wholly as expressions of that period and then creates an ideal contemporaneity among the individual periods (Ranke's "equally close to God"). The false objectivism of the historicist approach has been justly criticized. To propose bringing it back to life in a discussion of theories would be absurd.[2] But neither can historicizing mean that one views all previous theories as nothing more than steps leading up to one's own. In such an undertaking, fragments of earlier theories are detached from their original context and fitted into a new one but the change in function and meaning which that fragment undergoes is not adequately reflected. In spite of its progressiveness, the construction of history as the prehistory of the present, a construction that upward-moving

classes characteristically engage in, is one-sided in the Hegelian sense, for it grasps only one aspect of the historical process, whose other aspect historicism lays hold of in a false objectivism. In the present context, historicizing a theory will have a different meaning, that is, the insight into the nexus between the unfolding of an object and the categories of a discipline or science. Understood in this fashion, the historicity of a theory is not grounded in its being the expression of a *Zeitgeist* (the historicist view) nor in the circumstance that it incorporates earlier theories (history as prehistory of the present) but in the fact that the unfolding of object and the elaboration of categories are connected. Historicizing a theory means grasping this connection.

It might be objected that such an enterprise cannot but lay claim to a position outside history, so that historicizing simultaneously and necessarily becomes a dehistoricizing or, differently expressed, that the determination of the historicity of the language of a science presupposes a meta level from which this determination can be made, and that this meta level is necessarily metahistorical (which would then require the historicizing of this meta level, etc.). Not in the sense of a separation of various levels of the language of science did we introduce the concept of historicization here, but in that of reflection, which grasps in the medium of *one* language the historicity of its own speech. What is meant here can best be explained by some fundamental methodological insights that Marx formulated in the introduction to the *Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie:* "The example of labor," Marx writes, "shows strikingly how even the most abstract categories, despite their validity—precisely because of their abstractness—for all epochs, are nevertheless, in the specific character of this abstraction, themselves likewise a product of historic relations, and possess their full validity only for and within these relations."[3] The idea is difficult to grasp because Marx maintains on the one hand that certain simple categories are always valid, yet also states that their generality is due to specific historical conditions. The decisive distinction here is between "validity for all epochs" and the *perception* of this general validity (in Marx's terms, "the specific character of this abstraction"). It is Marx's contention that conditions must have unfolded historically for that perception to become possible. In the monetary system, he says, wealth is still interpreted to be money, which means that the connection between labor and wealth is not seen. Only in the theory of the physiocrats is labor discovered to be the source of wealth, though it is not labor in general but only a particular form of it, namely, agriculture. In classical English economics, in Adam Smith, it is no longer a particular kind of labor but labor in general that is recognized as the source of wealth. For Marx, this development is not merely one in economic theory. Rather, he feels that the possibility of a progress in knowledge is a function of the development of the object toward which insight directs itself. When the physiocrats developed their theory (in France, during the second half of the eighteenth century), agriculture was still the economically dominant sector on which all others depended. Only in the economically much more advanced England, where the industrial revolution had already set in and where the dominance of agriculture over all other sectors of social production would therefore be eventually eliminated, was Smith's insight possible—that it was not a specific form of labor but labor as such that created wealth. "The indifference toward a specific form of labor presupposes a highly developed totality of actual forms of labor none of which is any longer the dominant one" (*Grundrisse,* p. 25).

It is my thesis that the connection between the insight into the general validity of a category and the actual historical development of the field to which this category pertains and which Marx demonstrated through the example of the category of labor also applies to objectifications in the arts. Here also, the full unfolding of the constituent elements of a field is the condition for the possibility of an adequate cognition of that field. In bourgeois society, it is only with aestheticism that the full unfolding of the phenomenon of art became a fact, and it is to aestheticism that the historical avant-garde movements respond.[4]

The central category of "artistic means" or "procedures" can serve to illuminate this thesis. Through it, the artistic process of creation can be reconstructed as a process of rational choice between various techniques, the choice being made with reference to the effect that is to be attained. Such a reconstruction of artistic production not only presupposes a relatively high degree of rationality in artistic production; it also presupposes that means are freely available, i.e., no longer part of a system of stylistic norms where, albeit in mediated form, social norms express themselves. That Molière's comedy uses artistic means just as Beckett does goes without saying. But that they were not recognized as such during Molière's time can be demonstrated by a glance at Boileau's criticism. Aesthetic criticism here is still criticism of the stylistic means of the crudely comic that the ruling social class found unacceptable. In the feudal, absolutist society of seventeenth century France, art is still largely integrated into the life-style of the ruling class. Although

the bourgeois aesthetics that developed in the eighteenth century freed itself of the stylistic norms that had linked the art of feudal absolutism and the ruling class of that society, art nonetheless continued to obey the "imitatio naturae" principle. The stylistic means therefore do not yet have the generality of means whose single purpose is their effect on the recipient but are subordinated to a (historically changing) stylistic principle. Artistic means is undoubtedly the most general category by which works of art can be described. But that the various techniques and procedures can be *recognized* as artistic means has been possible only since the historical avant-garde movements. For it is in the historical avant-garde movements that the totality of artistic means becomes available as means. Up to this period in the development of art, the use of artistic means had been limited by the period style, an already existing canon of permissible procedures, an infringement of which was acceptable only within certain bounds. But during the dominance of a style, the category 'artistic means' as a general one cannot be seen for what it is because, *realiter,* it occurs only as a particular one. It is, on the other hand, a distinguishing feature of the historical avant-garde movements that they did not develop a style. There is no such thing as a dadaist or a surrealist style. What did happen is that these movements liquidated the possibility of a period style when they raised to a principle the availability of the artistic means of past periods. Not until there is universal availability does the category of artistic means become a general one.

If the Russian formalists view 'defamiliarization' as *the* artistic technique,[5] recognition that this category is a general one is made possible by the circumstance that in the historical avant-garde movements, shocking the recipient becomes the dominant principle of artistic intent. Because defamiliarization thereby does in fact become the dominant artistic technique, it can be discovered as a general category. This is not to say that the Russian formalists demonstrated defamiliarization principally in avant-gardiste art (on the contrary, Shklovsky's preferred demonstration objects are *Don Quixote* and *Tristram Shandy*). What is claimed is no more than a connection—though a necessary one—between the principle of shock in avant-gardiste art and the recognition that defamiliarization is a category of general validity. This nexus can be posited as necessary because it is only the full unfolding of the thing (here, the radicalization of defamiliarization in shock) that makes recognizable the general validity of the category. This is not to say that the act

of cognition is transferred to reality itself, that the subject that produces the insight is negated. What is acknowledged is simply that the possibilities of cognition are limited by the real (historical) unfolding of the object.[6]

It is my thesis that certain general categories of the work of art were first made recognizable in their generality by the avant-garde, that it is consequently from the standpoint of the avant-garde that the preceding phases in the development of art as a phenomenon in bourgeois society can be understood, and that it is an error to proceed inversely, by approaching the avant-garde via the earlier phases of art. This thesis does not mean that it is only in avant-gardiste art that *all* categories of the work of art reach their full elaboration. On the contrary, we will note that certain categories essential to the description of pre-avant-gardiste art (such as organicity, subordination of the parts to the whole) are in fact negated in the avant-gardiste work. One should not assume, therefore, that all categories (and what they comprehend) pass through an even development. Such an evolutionist view would eradicate what is contradictory in historical processes and replace it with the idea that development is linear progress. In contrast to such a view, it is essential to insist that the historical development of society as a whole as well as that within subsystems can only be grasped as the result of the frequently contrariant evolutions that categories undergo.[7]

The above thesis needs refining in one further respect. Only the avant-garde, it was said, made artistic means recognizable in their generality because it no longer chooses means according to a stylistic principle, but avails itself of them as *means.* It was not ex nihilo, of course, that avant-garde practice created the possibility of recognizing categories of the work of art in their general validity. Rather, that possibility has its historical presupposition in the development of art in bourgeois society. Since the middle of the nineteenth century, that is, subsequent to the consolidation of political rule by the bourgeoisie, this development has taken a particular turn: the form-content dialectic of artistic structures has increasingly shifted in favor of form. The content of the work of art, its "statement," recedes ever more as compared with its formal aspect, which defines itself as the aesthetic in the narrower sense. From the point of view of production aesthetics, this dominance of form in art since about the middle of the nineteenth century can be understood as command over means; from the point of view of reception aesthetics, as a

tendency toward the sensitizing of the recipient. It is important to see the unity of the process: means become available as the category "content" withers.[8]

From this perspective, one of the central theses of Adorno's aesthetics, "the key to any and every content (*Gehalt*) of art lies in its technique" becomes clear.[9] Only because during the last one hundred years, the relation between the formal (technical) elements of the work and its content (those elements which make statements) changed and form became in fact predominant can this thesis be formulated at all. Once again, the connection between the historical unfolding of a subject and of the categories that grasp that subject area becomes apparent. Yet Adorno's formulation has a problematical aspect and that is its claim to universal validity. If it is true that Adorno's theorem could be formulated only because art since Baudelaire took the course it did, the claim that the theorem applies also to earlier periods of art becomes questionable. In the methodological reflection quoted earlier, Marx addresses this question. He states specifically that even the most abstract categories have "full validity" only for and within those conditions whose products they are. Unless one wants to see a covert historicism in this formulation, there arises the problem of whether it is possible to have a knowledge of the past that does not fall victim to the historicist illusion of a presuppositionless understanding of the past nor simply grasps that past in categories that are the product of a later period.

2. The Avant-garde as the Self-Criticism of Art in Bourgeois Society

In the introduction to the *Grundrisse,* Marx formulates another idea of considerable methodological scope. It also concerns the possibility of understanding past social formations or past social subsystems. The historicist position that assumes it can understand past social formations without reference to the present of the researcher is not even considered by Marx, who has no doubt about the nexus between the development of the thing and that of the categories (and thus the historicity of cognition). What he criticizes is not the historicist illusion of the possibility of historical knowledge without a historical reference point, but the progressive construction of history as the prehistory of the present. "The so-called historical presentation of development is founded, as a rule, on the fact that the latest form regards the previous ones as steps leading up to itself, and, since it is only rarely and only under quite specific conditions

able to criticize itself—leaving aside, of course, the historical periods which appear to themselves as times of decadence—it always conceives them one-sidedly" (*Grundrisse,* p. 106). The concept "one-sided" is used here in a strictly theoretical sense. It means that a contradictory whole is not being understood dialectically (in its contradictions) but that only one side of the contradiction is being fastened on. The past is certainly to be constructed as the prehistory of the present, but this construction grasps only one side of the contradictory process of historical development. To take hold of the process in its entirety, it is necessary to go beyond the present that first makes knowledge possible. Marx takes this step not by introducing the dimension of the future but by introducing the concept of the self-criticism of the present. "The Christian religion was able to be of assistance in reaching an objective understanding of earlier mythologies only when its own self-criticism had been accomplished to a certain degree. . . . Likewise, bourgeois economics arrived at an understanding of feudal, ancient, oriental economics only after the self-criticism of bourgeois society had begun" (*Grundrisse,* p. 106). Marx speaks of "objective understanding" here but he certainly does not fall victim to the objectivist self-deception of historicism, for he never doubts that historical knowledge relates to the present. His sole concern is to overcome dialectically the necessary "one-sidedness" of the construction of the past as prehistory of the present, and to do so by using the concept of the self-criticism of the present.

If one wishes to use self-criticism as a historiographic category as one describes a certain stage of development of a social formation or of a social subsystem, its meaning will first have to be precisely defined. Marx makes a distinction between self-criticism and another type, such as the "critique Christianity levelled against paganism, or also that of Protestantism against Catholicism" (*Grundrisse,* p. 106). We will refer to this type as system-immanent criticism. Its characteristic is that it functions within a social institution. To stick to Marx's example: system-immanent criticism within the institution of religion is criticism of specific religious ideas in the name of other ideas. In contrast to this form, self-criticism presupposes distance from mutually hostile religious ideas. This distance, however, is merely the result of a fundamentally more radical criticism, and that is the criticism of religion as an institution.

The difference between system-immanent criticism and self-criticism can be transferred to the sphere of art. Examples of system-immanent criticism would be the criticism the theoreticians of

French classicism directed against Baroque drama, or Lessing's of the German imitations of classical French tragedy. Criticism here functions within an institution, the theater. Varying concepts of tragedy that are grounded (if by multiple mediations) in social positions confront each other. There is another kind of criticism and that is the self-criticism of art: it addresses itself to art as an institution and must be distinguished from the former type. The methodological significance of the category 'self-criticism' is that for social subsystems also, it indicates the condition of the possibility of 'objective understanding' of past stages of development. Applied to art, this means that only when art enters the stage of self-criticism does the 'objective understanding' of past periods of the development of art become possible. 'Objective understanding' here does not mean an understanding that is independent of the place in the present of the cognizing individual; it merely means insight into the overall process insofar as this process has come to a conclusion in the present of the cognizing individual, however provisional that conclusion may be.

My second thesis is this: with the historical avant-garde movements, the social subsystem that is art enters the stage of self-criticism. Dadaism, the most radical movement within the European avant-garde, no longer criticizes schools that preceded it, but criticizes art as an institution, and the course its development took in bourgeois society. The concept 'art as an institution' as used here refers to the productive and distributive apparatus and also to the ideas about art that prevail at a given time and that determine the reception of works. The avant-garde turns against both—the distribution apparatus on which the work of art depends, and the status of art in bourgeois society as defined by the concept of autonomy. Only after art, in nineteenth-century Aestheticism, has altogether detached itself from the praxis of life can the aesthetic develop "purely." But the other side of autonomy, art's lack of social impact, also becomes recognizable. The avant-gardiste protest, whose aim it is to reintegrate art into the praxis of life, reveals the nexus between autonomy and the absence of any consequences. The self-criticism of the social subsystem, art, which now sets in, makes possible the 'objective understanding' of past phases of development. Whereas during the period of realism, for example, the development of art was felt to lie in a growing closeness of representation to reality, the one-sidedness of this construction could now be recognized. Realism no longer appears as *the* principle of artistic creation but becomes understandable as the sum of certain period procedures. The totality

of the developmental process of art becomes clear only in the stage of self-criticism. Only after art has in fact wholly detached itself from everything that is the praxis of life can two things be seen to make up the principle of development of art in bourgeois society: the progressive detachment of art from real life contexts, and the correlative crystallization of a distinctive sphere of experience, i.e., the aesthetic.

The Marx text gives no direct answer to the question concerning the historical conditions of the possibility of self-criticism. From Marx's text, one can only abstract the general observation that self-criticism presupposes that the social formation or social subsystem to which that criticism directs itself have fully evolved its own, unique characteristics. If this general theorem is transferred to the sphere of history, the result is as follows: for the self-criticism of bourgeois society, the proletariat must first have come into existence. For the coming into being of the proletariat makes it possible to recognize liberalism as an ideology. The precondition for the self-criticism of the social subsystem 'religion' is the loss of the legitimating function of religious world pictures. These lose their social function as feudalism ends, bourgeois society comes into being, and the world pictures that legitimate dominion (and the religious world pictures belong into this category) are replaced by the basic ideology of the fair exchange. "Because the *social power* of the capitalist is institutionalized as an exchange relation in the form of the private labor contract and the siphoning off of privately available surplus value has replaced *political dependency,* the market assumes, together with its cybernetic function, an ideological function. The class relationship can assume the anonymous, unpolitical form of wage dependency."[10] Since the central ideology of bourgeois society is one of the base, dominion-legitimating world pictures lose their function. Religion becomes a private affair and, at the same time, the critique of religion as an institution becomes possible.

We now go on to ask what may be the historical conditions for the possibility of the self-criticism of the social subsystem that is art? As one attempts to answer this question, it is most important to guard against a hasty construction of relationships (of the sort, crisis of art, crisis of bourgeois society[11]). If one takes seriously the idea of the relative autonomy of social subsystems vis-à-vis the development of society as a whole, one cannot assert that crises that affect society as a whole will necessarily also manifest themselves as crises within subsystems, or vice versa. To grasp the conditions for the possibility of the self-criticism of the subsystem 'art,'

it is necessary to construct the history of the subsystem. But this cannot be done by making the history of bourgeois society the basis from which the history of art is to be developed. If one proceeded in this fashion, one would do no more than relate the artistic objectifications to the stages of development of bourgeois society, presupposing these latter to be already known. Knowledge cannot be produced in this fashion, since what is being looked for (the history of art and its social effect) is assumed to be known already. The history of society as a whole would then appear to be the meaning of the subsystems, as it were. In contrast to this idea, the nonsynchronism in the development of individual subsystems must be insisted on; which means that the history of bourgeois society can be written only as the synthesis of the nonsynchronisms in the development of the various subsystems. The difficulties that beset such an undertaking are manifest. They are alluded to simply to make clear why the subsystem 'art' is seen here as having a history of its own.

If the history of the subsystem 'art' is to be constructed, I feel it is necessary to distinguish between art as an institution (which functions according to the principle of autonomy) and the content of individual works. For it is only this distinction that permits one to understand the history of art in bourgeois society as a history in whose course the divergence between institution and content is eliminated. In bourgeois society (and already before the bourgeoisie also seized political power in the French Revolution), art occupies a special status that is most succinctly referred to as autonomy. "Autonomous art only establishes itself as bourgeois society develops, the economic and political systems become detached from the cultural one, and the traditionalist world pictures which have been undermined by the basis ideology of fair exchange release the arts from their ritual use."[12] Autonomy here defines the functional mode of the social subsystem 'art': its (relative) independence in the face of demands that it be socially useful.[13] But it must be remembered that the detachment of art from the praxis of life and the accompanying crystallization of a special sphere of experience (i.e., the aesthetic) is not a straight-line development (there are significant counter-trends), and that it cannot be interpreted undialectically (as the coming into its own of art, for example). Rather, the autonomy status of art within bourgeois society is by no means undisputed but is the precarious product of overall social development. That status can always be called into question by society (more precisely, society's rulers) when it seems useful to harness art once more. Not

only the extreme example of the fascist politics of art that liquidates the autonomy status, but the large number of legal proceedings against artists for offenses against morality, testify to that fact.[14] A distinction is to be made here between such attacks on the autonomy status by social authorities, and the force that emanates from the substance of individual works as it manifests itself in the form-content totality and that aims at eradicating the distance between work and the praxis of life. Art in bourgeois society lives off the tension between the institutional framework (releasing art from the demand that it fulfill a social function) and the possible political content (*Gehalt*) of individual works. This tension, however, is not stable but subject to a historical dynamics that tends toward its abolition, as we will see.

Habermas has attempted to define these contents as they characterize all art in bourgeois society: "Art is a sanctuary for the—perhaps merely cerebral—satisfaction of those needs which become quasi illegal in the material life process of bourgeois society" (*"Bewusstmachende oder rettende Kritik,"* p. 192). Among these needs, he counts the "mimetic commerce with nature," "solidary living with others," and the "happiness of a communicative experience which is not subject to the imperatives of means-ends rationality and allows as much scope to the imagination as to the spontaneity of behavior" (p. 192 f.). Such a perspective has its justification within the framework of a general definition of the function of art in bourgeois society that Habermas means to provide, but it would be problematic in our context because it does not permit us to grasp the historical development of the contents expressed in works. I believe it is necessary to distinguish between the institutional status of art in bourgeois society (apartness of the work of art from the praxis of life) and the contents realized in works of art (these may but need not be residual needs in Habermas's sense). This differentiation permits one to discover the period in which the self-criticism of art is possible. Only with the aid of this distinction can our question concerning the historical conditions for the possibility of the self-criticism of art be answered.

Someone may raise the following objection to the attempt to distinguish between the formal determinacy of art[15] (status of autonomy) and the determinacy of its content (*Gehalt*) of individual works: the autonomy status itself must be understood as content; apartness from the purposive, rational organization of bourgeois society already implies the claim to a happiness society does not permit. There is undoubtedly some justice in such a view. Formal

determinacy is not something external to content; independence vis-à-vis the direct demand that purposes be served also accrues to the work whose explicit content is conservative. But precisely this fact should prompt the scholar to distinguish between the status of autonomy that governs the functioning of the individual work on the one hand, and the import of individual works (or groups of works) on the other. Both Voltaire's *contes* and Mallarmé's poems are autonomous works of art. But in varying social contexts and for definable historical and social reasons, different uses are made of the scope that the status of autonomy confers on the work of art. As the example of Voltaire shows, the autonomy status certainly does not preclude the artist's adoption of a political position; what it does limit is the chance of effectiveness.

The proposed distinction between art as an institution (whose functional mode is autonomy) and the import of works makes it possible to sketch an answer to the question concerning the conditions for the possibility of the self-criticism of the social subsystem "art." As regards the difficult question concerning the historical crystallization of art as an institution, it suffices if we observe in this context that this process came to a conclusion at about the same time as the struggle of the bourgeoisie for its emancipation. The insights formulated in Kant's and Schiller's aesthetic writings presuppose the completed evolution of art as a sphere that is detached from the praxis of life. We can therefore take it as our point of departure that at the end of the eighteenth century at the latest, art as an institution is already fully developed in the sense specified above. Yet this does not mean that the self-criticism of art has also set in. The Hegelian idea of an end of the period of art was not adopted by the young Hegelians. Habermas explains this by the "special position which art occupies among the forms of the absolute spirit in the sense that unlike subjectified religion and scientific philosophy, it does not take on tasks in the economic and political system but satisfies residual needs which cannot be met in bourgeois society" (*Bewusstmachende oder rettende Kritik.*" p. 193 f.). I believe that there are historical reasons why the self-criticism of art cannot occur *as yet.* It is true that the institution of autonomous art is fully developed, but within this institution, there still function contents (*Gehalte*) that are of a thoroughly political character and thus militate against the autonomy principle of the institution. The self-criticism of the social subsystem that is art can become possible only when the contents also lose their political character, and art

wants to be nothing other than art. This stage is reached at the end of the nineteenth century, in Aestheticism.[16]

For reasons connected with the development of the bourgeoisie after its seizure of political power, the tension between the institutional frame and the content of individual works tends to disappear in the second half of the nineteenth century. The apartness from the praxis of life that had always constituted the institutional status of art in bourgeois society now becomes the content of works. Institutional frame and content coincide. The realistic novel of the nineteenth century still serves the self-understanding of the bourgeois. Fiction is the medium of a reflection about the relationship between individual and society. In Aestheticism, this thematics is overshadowed by the ever-increasing concentration the makers of art bring to the medium itself. The failure of Mallarmé's principal literary project, Valéry's almost total lack of productivity over two decades, and Hofmannsthal's Lord Chandos letter are symptoms of a crisis of art.[17] At the moment it has shed all that is alien to it, art necessarily becomes problematic for itself. As institution and content coincide, social ineffectuality stands revealed as the essence of art in bourgeois society, and thus provokes the self-criticism of art. It is to the credit of the historical avant-garde movements that they supplied this self-criticism.

3. Regarding the Discussion of Benjamin's Theory of Art

In his essay "The work of art in the age of technical reproduction,"[18] Walter Benjamin uses the concept, *the loss of aura,* to describe the decisive changes art underwent in the first quarter of the twentieth century, and attempts to account for that loss by changes in techniques of reproduction. Since up to this point we have derived the conditions for the possibility of the self-criticism of art from the historical unfolding of art (institution and content of works), we need to discuss the suitability of Benjamin's thesis, which explains these conditions as the direct result of changes in the sphere of productive forces.

Benjamin's point of departure is a certain type of relation between work and recipient, which he refers to as marked by the presence of an aura.[19] What Benjamin means by the concept of aura could probably most easily be rendered as unapproachability: the "unique phenomenon of a distance however close it may be" (*Illuminations,* p. 222). The aura has its origin in cultic ritual, but for Benjamin,

the mode of reception marked by the presence of aura remains characteristic also of the no longer sacral art that has developed since the Renaissance. It is not the break between the sacral art of the Middle Ages and the secular art of the Renaissance that Benjamin judges decisive in the history of art; rather, it is that break that results from the loss of aura. Benjamin traces this break to the change in techniques of reproduction. According to him, reception characterized by the presence of aura requires categories such as uniqueness and authenticity. But these become irrelevant to an art (such as the film, for example) whose very design entails reproduction. It is Benjamin's decisive idea that a change in reproduction techniques brings with it a change in the forms of perception and that this will result in a change in the "character of art as a whole." The contemplative reception of the bourgeois individual is to be supplanted by what is the simultaneously distracted and rationally testing reception of the masses. Instead of being based on ritual, art will now be based on politics.

We will first consider Benjamin's construction of the development of art, then the materialist explanatory scheme he proposed. The period of sacral art during which it is an integral part of ecclesiastical ritual, and the period of autonomous art that develops along with bourgeois society and that detaches itself from ritual, creating a specific type of perception (the aesthetic), are summarized by Benjamin in the concept of art with an aura. But the periodization of art he proposes is problematic for several reasons. For Benjamin, art with an aura and individual reception (absorption in the object) go hand in hand. But this characterization applies only to autonomous art, certainly not to the sacral art of the Middle Ages (the reception of the sculpture on medieval cathedrals and the mystery plays was collective). Benjamin's construction of history omits the emancipation of art from the sacral, which was the work of the bourgeoisie. One of the reasons for this omission may be that with the *l'art pour l'art* movement and aestheticism, something like a resacralization (or reritualization) of art did in fact occur. But there is no similarity between this reversion and the original sacral function of art. Art here is not an element in an ecclesiastical ritual within which a use value is conferred on it. Instead, art generates a ritual. Instead of taking its place within the sacral sphere, art supplants religion. The resacralization of art that occurred in aestheticism thus presupposes art's total emancipation from the sacral and must under no circumstances be equated with the sacral character of medieval art.

To judge Benjamin's materialist explanation of the change in modes of reception as a result of changes in reproduction techniques, it is important to realize that he sketches a second explanation, which may prove to have greater explanatory efficacy. The artists of the avant-garde, especially the dadaists, he writes, had already, before film was discovered, attempted to create filmlike effects by the means used in painting. "The Dadaists attached much less importance to the sales [exchange] value of their work than to its uselessness for contemplative immersion. . . . Their poems are a 'word salad' containing obscenities and every imaginable waste product of language. The same is true of their paintings, on which they mounted buttons and tickets. What they intended and achieved was a relentless destruction of the aura of their creation which they branded as reproductions with the very means of production" (*Illuminations,* pp. 237-38). Here, the loss of aura is not traced to a change in reproduction techniques but to an intent on the part of the makers of art. The change in the "overall character of art" is no longer the result of technological innovation but mediated by the conscious acts of a generation of artists. To the dadaists, Benjamin ascribes only the role of precursors; they create a "demand" that only the new technical medium can satisfy. But there is a problem here: how is one to explain this pioneering? Differently expressed, the explanation of the change in the mode of reception by the change in reproduction techniques acquires a different place value. It can no longer lay claim to explaining a historical process, but at most to being a hypothesis for the possible *diffusion* of a mode of reception that the dadaists were the first to have intended. One cannot wholly resist the impression that Benjamin wanted to provide an ex post facto materialist foundation for a discovery he owed to his commerce with avant-gardiste art, the discovery of the loss of aura. But such an undertaking is problematic for the decisive break in the development of art, which Benjamin fully grasps in its historical significance would then be the result of technological change. A direct link is established here between emancipation or emancipatory expectation, and industrial technique.[20] But although emancipation is a process that can certainly provide a field of new possibilities for the satisfaction of human needs, it cannot be conceived of as independent of human consciousness. An emancipation that occurs naturally would be the opposite of emancipation.

At bottom, Benjamin is attempting to transfer, from society as a whole to the partial sphere that is art, the Marxist theorem according to which the development of the productive forces "shatters" the

production relations.[21] The question arises whether this transfer does not ultimately remain mere analogy. In Marx, the concept 'productive forces' refers to the technological level of development of a given society and includes both the means of production as objectified in machines, and the workers' capacities to use these means. It is questionable whether a concept of artistic productive forces can be derived from this idea, because in artistic production, it would be difficult to subsume under one concept the capacities and abilities of the producer and the stage of development of the material productive and reproductive techniques. So far, artistic production has been a type of simple commodity production (even in late-capitalist society), where the material means of production have a relatively minor bearing on the quality of the product. They do, however, have significance as regards its distribution and effectiveness. That, since the invention of film, distribution techniques have affected production in turn cannot be doubted. The quasi-industrial techniques whose dominance in certain areas is a result of this fact have proved anything but "shattering," however.[22] What has occurred is the total subordination of work contents to profit motives, and a fading of the critical potencies of works in favor of a training in consumer attitudes (which extends to the most intimate interhuman relations).[23]

Brecht, in whose *Threepenny Lawsuit* we hear echoes of Benjamin's theorem concerning the destruction of art and its aura by new reproduction techniques, formulates more cautiously than Benjamin: "This apparatus *can be used* better than almost anything else to supersede the old kind of untechnical, anti-technical 'glowing' art, with its religious links."[24] In contrast to Benjamin, who tends to ascribe emancipatory quality to the new technical means (film) as such, Brecht emphasizes that certain possibilities inhere in the technical means; but he suggests that the development of such possibilities depends on the way they are used.

