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The Death and Life of the Avant-Garde: Or, Modernism and Biopolitics

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When Peter Bürger declared it "historical" a generation ago, the avant-garde's potential as anything more than a periodizing term was thrown into question. Subsequent criticism has tended to prove Bürger right: the trajectory suggested in his *Theory of the Avant-Garde* has been largely accepted, and the story of the twentieth-century avant-gardes is invariably a story of decline, from revolutionary movements to simulacra, from *épater le bourgeois* to advertising technique, from torching museums to being featured exhibitions in them. Consensus has settled on an interpretation that has the avant-garde crashing on the reef of postmodernism sometime around 1972.¹ Outside of historicist modernism studies, the avant-garde's treatment has been even less kind. In social and political writing since at least the Situationists in France, its fraternal twin "vanguardism" has become a leftist code word for an outdated strategy, no longer the necessary ideological and intellectual preparation for social transformation, but rather an anti-democratic elitism and crypto-totalitarianism.² To bring the story right up to date, today any putatively transgressive artistic practice falls flat against, in no particular order, intellectual relativism, a culture of permissiveness, and state-supported, market-segmented cultural difference — the avant-garde's ancient target of a stable bourgeois moral order long since displaced by the universal imperative to "Enjoy!"³

Any discussion of avant-gardes today is immediately marked as belated, gesturing back to a period when the term named a viable desire to move beyond the limits of liberal capitalism.⁴ What I want to suggest below is an alternate genealogy of avant-gardism in the twentieth century that might avoid that nostalgia. Alain Badiou has recently argued that the avant-garde has a double life today: "More or less the whole of twentieth-century art has laid claim to an avant-garde function. Yet today the term is viewed as obsolete, even derogatory. This suggests we are in the presence of a major symptom."⁵ The critical narrative reconstructed above, then, can't be the final word if avant-gardist discourses and objects have been proliferating, yet critical discourses

continue to disavow them. If the avant-garde is indeed a failed political concept, what does it say that many of its forms, rhetorics, and basic gestures survive beyond its expiry date, especially in today's anti-capitalist and alter-globalization movements? Relatedly, if one principal reason that the avant-garde has passed out of favor is a postcolonial critique that sees, with good reason, eurocentrism and false universalism at the heart of the concept, then what can contemporary critical art take from that critique? This strikes me as especially important today, in the context of a new series of transversal social movements, from Cairo to Madrid to New York and beyond, which ground themselves in direct democratic principles that eschew past vanguardisms on the left, or really any organization of political struggle around the categories of nation and party. At the same time, these movements retain central avant-gardist notions of collective authorship, the struggle of the commons against property, and the desire to build new forms of life and social reproduction outside of capitalism's governmental and institutional order. The first conjunction I want to analyze carefully, then, is the avant-garde's link to vanguardism and political centralization: necessary, or historical?

The genealogy I sketch below understands the tie between avant-gardes and political vanguardism as historical and contingent, which makes the history of critical art in the twentieth century, and the history of its criticism, more difficult to square with Bürger's thesis. By eliminating the distance between art and life, avant-gardes wanted to revolutionize both. Bürger's *Theory* insists that this narrative ends with the triumph of a culture industry that effectively accomplishes the avant-gardist "art into life" program, but within a capitalist framework and as a constantly proliferating source of economic value. By reinterpreting the historical avant-gardes' initial concept of "life," I want to reconsider this trajectory. I have in mind Jacques Rancière's remarks on the early-twentieth-century avant-gardes' pursuit of new "forms of life" with their anti-representational strategies. Rancière's point applies to a broader history of aesthetic regimes, but he points out that modernist avant-gardes have the virtue of foregrounding the closures of the existing "distribution of the sensible," and so they point not to an inevitable descent into commodification and totalitarianism but "the invention of sensible forms and material structures for a life to come."⁶ In Italian Futurism, I argue, we can see a specific instance of the tension between vanguardism and the invention of new sensible forms: their politicization of life was designed as an alternative criterion of value to liberal capitalism's regime of accumulation. It was short-lived, however, and so I want to retrace the itinerary of avant-gardism past the Futurists and through the later twentieth century. I ask how the avant-gardes' eventual appropriation by capital was not the negation or perversion of a state-revolutionary project, but a contingent and labile value struggle that wanted to find new modes of aesthetic valuation, and became attached to larger revolutionary projects at specific conjunctures. From this perspective, the concept of the avant-garde indicates a political struggle over life and reproduction that is very

much still with us.