If, for the reasons mentioned, it is a problematical undertaking to transfer the concept of productive forces from the sphere of overall social analysis to that of art, the same holds true of the concept of production relations, if only because in Marx, it unambiguously refers to the totality of social relations that govern work and the distribution of the products of work. But with art as an institution, we have previously introduced a concept that refers to the conditions under which art is produced, distributed, and received. In bourgeois society, the salient characteristic of this institution is that the products that function within it remain (relatively) free from any pressure that they serve social purposes. It is Benjamin's achievement to have

defined, by the concept of aura, the type of relation between work and recipient that evolves in the institution of art in bourgeois society. Two essential insights come together here: first, that it is not in and of themselves that works of art have their effect but rather that this effect is decisively determined by the institution within which the works function; second, that modes of reception must be based in social history: the perception of aura, for example, in the bourgeois individual. What Benjamin discovers is form as a determinant in art (*Formbestimmtheit,* in the sense Marx uses the concept); here, we also have what is materialist in his approach. But the theorem according to which reproduction techniques destroy art that has an aura is a pseudomaterialist explanatory model.

A final comment regarding the matter of periodization in the development of art: Above, we criticized Benjamin's periodization because he blurs the break between medieval-sacral and modern, secular art. Given the break between art with and without aura as elaborated by Benjamin, one arrives at the methodologically important insight that periodization in the development of art must be looked for in the sphere of art as institution, not in the sphere of the transformation of the content of individual works. This implies that periodization in the history of art cannot simply follow the periodization in the history of social formations and their phases of development but that it must be the task of a science of culture (*Kulturwissenschaft*) to bring into view the large-scale changes in the development of its subject. Only in this way can cultural science make an authentic contribution to the investigation of the history of bourgeois society. But where that history is taken as an already known reference system and used as such in the historical investigation of partial social spheres, cultural science degenerates into a procedure of establishing correspondences. The cognitive value of such an enterprise must be rated as small.

To summarize: the historical conditions for the possibility of self-criticism of the social subsystem 'art' cannot be elucidated with the aid of Benjamin's theorem; instead, these conditions must be derived from the disappearance of that tension that is constitutive for art in bourgeois society, the tension between art as institution (autonomy status) and the contents of individual works. In this effort, it is important not to contrast art and society as two mutually exclusive spheres. For both the (relative) insulation of art from demands that it serve purposes, and the development of contents are social phenomena (determined by the development of society as a whole).

If we criticize Benjamin's thesis according to which the technical reproducibility of the work of art imposes a different mode of reception (one marked by the absence of aura), this does not mean that we deny the importance the development of techniques of reproduction has. But two points must be made: technical development must not be understood as an independent variable, for it is itself dependent on overall social development. Second, the decisive turn in the development of art in bourgeois society must not be traced monocausally to the development of technical reproduction techniques. With these two provisos, one may summarize the importance that technical development has for the evolution of the fine arts in these terms: because the advent of photography makes possible the precise mechanical reproduction of reality, the mimetic function of the fine arts withers.[25] But the limits of this explanatory model become clear when one calls to mind that it cannot be transferred to literature. For in literature, there is no technical innovation that could have produced an effect comparable to that of photography in the fine arts. When Benjamin understands the rise of l'art pour l'art as a reaction to the advent of photography,[26] the explanatory model is surely being strained. L'art pour l'art theory is not simply the reaction to a new means of reproduction (however substantially it may have promoted the tendency toward the independence of the fine arts) but is the answer to the tendency in fully evolved bourgeois society for works of art to lose their social function (we characterized this development as the loss of the political content of individual works). There is no intent to deny the significance that changed techniques of reproduction had for the development of art; but the latter cannot be derived from the former. The evolution of art as a distinct subsystem that began with l'art pour l'art and was carried to its conclusion in Aestheticism must be seen in connection with the tendency toward the division of labor underway in bourgeois society. The fully evolved, distinct subsystem 'art' is simultaneously one whose individual products tend to no longer take on any social function.

By way of a general formulation, it is probably impossible to safely go further than this: the process by which the social subsystem 'art' evolves into a wholly distinct entity is part and parcel of the developmental logic of bourgeois society. As the division of labor becomes more general, the artist also turns into a specialist. This trend, which reaches its apogee in Aestheticism, has been most adequately reflected by Valéry. Within the general tendency toward

ever-increasing specialization, it may be assumed that various subsystems impinge on each other. The development of photography, for example, affects painting (withering of the mimetic function). But such reciprocal influences among social subsystems should not be given excessive weight. Although important, especially in explaining nonsynchronies in the evolution of the various arts, they cannot be made the "cause" of that process in which the various arts generate what is specifically theirs. That process is a function of the overall social development to which it belongs and cannot be adequately understood by a cause-effect scheme.[27]

The self-criticism of the social subsystem 'art' to which the avant-garde movements attained has been seen so far primarily in connection with the tendency toward the progressing division of labor that is so characteristic of the development of bourgeois society. The overall social tendency toward the articulation of subsystems and a concurrent specialization of function are being understood as the developmental law to which the sphere of art is also subject. This completes the sketch of the objective aspect of the process. But how the evolution of distinct subsystems is reflected by the subjects must still be inquired into. It seems to me that the concept of a shrinkage of experience can aid us here. If experience is defined as a bundle of perceptions and reflections that have been worked through, it becomes possible to characterize the effect of the crystallization of subsystems resulting from the progressing division of labor as a shrinking of experience. Such shrinkage does not mean that the subject who has now become specialist in a subsystem no longer perceives or reflects. In the sense proposed here, the concept means that 'experiences' the specialist has in his partial sphere can no longer be translated back into the praxis of life. The aesthetic experience as a specific experience, such as aestheticism developed it, would in its pure form be the mode in which the shrinking of experience as defined above expresses itself in the sphere of art. Differently formulated: aesthetic experience is the positive side of that process by which the social subsystem 'art' defines itself as a distinct sphere. Its negative side is the artist's loss of any social function.

As long as art interprets reality or provides satisfaction of residual needs only in the imagination, it is, though detached from the praxis of life, still related to it. It is only in Aestheticism that the tie to society still existent up to this moment is severed. The break with society (it is the society of Imperialism) constitutes the center of the works of Aestheticism. Here lies the reason for Adorno's repeated

attempts to vindicate it.[28] The intention of the avant-gardiste may be defined as the attempt to direct toward the practical the aesthetic experience (which rebels against the praxis of life) that Aestheticism developed. What most strongly conflicts with the means-ends rationality of bourgeois society is to become life's organizing principle.

Chapter Three
On the Problem of the Autonomy of Art in Bourgeois Society

Its autonomy (that of art) surely remains irrevocable.[1]
It is impossible to conceive of the autonomy of art without covering up work.[2]

1. Research Problems

The two sentences of Adorno circumscribe the contradictoriness of the category 'autonomy': necessary to define what art is in bourgeois society, it also carries the taint of ideological distortion where it does not reveal that it is socially conditioned. This suggests the definition of autonomy that will underlie the following comments and also serves to distinguish it from two other, competing concepts: the autonomy concept of l'art pour l'art and the autonomy concept of a positivist sociology that sees autonomy as the merely subjective idea of the producer of art.

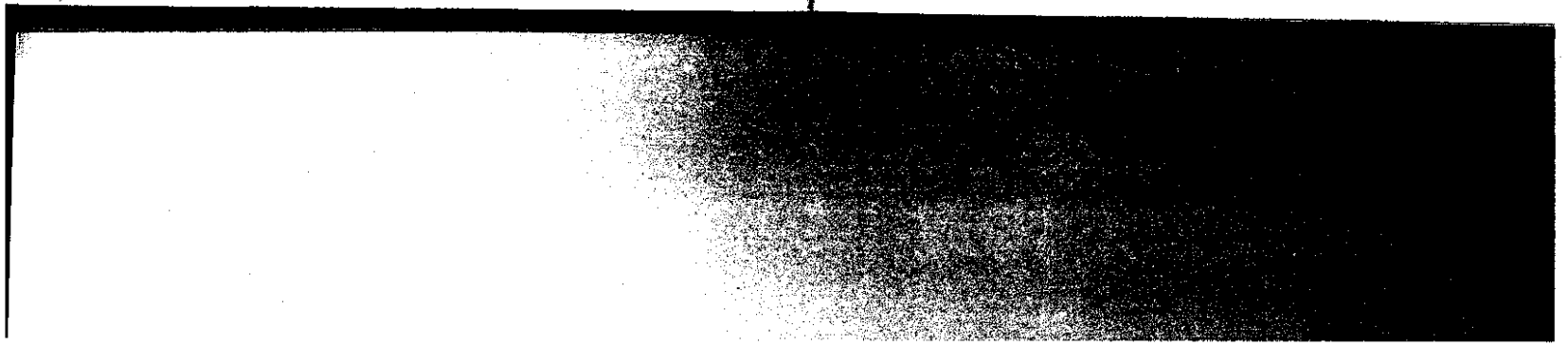
If the autonomy of art is defined as art's independence from society, there are several ways of understanding that definition. Conceiving of art's apartness from society as its 'nature' means involuntarily adopting the l'art pour l'art concept of art and simultaneously making it impossible to explain this apartness as the product of a historical and social development. If, on the other hand, one puts forward the view that art's independence from society exists only in the artist's imagination and that it tells us nothing about the status of works, the correct insight that autonomy is a historically conditioned phenomenon turns into its denial; what remains is mere illusion. Both approaches miss the complexity of

autonomy, a category whose characteristic it is that it describes something real (the detachment of art as a special sphere of human activity from the nexus of the praxis of life) but simultaneously expresses this real phenomenon in concepts that block recognition of the social determinacy of the process. Like the public realm (*Öffentlichkeit*), the autonomy of art is a category of bourgeois society that both reveals and obscures an actual historical development. All discussion of this category must be judged by the extent to which it succeeds in showing and explaining logically and historically the contradictoriness inherent in the thing itself.

A history of art as an institution in bourgeois society cannot be sketched in what follows because the requisite preliminary studies in the arts and the social sciences have not been done. Instead, various approaches toward a materialist explanation of the genesis of the category 'autonomy' will be discussed because this may lead to a clarification of both the concept and the thing. Also, concrete research perspectives can most readily be developed from a critique of the most recent studies.[3] B. Hinz explains the genesis of the idea of the autonomy of art as follows: "During this phase of the historical separation of the producer from his means of production, the artist remained as the only one whom the division of labor had passed by, though most assuredly not without leaving a trace. . . . The reason that his product could acquire importance as something special, 'autonomous,' seems to lie in the continuation of the handicraft mode of production after the historical division of labor had set in" (*Autonomie der Kunst*, p. 175 f.).[4] Being arrested at the handicraft stage of production within a society where the division of labor and the separation of the worker from his means of production becomes increasingly the norm would thus be the actual precondition for seeing art as something special. Because the Renaissance artist worked principally at a court, he reacted "feudally" to the division of labor. He denied his status as craftsman and conceived of his achievement as purely intellectual. M. Müller comes to a similar conclusion: "At least in theory, it is the court that promotes the division of artistic work into material and intellectual production, the field in which this happens being the art that is created there. This division is a feudal reflex to changed conditions of production" (*Autonomie der Kunst*, p. 26).

Here, we have the significant attempt to advance a materialist explanation of intellectual phenomena that transcends the rigid opposition of bourgeoisie and nobility. The authors do not content themselves with merely attributing intellectual objectifications to

specific social positions but try to derive ideologies (here, the idea of the nature of the process of artistic creation) from social dynamics. They see the autonomy claim of art as a phenomenon that emerges in the feudal sphere but that is a reaction to the change the early capitalist economy brings to courtly society. This nuanced interpretive scheme has its analogue in the conception Werner Krauss gave of the *honnête homme* in seventeenth century France.[5] The social ideal of the honnête homme also cannot be understood simply as the ideology of a nobility that is losing its political role. Precisely because it turns against the particularism of the estates, Krauss interprets it as the attempt of the nobility to win the upper reaches of the bourgeoisie for its own struggle against absolutism. The value of the results of these studies in the sociology of art is qualified, however, because the speculative element (and this applies also to Müller) dominates to such a degree that the thesis cannot be justified by the findings. Another factor is more decisive: What is referred to here by the concept 'autonomy' is almost wholly the subjective side of the process in which art becomes autonomous. The object of the explanatory attempt are the ideas artists have about their activity, not the birth of autonomy as a whole. But this process comprises a second element, which is that of the freeing of a capacity for the perception and shaping of reality that had hitherto been integrated into cultic ends. Although there is reason to assume that the elements of the process (the ideological and the real) are connected, there is something problematical about reducing it to its ideological dimension. It is to the real side of the process that Lutz Winckler's explanatory attempt addresses itself. His point of departure is Hauser's comment that, with the transition from the individual who commissions an artist to create something for a specific purpose to the collector who acquires the work of prestigious artists on the growing art market, the independently working artist makes his appearance as the historical correlate of the collector.[6] Winckler draws these conclusions: "The abstraction from the person who commissions a work and the work being commissioned, an abstraction which the market made possible, was the precondition for artistic abstraction, the interest in techniques of composition and coloring" (Winckler, p. 18). Hauser is largely descriptive; he sets forth a historical development, the simultaneous appearance of the collector and the independent artist, that is, the artist who produces for an anonymous market. On this, Winckler bases an explanation of the genesis of the autonomy of the aesthetic. Such an elaboration of descriptive statements into an explanatory historical construct



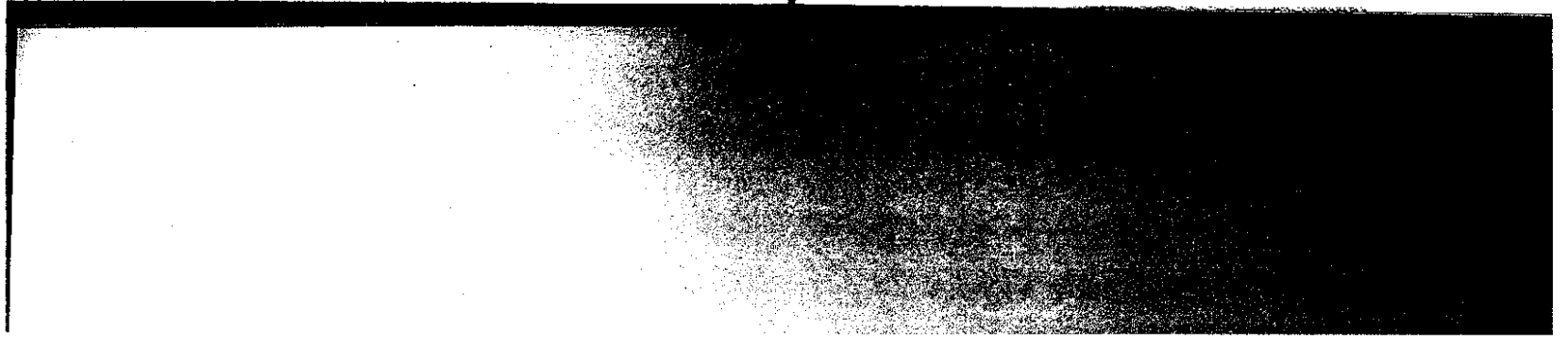
seems problematical to me, not least because other comments Hauser makes suggest different conclusions. Although artists' studios were still places of handicraft in the fifteenth century, Hauser writes, and subject to guild rules (p. 56 ff.), the social status of the artist changed around the beginning of the sixteenth century because the new seigneuries and principalities on the one hand, and wealthy cities on the other, became sources of an ever-increasing demand for qualified artists who were capable of taking on and executing important orders. In this context also, Hauser speaks of a demand on the art market, but what is meant is not the "market" on which individual works are bought and sold, but the growing number of important commissions. This increase resulted in a loosening of the guild ties of the artists (the guilds were an instrument of the producers by which they protected themselves against surplus production and the fall in prices this entailed). Whereas Winckler derives "artistic abstraction," the interest in techniques of composition and color, from the market mechanism (artists produce for the anonymous market on which the collector buys the works; they no longer produce for the individual who commissions something), an explanation that contradicts Winckler's could be deduced from the Hauser comments just given. The interest in techniques of composition and color would then be a consequence of the new social position of the artist, which results not from the decreasing importance of commissioned art but from its growth.

This is not the place to determine what the "correct" explanation may be. What is important is to recognize the research problem that the divergence of the various explanatory attempts makes apparent. The development of the art market (both of the old "commission" market and the new market where individual works are bought and sold) furnishes a kind of "fact" from which it is difficult to infer anything about the developing autonomy of the aesthetic. The process of the growth of the social sphere that we call art, which extended over centuries and was fitful because it was inhibited time and again by countermovements, can hardly be derived from any single cause, even though that cause be of such central importance for society as the market mechanism.

The study of Bredekamp differs from the approaches discussed so far because the author attempts to show "that the concept and idea of 'free' (autonomous) art is tied from the very beginning to a specific class, that the courts and the great bourgeoisie promoted art as a witness to their rule" (*Autonomie der Kunst*, p. 92). Because aesthetic appeal is used as a means of domination, Bredekamp sees

autonomy as a delusion (*Schein-Realität*) and contrasts it with non-autonomous art, which he considers a positive value. He tries to show that it was not out of an emotional conservatism that the lower classes clung to trecento forms in the fifteenth century "but because they had the capacity to experience and resist the process by which art develops from cult and then lays claim to autonomy as tied to the ideology of the upper classes" (ibid., p. 128). Similarly, he interprets the iconoclasm of the plebeian and petit bourgeois sects as a radical protest against the process by which sensuous appeal becomes something in its own right, for Savonarola certainly did not object to an art that tended toward moral instruction. In this type of interpretation, the principal problem is that it equates the interpreter's insight and the experience of those who lived through the event. The interpreter doubtlessly has the right to make attributions; on the basis of one's experience in and of society, one may tend to believe that the aesthetic conservatism of the lower strata contains an element of truth. But the interpreter cannot simply impute this insight to the petit bourgeois and plebeian strata of fifteenth-century Italy as their experience. That this is what Bredekamp does becomes clear once more at the end of his study, where he characterizes ascetic-religious art as an "early form" of 'partisanship' and ascribes to it as positive attributes "the denunciation of the aura of ascendancy and its abundance of art, the tendency toward receptibility by the masses, and the neglect of aesthetic appeal in favor of didactic and political clarity" (p. 169). Without meaning to, Bredekamp thus confirms the traditional view that engaged art cannot be 'genuine' art. More decisive is the fact that because of his partiality to a moralizing art, Bredekamp fails to give due weight to what is liberating in the emancipation of aesthetic appeal from religious contexts.

The divergence of genesis and validity must be taken note of here if one wishes to grasp the contradictoriness of the process by which art becomes autonomous. The works in which the aesthetic offers itself for the first time as a special object of pleasure may well have been connected in their genesis with the aura emanating from those that rule, but that does not change the fact that in the course of further historical development, they not only made possible a certain kind of pleasure (the aesthetic) but contributed toward the creation of the sphere we call art. In other words: critical science must not simply deny an aspect of social reality (and the autonomy of art is such an aspect) and retreat to the formulation of a few dichotomies (aura of the rulers versus receptibility by the masses, aesthetic appeal versus didactic-political clarity). It must open itself to the dialectic



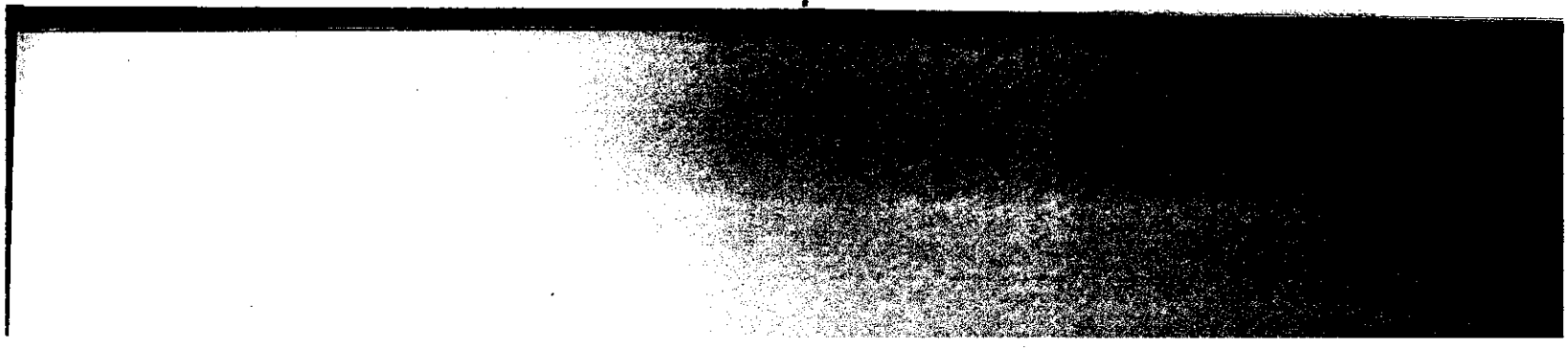
of art that Benjamin summarized in the phrase: "There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism."[7] Benjamin had no intention of condemning civilization with this phrase—an idea that would be at odds with his concept of criticism as something that saves or preserves. Rather, he formulates the insight that hitherto, culture has always been paid for by the suffering of those who were excluded from it. Greek culture, for example, was the culture of a slaveholding society). True, the beauty of works does not justify the suffering to which they owe their existence; but neither may one negate the work that alone testifies to that suffering. Although it is important to show what is suppression (aura of ascendancy) in the great works, they must not be reduced to it. Attempts to annul what is contradictory in the development of art, by playing off a 'moralizing' against an 'autonomous' art, miss the point because they overlook both what is liberating in autonomous and what is regressive in moralizing art. Compared with such undialectical reflections, Horkheimer and Adorno are correct when, in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment,* they insist that the process of civilization cannot be separated from suppression.

The various more recent approaches toward the clarification of the genesis of the autonomy of art were not confronted with each other here, but not because such efforts should be discouraged. Quite the contrary; I believe that they are extremely important. Yet it is also true that such confrontation shows the danger of historical-philosophical speculation. Especially a science that understands itself as materialist should be on guard against it. This is not meant as a call to blindly abandon oneself to the 'material' but as a plea for an empiricism that is informed by theory. This formula points to concealed research problems that, to the best of my knowledge, materialist cultural science has not yet clearly formulated and that it certainly has not solved: what procedures can be devised for the attempt to solve certain technical problems such that the investigation of the historical material can yield results not already postulated at the theoretical level? As long as this question has not been asked, the cultural sciences always risk oscillating between bad concreteness and bad generalization. With reference to the problem of autonomy, one should ask whether there is a connection between its two elements (the detachment of art from the praxis of life, and the obscuring of the historical conditions of this process as in the cult of genius, for example), and what sort of connection that may be. The emancipation of the aesthetic from the praxis of life could probably

be most easily traced if one examined the development of aesthetic ideas. The nexus between art and the sciences that the Renaissance created would then have to be interpreted as the first phase of art's emancipation from ritual. In the emancipation of art from the direct tie to the sacral, one should probably see the center of that process that is so difficult to analyze because it required centuries for its completion, the achievement of autonomy by art. The detachment of art from ecclesiastical ritual should undoubtedly not be understood as an unbroken development; its course was contradictory (Hauser repeatedly emphasizes that as late as the fifteenth century, the Italian merchant class still satisfied its need for representation by commissioning sacral works). But even within what still had the external appearance of sacral art, the emancipation of the aesthetic proceeds. Even the counterreformers who used art for its effect paradoxically promoted its emancipation by their very action. It is true that Baroque art makes an extraordinary impression, but its connection with the religious subject has become relatively loose. This art does not derive its principal effect from the *sujet* but from the abundance of colors and forms. The art that the counterreformers intended to make a means of ecclesiastical propaganda can thus detach itself from the sacral purpose because the artist developed a heightened sense for the effects of colors and forms.[8] There is yet another sense in which the process of emancipation of the aesthetic is a contradictory one. For as we have seen, what occurs here is not merely that a new way of perceiving that is immune to the coercion of means-ends rationality comes into existence. It is also that the sphere this opens up is ideologized (notion of genius, etc.). Concerning the genesis of the process, finally, it will undoubtedly be necessary to make its connection with the rise of bourgeois society the point of departure. It will have become clear that to prove such a connection, much remains to be done. Here, the first steps taken by the Marburg researchers into the sociology of art would have to be developed further.

2. The Autonomy of Art in the Aesthetics of Kant and Schiller

So far, it has been the fine arts of the Renaissance that have served to give some idea of the prehistory of the development of the autonomy of art. Not until the eighteenth century, with the rise of bourgeois society and the seizure of political power by a bourgeoisie that had gained economic strength, does a systematic aesthetics as a



philosophical discipline and a new concept of autonomous art come into being. In philosophical aesthetics, the result of a centuries-long process is conceptualized. By the "modern concept of art as a comprehensive designation for poetry, music, the stage, sculpture, painting and architecture which did not become current until the end of the 18th century,"[9] artistic activity is understood as an activity that differs from all others. "The various arts were removed from the context of everyday life and conceived of as something that could be treated as a whole. . . . As the realm of non-purposive creation and disinterested pleasure, this whole was contrasted with the life of society which it seemed the task of the future to order rationally, in strict adaptation to definable ends."[10] With the constitution of aesthetics as an autonomous sphere of philosophical knowledge, this concept of art comes into being. Its result is that artistic production is divorced from the totality of social activities and comes to confront them abstractly. Whereas the unity of *delectare* and *prodesse* had been a commonplace not only of all poetics since Hellenism and especially since Horace but also a fundamental tenet of artistic self-understanding, the construction of a non-purposive realm of art brings it about that in theory, prodesse is understood as an extra-aesthetic factor and that criticism censures as inartistic works with a didactic tendency.

In Kant's *Critique of Judgment* (1790), the subjective aspect of the detachment of art from the practical concerns of life is reflected.[11] It is not the work of art but the aesthetic judgment (judgment of taste) that Kant investigates. It is situated between the realm of the senses and that of reason, between the "interest of inclination in the case of the agreeable" (*Critique of Judgment,* § 5) and the interest of practical reason in the realization of the moral law, and is defined as *disinterested:* "The delight which determines the judgment of taste is independent of all interest" (§ 2), where interest is defined by "reference to the faculty of desire" (ibid.). If the faculty of desire is that human capability which makes possible on the side of the subject a society based on the principle of the maximization of profit, then Kant's axiom also defines the freedom of art from the constraints of the developing bourgeois-capitalist society. The aesthetic is conceived as a sphere that does not fall under the principle of the maximization of profit prevailing in all spheres of life. In Kant, this element does not yet come to the fore. On the contrary, he makes clear what is meant (the detachment of the aesthetic from all practical life contexts) by emphasizing the

universality of aesthetic judgment as compared with the particularity of the judgment to which the bourgeois social critic subjects the feudal life style: "If anyone asks me whether I consider that the palace I see before me is beautiful, I may, perhaps reply that I do not care for things of that sort that are merely made to be gaped at. Or I may reply in the same strain as that Iroquois sachem who said that nothing in Paris pleased him better than the eating-houses. I may even go a step further and inveigh with the vigor of a Rousseau against the vanity of the great who spend the sweat of the people on such superfluous things. . . . All this may be admitted and approved; only it is not the point now at issue. All one wants to know is whether the mere representation of the object is to my liking" (*Critique of Judgment,* § 2).

The quotation makes clear what Kant means by disinterest. Both the interest of the "Iroquois sachem," which is directed toward the immediate satisfaction of needs, and the practical interest of reason of Rousseau's social critic lie outside the sphere Kant stakes out for aesthetic judgment. With his demand that the aesthetic judgment be universal, Kant also closes his eyes to the particular interests of his class. Toward the products of the class enemy also, the bourgeois theoretician claims impartiality. What is bourgeois in Kant's argument is precisely the demand that the aesthetic judgment have universal validity. The pathos of universality is characteristic of the bourgeoisie, which fights the feudal nobility as an estate that represents particular interests.[12]

Kant not only declares the aesthetic as independent of the sphere of the sensuous and the moral (the beautiful is neither the agreeable nor the morally good) but also of the sphere of the theoretical. The logical peculiarity of the judgment of taste is that whereas it claims universal validity, it is not "a logical universality according to concepts" (§ 31) because in that case, the "necessary and universal approval would be capable of being enforced by proofs" (§ 35). For Kant, the universality of the aesthetic judgment is thus grounded in the agreement of an idea with the subjective conditions of the use of judgment that apply to all, concretely, in the agreement of imagination (*Einbildungskraft*) and understanding (*Verstand*).

In Kant's philosophical system, judgment occupies a central place, for it is assigned the task of mediating between theoretical knowledge (nature) and practical knowledge (freedom). It furnishes the "concept of a purposiveness of nature" that not only permits moving upward from the particular to the general but also the

practical modification of reality. For only a nature conceived as purposive in its manifoldness can be cognized as unity and become the object of practical action.

Kant assigned the aesthetic a special position between sensuousness and reason, and defined the judgment of taste as free and disinterested. For Schiller, these Kantian reflections become a point of departure from which he can proceed toward something like a definition of the social function of the aesthetic. The attempt strikes one as paradoxical, for it was precisely the disinterestedness of the aesthetic judgment and, it would seem at first, the *functionlessness* of art as an implicit consequence that Kant had emphasized. Schiller attempts to show that it is on the very basis of its autonomy, its not being tied to immediate ends, that art can fulfill a task that cannot be fulfilled any other way: the furtherance of humanity. The point of departure of his reflections is an analysis of what, under the influence of the Reign of Terror of the French Revolution, he calls the "drama of our period":

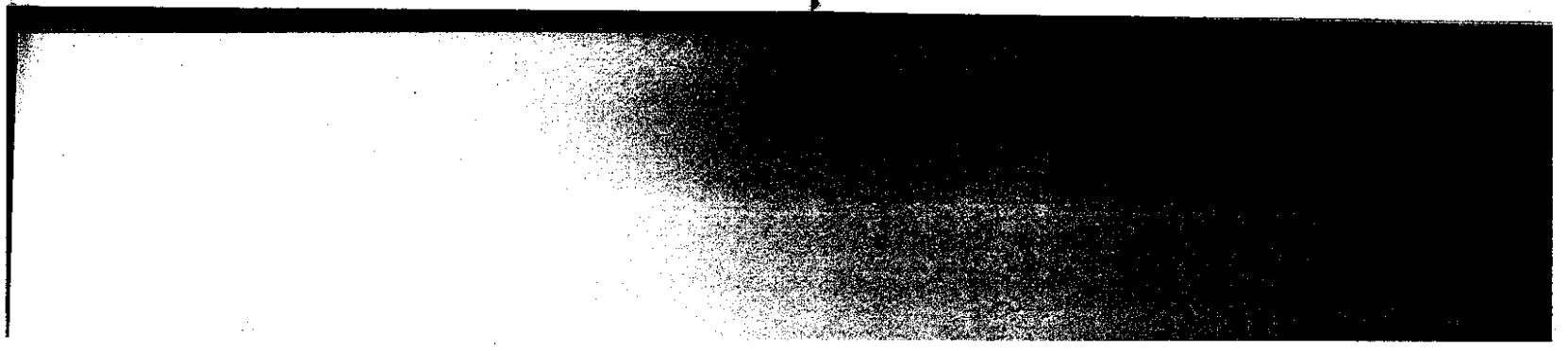
> Among the lower and more numerous classes we find crude, lawless impulses which have been unleashed by the loosening of the bonds of civil order, and are hastening with ungovernable fury to their brutal satisfaction. . . . The extinction of the state contains its vindication. Society uncontrolled, instead of hastening upward into organic life, is relapsing into its original elements. On the other hand, the civilized classes present to us the still more repugnant spectacle of indolence and a depravity of character which is all the more shocking since culture itself is the source of it. . . . The intellectual enlightenment on which the refined ranks of society not without justification, pride themselves, reveal, on the whole, an influence on the disposition so little ennobling that it rather furnishes maxims to confirm depravity.[13]

At the level of analysis quoted here, the problem seems to have no solution. In their actions, the "lower and more numerous classes" are slaves to the immediate satisfaction of their drives. Not only that, the "enlightenment of reason" has done nothing to teach the "civilized classes" to act morally. According to Schiller's analysis, in other words, one may put one's trust neither in man's good nature nor in the educability of his reason.

What is decisive in Schiller's procedure is that he does not interpret the result of his analysis anthropologically, in the sense of a definitively fixed human nature, but historically, as the result of a historical process. He argues that the development of civilization has destroyed the unity of the senses and of reason, which still existed among the Greeks: "We see not merely individual persons

but whole classes of human beings developing only part of their capacities, while the rest of them, like a stunted plant, shew only a feeble vestige of their nature" (p. 38). "Eternally chained to only one single little fragment of the whole, Man himself grew to be only a fragment; with the monotonous noise of the wheel he drives everlastingly in his ears, he never develops the harmony of his being, and instead of imprinting humanity upon his nature he becomes merely the imprint of his occupation, of his science" (p. 40). As activities become distinct from each other, "a more rigorous dissociation of ranks and occupations" becomes necessary (p. 39). Formulated in concepts of the social sciences, this means that the division of labor has class society as its unavoidable consequence. But Schiller argues that class society cannot be abolished by a political revolution because the revolution can be carried out only by those men who, having been stamped by a society where the division of labor prevails, have for that reason been unable to develop their humanity. The aporia that appeared at the first level of Schiller's analysis as the irresolvable contradiction of sensuousness and reason reappears at the second. Although the contradiction here is no longer an eternal but a historical one, it seems no less hopeless, for every change that would make society both rational and humane presupposes human beings who would need such a society to develop in.

It is at precisely this point of his argument that Schiller introduces art, to which he assigns no less a task than to put back together the "halves" of man that have been torn asunder—which means that it is within a society already characterized by the division of labor that art is to make possible the development of the totality of human potentialities that the individual cannot develop in his sphere of activity. "But can Man really be destined to neglect himself for any end whatever? Should Nature be able, by her designs, to rob us of a completeness which Reason prescribes to us by hers? It must be false that the cultivation of individual powers necessitates the sacrifice of their totality; or however much the law of Nature did have that tendency, we must be at liberty to restore by means of a higher Art this wholeness in our nature which Art has destroyed" (p. 45). This is a difficult passage, because the concepts here are not rigid but, seized by the dialectics of thought, pass into their opposite. 'End' refers first to the limited task of the individual, then to the teleology (unfolding into distinct human powers) that occurs in and through historical development ('nature'); and finally, to an all-around development of man that reason calls for. Similar considera-



tions apply to the concept of nature that is both a law of development but also refers to man as a psychophysical totality. Art also means two different things. First, it refers to technique and science, and then it has the modern meaning of a sphere that has been set apart from the praxis of life ("higher art"). It is Schiller's idea that precisely because it renounces all direct intervention in reality, art is suited to restore man's wholeness. Schiller, who sees no chance in his time for the building of a society that permits the development of the totality of everyone's powers, does not surrender this goal, however. It is true, though, that the creation of a rational society is made dependent on a humanity that has first been realized through art.

It cannot be our purpose here to trace Schiller's thought in its detail, to observe how he defines the play impulse, which he identifies with artistic activity as the synthesis of sense impulse and form impulse, or how, in a speculative history, he seeks to find liberation from the spell of sensuousness through the experience of the beautiful. What is to be emphasized in our context is the central social function that Schiller assigns to art precisely because it has been removed from all the contexts of practical life.

To summarize: the *autonomy of art* is a category of bourgeois society. It permits the description of art's detachment from the context of practical life as a historical development—that among the members of those classes which, at least at times, are free from the pressures of the need for survival, a sensuousness could evolve that was not part of any means-ends relationships. Here we find the moment of truth in the talk about the autonomous work of art. What this category cannot lay hold of is that this detachment of art from practical contexts is a *historical process,* i.e., that it is socially conditioned. And here lies the untruth of the category, the element of distortion that characterizes every ideology, provided one uses this term in the sense the early Marx does when he speaks of the critique of ideology. The category 'autonomy' does not permit the understanding of its referent as one that developed historically. The relative dissociation of the work of art from the praxis of life in bourgeois society thus becomes transformed into the (erroneous) idea that the work of art is totally independent of society. In the strict meaning of the term, 'autonomy' is thus an ideological category that joins an element of truth (the apartness of art from the praxis of life) and an element of untruth (the hypostatization of this fact, which is a result of historical development as the 'essence' of art).

3. The Negation of the Autonomy of Art by the Avant-Garde

In scholarly discussion up to now, the category 'autonomy' has suffered from the imprecision of the various subcategories thought of as constituting a unity in the concept of the autonomous work of art. Since the development of the individual subcategories is not synchronous, it may happen that sometimes courtly art seems already autonomous, while at other times only bourgeois art appears to have that characteristic. To make clear that the contradictions between the various interpretations result from the nature of the case, we will sketch a historical typology that is deliberately reduced to three elements (purpose or function, production, reception), because the point here is to have the nonsynchronism in the development of individual categories emerge with clarity.

A. Sacral Art (example: the art of the High Middle Ages) serves as cult object. It is wholly integrated into the social institution 'religion.' It is produced collectively, as a craft. The mode of reception also is institutionalized as collective.[14]

B. Courtly Art (example: the art at the court of Louis XIV) also has a precisely defined function. It is representational and serves the glory of the prince and the self-portrayal of courtly society. Courtly art is part of the life praxis of courtly society, just as sacral art is part of the life praxis of the faithful. Yet the detachment from the sacral tie is a first step in the emancipation of art. ('Emancipation' is being used here as a descriptive term, as referring to the process by which art constitutes itself as a distinct social subsystem.) The difference from sacral art becomes particularly apparent in the realm of production: the artist produces as an individual and develops a consciousness of the uniqueness of his activity. Reception, on the other hand, remains collective. But the content of the collective performance is no longer sacral, it is sociability.

C. Only to the extent that the bourgeoisie adopts concepts of value held by the aristocracy does bourgeois art have a representational function. When it is genuinely bourgeois, this art is the objectification of the self-understanding of the bourgeois class. Production and reception of the self-understanding as articulated in art are no longer tied to the praxis of life. Habermas calls this the satisfaction of residual needs, that is, of needs that have become submerged in

the life praxis of bourgeois society. Not only production but reception also are now individual acts. The solitary absorption in the work is the adequate mode of appropriation of creations removed from the life praxis of the bourgeois, even though they still claim to interpret that praxis. In Aestheticism, finally, where bourgeois art reaches the stage of self-reflection, this claim is no longer made. Apartness from the praxis of life, which had always been the condition that characterized the way art functioned in bourgeois society, now becomes its content, The typology we have sketched here can be represented in the accompanying tabulation (the vertical lines in boldface refer to a decisive change in the development, the broken ones to a less decisive one).

	Sacral Art	Courtly Art	Bourgeois Art
Purpose or function	cult object	representational object	portrayal of bourgeois self-understanding
Production	collective craft	individual	individual
Reception	collective (sacral)	collective (sociable)	individual

The tabulation allows one to notice that the development of the categories was not synchronous. Production by the individual that characterizes art in bourgeois society has its origins as far back as courtly patronage. But courtly art still remains integral to the praxis of life, although as compared with the cult function, the representational function constitutes a step toward a mitigation of claims that art play a direct social role. The reception of courtly art also remains collective, although the content of the collective performance has changed. As regards reception, it is only with bourgeois art that a decisive change sets in: its reception is one by isolated individuals. The novel is that literary genre in which the new mode of reception finds the form appropriate to it.[15] The advent of bourgeois art is also the decisive turning point as regards use or function. Although in different ways, both sacral and courtly art are integral to the life praxis of the recipient. As cult and representational objects, works of art are put to a specific use. This requirement no longer applies to the same extent to bourgeois art. In bourgeois art, the portrayal of bourgeois self-understanding occurs in a sphere that lies outside the praxis of life. The citizen who, in everyday life has been reduced to a partial function (means-ends activity) can be discovered in art as 'human being.' Here, one can

unfold the abundance of one's talents, though with the proviso that this sphere remain strictly separate from the praxis of life. Seen in this fashion, the separation of art from the praxis of life becomes the decisive characteristic of the autonomy of bourgeois art (a fact that the tabulation does not bring out adequately). To avoid misunderstandings, it must be emphasized once again that autonomy in this sense defines the status of art in bourgeois society but that no assertions concerning the contents of works are involved. Although art as an institution may be considered fully formed toward the end of the eighteenth century, the development of the contents of works is subject to a historical dynamics, whose terminal point is reached in Aestheticism, where art becomes the content of art.

The European avant-garde movements can be defined as an attack on the status of art in bourgeois society. What is negated is not an earlier form of art (a style) but art as an institution that is unassociated with the life praxis of men. When the avant-gardistes demand that art become practical once again, they do not mean that the contents of works of art should be socially significant. The demand is not raised at the level of the contents of individual works. Rather, it directs itself to the way art functions in society, a process that does as much to determine the effect that works have as does the particular content.

The avant-gardistes view its dissociation from the praxis of life as the dominant characteristic of art in bourgeois society. One of the reasons this dissociation was possible is that Aestheticism had made the element that defines art as an institution the essential content of works. Institution and work contents had to coincide to make it logically possible for the avant-garde to call art into question. The avant-gardistes proposed the sublation of art—sublation in the Hegelian sense of the term: art was not to be simply destroyed, but transferred to the praxis of life where it would be preserved, albeit in a changed form. The avant-gardistes thus adopted an essential element of Aestheticism. Aestheticism had made the distance from the praxis of life the content of works. The praxis of life to which Aestheticism refers and which it negates is the means-ends rationality of the bourgeois everyday. Now, it is not the aim of the avant-gardistes to integrate art into *this* praxis. On the contrary, they assent to the aestheticists' rejection of the world and its means-ends rationality. What distinguishes them from the latter is the attempt to organize a new life praxis from a basis in art. In this respect also, Aestheticism turns out to have been the necessary precondition of the avant-gardiste intent. Only an art the contents

of whose individual works is wholly distinct from the (bad) praxis of the existing society can be the center that can be the starting point for the organization of a new life praxis.

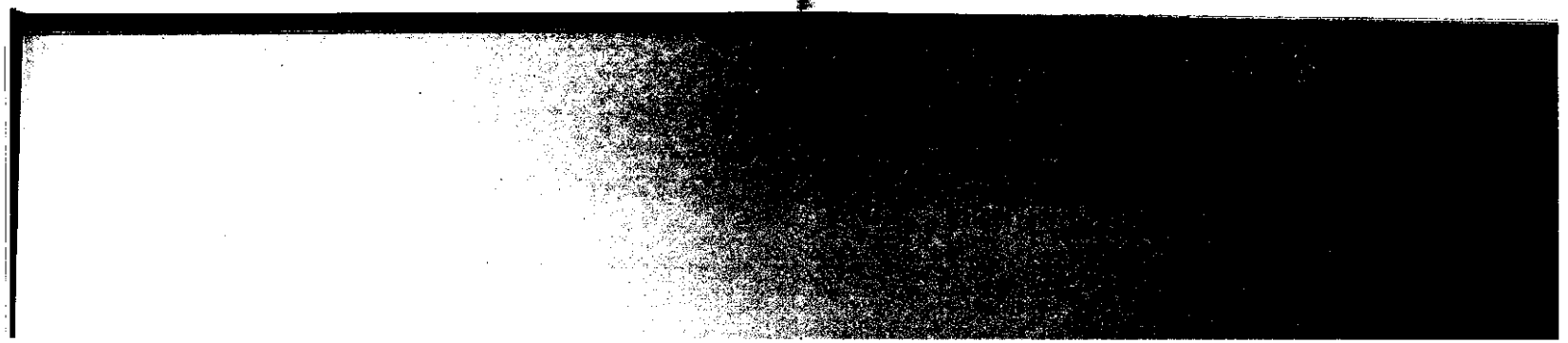
With the help of Herbert Marcuse's theoretical formulation concerning the twofold character of art in bourgeois society (sketched in chapter one), the avant-gardiste intent can be understood with particular clarity. All those needs that cannot be satisfied in everyday life, because the principle of competition pervades all spheres, can find a home in art, because art is removed from the praxis of life. Values such as humanity, joy, truth, solidarity are extruded from life as it were, and preserved in art. In bourgeois society, art has a contradictory role: it projects the image of a better order and to that extent protests against the bad order that prevails. But by realizing the image of a better order in fiction, which is semblance (*Schein*) only, it relieves the existing society of the pressure of those forces that make for change. They are assigned to confinement in an ideal sphere. Where art accomplishes this, it is 'affirmative' in Marcuse's sense of the term. If the twofold character of art in bourgeois society consists in the fact that the distance from the social production and reproduction process contains an element of freedom and an element of the noncommittal and an absence of any consequences, it can be seen that the avant-gardistes' attempt to reintegrate art into the life process is itself a profoundly contradictory endeavor. For the (relative) freedom of art vis-à-vis the praxis of life is at the same time the condition that must be fulfilled if there is to be a critical cognition of reality. An art no longer distinct from the praxis of life but wholly absorbed in it will lose the capacity to criticize it, along with its distance. During the time of the historical avant-garde movements, the attempt to do away with the distance between art and life still had all the pathos of historical progressiveness on its side. But in the meantime, the culture industry has brought about the false elimination of the distance between art and life, and this also allows one to recognize the contradictoriness of the avant-gardiste undertaking.[16]

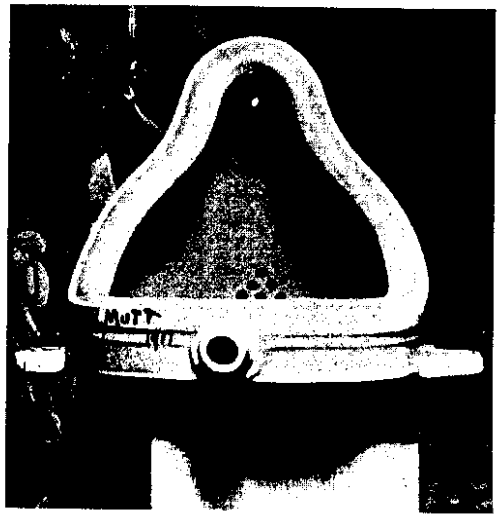
In what follows, we will outline how the intent to eliminate art as an institution found expression in the three areas that we used above to characterize autonomous art: purpose or function, production, reception. Instead of speaking of the avant-gardiste work, we will speak of avant-gardiste manifestation. A dadaist manifestation does not have work character but is nonetheless an authentic manifestation of the artistic avant-garde. This is not to imply that the avant-gardistes produced no works whatever and replaced them

by ephemeral events. We will see that whereas they did not destroy it, the avant-gardistes profoundly modified the category of the work of art.

Of the three areas, the *intended purpose or function* of the avant-gardiste manifestation is most difficult to define. In the aestheticist work of art, the disjointure of the work and the praxis of life characteristic of the status of art in bourgeois society has become the work's essential content. It is only as a consequence of this fact that the work of art becomes its own end in the full meaning of the term. In Aestheticism, the social functionlessness of art becomes manifest. The avant-gardiste artists counter such functionlessness not by an art that would have consequences within the existing society, but rather by the principle of the sublation of art in the praxis of life. But such a conception makes it impossible to define the intended purpose of art. For an art that has been reintegrated into the praxis of life, not even the absence of a social purpose can be indicated, as was still possible in Aestheticism. When art and the praxis of life are one, when the praxis is aesthetic and art is practical, art's purpose can no longer be discovered, because the existence of two distinct spheres (art and the praxis of life) that is constitutive of the concept of purpose or intended use has come to an end.

We have seen that the *production* of the autonomous work of art is the act of an individual. The artist produces as individual, individuality not being understood as the expression of something but as radically different. The concept of genius testifies to this. The quasitechnical consciousness of the makeability of works of art that Aestheticism attains seems only to contradict this. Valéry, for example, demystifies artistic genius by reducing it to psychological motivations on the one hand, and the availability to it of artistic means on the other. While pseudo-romantic doctrines of inspiration thus come to be seen as the self-deception of producers, the view of art for which the individual is the creative subject is let stand. Indeed, Valéry's theorem concerning the force of pride (*orgueil*) that sets off and propels the creative process renews once again the notion of the individual character of artistic production central to art in bourgeois society.[17] In its most extreme manifestations, the avant-garde's reply to this is not the collective as the subject of production but the radical negation of the category of individual creation. When Duchamp signs mass-produced objects (a urinal, a bottle drier) and sends them to art exhibits, he negates the category of individual production (see illustration). The signature, whose very purpose it is to mark what is individual in the work, that it owes its existence to this





Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain by R. Mutt*, 1917. © by ADAGP, Paris, 1982.

particular artist, is inscribed on an arbitrarily chosen mass product, because all claims to individual creativity are to be mocked. Duchamp's provocation not only unmasks the art market where the signature means more than the quality of the work; it radically questions the very principle of art in bourgeois society according to which the individual is considered the creator of the work of art. Duchamp's Ready-Mades are not works of art but manifestations. Not from the form-content totality of the individual object Duchamp signs can one infer the meaning, but only from the contrast between mass-produced object on the one hand, and signature and art exhibit on the other. It is obvious that this kind of provocation cannot be repeated indefinitely. The provocation depends on what it turns against: here, it is the idea that the individual is the subject of artistic creation. Once the signed bottle drier has been accepted as an object that deserves a place in a museum, the provocation no longer provokes; it turns into its opposite. If an artist today signs a stove pipe and exhibits it, that artist certainly does not denounce the art market but adapts to it. Such adaptation does not eradicate the idea of individual creativity, it affirms it, and the reason is the

failure of the avant-gardiste intent to sublate art. Since now the protest of the historical avant-garde against art as institution is accepted as *art*, the gesture of protest of the neo-avant-garde becomes inauthentic. Having been shown to be irredeemable, the claim to be protest can no longer be maintained. This fact accounts for the arts-and-crafts impression that works of the avant-garde not infrequently convey.[18]

The avant-garde not only negates the category of individual production but also that of individual *reception*. The reactions of the public during a dada manifestation where it has been mobilized by provocation, and which can range from shouting to fisticuffs, are certainly collective in nature. True, these remain reactions, responses to a preceding provocation. Producer and recipient remain clearly distinct, however active the public may become. Given the avant-gardiste intention to do away with art as a sphere that is separate from the praxis of life, it is logical to eliminate the antithesis between producer and recipient. It is no accident that both Tzara's instructions for the making of a Dadaist poem and Breton's for the writing of automatic texts have the character of recipes.[19] This represents not only a polemical attack on the individual creativity of the artist; the recipe is to be taken quite literally as suggesting a possible activity on the part of the recipient. The automatic texts also should be read as guides to individual production. But such production is not to be understood as artistic production, but as part of a liberating life praxis. This is what is meant by Breton's demand that poetry be practiced (*pratiquer la poesie*). Beyond the coincidence of producer and recipient that this demand implies, there is the fact that these concepts lose their meaning: producers and recipients no longer exist. All that remains is the individual who uses poetry as an instrument for living one's life as best one can. There is also a danger here to which Surrealism at least partly succumbed, and that is solipsism, the retreat to the problems of the isolated subject. Breton himself saw this danger and envisaged different ways of dealing with it. One of them was the glorification of the spontaneity of the erotic relationship. Perhaps the strict group discipline was also an attempt to exorcise the danger of solipsism that surrealism harbors.[20]

In summary, we note that the historical avant-garde movements negate those determinations that are essential in autonomous art: the disjunction of art and the praxis of life, individual production, and individual reception as distinct from the former. The avant-

garde intends the abolition of autonomous art by which it means that art is to be integrated into the praxis of life. This has not occurred, and presumably cannot occur, in bourgeois society unless it be as a false sublation of autonomous art.[21] Pulp fiction and commodity aesthetics prove that such a false sublation exists. A literature whose primary aim it is to impose a particular kind of consumer behavior on the reader is in fact practical, though not in the sense the avant-gardistes intended. Here, literature ceases to be an instrument of emancipation and becomes one of subjection.[22] Similar comments could be made about commodity aesthetics that treat form as mere enticement, designed to prompt purchasers to buy what they do not need. Here also, art becomes practical but it is an art that enthralls.[23] This brief allusion will show that the theory of the avant-garde can also serve to make us understand popular literature and commodity aesthetics as forms of a false sublation of art as institution. In late capitalist society, intentions of the historical avant-garde are being realized but the result has been a disvalue. Given the experience of the false sublation of autonomy, one will need to ask whether a sublation of the autonomy status can be desirable at all, whether the distance between art and the praxis of life is not requisite for that free space within which alternatives to what exists become conceivable.

Chapter Four
The Avant-Gardiste Work of Art

1. On the Problem of the Category 'Work'

The use of the concept 'work of art' when applied to products of the avant-garde is not without its problems. It might be objected that the crisis of the concept 'work' that was touched off by the avant-garde movements is being obscured and that the discussion therefore rests on false premises. "The dissolution of the traditional unity of the work can be shown in a perfectly formal fashion to be the common characteristic of Modernism. The coherence and autonomy of the work are deliberately called into question or even methodically destroyed."[1] One cannot but agree with this comment by Bubner. But does that mean that one must conclude that aesthetics today has to dispense with the concept 'work'? For that is how Bubner justifies his turning back to the Kantian aesthetics as today's only relevant one.[2] First, we must ask ourselves what it is that has entered a crisis: the category 'work,' or a specific historical form of that category? "Today the only works which really count are those which are no longer works at all."[3] This enigmatic sentence of Adorno's still makes use of the concept of 'work' in a twofold sense: in the general sense (and in that sense, modern art still has the character of work), and then in the sense of organic work of art (Adorno speaks of the "rounded work"), and this latter limited concept of work is

in fact destroyed by the avant-garde. We must thus distinguish between a general meaning of the concept 'work' and differing historical instantiations. Generally speaking, the work of art is to be defined as the unity of the universal and the particular. Although the work of art is not conceivable if this unity is not present, unity was achieved in widely varying ways during different periods in the history of art. In the organic (symbolic) work of art, the unity of the universal and the particular is posited without mediation; in the nonorganic (allegorical) work to which the works of the avant-garde belong, the unity is a mediated one. Here, the element of unity is withdrawn to an infinite distance, as it were. In the extreme case, it is the recipient who creates it. Adorno correctly emphasizes: "Even where art insists on the greatest degree of dissonance and disharmony, its elements are also those of unity. Without it, they would not even be dissonant."[4] The avant-gardiste work does not negate unity as such (even if the Dadists had such intentions) but a specific kind of unity, the relationship between part and whole that characterizes the organic work of art.

Theoreticians who consider the category 'work' null and void could answer this argument by pointing out that in the historical avant-garde movements, forms of activity were deployed that cannot be adequately subsumed under the category 'work': the Dadaist manifestations, for example, which made the provocation of the public their avowed aim. But what is involved in these manifestations is far more than the liquidation of the category 'work;' it is the liquidation of art as an activity that is split off from the praxis of life that is intended. It must be observed that even in its extreme manifestations, the avant-garde movements refer to the category 'work' by negation. It is only with reference to the category 'work of art,' for example, that Duchamp's Ready-Mades make sense. When Duchamp puts his signature on mass-produced, randomly chosen objects and sends them to art exhibits, this provocation of art presupposes a concept of what art is. The fact that he signs the Ready-Mades contains a clear allusion to the category 'work.' The signature that attests that the work is both individual and unique is here affixed to the mass-produced object. The idea of the nature of art as it has developed since the Renaissance—the individual creation of unique works—is thus provocatively called into question. The act of provocation itself takes the place of the work But doesn't this make the category 'work' redundant? Duchamp's provocation addresses itself to art as a social institution. Insofar as the work is part of that institution, the attack is also directed against it. But it

is a historical fact that the avant-garde movements did not put an end to the production of works of art, and that the social institution that is art proved resistant to the avant-gardiste attack.

A contemporary aesthetic can no more neglect the incisive changes that the historical avant-garde movements effected in the realm of art than it can ignore that art has long since entered a post avant-gardiste phase. We characterize that phase by saying that it revived the category of work and that the procedures invented by the avant-garde with antiartistic intent are being used for artistic ends. This must not be judged a 'betrayal' of the aims of the avant-garde movements (sublation of art as a social institution, uniting life and art) but the result of a historical process that can be described in these very general terms: now that the attack of the historical avant-garde movements on art as an institution has failed, and art has not been integrated into the praxis of life, art as an institution continues to survive as something separate from the praxis of life. But the attack did make art recognizable as an institution and also revealed its (relative) inefficacy in bourgeois society as its principle. All art that is more recent than the historical avant-garde movements must come to terms with this fact in bourgeois society. It can either resign itself to its autonomous status or "organize happenings" to break through that status. But without surrendering its claim to truth, art cannot simply deny the autonomy status and pretend that it has a direct effect.

The category 'work' is not merely given a new lease on life after the failure of the avant-gardiste attempt to reintroduce art into the praxis of life; it is actually expanded. The *objet trouvé* is totally unlike the result of an individual production process but a chance find, in which the avant-gardiste intention of uniting art and the praxis of life took shape, is recognized today as a 'work of art.' The *objet trouvé* thus loses its character as antiart and becomes, in the museum, an autonomous work among others.[5]

The revival of art as an institution and the revival of the category 'work' suggest that today, the avant-garde is already historical. Even today, of course, attempts are made to continue the tradition of the avant-garde movements (that this concept can be put on paper without being a conspicuous oxymoron shows again that the avant-garde has become historical). But these attempts, such as the happenings, for example, which could be called neo-avant-gardiste, can no longer attain the protest value of Dadaist manifestations, even though they may be prepared and executed more perfectly than the former.[6] In part this is owing to the avant-gardistes' effects

Neo-avant-garde: Daniel Spoerri, *Who Knows Where Up and Down Are?* 1964 © Siegfried Cremer, Stuttgart.

having lost their shock value. But it is probably more consequential that the sublation of art that the avant-gardistes intended, its return to the praxis of life, did not in fact occur. In a changed context, the resumption of avant-gardiste intentions with the means of avant-gardism can no longer even have the limited effectiveness the historical avant-gardes achieved. To the extent that the means by which the avant-gardistes hoped to bring about the sublation of art have attained the status of works of art, the claim that the praxis of life is to be renewed can no longer be legitimately connected with their employment. To formulate more pointedly: the neo-avant-garde institutionalizes the *avant-garde as art* and thus negates genuinely avant-gardiste intentions. This is true independently of the consciousness artists have of their activity, a consciousness that may perfectly well be avant-gardiste.[7] It is the status of their products, not the consciousness artists have of their activity, that defines the social effect of works. Neo-avant-gardiste art is autonomous art in the full sense of the term, which means that it negates the avant-gardiste intention of returning art to the praxis of life. And the efforts to sublate art become artistic manifestations that, despite their producers' intentions, take on the character of works.