Avant-Garde, Value, and the Politics of Life

Bürger's basic point, which I want to pause over for a moment, is that the historical avant-gardes threw into question how bourgeois society values art. This is important to recall if we want to broaden our conception of how a critique of aesthetic autonomy, which meant to undermine aesthetic taste and the institutions that supported it, became allied to other, larger political projects. Even in a movement like Italian Futurism, which has long been a boundary case in discussions of twentieth-century avant-gardes (for reasons I will discuss below), the first target was the question of aesthetic value.⁷

Well before the avant-garde's apparent death, in the middle of its first full manifestation of the twentieth century, Futurists Bruno Corradini and Emilio Settemelli offer a new vision of what art can be, requiring a different measure of the value of artworks. In their 1914 manifesto "Weights, Measures and Prices of Artistic Genius," the authors argue firmly against art's autonomy from other spheres of productive activity:

The artist of genius has been and is still today a social outcast. Now genius has a social, economic and financial value. [...] The Artist will finally find his place in life, along with the butcher and the tyre-manufacturer, the grave-digger and the speculator, the engineer and the farmer. This is the basis of a new universal financial organization through which a whole series of activities, formidable in their development, completeness and importance, which have remained up to the present time in the grip of barbarism, will be fitted into modern civilization.⁸

In order to integrate artists more fully into the process of production, the manifesto's authors invent a metric for the calculation of aesthetic value. A new appraiser, or "measurer," will evaluate a work's "genius" by essentially calculating its eccentricity. Outlandish analogies and juxtapositions are evidence of the amount of neurological energy, or genius, that went into a piece's production, as well as how much energy it will effect in its readers: "The quantity of cerebral energy necessary to produce a work is directly proportional to the resistance which separates the elements before its action is felt and to the cohesion which unites them afterwards."⁹ This criterion is quite obviously self-serving, as it favors precisely the kinds of wild recombinations of media and objects that Futurism had made central to its style. No small irony, then, in their claim that this was a defense against arbitrariness and charlatanism in art markets: "We therefore ask the state to create a body of law for the purpose of guarding and regulating the sale of genius. One is astonished to see that in the field of intellectual activity fraud is still perfectly legal."¹⁰

Underlying the fairly transparent self-promotion in this manifesto is the notion that “the work of art is nothing but an accumulator of cerebral energy,” and that artworks, too, can stimulate social activity.¹¹ Implied in this new basis for evaluating art, however, is a thoroughgoing rejection of the very basis of the capitalist system out of which the sphere of aesthetics developed: in arguing for their new “energy” metric, they were dispensing with all those market-based valuations of aesthetic objects, and all the attendant values of cultural capital, that could be accumulated by the collector. Theirs was a measure of the social utility of the artwork that simultaneously rejected the whole premise of art as surplus activity and surplus value, along with all those works that had accrued such value in Italy. Just as Marx had shown that the science of political economy was based on a price fundamentalism that effaced all traces of productive processes and social relations from the commodity’s surface, these Futurist writers wanted to question the reified value of artworks by reinstating the productive process and the social effect these artworks could have. Their alternative criteria for aesthetic value was, it has to be acknowledged, based on mystifications like the social “energy” artworks put into circulation, the scarcity of “genius” on which art markets depended, and, most importantly, the “life” artworks fostered, but the fundamental point was a struggle over how art was, and should be, valued. They rejected an entire critical apparatus that turned art into cultural capital, a mode of “disinterested” objectification and speculation that, as Pierre Bourdieu’s research has shown, reinforces class domination by indirect means.¹² Instead, the Futurists wanted a full accounting of art’s productive processes and social effects. This was the core of the avant-gardist slogan “art into life”: art would no longer be a separate sphere into which surplus value was invested. By foregrounding not only their artistic process, but art’s ability to constitute and transform social relations, the Futurists contested the institutional frame in which art was valued under market capitalism.