To speak of a revival of the category 'work' after the failure of the

historical avant-garde movements is not without its problems. The impression might be created that the avant-garde movements have no decisive significance for the further development of art in bourgeois society. The opposite is the case. Although the political intentions of the avant-garde movements (reorganization of the praxis of life through art) were never realized, their impact in the realm of art can hardly be overestimated. Here, the avant-garde does indeed have a revolutionary effect, especially because it destroys the traditional concept of the organic work of art and replaces it by another, which we must now seek to understand.[8]

2. The New

Adorno's *Ästhetische Theorie* is not conceived as a theory of the avant-garde but lays claim to greater generality. Yet Adorno's point of departure is the insight that the art of the past can be understood only in the light of modern art. It therefore makes sense to examine the important section on Modernism (*ÄT*, p. 31-56) and to try to discover whether the categories used there can help us understand the avant-gardiste work of art.[9]

Central to Adorno's theory of modern art is the category of the new. Adorno is perfectly aware, of course, that objections can be raised to the use of this category, and sets out to refute them from the start: "In an essentially non-traditionalist society (the bourgeois), esthetic tradition is a priori questionable. The authority of the new is that of the historically ineluctable" (*ÄT*, p. 38). "It (the concept of Modernism) does not negate earlier artistic exercises as styles have always done; however, it negates tradition as such. To that extent, it ratifies the bourgeois principle in art. Its abstractness is linked to the commodity character of art" (ibid). Adorno sees the new as a category of modern art as something distinct from the renewal of themes, motifs, and artistic techniques that also marked the development of art before the advent of Modernism. He does this because he feels that the category is grounded in the hostility to tradition typical of bourgeois-capitalist society. What this means, Adorno has explained elsewhere: "All of bourgeois society stands under the law of exchange, of the 'like for like,' of calculations which leave no remainder. By its very nature, exchange is something atemporal, like the ratio itself. . . . But this means no less than that memory, time and recollection are liquidated as a kind of irrational remnant."[10]

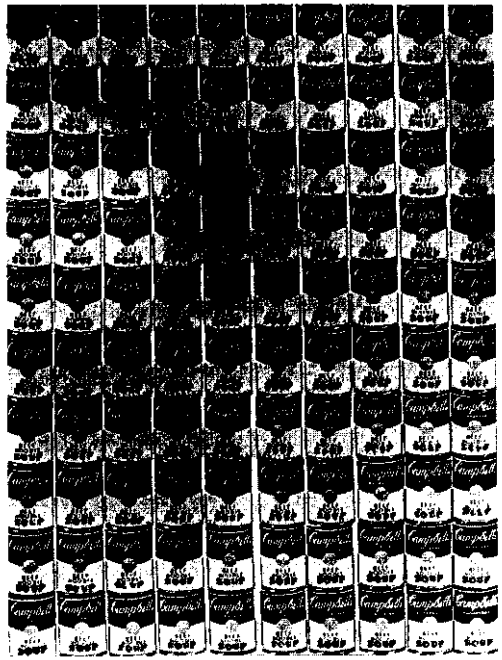
To begin with, we will attempt to clarify Adorno's thought for

ourselves by some examples. Newness as an aesthetic category existed long before Modernism, even as a program. The courtly minnesinger presented himself with the claim that he was singing a 'new song;' the authors of the French tragicomedy state that they are meeting the public's need for *nouveauté*.[11] Yet in both cases, we are dealing with something different from the claim to newness of modern art. In the case of the courtly poet and his 'new song,' not only the theme (*Minne*) but also an abundance of individual motifs already exist. Newness here means variation within the very narrow, defined limits of a genre. In French Tragicomedy, themes can be invented but a typical plot line exists, which makes the sudden turn of the action (example: a person diagnosed as dead turns out to be still alive) the identifying characteristic of the genre. The tragicomedy that comes close to what was later called popular literature already accommodates at the structural level the public's desire for shocklike effects (*surprise*). Newness becomes a calculated effect.

There is, finally, a third kind of newness that the Russian formalists proposed to elevate to a developmental law of literature: the renewal of literary techniques within a sequence of works of a literary genre. The 'mechanical' technique, i.e., the technique that is no longer perceived as form, and that therefore no longer conveys a new view of reality, is replaced by a new one that *can* accomplish this until it too becomes 'mechanical' and must be replaced in turn.[12] In all three cases, what is referred to as newness differs fundamentally from what Adorno means when he uses the concept to characterize Modernism. For here, we have neither a variation within the narrow limits of a genre (the 'new' song) nor a schema that guarantees surprise effects (tragicomedy) or the renewal of literary techniques in works of a given genre. We are dealing not with development but with a break with tradition. What distinguishes the category of the new in Modernism from earlier, perfectly legitimate uses of the same category is the radical quality of the break with what had prevailed heretofore. It is no longer artistic techniques or stylistic principles which were valid heretofore but the entire tradition of art that is negated.

This is precisely the point where Adorno's use of the category of the new must be challenged. For Adorno tends to make the historically unique break with tradition that is defined by the historical avant-garde movements the developmental principle of modern art as such. "The acceleration in the replacement of esthetic programs and schools at which the philistine smirks because he considers them

fads comes from the incessantly intensifying compulsion to reject which Valéry was the first to observe."[13] Adorno knows, of course, that newness is the brand that identifies the eternally identical consumption goods offered the buyer (*AT*, p. 39). His argument becomes problematic where he claims that art "appropriates" the brand of consumer goods. "It is only by assimilating its imagery to the autonomy of his poetry that Baudelaire reaches beyond a heteronomous market. Modernism is art through mimetic adaptation to what is hardened and alienated" (*AT*, p. 39). Here, at the latest, Adorno pays for his failure to precisely historicize the category of the new. Since he neglects to do so, he must derive it directly from the commodity society. For Adorno, the category of the new in art is a necessary duplication of what dominates the commodity society. Since that society can survive only if the goods that are produced are also sold, it becomes necessary to constantly lure the buyer with the appeal the newness of products has. According to Adorno, art also submits to this compulsion, and in a dialectical reversal, he claims to recognize the resistance to society in the very adaptation to the law that governs it. But it must be borne in mind that in the commodity society, the category of the new is not a substantive but merely an apparent one. For far from referring to the nature of the commodities, it is their artificially imposed appearance that is involved here. (What is new about the commodities is their packaging). If art adapts to this most superficial element in the commodity society, it is difficult to see how it is through such adaptation that it can resist it. The resistance that Adorno believes he discovers in art and that is compelled to take on ever new forms can hardly be found there. It remains the positing of a critical subject which, because it thinks dialectically, can perceive the positive in the negative. It must be remembered that where art does in fact submit to the coercion to bring what is new, it can hardly be distinguished from a fad. What Adorno calls "mimetic adaptation to the hardened and alienated" has probably been realized by Warhol: the painting of 100 Campbell soup cans contains resistance to the commodity society only for the person who wants to see it there (see illustration). The Neo-avant-garde, which stages for a second time the avant-gardiste break with tradition, becomes a manifestation that is void of sense and that permits the positing of any meaning whatever. Although to do justice to Adorno's position, it must be said that "mimetic adaptation to the hardened" does not simply mean adaptation but a showing of what is the case. And it is precisely to the portrayal that has not been deformed by the concept that he attaches the hope



Neo-avant-garde: Andy Warhol, *100 Campbell's Soup Cans*, 1962.
© Hessisches Landesmuseum, Darmstadt, West Germany.

it might make recognizable something that would otherwise remain unperceived. That he saw the aporia that overtakes art as a result is demonstrated in this formulation: "No general judgment can be made whether someone who does away with all expression is the mouthpiece of reified consciousness or the speechless, expressionless expression that denounces that consciousness" (*AT*, p. 179).

This shows the limits of the usefulness of the category of the new when one attempts to understand the historical avant-garde movements. If we sought to understand a change in the means of artistic representation, the category of the new would be applicable. But since the historical avant-garde movements cause a break with tradition and a subsequent change in the representational system,[14]

the category is not suitable for a description of how things are. And this all the less when one considers that the historical avant-garde movements not only intend a break with the traditional representational system but the total abolition of the institution that is art. This is undoubtedly something 'new,' but the 'newness' is qualitatively different from both a change in artistic techniques and a change in the representational system. Although the concept of the new is not false, it is too general and nonspecific to designate what is decisive in such a break with tradition. But even as a category for the description of avant-gardiste works, it is hardly suitable, not only because it is too general and nonspecific but, more important, because it provides no criteria for distinguishing between faddish (arbitrary) and historically necessary newness. Adorno's view according to which the ever accelerating change of schools is historically necessary is also debatable. The dialectical interpretation of adaptation to the commodity society as resistance to it ignores the problem of the irritating congruence between consumption fads and what one will probably have to call art fads.

Here, another theorem of Adorno's becomes recognizable as historically conditioned, and that is the view that only the art that carries on in the wake of the avant-garde corresponds to the historical level of development of artistic techniques. Whether the break with tradition that the historical avant-garde movements brought about has not made irrelevant all talk about the historical level of artistic techniques practiced today is something to be carefully thought about. The availability of and mastery over artistic techniques of past epochs (like the old-masterly technique in certain paintings of Magritte, for example) owed to the avant-garde movements make it virtually impossible to determine a historical level of artistic procedures. Through the avant-garde movements, the historical succession of techniques and styles has been transformed into a simultaneity of the radically disparate. The consequence is that no movement in the arts today can legitimately claim to be historically more advanced *as art* than any other. That the neo-avant-garde that makes it is least able to make good on this claim was explained in the preceding section. The time is gone when one could argue against the use of realistic techniques because the historical development had passed beyond them. To the degree Adorno does so, his theoretical position is itself part and parcel of the epoch of the historical avant-garde movements. That Adorno did not see the avant-garde movements as historical but as still alive in the present points to the same conclusion.[15]

René Magritte, *The Ready-Made Bouquet*, 1956. © by ADAGP, Paris, 1982.

3. Chance

In his outline of a history of 'chance in literature,' i.e., of the interpretations that chance has received since the courtly novel of the Middle Ages, Köhler devotes an extensive chapter to the literature of the twentieth century: "From Tristan Tzara's 'newspaper clipping' poems down to the most modern happening, the enthusiastic submission to the material was not the cause but the consequence of a state of society where only what chance reveals is immune against false consciousness, free of ideology, not stigmatized by the total reification of the conditions of human life."[16] Köhler observes correctly that submission to the material is a characteristic of both avant-gardiste and neo-avant-gardiste art, though I doubt that his interpretation of the phenomenon, which is reminiscent of Adorno,

can be subscribed to. The example of the surrealist *hasard objectif* (objective chance) will be used to show both the hopes that the avant-garde movements had for chance, and the ideological construct to which they subjected this category precisely because of these hopes.

At the beginning of *Nadja* (1928), Breton tells of a number of odd occurrences that convey a clear idea of what the Surrealists meant by 'objective chance.' The occurrences follow a basic pattern: because they have one or more characteristics in common, two events are brought into relation with one another. An example: Leafing through a Rimbaud volume, Breton and his friends make the acquaintance, at a fleamarket, of a young salesgirl who not only writes poetry herself but has also read Aragon's *Paysan de Paris*. The second event is not specifically dealt with, because readers of Breton are also familiar with it: the Surrealists are poets, and one of them is Aragon. Objective chance rests on the selection of congruent semantic elements (here: poet and Aragon) in unrelated events. The Surrealists take note of the congruence; it points to a sense that cannot be grasped. Although a chance event occurs "by itself," of course, there is required on the part of the Surrealists a set that permits them to note concordant semantic elements in unrelated events.[17]

Valéry once correctly observed that chance can be manufactured. One need only close one's eyes as one picks an object from a number of similar ones to make the result a chance result. Although the Surrealists do not manufacture chance, they devote a heightened attention to events whose occurrence is not held to be likely. They can therefore register 'chance events' that, because of their triviality (i.e., their unrelatedness to the preoccupations of the individual concerned) escape others. Starting from the experience that a society organized on the basis of a means-ends rationality increasingly restricts the individual's scope, the Surrealists attempt to discover elements of the unpredictable in daily life. Their attention is therefore directed toward those phenomena that have no place in a society that is organized according to the principle of means-ends rationality. The discovery of the marvelous in the everyday undoubtedly constitutes an enrichment of the experiential possibilities of "urban man." But it requires a behavioral type that renounces specific goals in favor of a pervasive openness to impressions. This is not enough for the Surrealists, however. They attempt to bring the extraordinary about. The fixation of specific places (*lieux sacrés*) and the effort to create a *mythologie moderne* indicate their intent to master chance, to make the extraordinary repeatable.

But what is ideological in the Surrealist interpretation of the category of chance does not lie in the attempt to gain control of the extraordinary but in the tendency to see in chance something like an objective meaning. The positing of meaning is always the achievement of individuals and groups; there is no such thing as a meaning that exists independent of a human communications nexus. But for the Surrealists, meaning is contained in the chance constellations of objects and events that they take note of as 'objective chance.' That such meaning cannot be specified does not change the Surrealists' expectation that it might be encountered in the real world. But this is tantamount to resignation on the part of the bourgeois individual. Since the active element in the shaping of reality by man is monopolized by a society organized around means-ends rationality, the individual that protests against society has no recourse but to submit to an experience whose characteristic quality and value are its purposelessness. It will never be possible to seize the meaning being searched for in chance events, because, once defined, it would become part of means-ends rationality and thus lose its value as protest. The regression to a passive attitude of expectation, in other words, must be understood as stemming from the total opposition to society as it is. Since the Surrealists do not see that a given degree of control over nature requires social organization, they run the risk of expressing their protest against bourgeois society at a level where it becomes protest against sociality as such. It is not the specific object, profit as the governing principle of bourgeois-capitalist society, that is being criticized but means-ends rationality as such. Paradoxically, chance, which subjects man to the totally heteronomous, can thus seem a symbol of freedom.

A theory of the avant-garde cannot simply make its own the concept of chance the theoreticians of the avant-garde developed, for we are dealing here with an ideological category: the production of meaning, which is a production by the human subject, presents itself as a natural product that must be deciphered. This reduction of the meaning produced in communicative processes to something natural is not arbitrary: it is connected with the attitude of abstract protest characteristic of the early phase of the Surrealist movement. Yet the theory of the avant-garde cannot wholly dispense with the category of chance, for it is of decisive importance for the self-understanding of the Surrealist movement at the very least. One will therefore view the category with the meaning the Surrealists gave it as an ideological one that permits scholars to understand the intention of the movement but simultaneously makes it their task to criticize it.

From the use of the category of chance as discussed above, we must distinguish another where the element of the accidental has its place in the work of art and not in nature, and where we are dealing with a manufactured, not perceived, chance.

Chance can be produced in a variety of ways. One might distinguish between its direct and its mediated production. The former is represented by movements that became known as Tachism, action painting, and by other names during the fifties. Paint is dripped or splashed on the canvas. Reality is no longer copied and interpreted. The intentional creation of a totality is largely renounced and makes way for a spontaneity that to a considerable extent allows chance to produce the painting. The subject that has freed itself of all the constraints and rules of creation finally finds itself thrown back into an empty subjectivity. Because it can no longer work itself out in something that the material, and a specific task, set for it, the result remains accidental in the bad sense of the word, i.e., arbitrary. The total protest against any and every element of constraint does not take the subject to the freedom of creation but into arbitrariness. At best, this arbitrariness can afterward be interpreted as individual expression.

The mediate production of chance is something different. It is not the result of blind spontaneity in the handling of the material but its very opposite, the most painstaking calculation. But that calculation only extends to the means, whereas the result remains largely unpredictable. "The progress of art as making," Adorno writes, "is accompanied by the tendency toward total arbitrariness. . . . The convergence of the technically integral, wholly made work of art with the one that is absolute chance has been noted with good reason" (*AT*, p. 47). In the principle of construction, there lies a renunciation of the subjective imagination in favor of a submission to the chance of construction, which Adorno explains philosophically and historically as the loss of power of the bourgeois individual: "The subject has become conscious of the loss of power which has been inflicted on him by the technique he has unleashed, and elevates it into a program" (*AT*, p. 43). This is another instance of the kind of interpretation we saw at work when the category of the new was discussed. Adaptation to alienation is seen as the only possible form of resistance to such alienation. The comments made on that occasion also apply here, mutatis mutandis.

One may hazard the guess that Adorno's thesis concerning the predominance of construction as an inherent law to which the artist submits without being able to define or determine the consequence

comes from a knowledge of the compositional technique used in twelve-tone music. In the *Philosophy of Modern Music*, he calls the twelve-tone rationality ". . . a closed system—one which is opaque even to itself—in which the configuration of means is directly hypostatized as goal and as law. The legitimacy of the procedure in which the technique fulfills itself is at the same time merely something imposed upon the material, by which the legitimacy is determined. This determination itself does not actually serve a purpose" (p. 66).[18]

In literature, the production of chance through the use of a principle of construction appears later than in music, namely in concrete poetry, unless I am mistaken. This has to do with the specificity of artistic media. The small role the semantic plays in music means that it is closer to formal construction than literature. To wholly subject literary material to a law of construction external to it does not become possible until the semantic contents of literature have largely receded to secondary importance. It must be emphasized, however, that recourse to a lawfulness merely imposed on the material has a different place value in the case of literature than does the employment of similar principles of construction in music, and this because the media genuinely differ.

4. Benjamin's Concept of Allegory

The development of a concept of the nonorganic work of art is a central task of the theory of the avant-garde. It can be undertaken by starting from Benjamin's concept of allegory. We will see that this concept represents an especially richly articulated category and that it can serve to illuminate certain aspects of the aesthetic effect of avant-gardiste works. Benjamin developed it as he was studying the literature of the Baroque, of course,[19] but one may say that it is only in the avant-gardiste work that it finds its adequate object. Differently formulated, we may say that it was Benjamin's experience in dealing with works of the avant-garde that made possible both the development of the category and its application to the literature of the Baroque, and not the other way around. Here also, it is the unfolding of the thing in our time that makes possible the interpretation of past, earlier stages. There is thus nothing forced in the attempt to read Benjamin's concept of allegory as a theory of the avant-gardiste (nonorganic) work of art. That this entails the exclusion of those elements that derive from the application to the literature of the Baroque goes without saying.[20] Yet it seems that

one should ask how the emergence of a particular type of work of art (the allegorical in our present context) during periods so fundamentally different in their social structure can be explained. To turn this question into an occasion for a search after common historical and social characteristics of the two periods would surely be a mistake, for it would imply that identical art forms necessarily have an identical social base, which is certainly not the case. Instead, one will have to recognize that whereas art forms owe their birth to a specific social context, they are not tied to the context of their origin or to a social situation that is analogous to it, for the truth is that they can take on different functions in varying social contexts. The investigation should not address itself to possible analogies between primary and secondary context but to the change in social function of the art form in question.

As one attempts to analyze the allegory concept into its components, the following schema results: 1. The allegorist pulls one element out of the totality of the life context, isolating it, depriving it of its function. Allegory is therefore essentially fragment and thus the opposite of the organic symbol. "In the field of allegorical intuition, the image is a fragment, a rune. . . . . The false appearance (*Schein*) of totality is extinguished" (*Origin*, p. 176). 2. The allegorist joins the isolated reality fragments and thereby creates meaning. This is posited meaning; it does not derive from the original context of the fragments. 3. Benjamin interprets the activity of the allegorist as the expression of melancholy. "If the object becomes allegorical under the gaze of melancholy, if melancholy causes life to flow out of it and it remains behind dead but eternally secure, then it is exposed to the allegorist, it is unconditionally in his power. That is, it is now quite incapable of emanating any meaning or significance of its own; such significance as it has, it acquires from the allegorist" (*Origin*, pp. 183-84). The allegorist's traffic with things is subject to a constant alternation of involvement and surfeit: "the profound fascination of the sick man with the isolated and insignificant is succeeded by that disappointed abandonment of the exhausted emblem" (p. 185). Benjamin also addresses the sphere of reception. Allegory, whose essence is fragment, represents history as decline: "in allegory, the observer is confronted with the 'facies hippocratica' (the deathmask) of history as a petrified primordial landscape" (p. 166).

Leaving aside the question whether the four elements of the allegory concept quoted here can be applied to the analysis of avant-gardiste works, one may note that it is a complex category,

which is therefore destined to occupy an important place in the hierarchy of categories that describe works of art. For the category combines two production-aesthetic concepts, one of which relates to the treatment of the material (removing elements from a context), the other to the constitution of the work (the joining of fragments and the positing of meaning) with an interpretation of the processes of production and reception (melancholy of the producer, pessimistic view of history of the recipient). Because it permits one to separate those aspects that relate to production and to aesthetic effect at the analytical level and yet to conceive of them as a unity, Benjamin's allegory concept can function as a central category of a theory of the avant-gardiste work of art. Yet it is also true that our schematization already shows that the analytical usefulness of the category lies principally in the sphere of production aesthetics, whereas in that of aesthetic effect, supplementary elements will be needed.

A comparison of the organic and nonorganic (avant-gardiste) work of art from a production-aesthetic point of view finds essential support in the circumstance that the first two elements of Benjamin's concept of allegory accord with what may be understood by 'montage.' Artists who produce an organic work (in what follows, we shall refer to them as 'classicists' without meaning to introduce a specific concept of what the classical work may be) treat their material as something living. They respect its significance as something that has grown from concrete life situations. For avant-gardistes, on the other hand, material is just that, material. Their activity initially consists in nothing other than in killing the 'life' of the material, that is, in tearing it out of its functional context that gives it meaning. Whereas the classicist recognizes and respects in the material the carrier of a meaning, the avant-gardistes see only the empty sign, to which only they can impart significance. The classicist correspondingly treats the material as a whole, whereas the avant-gardiste tears it out of the life totality, isolates it, and turns it into a fragment.

Just as the attitude toward the material differs, so does the constitution of the work. The classicist produces work with the intent of giving a living picture of the totality. And the classicist pursues this intention even while limiting the represented reality segment to the rendition of an ephemeral mood. The avant-gardiste, on the other hand, joins fragments with the intent of positing meaning (where the meaning may well be the message that meaning has ceased to exist). The work is no longer created as an organic whole but put together from fragments (this will be discussed in the following section).

We must distinguish between the aspects of the concept of allegory discussed up to this point, and which *describe* a particular procedure, and those where the attempt is made to *interpret* the procedure. This is the case when Benjamin characterizes the attitude of the allegorist as melancholy. Such an interpretation cannot be transferred from the Baroque to the avant-garde without further ado because that would limit the procedure to one meaning and thus ignore the fact that in the course of the history of its use, a procedure may perfectly well take on different meanings.[21] In the case of the allegorical procedure, however, it seems possible to infer an attitude of the producer, which the avant-gardiste shares with the Baroque allegorist. What Benjamin calls melancholy here is a fixation on the singular, which must remain unsatisfactory, because no general concepts of the shaping of reality correspond to it. Devotion to the singular is hopeless because it is connected with the consciousness that reality as something to be shaped eludes one. It seems plausible to see in Benjamin's concept of melancholy the description of an attitude of the avant-gardiste who, unlike the aestheticist before him, can no longer transfigure his social functionlessness. The Surrealist concept of *ennui* (which is inadequately translated by 'boredom') could support such an interpretation.[22]

The second (reception-aesthetic) interpretation of allegory Benjamin advances (and according to which it represents history as natural history, that is, as the fated history of decline) seems to permit application to the art of the avant-garde. If one takes the attitude of the Surrealist self as the prototype of avant-gardiste behavior, one will note that society is here being reduced to nature.[23] The Surrealist self seeks to recover pristine experience by positing as natural the world man has created. But this means making social reality immune from any idea of possible change. It is not so much that the history man made is transformed into natural history as that it turns into a petrified image of nature. The metropolis is experienced as enigmatic nature in which the Surrealist moves as primitives do in real nature: searching for a meaning that allegedly can be found in what is given. Instead of immersing himself in the secrets of man's making of this second nature, the Surrealist believes he can wrest meaning from the phenomenon itself. The change in function that allegory has passed through since the Baroque is undoubtedly considerable: the Baroque depreciation of the world in favor of the Beyond contrasts with what one can only call an enthusiastic affirmation of the world. But a closer analysis of the artistic methods and procedures shows this affirmation to

be imperfect, the expression of a fear of a technique that has become too powerful, and of a social organization that severely restricts the individual's scope.

The interpretations of the allegorical procedure sketched above cannot lay claim to the same place value as the concepts that explain the procedure itself, however, because as interpretations they already belong to that domain where the individual analysis of works is essential. In what follows, we will therefore attempt to continue confronting organic and nonorganic work without as yet introducing categories of interpretation. The organic work appears as a work of nature: "fine art must be clothed *with the aspect* of nature, although we recognize it to be art" (*Critique of Judgment* § 45). And George Lukács sees the task of the realist (as opposed to the avant-gardiste) as twofold: "first, the uncovering and artistic shaping of these connections (i.e., the connections within social reality) and secondly and inseparably from the former, the artistic covering of the connections that have been worked out abstractly—the sublation of the abstraction."[24] What Lukács calls 'covering' here is nothing other than the creation of the appearance (*Schein*) of nature. The organic work of art seeks to make unrecognizable the fact that it has been made. The opposite holds true for the avant-gardiste work: it proclaims itself an artificial construct, an artifact. To this extent, montage may be considered the fundamental principle of avant-gardiste art. The 'fitted' (*montierte*) work calls attention to the fact that it is made up of reality fragments; it breaks through the appearance (*Schein*) of totality. Paradoxically, the avant-gardiste intention to destroy art as an institution is thus realized in the work of art itself. The intention to revolutionize life by returning art to its praxis turns into a revolutionizing of art.

A different mode of reception that is a function of the construction principles of the various types of works corresponds to the difference suggested above (it goes without saying that this mode of reception need not in each and every case accord with the actual mode of reception of the individual work). The organic work intends the impression of wholeness. To the extent its individual elements have significance only as they relate to the whole, they always point to the work as a whole as they are perceived individually. In the avant-gardiste work, on the other hand, the individual elements have a much higher degree of autonomy and can therefore also be read and interpreted individually or in groups without its being necessary to grasp the work as a whole. In the case of the avant-gardiste work, it is possible only to a limited extent to speak of the work as a whole as the perfect embodiment of the totality of possible meaning.

5. Montage

It is important to clearly understand at the very onset that the concept of montage does not introduce a new category meant to replace the concept of allegory. Rather, it is a category that permits a more precise definition of a particular aspect of the concept of allegory. Montage presupposes the fragmentation of reality and describes the phase of the constitution of the work. Since the concept plays a role not only in the fine arts and in literature but also in the film, it is necessary to first clarify what it refers to in each of the various media.

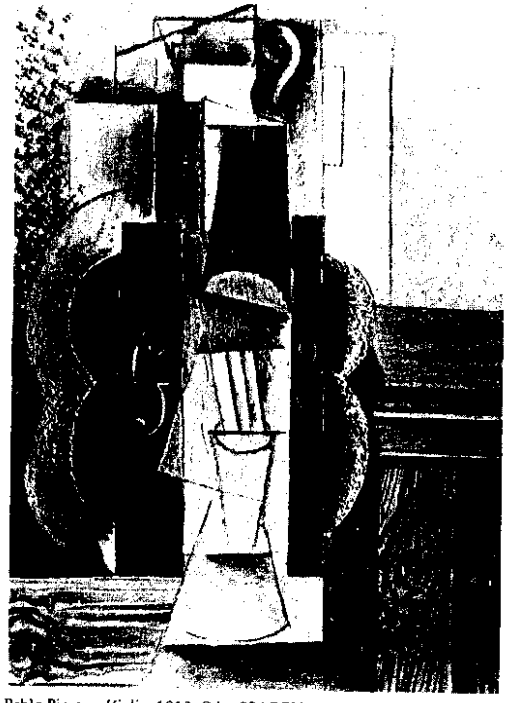
Film is the stringing together of photographic images that because of the speed with which they flow past the eye of the spectator, create the impression of movement. In the film, the montage of images is the basic *technical procedure*. It is not a specifically artistic technique, but one that lies in the medium. Nonetheless, there are differences in its use. It is not the same thing when natural movements are photographed as when simulated ones are created by cutting (for example, the leaping stone lion in Potemkin, which is edited from shots of a sleeping, an awakening, and a rising marble lion). In the former case, there is also a montage of individual shots but the impression created in the film only reproduces illusionistically the natural sequence of movements, whereas in the second case, it is montage that creates the impression of movement.[25]

Although montage is thus a technical device given with the medium itself, it has the status of an artistic principle in painting. It is no accident that, apart from 'precursors' who can always be discovered after the fact, montage first emerges in connection with cubism, that movement in modern painting which most consciously destroyed the representational system that had prevailed since the Renaissance. In the *papiers collés* of Picasso and Braque that they created during the years before the First World War, we invariably find a contrast between two techniques: the 'illusionism' of the reality fragments that have been glued on the canvas (a piece of a woven basket or wallpaper) and the 'abstraction' of cubist technique in which the portrayed objects are rendered. That this contrast is a dominant interest of the two artists can be inferred from its presence

Pablo Picasso, *Still Life*, 1912. © by SPADEM, Paris/VAGA, New York, 1981.