The alternative criterion of value in this manifesto derives from Futurism’s naïve privileging of scientific and biological tropes of formless life. Previously calling itself *Elettricismo* and *Dinimismo*, Futurism coalesced in 1909 around a concept of “living art,” wanting to “sweep the whole field of art clean of all themes and subjects which have been used in the past” in its initial, iconoclastic phase, and then to reconstitute an aesthetic that would “breathe in the tangible miracles of contemporary life,” devising new forms of representation “splendidly transformed by victorious Science,” to capture “the frenetic life of our great cities.”¹³ Futurism borrowed extensively from Bergsonian vitalism and turn-of-the-century life sciences, two discourses that contributed to a modernist concept of life that Georg Simmel in 1913 called the “dominant in the philosophical interpretation of the world” of that moment, “represent[ing] the ‘secret being’ of the epoch.”¹⁴

When Corradini and Settimelli highlight the problem of how art is valued in a capitalist society, the authors thematize, but only partially realize, the central problem that avant-gardes all through the century have attempted to address. The narrative of

the death of the avant-garde in the twentieth century, notably in Bürger's *Theory*, is about the end of any kind of autonomy for art, and the ultimate failure of avant-gardes to define some sphere of life outside of the commodity world to which they were eventually assimilated. But what I want to propose is that in some sense the reverse is true: avant-gardes have been defined by their ability to repeatedly generate new autonomous spaces of critique, however temporary and liminal. What I suggest below is that avant-garde practices are today and have always been less an example of art's diminishing autonomy from the political and economic spheres, and closer to what Massimo de Angelis has called a "value struggle."¹⁵ For de Angelis, the closing down of autonomous spaces of critique is not a one-way street, in which all of capital's outsides are eventually colonized, infiltrated, and reified; rather, even under advanced, global capitalism, outsides are continuously generated any time there is a struggle over the means of social reproduction, or over the capacity for groups and collectivities to engage in non-capitalist forms of social exchange and relationality. The struggle over how social relations would be reproduced, or reconstituted from scratch, was decisive for the historical avant-gardes, and shaped the utopian horizon of the first decade of Futurist manifestos. Value struggles meanwhile remain central to current-day political opposition to processes of primitive accumulation and enclosure of various commons at work in today's globalized accumulation strategies. De Angelis argues convincingly that the everyday social field is made up of non-capitalist value practices and reproductive processes, too, and so any model of a totalizing capitalism that rearticulates all forms of social cooperation as market-based exchanges misses a key part of the picture and, worse, limits our ability to theorize and practice real alternatives.¹⁶ If avant-gardes are, following de Angelis, constantly generating new "outsides" to capitalist production and reproduction, then the avant-garde problematic has been prematurely laid to rest.

The difference between the turn of the twentieth century and the turn of the twenty-first, then, is the relative importance of the state as a mediator of social reproduction. Futurists were part of a modernist political epistemology for which the state was the horizon of social reproduction, and so their struggle against liberal capitalism's value regime was conjoined to a national revolutionary politics. To illustrate this historical difference, consider that Settimelli and Corradini's call for a centralized administrative body for the valuation of art works, a "measurer," doesn't sound all that outlandish now, after the postwar establishment of arts funding and granting agencies in many advanced capitalist countries. Clearly some reversal has taken place in the strategies of value struggles.

The Avant-Garde Is History, but Which One?

One of the reasons for the conceptual exhaustion of the avant-garde is, following Bürger, that aesthetic autonomy presents art with a paradox. As we've seen, the Futurists are ready to obliterate autonomy entirely, merging art with life and situating

the artist “along with the butcher and the tyre-manufacturer, the grave-digger and the speculator, the engineer and the farmer.” Bürger and de Angelis, despite many differences, agree that some distance from productive spheres is a necessary condition of critique; it is the disappearance of that distance that motivated Bürger to announce the death of the avant-garde in the first place. And so a recent twist in the narrative of the avant-garde should be a cause for concern.

In *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, Eve Chiapello and Luc Boltanski point out that avant-gardism has filtered its way into management seminars: its anti-establishment shock techniques are now functionalized as organizational strategy. Surveying a large sample of American and French management texts from the 1990s, Chiapello and Boltanski observe that the once-opposed logics of managerialism and the avant-garde have begun to overlap significantly.¹⁷ On the one hand, artistic work is increasingly a managed enterprise: as Hal Foster decries in *Design and Crime*, “a nexus of curators and collectors, dealers and clients” has taken over the functions previously assigned to artists and critics, compromising the autonomy, or nominal autonomy, of both art and criticism. This phenomenon is confirmed by George Yúdice’s *The Expediency of Culture*, which documents the development of a new, globalized regime of arts administration and international exhibitions.¹⁸ But on the other hand, and reciprocally, business management itself has been transformed. In its shift from the hierarchical models of Taylorist planning in favor of postmodern, flexible networks of improvisation, entrepreneurialism, and self-management, the management of enterprise has, Chiapello observes, deployed avant-garde rhetorics and techniques to transform itself. Organized anarchy, workplace insurrection, business revolution: the shift is more than terminological, and goes well beyond the longstanding corporate predilection for military metaphors (including vogueish references to Sun Tzu and Clausewitz as sources of business wisdom).¹⁹ If the purpose of avant-garde intervention has always been the destruction of outdated hierarchies — of representational form, of cultural capital — then management has been on board since the post-Fordist turn, in which, as one *Harvard Business Review* writer put it, “greater speed and flexibility undermines hierarchy.”²⁰

It would be easy to interpret the avant-garde’s migration to management training as just the latest chapter in Bürger’s narrative of the avant-garde’s assimilation to capital. The endurance of his critique lies in the basic antinomy that he attributes to the historical avant-garde. If Surrealism, Expressionism, and Dada all gestured toward a radical transformation of society by shrinking the distance between art and life, by reconciling elitist “institution art” to an everyday “life-praxis,” this synthesis could only come at the expense of the very space of cultural autonomy that made their critique possible in the first place.²¹ Having developed out of the bourgeois separation of the cultural sphere from politics and economy, the historical avant-garde marks the moment of culture’s self-criticism; but in the end the avant-garde was unable to overcome its own merely-cultural status, an internal contradiction

that has manifested itself in over the course of the twentieth century in the eventual synonymy of “avant-garde” and elitist formal experimentation. Bluntly, the historical avant-garde was undone by its faith in aesthetic self-critique as a sufficient condition for social transformation. So Bürger’s *Theory* doesn’t only announce the collapse of the historical avant-garde under the accumulated weight of its misplaced ambition, but warns against the possibility of trying to revive it. He argues that the real successor to the avant-garde’s attempted negation of aesthetic autonomy is not the 1960s neo-avant-gardes who would revisit pastiche and minimalism, Dada and Constructivism, Duchamp’s readymades and Rodchenko’s monochromes, in an implied critique of the museumization of high modernism, but rather the “false sublation” of the commodity form, or mass culture’s union of art and commerce.²² The recent reorganization of business along avant-gardist principles, then, is an intensification of Bürger’s logic, or proof of his original complaint that reducing art to life under capitalism could only result in further encroachments on autonomous spaces of critique.