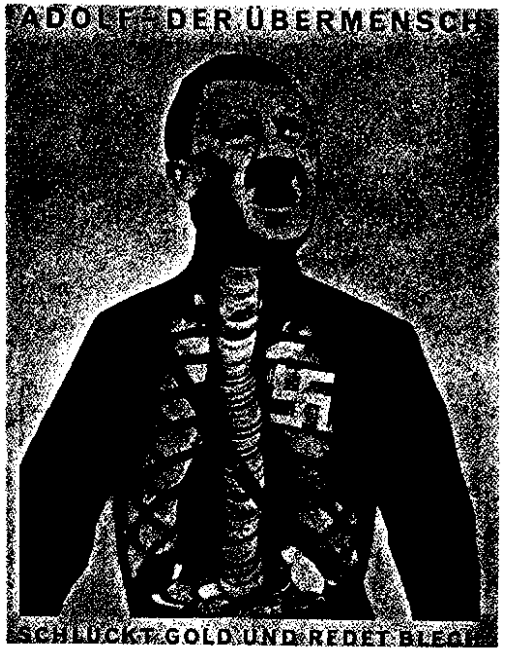
in paintings of the same period that dispense with the technique of montage.[26]

One must proceed with great care as one attempts to define the intended aesthetic effects that may be observed in the first montage canvases. There is unquestionably an element of provocation in sticking a piece of newspaper on a painting. But this must not be overestimated, for the reality fragments remain largely subordinate to the aesthetic composition, which seeks to create a balance of individual elements (volume, colors, etc). The intent can best be defined as tentative: although there is destruction of the organic work that portrays reality, art itself is not being called into question, as it is in the historic avant-garde movements. Instead, the intent to create an aesthetic object is clear, though that object eludes judgment by traditional rules.



Pablo Picasso, *Violin*, 1913. © by SPADEM, Paris/VAGA, New York, 1981.

Heartfield's photo montages represent an entirely different type. They are not primarily aesthetic objects, but images for reading (*Lesebilder*). Heartfield went back to the old art of the emblem and used it politically. The emblem brings together an image and two different texts, an (often coded) title (*inscriptio*) and a lengthier explanation (*subscriptio*). Example: Hitler speaks, the ribcage shows an esophagus consisting of coins. Inscriptio: Adolf the Superman. Subscriptio: "swallows gold and spouts junk [literally tin]" (see illustration). Or the SPD poster: socialization marches on and, in a montage effect, some dashing gentlemen from industry with tophats and umbrellas out front and, somewhat smaller, two soldiers carrying a swastica banner. Inscriptio: Germany is not yet lost!



John Heartfield, *Adolph – The Superman – Who Swallows Gold and Spouts Junk*, 1932. © Gertrud Heartfield.

Subscriptio: 'socialization marches' it says on the posters of the Social Democrats and at the same time they decide: socialists will be shot down"[27] (see illustration). The clear political statement and the antiaesthetic element characteristic of Heartfield's montages should be emphasized. In a certain sense, photomontage is close to film not only because both use photography but also because in both cases, the montage is obscured or at least made difficult to spot. This is what fundamentally distinguishes photomontage from the montage of the cubists or Schwitters'.

The preceding remarks do not of course claim to come anywhere close to exhausting the subject (cubist collage, Heartfield's photomontages); the aim was merely to give a sketch of all the elements the concept 'montage' takes in. Within the frame of a theory of the avant-garde, the use to which film puts the concept cannot become

„Die Sozialisierung marschiert!" haben „Sozial"-Demokraten plakatiert – und haben zugleich beschlossen: Sozialisten werden niedergeschossen. Seitdem regiert die Reaktion; und heute schreien, wie zum Hohn, National-„Sozialisten" (daß ich nicht lache): „Deutschland erwache!" Umsonst – ihr Parteien der Niedertracht habt die Rechnung ohne den Wirt gemacht. Der deutsche Arbeiter wird erwachen und den Sozialismus zur Wirklichkeit machen!

John Heartfield, *Germany is Still Not Lost!* 1932. © Gertrud Heartfield.

relevant because it is part and parcel of the medium. And photomontage will not be made the point of departure for a consideration of the concept for it occupies an intermediate position between montage in films and montage in painting, because in it, the fact that montage is being used is so often obscured. A theory of the avant-garde must begin with the concept of montage that is suggested by the early cubist collages. What distinguishes them from the techniques of composition developed since the Renaissance is the insertion of reality fragments into the painting, i.e., the insertion of material that has been left unchanged by the artist. But this means the destruction of the unity of the painting as a whole, all of whose parts have been fashioned by the subjectivity of its creator. The selection of a piece of woven basket that Picasso glues on a canvas may very well serve some compositional intent. But as a piece

of woven basket, it remains a reality fragment that is inserted into the painting tel quel, without substantive modification. A system of representation based on the portrayal of reality, i.e., on the principle that the artistic subject (the artist) must transpose reality, has thus been invalidated. Unlike Duchamp somewhat later, the cubists do not content themselves with merely showing a reality fragment. But they stop short of a total shaping of the pictorial space as a continuum.[28]

If one cannot accept the explanation that reduces to a saving of superfluous effort the principle that calls into question a technique of painting that was accepted over the course of centuries,[29] it is principally Adorno's comments on the significance of montage for modern art that furnish important clues for an understanding of the phenomenon. Adorno notes the revolutionary quality of the new procedure (for once, this overused metaphor is appropriate): "The semblance (*Schein*) of art being reconciled with a heterogeneous reality because it portrays it is to disintegrate as the work admits actual fragments (*Scheinlose Trümmer*) of empirical reality, thus acknowledging the break, and transforming it into aesthetic effect" (*ÄT*, p. 232). The man-made organic work of art that pretends to be like nature projects an image of the reconciliation of man and nature. According to Adorno, it is the characteristic of the non-organic work using the principle of montage that it no longer creates the semblance (*Schein*) of reconciliation. Even if one cannot accept in every detail the philosophy lying behind it, one will not fail to endorse this insight.[30] The insertion of reality fragments into the work of art fundamentally transforms that work. The artist not only renounces shaping a whole, but gives the painting a different status, since parts of it no longer have the relationship to reality characteristic of the organic work of art. They are no longer signs pointing to reality, they *are* reality.

But it is doubtful that one can follow Adorno in ascribing political significance to the artistic procedures of montage. "Art wishes to confess its impotence vis-à-vis the late capitalist totality and inaugurate its abolition" (*ÄT*, p. 232). That montage was used both by the Italian futurists, of whom it can hardly be said that they wanted to abolish capitalism, and by Russian avant-gardistes after the October revolution, who were working in a developing socialist society, is not the only fact that militates against this formulation. It is fundamentally problematical to assign a fixed meaning to a procedure. Bloch's approach is more appropriate here, for he starts out from the view that the effects of a technique or procedure can vary

in historically different contexts. He distinguishes between montage in late capitalism and montage in a socialist society.[31] Even though the concrete determinations of montage that Bloch advances are occasionally imprecise, the insight that procedures are not semantically reducible to invariant meanings must be held onto.

This means that one should try to pick those of Adorno's definitions that describe the phenomenon without assigning a fixed meaning to it. The following would be an example: "the negation of synthesis becomes a compositional principle" (*ÄT*, p. 232). On the production-aesthetic side, negation of synthesis refers to what was called rejection of reconciliation on the side of aesthetic effect. If, to check Adorno's statements, one looks again at the collages of the cubists, one can see that although they allow one to discover a principle of construction, they do not show a synthesis, in the sense of a unity of meaning (one need only recall the antithesis of 'illusionism' and 'abstraction' to which reference was made earlier).[32]

When condsidering Adorno's interpretation of the negation of synthesis as a negation of meaning (*ÄT*, p. 231), one must remember that even the withholding of meaning is a positing of it. The automatic texts of the Surrealists, Aragon's *Paysan de Paris* and Breton's *Nadja* all show the influence of the technique of montage. It is true that at the surface level, automatic texts are characterized by a destruction of coherence. But an interpretation that does not confine itself to grasping logical connections but examines the procedures by which the text was composed can certainly discover a relatively consistent meaning in them. Similar considerations apply to the sequence of isolated events on the opening pages of Breton's *Nadja*. Although it is true that they lack the kind of narrative coherence where the last incident logically presupposes all preceding ones, there is nonetheless a connection of a different kind between events: they all follow the identical structural pattern. Formulated in the concepts of structuralism, this means that the nexus is paradigmatic, not syntagmatic. Whereas the syntagmatic pattern, the phrase, is characterized by the fact that, whatever its length, the end is always reached, the sequence is, in principle, without one. This important difference also entails two differing modes of reception.[33]

The organic work of art is constructed according to the syntagmatic pattern; individual parts and the whole form a dialectical unity. An adequate reading is described by the hermeneutic circle: the parts can be understood only through the whole, the whole only through the parts. This means that an anticipating comprehension of the whole guides, and is simultaneously corrected by, the comprehension

of the parts. The fundamental precondition for this type of reception is the assumption of a necessary congruence between the meaning of the individual parts and the meaning of the whole.[34] This precondition is rejected by the nonorganic work, and this fact defines its decisive difference from the organic work of art. The parts 'emancipate' themselves from a superordinate whole; they are no longer its essential elements. This means that the parts lack necessity. In an automatic text that strings images together, some could be missing, yet the text would not be significantly affected. The same is true of the events reported in *Nadja*. New events of the same type could be added or some of those present could be omitted and neither additions nor omissions would make a significant difference. A change in their order is also conceivable. What is decisive are not the events in their distinctiveness but the construction principle that underlies the sequence of events.

All of this naturally has important consequences for reception. The recipient of an avant-gardiste work discovers that the manner of appropriating intellectual objectifications that has been formed by the reading of organic works of art is inappropriate to the present object. The avant-gardiste work neither creates a total impression that would permit an interpretation of its meaning nor can whatever impression may be created be accounted for by recourse to the individual parts, for they are no longer subordinated to a pervasive intent. This refusal to provide meaning is experienced as shock by the recipient. And this is the intention of the avant-gardiste artist, who hopes that such withdrawal of meaning will direct the reader's attention to the fact that the conduct of one's life is questionable and that it is necessary to change it. Shock is aimed for as a stimulus to change one's conduct of life; it is the means to break through aesthetic immanence and to usher in (initiate) a change in the recipient's life praxis.[35]

The problem with shock as the intended reaction of the recipient is that it is generally nonspecific. Even a possible breaking through the aesthetic immanence does not insure that the recipient's change of behavior is given a particular direction. The public's reactions to Dada manifestations are typical of the nonspecificity of the reaction. It responds to the provocation of the Dadaists with blind fury.[36] And changes in the life praxis of the public probably did not result. On the contrary, one has to ask oneself whether the provocation does not strengthen existing attitudes because it provides them with an occasion to manifest themselves.[37] A further difficulty inheres in the aesthetics of shock, and that is the impossibility to make

permanent this kind of effect. Nothing loses its effectiveness more quickly than shock; by its very nature, it is a unique experience. As a result of repetition, it changes fundamentally: there is such a thing as expected shock. The violent reactions of the public to the mere appearance of the Dadaists are an example: newspaper reports had prepared the public for the shock; it expected it. Such a nearly institutionalized shock probably has a minimal effect on the way the recipients run their lives. The shock is 'consumed.' What remains is the enigmatic quality of the forms, their resistance to the attempt to wrest meaning from them. If recipients will not simply give up or be contented with an arbitrary meaning extrapolated from just a part of the work, they must attempt to understand this enigmatic quality of the avant-gardiste work. They then move to another level of interpretation. Instead of proceeding according to the hermeneutic circle and trying to grasp a meaning through the nexus of whole and parts, the recipient will suspend the search for meaning and direct attention to the principles of construction that determine the constitution of the work. In the process of reception, the avant-gardiste work thus provokes a break, which is the analogue of the incoherence (nonorganicity) of the work. Between the shocklike experience of the inappropriateness of the mode of reception developed through dealing with organic works of art and the effort to grasp the principles of construction, there is a break: the interpretation of meaning is renounced. One of the decisive changes in the development of art that the historical avant-garde movements brought about consists in this new type of reception that the avant-gardiste work of art provokes. The recipient's attention no longer turns to a meaning of the work that might be grasped by a reading of its constituent elements, but to the principle of construction. This kind of reception is imposed on the recipient because the element necessary within the organic work when it plays a role in constituting the meaning of the whole merely serves to flesh out structure and pattern in the avant-gardiste work.

By presenting the formal methods of scholarship in literature and the fine arts as the recipient's reaction to avant-gardiste works that elude traditional hermeneutic approaches, we have attempted a genetic reconstruction of the nexus between the avant-gardiste work and those methods. In this attempted reconstruction, the break between formal methods (which are directed at procedures and techniques) and hermeneutics that seeks to discover meaning had to be given special emphasis. But such a reconstruction of a genetic nexus must not be understood to mean that specific scholarly

methods should be used in dealing with certain kinds of work as, for example, the hermeneutic in the case of organic works, the formal in the case of avant-gardiste ones. Such an allocation of methods would run counter to the thought that has been outlined here. Although it is true that the avant-gardiste work imposes a new approach, that approach is not restricted to such works nor does the hermeneutic problematic of the understanding of meaning simply disappear. Rather, the decisive changes in the field of study also bring about a restructuring of the methods of scholarly investigation of the phenomenon that is art. It may be assumed that this process will move from the opposition between formal and hermeneutic methods to their synthesis, in which both would be sublated in the Hegelian sense of the term. It seems to me that this is the point that literary scholarship has reached today.[38]

The condition for the possibility of a synthesis of formal and hermeneutic procedures is the assumption that even in the avant-gardiste work, the emancipation of the individual elements never reaches total detachment from the whole of the work. Even where the negation of synthesis becomes a structural principle, it must remain possible to conceive however precious a unity. For the act of reception, this means that even the avant-gardiste work is still to be understood hermeneutically (as a total meaning) except that the unity has integrated the contradiction within itself. It is no longer the harmony of the individual parts that constitutes the whole; it is the contradictory relationship of heterogeneous elements. In the wake of the historical avant-garde movements, hermeneutics is neither to be simply replaced by formalist procedures nor is its use as an intuitive form of understanding to be continued as before; rather, it must be modified as the new historical situation demands. It is true, however, that within a critical hermeneutics, the formal analysis of works of art takes on greater importance as the subordination of parts to the whole, postulated by traditional hermeneutics, becomes recognizable as an interpretative system that ultimately derives from classical aesthetics. A critical hermeneutics will replace the theorem of the necessary agreement of parts and whole by investigating the contradiction between the various layers and only then infer the meaning of the whole.

Chapter Five
Avant-Garde and Engagement

1. The Debate between Adorno and Lukács

In a theory of the avant-garde, a section on engagement is justified only if it can be shown that the avant-garde has radically changed the place value of political engagement in art, that the concept of engagement prior and subsequent to the avant-garde movements is not the same. It is our intent, in what follows, to show that this is the case. This means that the discussion of the question whether it is necessary to deal with engagement within the framework of a theory of the avant-garde cannot be separated from a discussion of the problem itself.

So far, the theory of the avant-garde has been treated at two levels: the level of the intention of the historical avant-garde movements, and that of the description of the avant-gardiste work. The intention of the historical avant-garde movements was defined as the destruction of art as an institution set off from the praxis of life. The significance of this intention is not that art as an institution in bourgeois society was in fact destroyed and art thereby made a direct element in the praxis of life, but that the weight that art as an institution has in determining the real social effect of individual works became recognizable. The avant-gardiste work is defined as nonorganic. Whereas in the organic work of art, the structural

principle governs the parts and joins them in a unified whole, in the avant-gardiste work, the parts have a significantly larger autonomy vis-à-vis the whole. They become less important as constituent elements of a totality of meaning and simultaneously more important as relatively autonomous signs.

The contrast between organic and avant-gardiste work underlies both Lukács's and Adorno's theories of the avant-garde. They differ in their evaluation. Whereas Lukács holds onto the organic work of art ('realistic' in his terminology) as an aesthetic norm and from that perspective rejects avant-gardiste works as decadent,[1] Adorno elevates the avant-gardiste, nonorganic work to an—albeit merely historical—norm and condemns as aesthetic regression all efforts to create a realistic art in Lukács's sense in our time.[2] In both cases, we are dealing with a theory of art that already advances decisive definitions at the theoretical level. This does not mean, of course, that Lukács and Adorno, like the authors of Renaissance and Baroque poetics, construct general, metahistorical laws by which to measure individual works. Their theories are normative only in the sense in which Hegel's aesthetics, to which both theoreticians owe a diverse debt, contains a normative element. Hegel historicizes aesthetics. The form-content dialectic realizes itself in different ways in symbolic (oriental), classical (Greek), and romantic (Christian) art. But for Hegel, this historicizing does not mean that the romantic art form is also the most perfect. On the contrary, he considers the interpenetration of form and matter in classical Greek art a peak that is tied to a particular stage in the development of the world spirit and will necessarily pass away with it. Classical perfection whose essence it is that "the spiritual was completely drawn through its external appearance"[3] (Hegel, vol. I, p. 517) can no longer be attained by the romantic work of art, because "the elevation of the spirit to itself" is the fundamental principle of romantic art. As spirit withdraws "from the external into its own intimacy with itself and posits external reality as an existence inadequate to itself" (p. 518), the interpenetration of the spiritual and material that classical art attained disintegrates. Hegel even goes one step further and anticipates a "culmination of the romantic in general" which he characterizes as follows: "the contingency of both outer and inner, and the separation of these two sides, whereby art annuls [sublates (*aufhebt*)] itself" (p. 529). With romantic art, art comes to its end and makes way for higher forms of consciousness, i.e., philosophy.[4]

Lukács adopts essential elements of the Hegelian conception.

Hegel's confrontation of classical and romantic returns in his work as the opposition between realistic and avant-gardiste art. And like Hegel, Lukács also develops this opposition within the framework of a philosophy of history. In Lukács, of course, that philosophy is no longer the movement of the world spirit, who withdraws to itself from the external world and thus destroys the possibility of a classical harmony between intellect and sensuousness. It is materialistic, the history of bourgeois society. With the end of the bourgeois emancipation movement, the 1848 June revolution, the bourgeois intellectual also loses the ability to portray bourgeois society as a changing society in the totality of a realistic work of art. In the naturalistic absorption in detail and the associated loss of an encompassing perspective, we have the intimation of the dissolution of bourgeois realism, which reaches its climax in the avant-garde. This development is the development of a historically necessary decline.[5] Lukács thus transfers Hegel's critique of romantic art, as a historically necessary symptom of decay, to the art of the avant-garde. On the other hand, he largely adopts Hegel's view that the organic work of art constitutes a type of absolute perfection, except that he sees the realization of this type in the great realistic novels of Goethe, Balzac, and Stendhal rather than in Greek art. This suggests that for Lukács also, the culmination of art lies in the past, though it is true that he differs from Hegel in not feeling that perfection is necessarily unattainable in the present. Not only do the great realistic writers of the ascent of the bourgeoisie become models of socialist realism, according to Lukács, but he goes further and tries to attenuate the radical consequences of his historical-philosophical construct (the impossibility of a bourgeois realism after 1848 or 1871) by also allowing for a bourgeois realism in the twentieth century.[6]

Adorno is more radical on this point: for him, the avant-gardiste work is the only possible authentic expression of the contemporary state of the world. Adorno's theory is also based on Hegel but does not adopt its evaluations (negative view of romantic art versus high estimation of classical art), which Lukács transferred to the present. Adorno attempts to think radically and to take to its conclusion the historicizing of the art forms that Hegel had undertaken. This means that no historical type of the form-content dialectic will be given a higher rank than any other. In this perspective, the avant-gardiste work of art presents itself as the historically necessary expression of alienation in late-capitalist society. To propose measuring it against the organic coherence of the classical or realistic work would be improper. It seems at first as if Adorno had definitively broken with

any normative theory. But it is not difficult to see how, by way of a radical historicizing, the normative again enters into theory and stamps it no less markedly than in Lukács's case.

For Lukács also, the avant-garde is the expression of alienation in late-capitalist society, but for the socialist it is also the expression of the blindness of bourgeois intellectuals vis-à-vis the real historical counterforces working toward a socialist transformation of this society. It is on this political perspective that Lukács bases the possibility of a realistic art in the present. Adorno does not have this political perspective; therefore, avant-garde art becomes for him the only authentic art in late capitalist society. Every attempt to create organic, coherent works (which Lukács calls 'realist') is not merely a regression beyond an already attained level of artistic techniques,[7] it is ideologically suspect. Instead of baring the contradictions of society in our time, the organic work promotes, by its very form, the illusion of a world that is whole, even though the explicit contents may show a wholly different intent.

This is not the place to decide which of the two approaches is 'correct'; rather, the intention of the theory sketched here is to demonstrate that the debate itself is historical. To do so, it must be shown that the premises of the two authors are already historical today and that it is therefore impossible to simply adopt them. One may formulate the following thesis: the dispute between Lukács and Adorno concerning the legitimacy of avant-gardiste art as outlined above is confined to the sphere of artistic means and the change in the kind of work this involves (organic versus avant-gardiste). Yet the two authors do not thematize the attack that the historical avant-garde movements launched against art as an institution. According to the theory here set forth, it is this atack, however, that is the decisive event in the development of art in bourgeois society, because that attack first made recognizable the institution that is art, as it made recognizable that institution's determining influence on the effect individual works will have. Where the significance of the break in the development of art as caused by the historical avant-garde movements is not seen in the attack on art as an institution, the formal problem (organic versus nonorganic work) necessarily comes to occupy the center of reflection. But once the historical avant-garde movements revealed art as an institution as the solution to the mystery of the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of art, no form could any longer claim that it alone had either eternal or temporally limited validity. The historical avant-garde movements liquidated such a claim. Because Lukács and Adorno make it once more, they

show that their thought is still dominated by a pre-avant-gardiste period that knew historically conditioned stylistic change.

It is certainly true that Adorno brought out the significance of the avant-garde for aesthetic theory in our time. But in so doing, he insisted exclusively on the new type of work, not on the intent of the avant-garde movements to reintegrate art in the praxis of life. In that way, the avant-garde becomes the only type of art that is appropriate to our time.[8] This view is true in the sense that today, the farther-reaching intentions of the avant-garde movements can in fact be judged to have failed. Its untruth lies in the fact that it is precisely this failure that had certain consequences. The historical avant-garde movements were unable to destroy art as an institution; but they did destroy the possibility that a given school can present itself with the claim to universal validity. That 'realistic' and 'avant-gardiste' art exist side by side today is a fact that can no longer be objected to legitimately. The meaning of the break in the history of art that the historical avant-garde movements provoked does not consist in the destruction of art as an institution, but in the destruction of the possibility of positing aesthetic norms as valid ones. This has consequences for scholarly dealings with works of art: the normative examination is replaced by a functional analysis, the object of whose investigation would be the social effect (function) of a work, which is the result of the coming together of stimuli inside the work and a sociologically definable public within an already existing institutional frame.[9]

Lukács's and Adorno's failure to deal with art as an institution will have to be seen in connection with something else the two theoreticians share, and that is their critical attitude toward the work of Brecht. In Lukács's case, the rejection of Brecht is a direct result of his theoretical approach: Brecht's work falls under the same verdict as all nonorganic work. In Adorno's case, the rejection is not a direct outflow of a central theoretical position but of a subsidiary theorem, according to which works of art are "the unconscious historiography of what is norm and what is monstrous in history" (*des geschichtlichen Wesens und Unwesens*).[10] Where the nexus between the work and the society that conditions it is posited as necessarily unconscious, Brecht, who endeavored to give shape to this nexus with the highest possible degree of consciousness, can hardly be adequately received.[11]

To summarize: the Lukács-Adorno debate, which in many respects resumes the expressionism debate of the mid-thirties, ends with an aporia: two theories of culture that understand themselves as

materialist confront each other antagonistically, and both are tied to specific political positions. Adorno not only sees late capitalism as definitively stabilized but also feels that historical experience has shown the hopes placed in socialism to be ill-founded. For him, avant-gardiste art is a radical protest that rejects all false reconciliation with what exists and thus the only art form that has historical legitimacy. Lukács, on the other hand, acknowledges its character as protest but condemns avant-gardiste art because that protest remains abstract, without historical perspective, blind to the real counterforces that are seeking to overcome capitalism. A common element in both approaches in which the aporia is not abolished but intensified is that for reasons relevant to their theories, both authors are incapable of understanding the most important materialist writer of our time (Brecht).

In this situation, a way out seems to offer itself, and that would be to make the theory of this materialist writer the yardstick of judgment. But this solution has a considerable drawback: it does not permit an *understanding* of Brecht's work. For Brecht cannot become the horizon of judgment and simultaneously be understood in his distinctiveness. If one makes Brecht the yardstick for what literature can accomplish today, Brecht himself can no longer be judged and the question whether the solution he found for certain problems is tied to the period of its creation or not can no longer be asked. In other words: it is precisely when one attempts to grasp Brecht's epochal significance that his theory must not be made the framework of the investigation. To resolve this aporia, I would propose that the historical avant-garde movements be seen as a break in the development of art in bourgeois society, and that literary theory be conceived on the basis of this break. Brecht's work and theory also would have to be defined with reference to this historical discontinuity. The question then would be: what is Brecht's relation to the historical avant-garde movements? So far, this question has not been asked, because Brecht was taken for an avant-gardiste and a precise concept of historical avant-garde movements did not exist. This complex question cannot be examined here, of course, and we will have to content ourselves with a few suggestions.

Brecht never shared the intention of the representatives of the historical avant-garde movements to destroy art as an institution. Even the young Brecht who despised the theater of the educated bourgeoisie (*Bildungsbürgertum*) did not conclude that the theater should be abolished altogether; instead, he proposed to radically

change it. In sport, he found the model for a new theater whose central category is fun.[12]

Not only does the young Brecht define art as its own end and thus retain a central category of classical aesthetics: he intends to change rather than destroy the theater as an institution, and thus makes clear the distance that separates him from the representatives of the historical avant-garde movements. What they and Brecht share is, first, a conception of the work in which the individual elements attain autonomy (this being the condition that must be met if alienation is to become effective) and, second, the attention he devotes to art as an institution. But whereas the avant-gardistes believe they can directly attack and destroy that institution, Brecht develops a concept that entails a change of function and sticks to what is concretely achievable. These few comments may have shown that a theory of the avant-garde permits one to situate Brecht within the context of modern art and thereby to define his distinctiveness. There is thus reason to assume that a theory of the avant-garde can contribute to a resolution of the aporia of materialist literary scholarship (between Lukács and Adorno) as sketched above, and that this can be done without canonizing Brecht's theory and artistic practice.

It goes without saying that the thesis being advanced here refers not only to Brecht's work but to the place of political engagement in art generally. It is this: through the historical avant-garde movements, the place of political engagement in art was fundamentally changed. In consonance with the twofold definition of the avant-garde as given above (attack on art as institution and the coming into existence of a nonorganic work of art), the question will have to be discussed at both levels. That there existed political and moral engagement in the art preceding the historical avant-garde movements is beyond doubt. But the relationship between this engagement and the work in which it articulated itself is strained. In the organic work of art, the political and moral contents the author wishes to express are necessarily subordinated to the organicity of the whole. This means that whether the author wants to or not, they become parts of the whole, to whose constitution they contribute. The engaged work can be successful only if the engagement itself is the unifying principle that articulates itself throughout the work (and this includes its form). But this is rarely the case. The degree to which already existing traditions in a genre can resist being used for purposes of moral or political engagement can be observed in Voltaire's tragedies and the freedom lyric of the Restoration. In the organic work of art, the danger is always present that engagement

remains external to the form-content totality and destroys its substance. It is at this level of argument that most criticism of engaged art moves. But two presuppositions must be met if this argument is to claim validity: it applies only to organic works of art, and only when engagement has not been made the unifying principle of the work. Where the author is successful in organizing the work around the engagement, another danger threatens the political tendency: neutralization through the institution that is art. Received in the context of artifacts whose shared characteristic is their apartness from the praxis of life, the work that shapes engagement according to the aesthetic law of organicity tends to be perceived as a 'mere' art product. Art as an institution neutralizes the political content of the individual work.

The historical avant-garde movements made clear the significance art as an institution has for the effect of individual works, and thereby brought about a shift in the problem. It became apparent that the social effect of a work of art cannot simply be gauged by considering the work itself but that its effect is decisively determined by the institution within which the work 'functions.'

Had there never been any avant-garde movements, Brecht's and Benjamin's reflections from the twenties and thirties regarding a restructuring of the production apparatus[13] would not have been possible. Here also, however, one will have to take care not to adopt Brecht's and Benjamin's *solutions* along with their recognition of the problem and to transfer them ahistorically to the present.[14]

For the shift in the problem of engagement, the development of a type of nonorganic work is as important as the attack on art as an institution. If, in the avant-gardiste work, the individual element is no longer necessarily subordinate to an organizing principle, the question concerning the place value of the political contents of the work also changes. In the avant-gardiste work, they are aesthetically legitimate even as individual elements. Their effect is not necessarily mediated through the whole of the work but to be thought of as standing on its own.[15] In the avant-gardiste work, the individual sign does not refer primarily to the work as a whole but to reality. The recipient is free to respond to the individual sign as an important statement concerning the praxis of life, or as political instruction. This has momentous consequences for the place of engagement within the work. Where the work is no longer conceived as organic totality, the individual political motif also is no longer subordinate to the work as a whole but can be effective in isolation. On the basis of the avant-gardiste type of work, a new type of engaged art becomes

possible. One may even go a step further and say that the avant-gardiste work does away with the old dichotomy between 'pure' and 'political' art, although it will have to be made clear what the sentence means. Following Adorno, it may mean that the structural principle of the nonorganic is emancipatory in itself, because it permits the breakup of an ideology that is increasingly congealing into a system. In such a view, avant-garde and engagement ultimately coincide. But since the identity rests wholly in the structural principle, it follows that engaged art is defined only formally, not in its substance. The tabooing of political art in the avant-gardiste work is just one step away from this. But the abolition of the dichotomy between 'pure' and 'political' art can take a different form. Instead of declaring the avant-gardiste structural principle of the nonorganic itself to be a political statement, it should be remembered that it enables political and nonpolitical motifs to exist side by side in a single work. On the basis of the nonorganic work, a new type of engaged art thus becomes possible.[16]

To the extent that individual motifs in the avant-gardiste work are largely autonomous, the political motif also can have a direct effect: the spectator can confront it with life as he experiences it. Brecht recognized and made use of this possibility. In his *Arbeitsjournal*, he writes: "in the aristotelian composition of plays and the acting that goes along with it . . . the delusion of the spectator concerning the way events on the stage take place in real life and come about there is furthered by the fact that the presentation of the fable constitutes an absolute whole. The details cannot be individually compared with those parts which correspond to them in real life. Nothing must be 'taken out of context' to set it into the context of reality. This is changed by a performance that produces estrangement. Here, the progress of the fable is discontinuous, the unified whole consists of independent parts each of which can and indeed must be directly confronted with the corresponding partial events in reality."[17] Brecht is avant-gardiste to the extent that the avant-garde work of art makes possible a new kind of political art because it frees the parts from their subordination to the whole. Brecht's comments make clear that although the avant-garde work of art necessarily falls short of attaining the goal of the historical avant-garde movements, which is the revolutionizing of the praxis of life, it yet preserves their intent. Although the total return of art to the praxis of life may have failed, the work of art entered into a new relationship to reality. Not only does reality in its concrete variety penetrate the work of art but the work no longer

seals itself off from it. It must be remembered, however, that it is art as an institution that determines the measure of political effect avant-garde works can have, and that art in bourgeois society continues to be a realm that is distinct from the praxis of life.