Boltanski and Chiapello’s argument suggests a different periodization. The central historical argument of *The New Spirit of Capitalism* is that the long-term effect of France’s 1968 uprisings has been a transformation in capitalism’s mode of self-justification, a “recuperation” of 1960s-era anti-capitalist and anti-state critiques, after which such critiques are not only structurally impossible but deployed as part of capitalism’s very logic of expansion.²³ Boltanski and Chiapello show how the central premises of the 1960s critique of capitalism — a demand for liberation (from administered lives, state and normalizing apparatuses) and rejection of inauthenticity (of consumer conformity and spectacle) — are, on the one hand, a continuation of an “artistic critique” of alienation under capitalism that was inaugurated by the avant-gardes of the late nineteenth century, and on the other hand ultimately neutralized by the shift from rational-bureaucratic to post-Fordist and neoliberal models of labor organization.²⁴ Personal fulfillment and liberation have been recuperated by capitalism and located within the organization of production, itself reoriented in the direction of labor flexibility, self-management, and project-based adhocery. Management’s guiding principle has shifted from Fordist discipline to neoliberal “workforce participation.”²⁵ All of which means that Boltanski and Chiapello give sociological substance to a familiar point. What has elsewhere been termed the “real subsumption” of labor to capital, or the realization of a world capitalist system and the turn to intensive, as opposed to extensive, forms of accumulation, is felt here in Boltanski and Chiapello’s picture of the contemporary regime of business management. One key consequence of real subsumption, according to Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, is the rise of immaterial labor, or the transformation of previously semi-autonomous spheres like intellectual and cultural work, as well as the very production of subjectivities, into a new source of the production and accumulation of value.²⁶ Put differently, demands for personal or collective autonomy can no longer be positioned as critiques of an impersonal and alienating wage-labor system, but

are instead requirements of the system itself. From the proliferation of personalized goods and service economies, to the demand to view one's own employment as the never-ending expansion of human capital and transferable capacities under flexible employment regimes, capitalism's absorption of the oppositional politics of avant-gardes has been nothing less than total: the familiar surrealist critique of instrumental rationality, "take your desires for reality," was only too easily reconverted into a post-behaviorist principle of "employee empowerment" and *Liberation Management*, to borrow the title of one business bestseller.²⁷

What Boltanski and Chiapello's recuperation thesis makes possible is a finer-grained genealogy of avant-garde practice. Bürger's thesis, in all its finality and despair at the avant-garde's "false sublation," has to be understood in its historical moment, at the conjuncture where the real subsumption of the social begins to impose itself in earnest; as Fredric Jameson has argued, the end of the 1960s saw those last few untouched spaces of social reality, or standpoints of potential resistance "from the outside" — the third world and the unconscious — succumb to the all-encompassing logic of the commodity.²⁸ Bürger's thesis on the intractable contradictions of the avant-garde, its negation of its own autonomy, is unmistakably a document of this critical closure. The aspects of Bürger's critique that speak the clearest today are the many nods towards May 1968, when, as he notes in a postscript, "the hopes of those who, like myself, believed in the possibility of 'more democracy' in all spheres of social life went unfulfilled."²⁹ Bürger's intervention stands as a sort of summary judgment on two decades of artistic and theoretical engagement with the avant-garde concept, from echoes of Dada and Constructivism in postmodern visual artists like Rauschenberg, Warhol, and Johns, with all their implied and overt contestation of high modernism's ascendance in galleries and art criticism; to Situationism's direct lineage from Surrealism, and its intensification and re-politicization of the Surrealist critique of instrumental rationality and the dead forms of capitalist reification with the irrationalism of the dream image and the motility of desire; to, in criticism, the real emergence and codification of the avant-garde as an intelligible critical category, and no longer only a performative self-description by artists, in the work of critics like Renato Poggioli, Hans-Magnus Enzensburger, Leslie Fiedler, and others.³⁰ Bürger's thesis, it seems to me, is significant primarily as a document that recognizes the real subsumption of the social at the moment it was set in motion.

But this raises the question of what the concept of the avant-garde had to offer to a critique of capitalism in the 1960s, or why it became necessary to evaluate social and artistic movements of that decade in terms of a prior cultural formation. Here the picture gets complicated, but in broad outline, the failure of the historical avant-garde was only partial: its critique of a moribund liberalism in politics and economy, of a philistine and classicist national bourgeois culture, formed the very basis of the planned economies of the mid-twentieth century. In a word, its critique of bourgeois liberalism paved the way for the midcentury "managerial revolution."³¹

In its various, and widely disparate, forms — fascist corporatism, the Soviet five-year plan, the Keynesian economic *dirigisme* — planning formed an ideological consensus that displaced classical liberalism's axiom of free competition and, for the problematic raised by the avant-garde, produced new avenues for integrating culture and industry and a whole new conception of culture *as work*, cast in the image of the designer — as well as new resistances to integration. In the analysis of the architectural theorist Manfredo Tafuri, “the ideology of the plan” was nothing less than capitalism's midcentury recuperation of the avant-garde, a transformation of the negative critique of the cultural apparatus articulated by Futurism and Dada into more production-friendly schools of design modernism like De Stijl and Bauhaus.³² These latter rapidly became the hegemonic form of modernism, which cut across political divides: “Organization and planning,” argues Tafuri, “are thus the passwords of both democratic socialism and democratic capitalism.”³³ We would have to add to Tafuri's bipolar map of the twentieth century the uses of planning in developmental policies enacted primarily in African and Latin American countries — and indeed the idea of a modernizing “third world” itself has to be considered a key symptom of the near-global acceptance of the ideology of the plan.³⁴ For Tafuri, utopian design modernisms were the dialectical realization of the first, negative moment of the historical avant-garde, whose critique of the residues of classicism cleared the way for the ambitious planning projects of Le Corbusier or El Lissitzky, and the transformation of everyday life by industrial design in Walter Gropius. That these were a partial version of the transformation of life by art envisioned by the historical avant-garde, or in other words capitalism's homeopathic defense against more radical systemic change, is precisely how we should understand the mechanics of recuperation to work.

All of which is to say that the 1960s rediscovery of the avant-garde was, in a sense, directed against its own false realization. But here it becomes necessary to make a distinction between specific historical avant-gardes. The particular movements Bürger takes as paradigmatic of the historical avant-garde period are Surrealism and Dada especially, with some space dedicated to the Frankfurt School's uptake of Expressionism. All of them contest the very forms of instrumental rationality that would manifest themselves in the Fordist rationalization of production and the managerialist basis of the postwar Keynesian state. As some critics have noticed, Bürger neglects the Futurist movement almost entirely.³⁵ On one hand this omission is confusing, because Futurism appears to meet his minimum requirements, as a movement that made the destruction of the cultural sphere and the integration of art and life its most basic tenet, and did this nearly a decade before the movements he chooses to investigate. The easy explanation for Bürger's avoidance of Futurism is its eventual accommodation to Fascism, which is a much more complicated issue than it appears, but has been an insurmountable barrier for leftist critics both before Bürger and since. The more likely reason that Futurism is overlooked in Bürger's *Theory* is because its totalizing ambitions looked too much like the expanded state-

form of the postwar period, from which Dada and Surrealism offered a potential, but ultimately contradictory, liberation — what Roland Barthes once dismissively called a “life style” avant-gardism.³⁶ By contrast, Futurism’s scope was all-encompassing. It sought to rehabilitate much more than just a stagnant art world: the range of targets in its manifestos includes the institutions of parliament, industry, church, and schools, but also the disciplines of city planning, architecture, fashion, cuisine, and far beyond: witness Giacomo Balla and Fortunato Depero’s 1915 manifesto called “The Futurist Reconstruction of the Universe.”³⁷ From their agenda-setting critique, it was only a few steps to realize midcentury planning ideology, or “a utopia serving the objectives of the reorganization of production,” in Tafuri’s words.³⁸ And so if the avant-garde re-emerged as a critical category during the ’60s, it was partly as a discourse of complicity: this is the other side of Bürger’s antinomy, where the false sublation of art’s autonomy meant its ability to envision, and then find a place within, the institutional and administrative expansion of the midcentury state.