2. Concluding Remark and a Comment on Hegel

We have seen that Hegel historicizes art but not the *concept* of art. Although it has its origins in Greek art, he accords metahistorical validity to it. Szondi is correct in this observation: "While in Hegel everything starts to move and everything has its specific place value in historical development . . . the concept of art can hardly develop for it bears the unique stamp of Greek art."[18] Yet Hegel was perfectly aware that this concept of art was inappropriate to the works of his time: "If in considering them [works of art] we keep before our eyes the essential nature of works of art proper (i.e., the Ideal) where the important thing is both a subject matter not inherently arbitrary and transient and also a mode of portrayal fully in correspondence with such a subject-matter, then in the face of works of that kind the art products of the stage we are now considering must undoubtedly fall far short."[19]

We recall that for Hegel, romantic art (which takes in the period from the Middle Ages to Hegel's time) is already the dissolution of the interpenetration of form and content which was the characteristic of classical (Greek) art. This dissolution is caused by the discovery of autonomous subjectivity.[20] The principle of romantic art is the "elevation of the spirit to itself" (*Esthetics,* vol. I, p. 518), which is the result of Christianity. Spirit no longer immerses itself in the sensuous as in classical art but returns to itself and thus posits "external reality as an existence inadequate to it" (ibid.). Hegel sees a connection between the development of the autonomous subjectivity and the contingency of external existence. For that reason, romantic art is both an art of subjective inwardness and one that portrays the world of phenomena in their contingency:

> External appearance cannot any longer express the inner life, and if it is still called to do so, it merely has the task of proving that the external is an unsatisfying existence and must point back to the inner, to the mind and feeling as the essential element. But just for this reason romantic art leaves externality to go its own way again for its part freely and independently, and in this respect allows any and every material down to flowers, trees, and the commonest household gear, to enter the representation without hindrance even in its contingent natural condition. (vol. I, p. 527).

For Hegel, romantic art is the product of the dissolution of the interpenetration of spirit and sensuousness (external appearance) characteristic of classical art. But beyond that, he conceives of a further stage where romantic art also dissolves. This is brought about by the radicalization of the opposites of inwardness and external reality that define romantic art. Art disintegrates into "the subjective imitation of the given" (realism of detail) and "subjective humor." Hegel's aesthetic theory thus leads logically to the idea of the end of art where art is understood to be what Hegel meant by classicism, the perfect interpenetration of form and content.

But outside his system, Hegel at least sketched the concept of a post-romantic art.[21] Using Dutch genre painting as his example, he writes that here the interest in the object turns into interest in the skill of presentation: "What should enchant us is not the subject of the painting and its lifelikeness, but the pure appearance (*interesseloses Scheinen*) which is wholly without the sort of interest that the subject has. The one thing certain about beauty is, as it were, appearance [semblance (*Scheinen*)] for its own sake, and art is mastery in the portrayal of all the secrets of this ever profounder pure appearance (*Scheinen*) of external realities" (vol. I, p. 598). What Hegel alludes to here is nothing other than what we called the developing autonomy of the aesthetic. He says expressly "that the artist's subjective skill and his application of the means of artistic production are raised to the status of an objective matter in works of art" (vol. I, p. 599). This announces the shift of the form-content dialectic in favor of form, a development that characterizes the further course of art.

What we deduced for post avant-gardiste art from the failure of avant-gardiste intentions, the legitimate side-by-side existence of styles and forms of which none can any longer claim to be the most advanced, is already observed by Hegel with reference to the art of his time. "Herewith we have arrived at the end of romantic art, at the standpoint of most recent times, the peculiarity of which we may find in the fact that the artist's subjective skill surmounts his material and its production because he is no longer dominated by the given conditions of a range of content and form already inherently determined in advance, but retains entirely within his own power and choice both the subject-matter and the way of presenting it" (vol. I, p. 602). Hegel grasps the development of art with the pair of concepts 'subjectivity:external world' (or spirit:sensuousness). The analysis here presented, on the other hand, is based on the crystallization of social subsystems and thus arrives at the antithesis between

art and the praxis of life. That as early as the 1820s Hegel should have been able to foresee what did not definitively occur until after the failure of the historical avant-garde movements demonstrates that speculation is a mode of cognition.

The standard for any contemporary theory of aesthetics is Adorno's, whose historicalness has become recognizable. Now that the development of art has passed beyond the historical avant-garde movements, an aesthetic theory based on them (such as Adorno's) is as historical as Lukacs's, which recognizes only organic works as works of art. The total availability of material and forms characteristic of the post avant-gardiste art of bourgeois society will have to be investigated both for its inherent possibilities and the difficulties it creates, and this concretely, by the analysis of individual works.

Whether this condition of the availability of all traditions still permits an aesthetic theory at all, in the sense in which aesthetic theory existed from Kant to Adorno, is questionable, because a field must have a structure if it is to be the subject of scholarly or scientific understanding. Where the formal possibilities have become infinite, not only authentic creation but also its scholarly analysis become correspondingly difficult. Adorno's notion that late-capitalist society has become so irrational[22] that it may well be that no theory can any longer plumb it applies perhaps with even greater force to post avant-gardiste art.

Postscript to the Second German Edition

If, in spite of the intense discussion and occasional vigorous attack that this book provoked[1] it appears unchanged, it is primarily because it reflects a historical constellation of problems that emerged after the events of May 1968 and the failure of the student movement in the early seventies.[2] I shall not succumb to the temptation here to criticize the hopes of those who believed at the time (without a social basis) that they could build directly on the revolutionary experiences of Russian futurism, for example. There is all the less cause for doing so since the hopes of those who, like myself, believed in the possibility of 'more democracy' in all spheres of social life went unfulfilled. This also applies to the question of *unrestricted* scholarly and scientific debate. In what follows, I will limit myself to a discussion of some of the problems that were raised in critical reviews of the book and that have not been dealt with elsewhere.[3]

The thesis that art in bourgeois society is 'functionless' (see end of chapt. I, Section 2) has encountered justified criticism. Hans Sanders, for example, has pointed out that "in sociological terms, institutions can only be structures which sustain functions for society as a whole."[4] My formulation is in fact subject to misinterpretation. Art as an institution prevents the contents of works that press for radical change in a society (i.e., the abolition of alienation) from having any practical effect. That is not to say, of course, that art as institutional-

ized in bourgeois society cannot assume tasks relating to the elaboration and stabilization of the subject, and have functions in that sense.

A second problem raised repeatedly in discussion regards the central place Aestheticism is given in the historical construct. Aestheticism is understood as the logically necessary precondition of the historical avant-garde movements and more specifically as that moment in history where the autonomy of the institution comes to manifest itself in the contents of works. The question may be raised whether this does not mean that Aestheticism is assigned an inadmissibly privileged place[5] in the theoretical construct and that opposing trends, such as naturalism or *littérature engagée*,[6] are simultaneously being neglected. Two observations are in order here. First, a distinction is to be drawn between the systematic place that Aestheticism occupies in the development of art in bourgeois society on the one hand, and the evaluation of the aesthetic and political (where applicable) quality of the works of this movement on the other. It is in fact my view that Aestheticism deserves a key position where what is meant by 'art' in bourgeois society is to be understood. But this in no way entails a high estimate of the aesthetic value of the works. That both elements coincide in Adorno's theory does not mean that they necessarily belong together. It is precisely the break with art as an institution that Adorno failed to bring out in his study of the avant-garde movements. When this is done, art becomes recognizable both as an institution and as a possible object of criticism.

A second aspect needs emphasis: every theory with historical substance must arrest the development of the topic at a given point if it is to construct that development. Lukács, for example, chose Weimar classicism and the realism of Balzac and Stendhal for the historical situs of his construct. And everyone knows how this decision has affected the chances for an understanding of the literature of Modernism. Although for different reasons, Jürgen Kreft also makes the level of development that literature attained in the classicism of Weimar the hub of his construct. The consequence is that he sees Aestheticism and avant-garde merely as 'unsuccessful forms,' the result of social constraints. But even the attempt to construct the development of literature and art from the perspective of naturalism or from Sartre's concept of littérature engagée does not seem very promising to me because this would mean that one would leave out of consideration all those problems that idealist aesthetics define as the distinctiveness of the aesthetic. A critical science especially cannot afford to ignore these problems. Strategies of

resistance and neglect are useless here, for what has been shut out never fails to return, its vehemence increased.

In this situation, Hans Sanders's proposal has prima facie plausibility. Instead of using a *historical* construct as a point of departure, he suggests that Aestheticism and engagement be understood as a "*structural* range of possibilities for art in bourgeois society." Yet the ease with which this concept would lend itself to use in research exacts a high price. For it would mean the end of all history of art in bourgeois society; we would be left with "contingent peripheral conditions" (structure of the public, overall social situation, group and class interests), which would decide "what variant dominates in what form and in what historical situation." But this is an objectivist short-circuiting of the hermeneutic approach to the problem whose aim it is to illuminate the present.

The critique and proposed solution of Gerhard Goebel point in a similar direction. His primary concern is to separate the *autonomy status* (dissociation from other institutions such as church and state) from the *autonomy doctrine*: "Literature must already have a relatively autonomous institutional status for political engagement or 'autonomy' to be possible alternatives."[7] It makes sense, of course, to distinguish between autonomy status and autonomy doctrine. But to separate the two is problematic. For then the concept of art as an institution shrinks to a degree where it amounts to no more than the nugatory definition of a relative independence vis-à-vis other institutions such as church and state. Relative autonomy *in this sense* is a characteristic of any and every institution and yields no specific criterion for the institution that is art. Differently formulated, art as an institution in bourgeois society would be an institution without a doctrine, like a church without a dogma or, more accurately, a church that admits all varieties of belief (autonomistic and 'engaged' equally). This would deprive the category 'institution' of all substance. For it would then be precisely the ideology of literature, which governs the interaction with and about works of art and which the category seeks to grasp, that would be downgraded and become a mere subordinate element.[8]

That, since Kant's and Schiller's writings, aesthetic theory has been one of the autonomy of art seems to me to speak in favor of a definition of art as an institution in developed bourgeois society that makes the normative aspect central to its reflection. This is still true in Adorno. A developed aesthetic theory of engaged art does not exist, to the best of my knowledge. It is significant that Zola's and

Sartre's great manifestos should be limited to a literary genre that resisted the autonomy doctrine for a long time, namely, the novel. In both cases, it can be shown that efforts toward an alternative institutionalization of literature (which is what is involved) remain indebted to the autonomy concept in essential points. Zola's wavering between a singularly prosaic view of the writer ("an auteur est un ouvrier comme un autre, qui gagne sa vie par son travail"),[9] which corresponds to his effort on behalf of the institutionalization of a nonautonomous concept of literature, and a conception of the writer as someone with special standing to which he characteristically resorts when he discusses aesthetic value, is illuminating in this connection.[10] And Sartre adopts, in *Qu'est-ce que la littérature,* the separation of poetry and prose that is anchored in the French tradition, and limits the validity of his theory of engagement to prose. Only in Brecht do we find elements of an aesthetic theory of engaged literature; but Brecht only formulated his theory when the attack of the historical avant-garde movements on the autonomy status of art had already occurred. Inferences concerning the institutionalization of art in late bourgeois society can therefore not be drawn from Brecht's theory. At most, the theory can be considered an indicator of the possibilities of engaged art after the historical avant-garde movements.

The objection repeatedly raised against the preceding comments in discussion was that the institutional frame was being largely equated with aesthetic theory and that the importance that physical institutions such as school, university, academies, museums, etc. had for the functioning of art was being underestimated as a result. The argument would be correct if aesthetic theories were the exclusive domain of philosophers. But this is no longer the case. The ideas they formulate enter the heads of producers of art and their publics by way of various mediating instrumentalities (school, especially the *Gymnasium,* the university, literary criticism, and literary histories, to name just a few) and thus determine attitudes toward individual works.[11] Making use of aesthetic theories is indicated because they represent prevailing ideas about art in their most developed form. It is precisely when one assumes that art is institutionalized as ideology in developed bourgeois society that its critique must engage its most developed exemplification. Far from excluding investigations into ideas of art and literature as, for example, in histories of literature or in literary criticism, it calls for them as necessary complements. The practical suggestion for research that can be drawn from the approach suggested here is that the coherence of the normative frame

of production and reception, which the concept of art as institution implies, be kept in mind, and that the unrelated concurrency of accounts by individual instrumentalities (such as school literary criticism, etc.) be avoided.[12]

Two kinds of criticism are situated at a different level. There are those who do not accept the failure of the avant-garde movements (more precisely, the failure of their proposed reintegration of art in the praxis of life). Others, like Burkhardt Lindner, see the demand for sublation by the avant-garde as continuous with the ideology of autonomy and conclude from this that the transfer of this demand for sublation "to the categorial level of art as an institution [would necessarily lead to] a confirmation of the traditional autonomy of art" (*Antworten,* p. 92).

Lindner's thesis, that the demand by art for sublation is already germinally present in the doctrine of autonomy, is undoubtedly interesting. Elsewhere, he quotes a Schiller text that is illuminating in this context: "If the extraordinary event had actually occurred that political legislation was assigned to reason, man respected and treated as an end in himself, the law installed on the throne and liberty made the foundation of the state, I would forever take leave of the muses and devote all my activity to that most splendid of all works of art, the monarchy of reason."

Lindner interprets the text to mean "that the constitution of an autonomy of the aesthetic is connected from the very beginning with the problem of the abolition of autonomy."[13] But this may well be placing Schiller into too close a proximity to the avant-garde. For Schiller is not concerned with the sublation of artistic in political and social praxis but with justifying the renunciation of political praxis and the justification of the autonomy of art as a consequence. In his argument, the separation of the two spheres is maintained, whereas what matters to the avant-garde is their interpenetration.

The assumption by literary science of the avant-gardiste demand that Lindner not unjustly imputes to me could occur only if that demand were transformed. Literary science cannot make it its task to integrate art in the praxis of life. It can, however, make its own the demand of the avant-garde movements insofar as the critique of art as institution is concerned. If it is correct that the forms of interaction that govern the production and commerce with works of art in bourgeois society are ideological, a patient, dialectic critique of that institutional frame becomes an important scientific task.

Notes

Foreword: Theory of Modernism versus Theory of the Avant-Garde

1. Renato Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Gerald Fitzgerald (Cambridge, Mass., 1968), p. 37.
2. Ibid., p. 80.
3. Ibid., p. 107.
4. Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Werke* (Weimarer Ausgabe), vol. 47, p. 313.
5. See especially Johann Goldfriedrich, *Geschichte des deutschen Buchhandels*, vol. 3 (Leipzig, 1909); Leo Lowenthal, *Literature, Popular Culture, and Society* (Palo Alto, 1961), here chapter 2; and Jochen Schulte-Sasse, *Die Kritik an der Trivialliteratur seit der Aufklärung. Studien zur Geschichte des Kitschbegriffs* (Munich, 1971).
6. See, for example, Jochen Schulte-Sasse, "Das Konzept bürgerlich-literarischer Öffentlichkeit und die historischen Gründe seines Zerfalls," in *Aufklärung und literarische Öffentlichkeit* (Frankfurt/Main, 1980), pp. 83-115.
7. Poggioli, *Theory*, p. 112.
8. Ibid., p. 50.
9. See, for example, Peter Bürger, "Zum Problem des Funktionswandels von Kunst und Literatur in der Epoche des Übergangs von der feudalen zur bürgerlichen Gesellschaft," *Zeitschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Linguistik* 32 (1978): 11-27.
10. Irving Howe, *Decline of the New* (New York, 1970), p. 27.
11. Ibid., p. 3.
12. Clement Greenberg, *Art and Culture. Critical Essays* (Boston, 1965), p. 6.
13. (London, 1973).
14. Howe, *Decline*, p. 15. See also p. 16 and passim.
15. Poggioli, *Theory*, p. 107.
16. André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor, 1972), pp. 7-8.

17. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York, 1972), pp. 83-84.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid., p. 7.
20. Ibid.
21. Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York, 1973), p. 280.
22. Ibid., p. 281.
23. Ibid., p. 166.
24. Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic*, p. 123.
25. Ibid., p. 121.
26. Theodor W. Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie* (Frankfurt/Main, 1970), pp. 335-36.
27. Michael Ryan, *Marxism and Deconstruction. A Critical Articulation* (Baltimore and London, 1982), p. 211.
28. Theodor W. Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 11 (Frankfurt/Main, 1974), pp. 104-5.
29. Antonin Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double*, trans. Mary Caroline Richards (New York, 1958), p. 114.
30. Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago, 1978), p. 234.
31. Ibid., p. 235.
32. Ibid., p. 240.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid., p. 246.
35. Ibid., pp. 245-6.
36. The recent attempt by Michael Ryan to join deconstruction as a "linguistic-conceptual material practice of philosophy" to a leftist political position was predestined to fail because such an attempt necessarily must concern itself with the connection between philosophical and social praxis. How can the material practice of philosophy be institutionalized so that it becomes relevant to social praxis? An answer to this question could not avoid the discussion—the philosophical as well as historical—of a social agency that could lead to something like a positive development in social life. Ryan does not even raise this question. The problem, however, cannot be solved easily, since the linear expansion of deconstructive practice into social praxis inevitably ends in sociopolitical pessimism. I don't mean to say here, though, that parts of deconstructive praxis could not be successfully integrated into another philosophical, analytical framework. See Ryan, *Marxism*, esp. p. 79.
37. See Ryan, *Marxism*, and Jochen Hörisch, "Herrscherwort, Geld und geltende Sätze. Adornos Aktualisierung der Frühromantik und ihre Affinität zur poststrukturalistischen Kritik des Subjekts," in *Materialien zur ästhetischen Theorie Theodor W. Adornos* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp taschenbuch wissenschaft, 1980), pp. 397-414.
38. Ryan, *Marxism*, p. 78.
39. Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie*, p. 507.
40. Christopher Norris, *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice* (London: Methuen, 1982), p. 81.
41. Ryan, *Marxism*, p. 152.
42. Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic*, p. 154.
43. Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (New York and London, 1971), p. 11.
44. Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Öffentlichkeit und Erfahrung. Zur Organisationsanalyse von bürgerlicher und proletarischer Öffentlichkeit* (Frankfurt/Main, 1972), p. 293. The book will soon be published in English by the University of Minnesota Press.

45. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Finding Feminist Readings: Dante-Yeats," *Social Text* 3 (1980): 75.

46. Ibid., p. 77.

47. Hans-Thiess Lehmann, "Das Subjekt als Schrift. Hinweise zur französischen Texttheorie," *Merkur* 33 (1979): 673.

48. Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York, 1975), pp. 23-24.

49. Ibid., p. 29.

50. Breton, *Manifestoes*, p. 10.

51. Rainer Nägele, "Modernism and Postmodernism: The Margins of Articulation," *Studies in 20th Century Literature* V,1 (1980): 13-14.

52. Artaud, *Theater*, p. 110.

53. Ibid., p. 110.

54. Ibid., p. 91.

55. Even Kristeva, who claims to develop a *materialistic* theory of modernism, shifts strategies of dissolving and dislodging existing textual (i.e., ideological) patterns to the center of her theory of the avant-garde, which like others I have mentioned may be more precisely termed a theory of modernism. Although Kristeva, in contrast to Derrida, does not proceed from an all-presence and omnipotence of the text, i.e. of the chains of signifiers, her approach permits no comparative discussion of experiences that (despite her own political and intellectual acceptance of heterogeneity) would remain centered on a position. Whereas Derrida, owing to his presuppositions, could not go beyond the "systematic play of differences" that is language, Kristeva adheres both to an extralinguistic view of social relations and a transcendental notion of subjectivity. Characteristic for the history of social relations is the development of material contradictions. These material contradictions subject the individual to tensions that in turn lead to breaches in the *weltanschauung* of social individuals. According to Kristeva, the collaboration of material contradictions and ideological-textual breaches reactivates preoedipal inclinations, such as pleasure in the musicality and in the rhythm of language, unmeaning play with the phonetic material, as it is for example expressed in nonsense poetry. Kristeva calls this presignifying activity that ontogenetically reaches back to the pleasure in sounds that the small child displays before his entrance into the world of meaning, "the Semiotic": "Neither model nor copy, the semiotic is antecedent and subjacent to representation and so to specularization and it admits of analogy only with vocal and kinetic rhythm." This she juxtaposes with the "symbolic" or "thetic," the realm of verbally solidified ideology, the "domain of *positions*: of pro-positions and judgement." Since the "thetic" is "irremediably shaken by the afflux of the semiotic in the symbolic," the point is to reinvest that "amorphous and provisionally structurable motility . . . with all its gestural and vocal heterogeneity on the register of the socialized body." (Julia Kristeva, "The Subject in Signifying Practice," *Semiotext(e)* I,3 (1975): 22, 24, 25. See also Rosalind Coward and John Ellis, *Language and Materialism. Developments in Semiology and the Theory of the Subject* [Boston, London and Henley, 1975], passim.)

In her view, the institutionalization of semiotic practice is accomplished by the art of the avant-garde, or of modernism. By dislodging verbal patterns, such art allegedly modifies "the very principle of ideology in that it opens up the unicity of the thetic and prevents its theologization" (Ibid., p. 25). This praxis is intended to become political-revolutionary in that it attacks authorities and breaks up identities. But such a political-revolutionary praxis that can only conceive of decomposition threatens, through the circle of anarchistic deconstruction, to stifle all construction of social organization. For Kristeva confronts the subject, with its somatic drives, with an external world, without in any way mediating this contradictory social external world and the symbolic projections of the subject with each other.

Clearly it remains arbitrary which new draft of the "thetic" or "symbolic" will prevail after the interference of the "semiotic." One question that remains is whether such a text praxis, which supposedly undermines the positing of the "thetic" within capitalistic societies, must not always lead to something "new" that, as something new, all too easily adapts to the capitalistic mode of production.

56. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie* (Berlin, 1974), p. 400.

57. Fredric Jameson, "The Ideology of the Text," *Salmagundi* 31/32 (1975/76): 204-46.

58. Ibid., p. 242.

59. For a more detailed analysis, see Jochen Schulte-Sasse, "Leftist Radicalism and Literature in the Weimar Republic," *Literature and Politics in the Weimar Republic* (Minneapolis, forthcoming).

60. Jürgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston, 1975), p. 78.

61. Ibid., p. 85.

62. Ibid., p. 85.

63. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* (Frankfurt/Main, Berlin and Vienna, 1972), p. 14.

64. I would argue that this is a virtue of Bürger's theory that is especially valuable in the face of the current plurality of theories that are characterized by inadmissable metahistorical generalizations. I find that even Paul de Man illustrates this shortcoming. In "Blindness and Insight," Paul de Man describes how modernist writers and theoreticians tend to distinguish themselves from the art concept of classical-romantic aesthetics: "The fallacy of the belief that, in the language of poetry, sign and meaning can coincide, or at least be related to each other in the free and harmonious balance that we call beauty, is said to be a specifically romantic delusion." Disengaging themselves from this concept, modernists believe that "literature finally comes into its own, and becomes authentic, when it discovers that the exalted status it claimed for its language was a myth. The function of the critic then naturally becomes coextensive with the intent at demystification that is more or less consciously present in the mind of the author" (pp. 12-14). In fact de Man characterizes here precisely a trend in current American literary scholarship that is documented in sentences such as these: "Because the text deconstructs itself, the author is not responsible for what the text seems to say" (Comment, reported from a 1977 convention by Gayatri Spivak, *Social Text*, p. 73). A metahistorical generalization from *one* aspect of modernism is treated as the essence of art itself (premodernist literature just had not come into its own yet), permitting de Man to reproach these critics for themselves mystifying their demystification. The question is whether de Man, despite all gestures of distancing, does not do exactly the same thing, namely, to hypostatize a historical-concrete feature of art ahistorically as the essence of art, when he counters with: "For the statement about language, that sign and meaning can never coincide, is what is precisely taken for granted in the kind of language we call literary. Literature, unlike everyday language, begins on the far side of this knowledge; it is the only form of language free from the fallacy of unmediated expression" (p. 17). De Man attributes to literature in general what his opponents attribute to modernist literature. But his own critical perspective, with which he evaluates literature in general, remains modernistic. One could demonstrate in detail that here a resignative and nihilistic philosophy presented on a high philosophical level turns into a concept of art: literature "is not a demystification, it is demystified from the start."

65. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, as quoted in W. K. Wimsatt, *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1954), p. 81. I owe this and the following reference to Lindsay Waters.

66. W. K. Wimsatt, *Verbal Icon*, p. 81.

67. Coward and Ellis, *Language*, p. 45.

68. Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*, trans. Geoffrey Wall (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), passim.

69. Within the bourgeois institution "art," social engagement, if it does not want to remain an alien body within an organic work of art, would have to transform itself into world interpretation, as may best be illustrated by Lukács' aesthetics.

70. However, it appears at times as if Bürger did not see the consequences of his own theory, such as when he writes that today aesthetic theory has possibly become obsolete, "because a field must have a structure if it is to be the subject of scholarly or scientific understanding" (p. 94). Can the subject of literary-critical understanding still be at all structured or closed after the deconstruction of the institution "art"? Wouldn't an aesthetic theory that opens itself to interdisciplinary understanding be even more important than before?

71. Heiner Boehncke, "Überlegungen zu einer proletarisch-avant gardistischen Ästhetik," in *"Theorie der Avantgarde." Antworten auf Peter Bürgers Bestimmung von Kunst und bürgerlicher Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt/Main, 1976), passim. This book is a collection of 10 essays analyzing and criticizing Peter Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-garde*.

72. Peter Bürger, *Der französische Surrealismus. Studien zum Problem der avantgardistischen Literatur* (Frankfurt/Main, 1971).

73. Ibid., pp. 115-16.

74. Ibid., p. 194.

75. Ibid., p. 196.

76. Walter Benjamin, *One-Way Street and Other Writings*, trans. Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter (London, 1979), p. 227.

77. Ibid., p. 229.

78. Ibid., p. 239.

79. Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. 2,3 (Frankfurt/Main, 1980), p. 1021.

80. See for detail, Jochen Schulte-Sasse, "Gebrauchswerte der Literatur. Eine Kritik der ästhetischen Kategorien 'Identifikation' und 'Reflexivität', vor allem im Hinblick auf Adorno," in *Zur Dichotomisierung von hoher und niederer Literatur* (Frankfurt/Main, 1982), esp. pp. 94-96.

81. Karlheinz Stierle, "Erfahrung und narrative Form," in *Theorie der Geschichte, vol. 3: Theorie und Erzählung in der Geschichte* (Munich, 1979), p. 90.

82. See Negt and Kluge's *Öffentlichkeit und Erfahrung*, and their new book *Geschichte und Eigensinn* (Frankfurt am Main, 1981).

83. This is especially true for the discussion in a recent issue of *New German Critique*. There Jürgen Habermas attempted to weaken Daniel Bell's modernism critique in order to shield the project of modernism against neoconservative attacks. In his book *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*, Bell made modernism's and postmodernism's aesthetic concept, aimed at pleasure and intensity of experience, responsible for the crisis of late capitalism, since "the rise of a hip-rock-drug culture on the popular level," which he regards as resulting from the alleged overemphasis of aesthetic experience, "undermines the social structure itself by striking at the motivational and psychic-reward system which has sustained it" (Daniel Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* [New York, 1976], p. 54). Habermas, who justifiably criticizes Bell's idealistic accusation, opposes this with a Weberian differentiation model proceeding from a historical differentiation of the value spheres of science, morality, and art. According to this model, sociopolitical decisions should be given over entirely to the separate sphere of moral, public discussions. Aesthetic experience is interpreted by Habermas, as it is in Aestheticism, or by Adorno, for that matter, as an independent sphere of experience that should have nothing more to do with the rational organization of life praxis. When, in the same issue of *New German Critique*, Bürger opposes such a defunctionalization of art with the argument that it could in the

long run lead only to an institutionalization of a "semantic atrophy" of aesthetic works, he is certainly correct. Insofar as the social function of art in modern times is concerned, Habermas indeed falls behind what Peter Bürger had already achieved. His own position, however, because of his insistence on the avant-garde's failure and on the positive quality of art's autonomous status, here again remains determined by a combination of elements from the theories of Adorno, Lukács, and Marcuse. Neither Habermas's answer to our problem, which accepts the dissociation of aesthetic experiences from life praxis as theoretically and historically irreversible, nor Bürger's, which insists on a critical cognitive function of art for an understanding of the whole of society, in my opinion addresses adequately the question of art's social function in modern societies. Habermas, in relying upon the spreading institutionalization of rational discourse in future societies, dismisses art as a medium of social significance altogether, whereas Bürger prepares for hibernation by propagating art merely as a medium of critical reflection.

Preliminary Remarks

1. Peter Bürger, *Der französische Surrealismus. Studien zum Problem der avantgardistischen Literatur* (Frankfurt, 1971). I will not return here to the studies of the avant-garde problem that I discussed in the introduction to the Surrealism book. This applies especially to W. Benjamin, "Der Surrealismus. Die letzte Momentaufnahme der europäischen Intelligenz," in *Angelus Novus. Ausgewählte Schriften 2* (Frankfurt, 1966), pp. 200-15; Th. W. Adorno, "Rückblickend auf den Surrealismus," in *Noten zur Literatur I* (Frankfurt:Bibliothek Suhrkamp 47, 1963), pp. 153-60; H. M. Enzensberger, "Die Aporien der Avantgarde," in *Einzelheiten II. Poesie und Politik* (Frankfurt:Suhrkamp, n.d.), pp. 50-80; and K. H. Bohrer, "Surrealismus und Terror oder die Aporien des Juste-milieu," in *Die gefährdete Phantasie oder Surrealismus und Terror* (München:Hanser, 1970), pp. 32-61.

Introduction: Theory of the Avant-garde and Theory of Literature

1. I avail myself of this opportunity to discuss some of the critiques of my *Theory of the Avant-garde*. See W. M. Lüdke, ed., *"Theorie der Avant-garde." Antworten auf Peter Bürgers Bestimmung von Kunst und bürgerlicher Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt:Suhrkamp, 1976). In what follows, the volume will be abbreviated as *Antworten*.

2. Although I do not wish to deny the difficulties of aesthetic theory today, I must reject the kind of renunciation of all theory that has recently been advocated by D. Hoffmann-Axthelm. Sentences such as, "Theory is not enjoyable," "in the meantime, theory and art have become hollow concepts," "theory in the emphatic sense no longer finds any customers" ("Kunst, Theorie, Erfahrung," in Lüdke, ed., *Antworten*, pp. 190, 192) are symptoms of a profound crisis among parts of the left intelligentsia. After the excessive hopes that theory might change society went unfulfilled, the left tends to act like Benjamin's melancholic who throws away the fragment to which he had attached his hopes. It thereby leaves this field to the right and runs the risk of being taken in by their theorems.

3. Th. Metscher represents the first view in his answer to my essay, "Was leistet die Widerspiegelungstheorie?" "Bürger's fixation on the avant-garde is the result of what is fundamentally an immanent view of the development of art. In spite of reflections on bourgeois society, the development of art is interpreted as a *process that occurs outside the class struggles* (in this respect, though not in others, Bürger follows Adorno)". ("Ästhetische Erkenntnis and realistische Kunst," quoted from the reprint in Th. M., *Kunst und sozialer Prozess* [Köln, 1977], p. 225.) That I attempted to show that the historical avant-garde movements are the logical place from which a critique of the institution art/literature can first be developed, that the "fixation" is thus something that is an integral part of the

matter is overlooked by Metscher (though not wholly without polemical intent). The opposite point of view is put forward by W. M. Lüdke, who clearly wants to develop an immanent critique of the *Theory of the Avant-garde*, yet constantly relapses into a mere confrontation of my approach and Adorno's in which the latter's theory is judged to be the correct one ("Die Aporien der materialistischen Ästhetik—kein Ausweg?" in Lüdke, ed., *Antworten*, pp. 27-71.)

4. L. Althusser, *Reading Capital*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York:Pantheon Books, 1970), p. 43 ff.

5. See pp. 15-34.

6. Althusser, *Reading Capital*, p. 35 ff.

7. On this, see A. Schmidt, *Geschichte und Struktur. Fragen einer marxistischen Historik* (München:Hanser 1971), p. 65 ff.

8. To the extent this nexus is not discussed by Althusser, his criticism of empiricism seems to me to go too far. See also J.-F. Lyotard, "La Place de l'aliénation dans le retournement marxiste," in Lyotard, *Dérive à partir de Marx et Freud* (Paris: Union générale d'éditions, 1973), p. 78 ff.

9. The exceptionally comprehensible critique [of my attempt to conceive of the connection between the development of categories and that of the subject] that W. M. Lüdke presented amounts to the reproach that my argument is circular, "that it keeps shifting the burden of proof from one element to the next." ("Die Aporien der materialistischen Ästhetik," in Lüdke, *Antworten*, p. 65). More precisely, it is "the inconsistent reasons for that break which Bürger must adduce" (p. 85). The problem from which Lüdke proposes to infer the inconsistency of the approach arises only because he refuses to take note of the critique of the autonomy status of art by the avant-garde movements. For him, there is only one stringent theory, and that is one in which *all* elements can be derived from each other. But such a theory bears no relation to reality. Since he leaves out of consideration the relation to reality to be found in the *Theory of the Avant-garde*, it is only natural that it should appear inadequately grounded to him.

10. B. Lindner provided one of the most interesting contributions to the discussion on the *Theory of the Avant-garde*. His thesis is this: "In its intention to sublate art in the praxis of life, the avant-garde can thus be understood as the most radical and consistent attempt to maintain the universal claim of autonomous art vis-à-vis all other social spheres and to give it practical meaning. In that case, the atempt to liquidate art as an institution does not appear as a break with the ideology of the period of autonomy but as a *reversal phenomenon on the identical ideological level*" ("Aufhebung der Kunst in der Lebenspraxis? Über die Aktualität der Auseinandersetzung mit den historischen Avantgardebewegungen," in Lüdke, ed., *Antworten*, p. 83.

That the attack of the historical avant-garde movements on art as an institution remains indebted to what it turns against is generally true. But what does seem problematical to me are the conclusions Lindner draws from this fact (on this, see my comment in "Neue Subjektivität in der Literaturwissenschaft?" in J. Habermas, ed., *Die geistige Situation der Zeit* (Frankfurt:Suhrkamp, 1979)

11. See the introductory research report in Ch. Bürger, *Textanalyse als Ideologiekritik* (Frankfurt, 1973), pp. 3-64.

12. Such global judgments must be granted their nuances, of course. In his "Über den Fetischcharakter in der Musik," Adorno certainly also points to a development in the field of popular art when he notes, for example, that the hit tune (Gassenhauer) which "once attacked the educational privileges of the ruling class" has lost that function today (in Adorno, *Dissonanzen. Musik in der verwalteten Welt* (Göttingen:Kleine Vandenhoeck Reihe, 1969), p. 14.

13. That Adorno saw the problem is shown by a sentence from a letter to Walter Benjamin: "Both bear the scars of capitalism, both contain elements of change; . . . both are the sundered halves of total freedom which yet cannot be had by adding them up" (Th. W. Adorno, *Über Walter Benjamin*, ed. R. Tiedemann (Frankfurt:Suhrkamp, 1970), p. 129.

14. On this, see J. Schulte-Sasse, *Die Kritik an der Trivialliteratur seit der Aufklärung* (Bochumer Arbeiten zur Sprach-und Litwiss., 6) (München, 1971), and *Zur Dichotomie von hoher und niederer Literatur* (Frankfurt:Suhrkamp, 1980).

15. This is Lindner's position. See "Der Begriff der Verdinglichung und der Spielraum der Realismuskontroverse," in H. J. Schmitt, ed., *Der Streit mit Georg Lukács*, (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp,1978), pp. 91-123. Quote from p. 117.

16. The fact that Mikel Dufrenne clearly felt prompted at the same time to introduce it for me, the most persuasive confirmation that the introduction of the category 'art as institution' is not just an idea, but is suggested by the stage of development of art in late-capitalist society. Dufrenne writes: "l'art n'a reçu un concept que parce que, en même temps, lui était assigné un statut social (sc. celui de l'autonomie)." (*Art et politique* [Paris: Union générale d'éditions, 1974], p. 75). It is exceptionally interesting to observe that Dufrenne, whom one may—at least in this book—refer to as a theoretician of the neo-avant-garde takes up a position that is the diametric opposite of the historical avant-garde movements where the question of the institutionalization of art is concerned. He formulates as follows: "l'institutionnalisation, c'est-à-dire l'autonomisation, de l'art est une chance pour la révolution" (ibid., p. 79).

17. *Hegel's Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, trans. Haldane and Simson (New York:The Humanities Press, 1974), vol. I, p. 264.

18. "It is this lack of idea which most frequently causes criticism embarrassment for if all criticism is subsumption under the idea, criticism necessarily comes to an end when there is none, and can assume no other direct relation except that of rejection. In rejection, however, it wholly breaks off all connection between that which is without the idea of philosophy and that in whose service the idea stands. Because this means the end of all reciprocal acknowledgment, we are left with two subjectivities that confront each other. Positions that have nothing in common appear with the same right. Criticism becomes subjective because it views what is to be judged as anything but philosophy. But because what is to be judged wishes to be nothing other than philosophy, criticism declares it to be nothing. This verdict appears as a one-sided pronouncement, a position which directly contravenes its nature, considering that its activity is to be objective. Its judgment is an appeal to the idea of philosophy but that idea is not acknowledged by the other side, and thus a foreign tribunal for it. To stand on one side in one's opposition to this condition of criticism which distinguishes between non-philosophy and philosophy, and to have non-philosophy on the other is no true salvation" (Hegel, Über das Wesen der philosophischen Kritik überhaupt und ihr Verhältniss zum gegenwärtigen Zustand der Philosophie insbesondere" *Werke*, Bd. 2 [Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970], p. 173 f.).

19. It goes without saying that this is not a criticism of reception research that is socio-historically based. See P. U. Hohendahl, ed., *Sozialgeschichte und Wirkungsästhetik* (Frankfurt: Athenäum, 1974).

Chapter One: Preliminary Reflections on a Critical Literary Science

1. Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), p. 309.

2. On the distinction between traditional and critical science, see Max Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory," in *Critical Theory, Selected Essays* (New York:Herder and Herder, 1972), p. 188 ff.

3. D. Richter, "Geschichte und Dialektik in der materialistischen Literatur wissenschaft," *Alternative,* no. 82 (January 1972), p. 14.

4. H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975), p. 274.

5. J. Habermas, *Zur Logik der Sozialwissenschaften. Materialien* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970), p. 283.

6. Quoted from J. Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971). Of course, this "making" must not be understood to mean unlimited possibilities. Rather, it is to be emphasized that given conditions always limit the scope of the actual possibilities of historical action.

7. On the following, also see P. Bürger, "Ideologiekritik und Literaturwissenschaft," in P. Bürger, ed., *Vom Ästhetizismus zum Nouveau Roman. Versuche kritischer Literaturwissenschaft* (Frankfurt: Athenäum, 1974).

8. The following comment by Hegel elucidates the concept of truth usual in the tradition of dialectical philosophy: "Usually we call truth the agreement of an object with our perception. In doing so we presuppose an object that should be in accordance with our idea of it. In the philosophical sense, by contrast, truth expressed in the most abstract sense means agreement of a content with itself. This is accordingly a totally different meaning of truth than the first. The deeper (philosophical) meaning of truth can, by the way, also be found in part already in the common use of language. Thus one speaks for example of a *true* friend and understands by this one whose behavior is in accordance with the concept of friendship; in the same way one speaks of a *true* work of art. Untrue is then equivalent to bad, inappropriate in itself. In this sense a bad state is an untrue state, and the bad and the untrue exist in the contradiction that occurs between the determination or the concept and the existence of an object." (G. W. F. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse, Erster Teil: Die Wissenschaft der Logik,* in *Werke* 8 [Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970], p. 86)

9. Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1970), p. 131.

10. G. Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics,* trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1971), p. 58.

11. Further bibliographical references to ideology critical analysis may be found in the Selected Bibliography of the reader *Seminar: Literatur- und Kunstsoziologie,* ed. P. Bürger, suhrkamp taschenbuch wissenschaft, 245 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1978), p. 473 ff.

12. G. Lukács, "Eichendorff," in Lukács, *Deutsche Realisten des 19. Jahrhunderts,* (Berlin: Luchterhand, 1952), pp. 59, 60.

13. Th. W. Adorno, "Zum Gedächtnis Eichendorffs," in his *Noten zur Literatur I,* Bibliothek Suhrkamp, 47 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1958), p. 113.

14. Cf. Peter Bürger, *Vermittlung-Rezeption-Funktion,* suhrkamp taschenbuch wissenschaft, 288 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1979), pp. 173-99.

15. Th. W. Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie,* in his *Gesammelte Schriften,* 7 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970), p. 336 f. All further references to this work appear in the text.

16. Cf. Bürger, "Die Rezeptionsproblematik in der ästhetischen Theorie Adornos," in *Vermittlung-Rezeption-Funktion,* pp. 124-33. Adorno's dispute with the positivistic sociology of art is documented in Bürger, *Seminar: Literatur- und Kunstsoziologie,* pp. 191-211.

17. In *History and Class Consciousness,* Georg Lukács developed the concept of reification in connection with Marx's commodity analysis and Max Weber's concept of rationality. Lukács interprets the commodity form in the developed capitalistic society as follows: "because of this situation [the commodity form] a man's own activity, his own labour becomes something objective and independent of him, something that controls him by virtue of an autonom alien to man" (Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciouness,* trans. Rodney Livingstone [Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1971, pp. 86-87]).

18. Herbert Marcuse, "The Affirmative Character of Culture," in Marcuse, *Negations,* trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro (Boston: Beacon, 1968), pp. 88-133. Further references to this work are included in the text.

19. On the Freudian components of Marcuse's culture theory cf. Hans Sanders, *Institution Literatur und Theorie des Romans* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1981), pp. 20-26.

20. For an example, cf. the parasitic receptional attitude that emerged with the autonomy aesthetic, which Christa Bürger referred to as the "auratization of the poetic personality," Chapter 4, "Zeitgenössische Goethe-Rezeption. Zum Verhältnis von Kunst und Lebenspraxis in der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft," in *Der Ursprung der bürgerlichen Institution Kunst im höfischen Weimar* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1977).

Chapter Two: Theory of the Avant-garde and Critical Literary Science

1. Th. W. Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie,* ed. Gretel Adorno and R. Tiedemann (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970), p. 532.

2. On the critique of historicism, see H.-G. Gadamer: "The naiveté of so-called historicism consists in the fact that it does not undertake this reflection and in trusting to its own methodological approach forgets its own historicality." *Truth and Method,* p. 266-67. See also the analysis of Ranke by H. R. Jauss, "Geschichte der Kunst und Historie," in Jauss, *Literaturgeschichte als Provokation* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970), p. 222-26. (A translation of this essay appears as chapt. 2 in H. R. Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception,* trans. T. Bahti, intro. Paul de Man [Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1982].)

3. K. Marx, *Grundrisse,* trans. Martin Nicolaus (New York: Random House 1973), p. 105.

4. The concept of the historical avant-garde movements used here applies primarily to Dadaism and early Surrealism but also and equally to the Russian avant-garde after the October revolution. Partly significant differences between them notwithstanding, a common feature of all these movements is that they do not reject individual artistic techniques and procedures of earlier art but reject that art in its entirety, thus bringing about a radical break with tradition. In their most extreme manifestations, their primary target is art as an institution such as it has developed in bourgeois society. With certain limitations that would have to be determined through concrete analyses, this is also true of Italian Futurism and German Expressionism.

Although cubism does not pursue the same intent, it calls into question the system of representation with its linear perspective that had prevailed since the Renaissance. For this reason, it is part of the historic avant-garde movements, although it does not share their basic tendency (sublation of art in the praxis of life).

The concept 'historic avant-garde movements' distinguishes these from all those neo-avant-gardiste attempts that are characteristic for Western Europe and the United States during the fifties and sixties. Although the neo-avant-gardes proclaim the same goals as the representatives of the historic avant-garde movements to some extent, the demand that art be reintegrated in the praxis of life within the existing society can no longer be seriously made after the failure of avant-gardiste intentions. If an artist sends a stove pipe to an exhibit today, he will never attain the intensity of protest of Duchamp's Ready-Mades. On the contrary, whereas Duchamp's *Urinoir* is meant to destroy art as an institution (including its specific organizational forms such as museums and exhibits), the finder of the stove pipe asks that his "work" be accepted by the museum. But this means that the avant-gardiste protest has turned into its opposite.

5. See, among others, Victor Shklovsky, "Art as Technique" (1916), in *Russian Formalist Criticism. Four Essays,* trans. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1965).

6. Reference to and comments on the historical connection between Formalism and avant-garde (more precisely, Russian Futurism) in V. Ehrlich, *Russian Formalism* ('s Gravenhage, Mouton, 1955). On Shklovsky, see Renate Lachmann, "Die 'Verfremdung' und das 'neue Sehen' bei Viktor Sklovskij," in *Poetica* 3 (1970), pp. 226-49. But K. Chvatik's interesting remark that there exists "an inner reason for the close connection between structuralism and avant-garde, a *methodological* and *theoretical* reason" (*Strukturalismus und Avantgarde* [München: Hanser, 1970], p. 21) is not developed in the book. Krystyna Pomorska, *Russian Formalist Theory and its Poetic Ambiánce* (The Hague/Paris: Mouton Slavistic Printings and Reprintings, 82, 1968) contents herself with a listing of elements Futurism and Formalism have in common.

7. On this, see the important comments by Althusser in Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar, *Reading Capital,* trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Pantheon Books, 1970), which have hardly been discussed as yet in the German Federal Republic. On the problem of the nonsynchrony of individual categories, see chapter 2, section 3, below.

8. See also H. Plessner, "Über die gesellschaftlichen Bedingungen der modernen Malerei," in Plessner, *Diesseits der Utopie. Ausgewählte Beiträge zur Kultursoziologie* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1974), pp. 107, 118.

9. Th. W. Adorno, *Versuch über Wagner* (München/Zürich: Knaur, 1964), p. 135.

10. J. Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975), pp. 25-26.

11. F. Tomberg's "Negation affirmativ. Zur ideologischen Funktion der modernen Kunst im Unterricht," in Tomberg, *Politische Ästhetik. Vorträge und Aufsätze* (Darmstadt/Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1973) may be considered a hasty attempt to create a tie-in between the development of art and that of society, for it is not backed by analyses of the subject. Tomberg constructs a connection between the "worldwide rebellion against the intellectually limited bourgeois master" whose "most characteristic symptom" is the resistance of the Vietnamese people against "northamerican imperialism," and the end of "modern art." "This means the end of the period of so-called modern art as an art of creative subjectivity and the total negation of social reality. Where it continues to go on, it must turn into farce. Art can be credible today only if it engages itself in the present revolutionary process—even though this may temporarily be at the price of a loss of form" (ibid., p. 59 f.). The end of modern art here is merely a moral postulate; it is not derived from its development. If, in the same essay, an ideological function is ascribed to commerce with modern art (since it comes out of the experience of "the unchangeability of the social structure," commerce with it promotes this illusion [ibid., p. 58]), this contradicts the claim that we have come to the end of the "period of modern art so-called." In another essay in the same volume, the thesis of the loss of function of art is affirmed, and we read this conclusion: "The beautiful world which must now be created is not the reflected world but society as it really is," (Über den gesellschaftlichen Gehalt ästhetischer Kategorien," ibid., p. 89).

12. J. Habermas, "Bewusstmachende oder rettende Kritik—die Aktualität Walter Benjamins," in S. Unseld, ed., *Zur Aktualität Walter Benjamins* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1972), p. 190.

13. Habermas defines autonomy as "independence of works of art vis-à-vis demands for their use outside art" (p. 190). I prefer to speak of social demands for its use because this avoids having the definiendum enter the definition.

14. On this, see K. Heitmann, *Der Immoralismus-Prozess gegen die französische Literatur im 19. Jahrhundert* (Bad Homburg: Athenäum, 1970).

15. The concept "formal determinacy" (*Formbestimmtheit*) does not mean here that form is a component of the statement but the determination by the institutional frame within which works of art function. The concept is thus used in the same sense as when Marx speaks of the determination of goods by the commodity form.

16. G. Mattenklott sketches a political critique of the primacy of the formal in Aestheticism: "form is the fetish which has been transplanted into the political sphere. The total indeterminacy of its contents leaves open the door to any and all ideological accretion" (*Bilderdienst. Ästhetische Opposition bei Beardsley und George* [München, 1970], p. 227). This critique contains the correct insight into the political problematic of Aestheticism. What it fails to see is that it is in Aestheticism that art in bourgeois society becomes conscious of itself. Adorno did see this: "But there is something liberating in the consciousness of self which bourgeois art finally attains of itself as bourgeois, the moment it takes itself seriously, as does the reality which it is not" ("Der Artist als Statthalter," in Adorno, *Noten zur Literatur I* [Bibliothek Suhrkamp 47], p. 188. On the problem of Aestheticism, also see H. C. Seeba, *Kritik des ästhetischen Menschen. Hermeneutik und Moral in Hofmannsthals 'Der Tor und der Tod.'* (Bad Homburg/Berlin/Zürich, 1970). For Seeba, the relevance of Aestheticism is to be found in the circumstance that "the actual 'aesthetic' principle of fictional patterns which are intended to facilitate the understanding of reality but make more difficult its direct, imageless experience leads to that loss of reality from which Claudio already suffers" (ibid., p. 180). The shortcoming of this ingenious critique of Aestheticism is that in opposing the "principle of fictional patterns" (which can surely function as an instrument of cognition of reality), it resorts to a "direct, imageless experience" that is itself rooted in Aestheticism. So that one element of Aestheticism is being criticized here by another! If one listens to authors such as Hofmannsthal, it will be impossible to understand the loss of reality as a result of an addiction to images. Rather, that loss will have to be seen as the socially conditioned cause of that addiction. In other words, Seeba's critique of Aestheticism remains largely rooted in what it proposes to criticize. Further, P. Bürger, "Zur ästhetisierenden Wirklichkeitsdarstellung bei Proust, Valéry und Sartre," in P. Bürger, ed., *Vom Ästhetizismus zum Nouveau Roman. Versuche kritischer Literaturwissenschaft* (Frankfurt, 1974).

17. On this, see W. Jens, *Statt einer Literaturgeschichte* (Pfullingen, 1962), the chapter "Der Mensch und die Dinge. Die Revolution der deutschen Prosa," pp. 109-33.

18. In W. Benjamin, "The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction," in *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), pp. 217-51. Adorno's letter to Benjamin, dated March 18, 1936 (reprinted in Th. W. Adorno, *Über Walter Benjamin,* ed. R. Tiedemann [Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970], pp. 126-34 is especially important in the critique of Benjamin's theses. R. Tiedemann, *Studien zur Philosophie Walter Benjamins* (Frankfurt: 1965), p. 87 ff., argues from a position close to Adorno's.

19. See B. Linder, "'Natur-Geschichte'—Geschichtsphilosophie und Welterfahrung in Benjamins Schriften," in *Text + Kritik,* nos. 31/32 (October 1971), pp. 41-58.

20. Here, we see Benjamin in the context of an enthusiasm for technique that was characteristic during the twenties of both liberal intellectuals (some references on this in H. Lethen, *Neue Sachlichkeit 1924-1932* [Stuttgart: Metzler, 1970], p. 58 ff.) and the revolutionary Russian avant-garde (an example is B. Arvatov, *Kunst und Produktion,* ed., trans. H. Günther and Karla Hielscher (München: Hanser, 1972).

21. This explains why Benjamin's theses were interpreted as a revolutionary theory of art by the extreme Left. See H. Lethen, "Walter Benjamins Thesen zu einer 'materialistischen Kunsttheorie,'" in Lethen, *Neue Sachlichkeit,* pp. 127-39.

22. Pulp literature is produced by teams of authors, as is well known. There is a division of labor and the work is put out according to criteria that are dictated by the tastes of groups of addressees.

23. This is also the point at which Adorno's critique of Benjamin sets in. See his essay "Über den Fetischcharakter in der Musik und die Regression des Hörens," in Adorno, *Dissonanzen. Musik in der verwalteten Welt* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck 29/29a, 1969),

pp. 9-45, which is an answer to Benjamin's essay. See also Christa Bürger, *Textanalyse als Ideologiekritik. Zur Rezeption zeitgenössischer Unterhaltungsliteratur* (Frankfurt: Athenäum, 1973), chap. I, 2.

24. B. Brecht, *The Threepenny Lawsuit* (1931), in John Willett, ed., trans., *Brecht on Theatre. The development of an aesthetic*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1966), p. 48.

25. This is the reason for the difficulties encountered by attempts to ground an aesthetic theory today in the concept of reflection. Such attempts are historically conditioned by the development of art in bourgeois society, more precisely, by the 'withering' of the mimetic function of art that sets in with the avant-garde. The attempt to provide a sociological explanation of modern painting is undertaken by A. Gehlen, *Zeit-Bilder. Zur Soziologie und Ästhetik der modernen Malerei* (Frankfurt/Bonn, 1960). But the social conditions of the development of modern painting as listed by Gehlen remain rather general. In addition to the invention of photography, he mentions the enlargement of living space and the end of the nexus between painting and the natural sciences (ibid., p. 40 ff.).

26. "With the advent of the first truly revolutionary means of reproduction, photography, simultaneously with the rise of socialism, art sensed the approaching crisis which has become evident a century later. At the time, art reacted with the doctrine of *l'art pour l'art*, that is, with a theology of art" ("The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction," p. 224).

27. See P. Francastel, who summarizes his investigations on art and technique as follows: 1. "There is no contradiction between the development of certain forms of contemporary art and the forms scientific and technical activity takes in contemporary society"; 2. "the development of the arts in the present obeys a specific esthetic developmental principle" (*Art et technique aux XIX^e et XX^e siecles* [Bibl. Meditations 16, 1964], p. 221 f.

28. See Th. W. Adorno, "George und Hofmannsthal. Zum Briefwechsel: 1891-1906 in *Prismen. Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft* (München: dtv 159, 1963), pp. 190-231; and Adorno, "Der Artist als Statthalter," in *Noten zur Literatur I*, pp. 173-93.

Chapter Three: On the Problem of the Autonomy of Art in Bourgeois Society

1. Th. W. Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie*, ed. Gretel Adorno, R. Tiedemann (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970), p. 9.

2. Th. W. Adorno, *Versuch über Wagner* (München/Zürich: Knaur, 1964), p. 88 f.

3. I am referring to the following studies: M. Müller, "Künstlerische und materielle Produktion. Zur Autonomie der Kunst in der italienischen Renaissance;" H. Bredekamp, "Autonomie und Askese;" B. Hinz, "Zur Dialektik des bürgerlichen Autonomie-Begriffs," all of which appeared in the volume *Autonomie der Kunst. Zur Genese und Kritik einer bürgerlichen Kategorie* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1972), which is quoted as 'autonomy of art' in what follows. I refer further to L. Winckler, "Entstehung und Funktion des literarischen Marktes," in Winckler, *Kulturwarenproduktion. Aufsätze zur Literatur- und Sprachsoziologie* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1973), pp. 12-75; and B. J. Warneken, "Autonomie und Indienstnahme. Zu ihrer Beziehung in der Literatur der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft," in *Rhetorik, Ästhetik, Ideologie. Aspekte einer kritischen Kulturwissenschaft* (Stuttgart, 1973), pp. 79-115.

4. In the twenties, the Russian avant-gardiste B. Arvatov had already given a similar interpretation of bourgeois art: "While the entire technique of capitalist society is based on the highest and most recent achievements and represents a technique of mass production (industry, radio, transport, newspapers, scientific laboratory etc.)—bourgeois art has remained handicraft in principle and has for that reason been pushed out of the general social praxis of mankind and into isolation, into the sphere of pure esthetics. . . . The solitary master is the only type of artist in capitalist society, the type of the specialist of 'pure' art who works outside of a directly utilitarian praxis because that praxis is based on the technique of machines. This is the cause of the illusion that art is an end in itself, and it is here that all of its bourgeois fetishism originates," H. Günther and Karla Hielscher, ed., trans., *Kunst und Produktion* [München: Hanser, 1972], p. 11 f.).

5. W. Krauss, "Über die Träger der klassischen Gesinnung im 17. Jahrhundert," in Krauss, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Literatur und Sprachwissenschaft* (Frankfurt, 1949), pp. 321-38. The essay is based on and continues the significant study of the sociology of the public by Erich Auerbach, "La cour et la ville," in Auerbach, *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature* (New York: Meridian Books, 1959; reprint forthcoming from Univ. of Minnesota Press).

6. A. Hauser, *The Social History of Art*, vol. II (New York: Vintage Books, n.d.), p. 42. Quoted as Hauser in what follows.

7. W. Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, p. 256.

8. An art that is an integral part of ritual cannot be harnessed because it does not exist as an independent sphere. Here, the work of art *is* part of the ritual. Only an art that has become (relatively) autonomous can be harnessed. The autonomy of art is thus simultaneously the precondition for later heteronomy. Commodity aesthetics presupposes an autonomous art.

9. H. Kuhn, "Ästhetik," in *Das Fischer Lexikon. Literatur 2/1*, ed. W.-H. Friedrich, W. Killy (Frankfurt, 1965), pp. 52, 53.