As for Bürger’s own false sublation of the avant-garde, the commodification of everyday life, it too stands to be folded into this periodization. One of the more historically and ideologically remote aspects of the early avant-gardes is their unproblematic enthusiasm for industry and mass production. But this enthusiasm needs to be considered in the contexts of a widespread productivism that threads its way through even the most radical writers of the period — recall Gramsci’s enthusiasm for Fordism, his question of how it would restructure social conditions far beyond the factory floor.³⁹ But it must be remembered that mass commodity production — all those midcentury labor-saving consumer durables, along with Keynesian full-employment policies and the expansion of the welfare state — offered an unparalleled mobility and freedom from the constraints imposed by a more family- and location-based bourgeois capitalism. It was in this way that planning and industrial design were positioned as market-based solutions to the demands for liberation posed by historical avant-garde. As Peter Wollen’s *Raiding the Icebox* argues, modernism itself can be understood as a kind of “cultural Fordism,” negotiating the impact of an emergent Fordist-Keynesianism in phenomena as varied as film (Chaplin’s *Modern Times*, Léger’s *Ballet Mécanique*), Surrealist automatic painting, architecture (New York’s 1920s skyscraper boom), fashion (Coco Chanel’s unadorned “little black dress”), criticism (Clement Greenberg’s radically abstracted formalism), and academic disciplines (Vienna Circle linguistics, with its anti-metaphysical approach to language, indeed, to reality itself, as segmented parts open to rational analysis). For Wollen, mass production had worn out its welcome by the 1960s, when it was met with the parodies of standardization in Pop Art (Warhol’s “factory”) as well as the *détournements* of the Situationists. By the time of Bürger’s critique, mass consumption itself had so saturated the social world that another liberation was needed: Dada and Surrealism’s anti-rationalization critiques, then, were revived for a time in order to contest the “bureaucratic capitalism” that Guy Debord’s *Society of the*

Spectacle called “the concentrated form of the spectacle,” an anti-technocracy, anti-rationalization stance adopted from the *Socialisme ou barbarie* group.⁴⁰ Important here is that consumption, too, was determined by the logic of Taylorized production and centralized management, and required a kind of Copernican revolution in consumer orientation to absorb the anti-establishment zeitgeist of the 1960s: as Thomas Frank argues in *The Conquest of Cool*, the conformity of mass consumption was transformed on Madison Avenue into individualized appeals to self-realization that make up what he calls a “countercultural style,” which has only since continued to develop in the direction of personalized niche products and experience economies.⁴¹

So it becomes necessary to recognize two distinct moments of avant-garde recuperation by a resilient and adaptable capitalism. First, the historical avant-garde set itself against bourgeois liberalism, whose expanding industrial organization was at odds with its residually classicist culture, and provided the aesthetic and ideological critique necessary for an ascendant managerialism. Second, in the '60s, the avant-garde was again appealed to, this time as a discourse of liberation from the hegemonic state forms of managerialism that were derived, ironically, from the historical avant-garde itself. Our present-day unease with the avant-garde concept follows in the wake of this second recuperation. It may not be necessary to add that capitalism's recuperation of these avant-garde critiques ignored the more radical claims for social change to which they were, in their historical moments, linked, from the anarchism and syndicalism of Dada and Futurism, to the council communism that underpinned Situationism's notion of self-management.⁴² Instead, the recuperation of these critiques essentially assimilated their aesthetic forms, their critiques of hierarchy and alienation, and turned them into new models for the accumulation of value.