10. Ibid.

11. I. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952).

12. This element is considerably more important in Kant's argument than is the anti-feudal element that Warneken demonstrated in Kant's comment that table music is merely pleasant but cannot claim to be beautiful (Critique, § 44), (*Autonomie und Indienstnahme*, p. 85).

13. Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, trans. Reginald Snell (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1965), pp. 35-36.

14. On this, see the recent essay by R. Warning, "Ritus, Mythos und geistliches Spiel," in *Terror und Spiel. Probleme der Mythenrezeption*, ed. Fuhrmann (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1971), pp. 211-39.

15. Hegel already referred to the novel as "the modern middle-class epic" (*Ästhetik*, ed. F. Bassenge, 2 vols. [Berlin/Weimar, 1965], vol. II, p. 452.) [In his translation of the *Aesthetics*, T. M. Knox renders this passage as follows: "But it is quite different with romance, the modern popular epic" (vol. II, p. 1092), but this seems wrong. Translator's note.]

16. On the problem of the false sublation of art in the praxis of life, see J. Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit. Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* (Neuwied/Berlin, 1968), § 18, p. 176 ff.

17. See P. Bürger, "Funktion und Bedeutung des *orgueil* bei Paul Valéry," in *Romanistisches Jahrbuch 16* (1965), pp. 149-68.

18. Examples of neo-avant-gardiste paintings and sculptures to be found in the catalog of the exhibit *Sammlung Cremer. Europäische Avantgarde 1950-1970*, ed. G. Adriani (Tübingen, 1973). See also chapter 3, 1 below on the problem of the Neo-avant-garde.

19. T. Tzara, "Pour faire un Poème dadaiste," in Tzara, *Lampisteries précédées des sept manifestes dada* (place of publication not given, 1963), p. 64. A. Breton, "Manifeste du surréalisme" (1924), in Breton, *Manifestes du surréalisme* (Paris: Coll. Idées 23, 1963), p. 42 f.

20. On the Surrealists' conception of groups and the collective experiences they sought

and partially realized, see Elisabeth Lenk, *Der springende Narziss. André Breton's poetischer Materialismus* (München, 1971), p. 57 ff., 73 f.

21. One would have to investigate to what extent, after the October revolution, the Russian avant-gardistes succeeded to a degree, because social conditions had changed, in realizing their intent to reintegrate art in the praxis of life. Both B. Arvatov and S. Tretjakov turn the concept of art as developed in bourgeois society around and define art quite straightforwardly as socially useful activity: "The pleasure of transforming the raw material into a particular, socially useful form, connected to the skill and the intensive search for the suitable form—those are the things the slogan 'art for all' should mean." (S. Tretjakov, "Die Kunst in der Revolution and die Revolution in der Kunst," in Tretjakov, *Die Arbeit des Schriftstellers*, ed. H. Boehncke (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1971), p. 13. "Basing himself on the technique which is common to all spheres of life, the artist is imbued with the idea of suitability. It is not by subjective taste that he will allow himself to be guided as he works on his material but by the objective tasks of production" (B. Arvatov, "Die Kunst im System der proletarischen Kultur," in Arvatov, *Kunst und Produktion*, p. 15). With the theory of the avant-garde as a point of departure, and with concrete investigations as guide, one should also discuss the problem of the extent (and of the kinds of consequences for the artistic subjects) to which art as an institution occupies a place in the society of the socialist countries that differs from its place in bourgeois society.

22. See Christa Bürger, *Textanalyse als Ideologiekritik. Zur Rezeption zeitgenössischer Unterhaltungsliteratur* (Frankfurt: Athenäum, 1973).

23. See W. F. Haug, *Kritik der Warenästhetik* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1971).

Chapter Four: The Avant-Gardiste Work of Art

1. R. Bubner, "Über einige Bedingungen gegenwärtiger Ästhetik," in *Neue Hefte für Philosophie*, number 5 (1973), p. 49.

2. The point of departure of Kant's aesthetics is not the definition of the work of art but that of the aesthetic judgment. But for such a theory, the category 'work' is not central; on the contrary, Kant can also include in his reflections what is beautiful in nature, which, not having been produced by man, does not have the character of work.

3. Th. W. Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music* (New York: Continuum, 1973), p. 30.

4. Th. W. Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970), p. 235. Abbreviated as *AT*.

5. See the exhibit *Metamorphosis of the Thing: Art and Anti-art, 1910-1970*, Brussels 1971, which was shown in Brussels and elsewhere.

6. See M. Damus, *Funktionen der bildenden Kunst im Spätkapitalismus. Untersucht anhand der 'avantgardistischen' Kunst der sechziger Jahre* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1973). The author attempts to bring out the affirmative function of neo-avant-gardiste art. Example: "Pop art . . . which seems more intimately connected with American metropolitan life than any other earlier art in the choice of its objects, its colors and its execution advertises comics, filmstars, electrical chairs, bathrooms, autos and automobile accidents, tools and comestibles of all kinds as it were, it advertises for advertising in this exhibit" (p. 76 ff.). But since Damus does not have available to him a concept of the historical avant-garde movements, he tends to neglect the divergence between Dadaism and Surrealism on the one hand, and that between those two movements and the neo-avant-gardiste art of the sixties on the other.

7. An example of this: Referring explicitly to Breton's demand that poetry should be put into practice, Gisela Dischner summarizes the intentions of concrete poetry as follows: "But the concrete work of art moves toward this utopian state, its sublation in concrete reality" ("Konkrete Kunst und Gesellschaft," in *Konkrete Poesie. Text + Kritik*, no. 25 (January 1970), p. 41.

8. The significance here ascribed to the avant-garde movements is certainly not undisputed. In Hugo Friedrich's *Die Struktur der modernen Lyrik*, which certainly claims to be a theory of modern poetry, Dadaism is not treated at all. It is only in the second, enlarged edition that we find a chronological table, which includes this comment: "1916. Dadaism is founded in Zürich." (*Die Struktur der modernen Lyrik. Von der Mitte des neunzehnten bis zur Mitte des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts*, 2nd ed. [Hamburg: rowohlts deutsche enzyklopädie 25/26/26a, 1968], p. 288.) This is what the reader is told about Surrealism: "The Surrealists have interest only because of their programs which resort to pseudoscientific theories to confirm a poetic procedure that came in with Rimbaud. The conviction that in the chaos of the unconscious, man can infinitely enlarge his experiences; the conviction that in the production of a 'super-reality,' the madman shows no less genius than the poet; the concept of poetry as a formless dictation from the unconscious: these are some of the items of this program. It confuses vomiting—indeed, artificially induced vomiting—with creation. No first-rate poetry came out of it. Lyric poets of superior quality who are counted among the Surrealists such as Aragon or Eluard hardly owe their poetry to that program but to the general stylistic constraint which, since Rimbaud, has made lyric poetry the language of the alogical" (ibid., p. 192 f.). It must be said first of all that the perspective of the present study is not that of Friedrich's. I am concerned with understanding the important historic break in the development of the phenomenon 'art' in bourgeois society; what Friedrich cares about is "poetry of quality." The following point is more important: The thesis concerning the structural unity of poetry from Baudelaire to Benn cannot be discussed when one adopts Friedrich's concept of structure, because that concept is itself problematic. What is involved here is not the term 'structure' (in the passage quoted above, Friedrich speaks of "stylistic constraint," for example), nor the fact that his use of the term differs from its use in structuralism, which became known in Germany only subsequently. What *is* involved is the scholarly or scientific method marked by Friedrich's use of the concept 'structure' to refer to wholly heterogenous phenomena: poetic techniques (the 'technique of focusing' [*Einblendungstechnik*]), themes (isolation and fear, for example), and poetological theorems of the poets (language magic, for example). The unity of these different spheres is posited with the help of the concept of structure. But one can speak of structure only where categories of the same order are brought together—which leaves the question whether the artistic procedures and techniques of the avant-garde were already fully developed in Rimbaud. This question touches on the problem of 'precursors.' Because historical accounts have a narrative structure, precursors can always only be identified after the fact. Only after certain (not all) techniques used by Rimbaud gained general currency did he become recognizable as a 'precursor' of the avant-garde. In other words, it is only through the avant-garde that Rimbaud achieved the significance that today is justly ascribed to him. (Friedrich's book is available in the English translation of Joachim Neugrosche as *The Structure of Modern Poetry* [Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1974].)

9. By Modernism, Adorno means art since Baudelaire. The concept thus takes in what directly preceded the avant-garde movements, those movements themselves, and the neo-avant-garde. Whereas I seek to lay hold of the historical avant-garde movements as a historically definable phenomenon, Adorno's point of departure is modern art as the only legitimate art of our time. By constructing a history of the concept 'modern' and its opposites, H. R. Jauss has sketched a history of the experience of epochal transition from late antiquity to Baudelaire: "Literarische Tradition und gegenwärtiges Bewusstsein der Modernität," in Jauss, *Literaturgeschichte als Provokation* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970), pp. 11-66.

10. Th. W. Adorno, "Was bedeutet Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit," in Adorno, *Erziehung zur Mündigkeit*, ed. G. Kadelbach (Frankfurt, 1970), p. 13.

11. On *nouveauté* in tragicomedy, see P. Bürger, *Die frühen Komödien Pierre Corneilles und das französische Theater um 1630. Eine wirkungsästhetische Analyse* (Frankfurt: 1971), pp. 48-56.

12. See J. Tynianov, *Die literarischen Kunstmittel und die Evolution in der Literatur* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1967), p. 7-60. For this specific reference, see especially p. 21.

13. Th. W. Adorno, "Thesen über Tradition," in Adorno, *Ohne Leitbilder. Parva Aesthetica* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1967), p. 33.

14. In contrast to the constant change of individual *means* of representation, which marks the development of art, the change of the *system* of representation (even where it extends over a longer period) is a historically decisive event. P. Francastel has studied such a change of the system of representation (*Etudes de sociologie de l'art* [Paris: Bibl. Médiations 74, 1970]). During the course of the fifteenth century, a representational system developed in painting characterized by linear perspective and the uniform organization of the space of the painting. Whereas in medieval painting, differences in the sizes of figures referred to their varying *importance*, they indicate, since the Renaissance, the position of the figures in a space imagined according to the principles of Euclidean geometry. This representational system, which is only being schematically characterized here, has dominated occidental art for five hundred years. Early in the twentieth century, it loses its obligatory validity. Already in Cézanne, linear perspective no longer has the significance it still had for the Impressionists, who clung to it although they dissolved shapes and forms. The universal validity of the traditional system of representation had been broken.

15. It is logical that conscious neo-avant-gardistes should seek to ground the claim they make in connection with their production by arguments that closely follow Adorno's. A representative of concrete poetry, Chris Bezzel, writes as follows: "a revolutionary writer is not one who invents semantic-poetic sentences which have as their content and aim the necessary revolution but one who uses poetic means to revolutionize poetry itself as the model of the revolution . . . measured by the degree of late-bourgeois alienation, the created alienation of art from repressive reality is a great propulsive force. It is dialectical for it unstoppably widens the gap between esthetic and real alienation" ("dichtung und revolution," in *Konkrete Poesie. Text + Kritik*, no. 25 [January 1970], p. 35 f.). Adorno himself is undoubtedly more skeptical as regards "the great propulsive force" of neo-avant-gardiste art. In the *Ästhetische Theorie*, some passages even admit the total ambivalence of such works and thereby simultaneously make possible their critique.

16. E. Köhler, *Der literarische Zufall, das Mögliche und die Notwendigkeit* (München, 1973), chap. III; this quote is on p. 81.

17. On the significance of the 'set' as a production-aesthetic category, see P. Bürger, *Der französische Surrealismus. Studien zum Problem der avant-gardistischen Literatur* (Frankfurt, 1971), p. 154 ff. On what follows, see the analysis there of Aragon's *Paysan de Paris*.

18. Th. W. Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music*, p. 66.

19. W. Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: NLB, 1977). To be referred to as *Origin* in what follows.

20. As an instrument in the interpretation of Breton's work, I used Benjamin's concept of allegory, in *Der französische Surrealismus*, chap. XI, p. 174 ff. To my knowledge, G. Lukács was the first to point out that Benjamin's concept of allegory is applicable to avant-gardiste works ("The Ideology of Modernism," in Lukács, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism* (London: Merlin Press, 1962), pp. 40-43. It is not just the reference to Expressionism in the introduction to *Origin* that shows that Benjamin's study derived from the interest

in understanding the literature of his own time. The matter has been explicitly testified to by Asja Lacis: "He also said that his study was not just academic research but had a direct connection with topical problems of contemporary literature. He emphasized expressly that in his study, he had referred to the drama of the Baroque as a phenomenon that was analogous to Expressionism. That is the reason, he said, that I have treated the artistic problematic of allegory, emblems and ritual at such length" (Hildegard Brenner, ed., *Revolutionäre im Beruf* [München, 1971], p. 44.)

21. On the problem of the "semanticizing of literary procedures," see H. Günther, "Funktionsanalyse der Literatur," in J. Kolbe, ed., *Neue Ansichten einer künftigen Germanistik*, (München: Hanser, 1973), p. 179 ff.

22. The behavior of the Surrealist self as Aragon portrays it in the *Paysan de Paris* (1926) is governed by the refusal to submit to the constraints of the social order. The loss of practical possibilities of action that is caused by the lack of a social position creates a vacuum, ennui. From the Surrealist perspective, ennui is not viewed negatively but rather as the decisive condition for that transformation of everyday reality which is what the Surrealists are after.

23. It is regrettable that Gisela Steinwachs's study (*Mythologie des Surrealismus oder die Rückverwandlung von Kultur in Natur* [Neuwied/Berlin: Luchterhand, 1971], p. 71 ff.), which correctly identifies the phenomenon, does not have at its command descriptive categories that would make possible its precise understanding.

24. G. Lukács, "Es geht um den Realismus," F. J. Raddatz, ed., in *Marxismus und Literatur. Eine Dokumentation* (Reinbek bei Hamburg, 1969), vol. II, p. 69 f.

25. On the problem of montage in film, see W. Pudowkin, "Über die Montage," in V. K. Witte, ed., *Theorie des Kinos* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1972), pp. 113-30; and Sergei M. Eisenstein, "Dialektische Theorie des Films," in D. Prokop, ed., *Materialien zur Theorie des Films. Ästhetik, Soziologie, Politik*, (München, 1971), pp. 65-81. See Eisenstein's "Montage of Attractions" in Jay Leyda, trans., ed., *The Film Sense* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1947), pp. 230-33, and "A Dialectic Approach to Film Form" in Sergei Eisenstein, *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*, ed., trans. Jay Leyda (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1949), pp. 45-63.

26. See, for example, Picasso's *Un Violon* (1913), Kunstmuseum, Berne, Switzerland.

27. *John Heartfield Dokumentation*, ed. by the Arbeitsgruppe Heartfield (Berlin: Neue Gesellschaft für bildende Kunst, 1969/70), pp. 43 and 31.

28. J. Wissmann, who gives a useful overview of the use of collage in modern painting, describes the effect of cubist collage in these terms: the elements that "signal reality" take on the task of "making readable for a viewer those pictorial signs that have become abstract." The aim of this technique is not illusionism in the traditional sense. "What is achieved is an alienation which plays in a highly nuanced form with the antithesis between art and reality," where the contradictions between what is painted and what is real "are left to the viewer to resolve" ("Collagen oder die Integration von Realität im Kunstwerk," in *Immanente Ästhetik. Ästhetische Reflexion* [München: Fink, 1966], p. 333 f.). The point of view from which collage is considered here is that of "immanent aesthetics;" the problem is that of the "integration of reality in the work of art." Barely one page of this lengthy essay is devoted to Hausmann's and Heartfield's photo montages. But is is precisely the work of these men that would have provided an occasion to test the correctness of the view that "an integration of reality in the work of art" occurs in collage, or whether it is not rather the case that the collage principle strongly resists such integration, and that such resistance makes possible a new type of engaged art. In this connection, see S. Eisenstein's reflections:

Instead of a static "reflection" of an event with all possibilities for activity within the limits of the event's logical action, we advance to a new plane – free montage of arbitrarily selected, independent (within the given composition and the subject links that hold the influencing actions together) attractions – all from the stand of establishing certain final thematic effects – this is montage of attractions. ("The Montage of Attractions," in *The Film Sense*, p. 232).

See also Karla Hielscher, "S. M. Eisensteins Theaterarbeit beim Moskauer Proletkult (1921-1924)," in *Ästhetik und Kommunikation*, no. 13 (December 1973), p. 68 ff.

29. See Herta Wescher, *Die Collage. Geschichte eines künstlerischen Ausdrucksmittels* (Köln, 1968), p. 22, which explains Braque's introduction of collage by his desire "to save himself the laborious process of painting." A short overview of the development of collage, which correctly insists on the significance of the technique is provided by E. Roters, "Die historische Entwicklung der Collage in der bildenden Kunst," in *Prinzip Collage* (Neuwied/Berlin, 1968), pp. 15-41.

30. On the connection between Adorno's aesthetic theory and the philosophy of history developed in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Herder & Herder, 1972), see Th. Baumeister/J. Kulenkampff, "Geschichtsphilosophie und philosophische Ästhetik. Zu Adornos 'Ästhetischer Theorie,'" in *Neue Heft für Philosophie* no. 5 (1973), pp. 74-104.

31. E. Bloch, *Erbschaft dieser Zeit*. Erweiterte Ausgabe: Gesamtausgabe, 4. (Frankfurt, 1962), pp. 221-28.

32. W. Iser has written on montage in modern lyric poetry: "Image und Montage. Zur Bildkonzeption in der imagistischen Lyrik und in T. S. Eliots Waste Land," in *Immanente Ästhetik und ästhetische Reflexion* (München: Fink, 1966), pp. 361-93. Starting from a definition of the poetic image as an "illusionary foreshortening of reality" (to apperception, the image only gives one individual element of the object), Iser defines montage as the "side by side" (overlapping) of images that refer to an identical object, and describes their effect as follows: "the montage of images destroys the illusionary finiteness of 'images' and does away with the confusion between genuine phenomena and the form of their apperception. That reality cannot be depicted is shown by the overlapping (or intersecting) images in the form of an abundance of extremely bizarre views which, precisely because of their individual character, are capable of being produced ad infinitum" (p. 393). That reality cannot be pictured or represented is not the result of an interpretation here; it is assumed to be a fact that montage reveals. Instead of inquiring why it is that reality *appears* as something that cannot be pictured, the fact that it can not becomes an ultimate certainty for the interpreter. This places Iser at the diametric opposite of the theory of reflection (or mimesis). Even in the images of traditional lyric poetry, he discovers the realist illusion ("the confusion of genuine phenomena with the form of their apperception").

33. The application of the categories of paradigm and syntagm to Breton's *Nadja* is the most persuasive part of Gisela Steinwachs's study (*Mythologie des Surrealismus*). Its shortcoming is that in many instances, she contents herself with the search for analogies between surrealist motifs and various structuralist approaches whose cognitive value remains problematical.

34. On the hermeneutic circle, see H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 235 ff. How the dialectic of whole and parts in the interpretation of works can degenerate into a schema "which implements time and again the unrestricted authority of the whole of the individual element," is shown by M. Warnke, "Weltanschauliche Motive in der kunstgeschichtlichen Populärliteratur," in Warnke, ed., *Das Kunstwerk zwischen Wissenschaft und Weltanschauung* (Gütersloh, 1970), p. 80 ff.

35. On the problem of shock in Modernism, see the stimulating comments by W. Benjamin, though their explanatory value would still have to be tested: Über einige Motive bei Baudelaire," In *Illuminations*, p. 160 ff. In English: "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, introd. Hannah Arendt (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World, Inc., 1968; paperback reprint, Schocken Books, 1969), pp. 155-200.

36. See the consistently lively account by R. Hausmann, valuable especially because of the many reprints of documents it contains: K. Riha, G. Kämpf, ed., *Am Anfang war Dada* (Steinbach/Giessen, 1972).

37. Brecht's estrangement theory is the most consistent attempt to overcome what is nonspecific in the effect of shock and to deal with this problem dialectically, as it were.

38. See P. Bürger, "Zur Methode. Notizen zu einer dialektischen Literaturwissenschaft," in Bürger, *Studien zur französischen Frühaufklärung* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1972), pp. 7-21, and P. Bürger, "Benjamin's 'rettende Kritik.' Vorüberlegungen zum Entwurf einer Kritischen Hermeneutik," *Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift* N.F. 23 (1973), pp. 198-210. I propose to deal with the theoretical problems that a synthesis of formalism and hermeneutics would pose within the framework of a critique of methods.

Chapter Five: Avant-Garde and Engagement

1. See Georg Lukács, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism* (London: Merlin Press, 1962).

2. See Th. W. Adorno, "Erpresste Versöhnung. Zu Georg Lukács: 'Wider den missverstandenen Realismus,'" in Adorno, *Noten zur Literatur II* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1963), pp. 152-87.

3. G. W. F. Hegel, *Esthetics*, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), vol. I, p. 517.

4. See also the 'concluding comment' in this book.

5. The two elements of Lukács's theory of the avant-garde, i.e., historical necessity of the genesis of avant-gardiste art and its rejection on aesthetic grounds, are also recognizable in the essay, "Narrate or Describe," in Arthur D. Kahn, ed., trans., *Writer and Critic and other Essays* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1970), pp. 110-48. Lukács contrasts the description, which is functionally subordinate to the whole in Balzac, and its treatment in Flaubert and Zola, where it exists for its own sake. He refers to this as "the product of a social development," but also criticizes it: "necessity can also be the necessity for the artistically false, distorted, and corrupt."

6. See G. Lukács, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism* (London, 1962).

7. It may seem surprising that Adorno should endorse the concept of technical progress in art, considering that together with Horkheimer (in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* [Herder & Herder, 1972]), he showed the radical difficulties in technical progress: although technical progress opens up the possibility of an existence more worthy of man, that is by no means its inevitable result. The diverse attitude toward industrial technique on the one hand, and artistic technique on the other is owing to Adorno's separation of the two. See B. Lindner, "Brecht/Benjamin/Adorno. Über Veränderungen der Kunstproduktion im wissenschaftlich-technischen Zeitalter," in H. L. Arnold, ed., *Bertold Brecht I*, (München: Sonderband der Reihe *Text + Kritik*, 1972), pp. 14-36. But one certainly cannot reproach Critical Theory with identifying "the economic production relations with the technical structure of the productive forces" (Lindner, p. 27). Critical Theory reflects the historical experience that the unfolding of the productive forces does not necessarily break up the production relations, that, on the contrary, it may perfectly well make available the means for the control of man. "The signature of the age is the preponderance of production relations over the forces of production which have long since made a mockery of them" (Th. W. Adorno, "Einleitungsvortrag zum 16. deutschen Soziologentag," in Th. W. Adorno, ed., *Verband-*

lungen des 16. deutschen Soziologentages vom 8. bis 11. April 1968 in Frankfurt. Spätkapitalismus oder Industriegesellschaft?, (Stuttgart, 1969), p. 20.

8. "Art finds itself within reality, has its functions in reality, and entertains a relationship of manifold mediation to it. That does not change the fact that as art, in its very concept, it is the antithesis of what is the case" (Th. W. Adorno, "Erpresste Versöhnung," in *Noten II*, p. 163.) This sentence defines with precision the distance separating Adorno from the most radical aims of the European avant-garde movements: the clinging to the autonomy of art.

9. On functional analysis, see chapter one of this volume.

10. Th. W. Adorno, "Selbstanzeige" for *Versuch über Wagner* (1952), reprinted in *Die Zeit*, 9 (Oct. 1964), p. 23.

11. In the *Ästhetische Theorie*, Adorno attempted an appropriate judgment on and evaluation of Brecht. But that does not change the fact that Adorno's theory leaves no room for a writer such as Brecht.

12. See B. Brecht, "Emphasis on Sport," in John Willett, ed., trans., *Brecht on Theatre. The development of an aesthetic* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1966), p. 48.

13. See B. Brecht, "Radiotheorie," in Brecht, *Schriften zur Literatur und Kunst*, vol. I (Berlin/Weimar, 1966), pp. 125-47; W. Benjamin, "The Author as Producer," in *Walter Benjamin, Reflections*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), and W. Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken, 1969).

14. This occurs in H. M. Enzensberger, "Baukasten zu einer Theorie der Medien," in *Kursbuch*, no. 20 (1970), pp. 159-86. Reprinted in Enzensberger, *Palaver* (Frankfurt/Main, 1974).

15. Seen from this perspective, it would seem that my interpretation of the opening pages of Aragon's *Paysan de Paris* should be reconsidered. The comment early in the analysis that description in the *Paysan* "is no longer functionally related to something else . . . but the subject of the story" (P. Bürger, *Der französische Surrealismus*, p. 104) is not adequately taken into account when the documentation relating to the misery of the expropriated merchants is evaluated (p. 109). The avant-gardiste work is no longer centered on a principle but can bring divergent approaches at one and the same time. Social condemnation and a sense of the end of things are found side by side without its being admissible to maintain that a given element is the dominant one, as is the case in the organic work.

16. The nonorganic work makes it possible to rephrase the question concerning the possibility of engagement. The criticism that has often been leveled against engaged art did not recognize this. It still treats the problem as if it were a question of determining the place of political contents in the organic work. In other words: Criticism has ignored the change in the problem due to the historical avant-garde movements.

17. B. Brecht, *Arbeitsjournal*, ed. W. Hecht (Frankfurt, 1973), p. 140; entry of August 3, 1940.

18. P. Szondi, "Hegels Lehre von der Dichtung," in Szondi, *Poetik und Geschichtsphilosophie* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1974), p. 305.

19. G. W. Hegel, *Esthetics*, vol. I, p. 596.

20. If, for Greece, "the immediate coalescence of the individual with the universality of politics" (*Esthetics*, vol. I, p. 510) is characteristic, "the need for a higher freedom of the subject in himself" (*Esthetics*, vol. I, p. 510) awakens for the first time with Socrates, a need that subsequently became dominant in Christianity. Compare the section devoted to Socrates in Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*.

21. See W. Oelmüller, *Die unbefriedigte Aufklärung. Beiträge zu einer Theorie der Moderne von Lessing, Kant und Hegel* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1969), pp. 240-64.

22. See Th. W. Adorno, Einleitungsvortrag zum 16. deutschen Soziologentag, p. 17.

Postscript to the Second German Edition

1. See especially W. M. Lüdke, ed., *'Theorie der Avantgarde.' Antworten auf Peter Bürgers Bestimmung von Kunst und bürgerlicher Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt: edition suhrkamp, 1976). Abbreviated as *Antworten*.

2. That this constellation of problems is not confined to the German Federal Republic but is at least Western European in scope can be gathered from a number of French studies that treat similar problems and tend partly toward comparable solutions. See M. Le Bot, *Peinture et machinisme* (Paris, 1973); M. Dufrenne, *Art et Politique* (Paris: Union générale d'éditions, 1974); J. Dubois, *L'Institution de la Littérature* (Brussels, 1978).

3. See Bürger, *Vermittlung-Rezeption-Funktion. Ästhetische Theorie und Methodologie der Literaturwissenschaft*, especially the notes on the introduction, which is included as the introduction to this book. The book attempts to discuss methodological problems in literary scholarship within the frame of the position outlined in the present study.

4. H. Sanders, *Institution Literatur und Theorie des Romans*, Diss. Bremen 1977, p. 16 (appeared in 1982 at Suhrkamp). See also H. U. Gumbrecht's comment that "the author has gone somewhat too far in isolating the history of art from the development of other social systems" (*Poetica* 7 [1975], p. 229).

5. See J. Kraft, *Grundprobleme der Literaturdidaktik* (Heidelberg: UTB 714, 1977), p. 173 ff.

6. H. Krauss, "Die Zurücknahme des Autonomiestatus der Literatur im Frankreich der vierziger Jahre," in R. Kloepfer, ed., *Bildung und Ausbildung in der Romania*, vol. 1 (München, 1979).

7. G. Goebel (Hannover), "'Literatur' und Aufklärung," presentation in the section "Literatur-und Gesellschaftswissenschaften" at the *Romanistentag*, October 1979, in Saarbrücken (typescript p. 4).

8. P. Bourdieu also insists on the connection between autonomy status and autonomy doctrine when he points out that the market was needed to create the precondition for the doctrine of the autonomy of art to come into existence ("Le Marché des bien symboliques," in *L'Année sociologique* 22 [1971/72] pp. 49-126; here, p. 52 f.

9. E. Zola, *Le Roman expérimental* (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1971), p. 191.

10. See my contribution and that of H. Sanders in *Naturalismus und Ästhetizismus* (Hefte für kritische Literaturwissenschaft, I [Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1979]).

11. It can be shown that beginning in 1840, the concept of an autonomous art marked the conception of literature as that subject was taught in the *Gymnasium*. (see Ch. Bürger, "Die Dichotomie von 'höherer' und 'volkstümlicher' Bildung," in *Germanistik und Deutschunterricht. Zur Einheit von Fachwissenschaft und Fachdidaktik*, ed. R. Schäfer [München: Fink, 1979], pp. 74-102).

12. See also J. Schulte-Sasse, ed., *Aufklärung und literarische Öffentlichkeit* (Hefte für kritische Literaturwissenschaft, 2) [Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1980]).

13. B. Lindner, "Autonomisierung der Literaturwissenschaft als Kunst, klassisches Werkmodell und auktoriale Schreibweise," in *Jahrbuch der Jean-Paul-Gesellschaft* 1975, pp. 85-107; here: p. 89. Ibid., p. 88, the quote from a letter Schiller wrote to the Herzog von Augustenburg on July 13, 1793.

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