Like any survey, this one is cursory. But one advantage of starting from an analysis of recuperation — or how cultural and political formations move against and then within a dominant order or rationality — is how it explains a certain definitional confusion around modernism's politics: why certain modern movements can seem to be both revolutionary and reactionary, or rather why they look radical from one vantage point and conformist from another. But that problem dissolves if we adopt a thoroughly historical understanding of these movements, one that refers itself to broad changes in the organization of production, as well as the different justifications used to perpetuate them. For example, the problem I opened with — avant-gardism as management doctrine, and as part of a new labor regime based on flexible networks — seems a scandal precisely because our conceptual tools for the avant-garde are outdated. The fact that Bürger's *Theory* remains the standard reading of the avant-garde today should tip us off that our concept remains locked within the constellation of terms that emerged in the anti-commodification critique of the 1960s.

Contemporary Disavowals

Today, the dynamics of the avant-garde have changed: after the real subsumption

of cultural work, or in other words at a point where culture's ubiquity and non-autonomy are the condition of possibility of cultural work at all, any purportedly resistant cultural or artistic practice has been forced to redefine its aims and terms. Typically these redefinitions are accompanied by an almost ritualized, anxious disavowal of the avant-garde, but with decidedly mixed results. One strategy can be found in the 2005 book *Collectivism After Modernism*, whose editors situate their idea of the kinds of artistic resistance that have been on the rise since the eclipse of modernism in a collectivist "general intellect," following Italian *autonomia*, where the legacy of the avant-garde is reclaimed for political radicalism, though in spectral, almost spiritual, terms:

This new collectivism carries with it the spectral power of collectivisms past just as it is realized fully within the hegemonic power of global capitalism. Its creativity stands in relationship to the modernist image and the postmodernist counterimage much in the same way that the multitude of Sunday painters and other amateurs does to the handful of art stars: as a type of dark matter encircling the reified surfaces of the spectacle of everyday life. Vastly more extensive and difficult to pinpoint, this new collectivist fetish inhabits the everywhere and nowhere of social life. In so doing it gives its own interpretation of the old avant-garde banner — "art into life!" — that it proudly carries forth from its predecessors: that the ancient dream of the glorious, all-encompassing body of the collective — of Christ or God or Allah or King or Leviathan or Nation or State or Public — the dream of redemption, of experiencing the imagined community as an end to alienation and as a promise of eternal life, realize itself not as an image or as flight from images but instead as a form of social building that brings itself into being wherever and whenever it can.⁴³

This model of a resistant art, claiming some distance from the avant-garde, though retaining its sense of collective authorship, is drawn from Hardt and Negri's concept of the constituent power of the multitude, and is compatible with approaches to critical art taken elsewhere. Nicholas Bourriaud's grouping of a series of 1990s art exhibitions as a "relational aesthetic," where the gallery space is a sort of laboratory in the exploration of new social forms and the constitution of communities, is one version of this post-avant-garde collectivism.⁴⁴ Many of the exhibitions cited by Bourriaud and Claire Bishop that fall under this category take as their subject matter figures and bodies of the multitude — service workers, undocumented immigrants⁴⁵ — and use the gallery space as the site of a suspension or *détournement* of marginalizing discourses or forms of labor in an attempt to "fill the cracks in the social bond"⁴⁶; from Rirkrit Tiravanija's interactive installations, in which the artist takes up the

position of a service worker by, in one example, cooking for gallery patrons and creating a convivial, reparative space for open-ended sociability, to Santiago Sierra's more confrontational "ethnographic realism," which foregrounds an exploitative and exclusionary economic and legal order by, in the case of his exhibition at the 2001 Venice biennale, paying undocumented immigrants who work as the city's street vendors to dye their hair blond and then inviting those who typically surround the biennale into his exhibition to sell their goods.⁴⁷ However, Bourriaud's rejection of the world-historical ambitions of the avant-garde and his accompanying restriction of relational aesthetics to the "laboratory" of the gallery space — a complaint that has been raised from several quarters — are signs that the avant-garde's most fundamental problematic, the autonomy of the aesthetic from the economic and the political, returns here in all too familiar form: to its credit, Bourriaud's relational aesthetic has thematized that divide, but how it might be surpassed remains, in his writings, unclear.⁴⁸

Another post-avant-garde development, vastly different in tone and scope, is *The Coming Insurrection* (2009) by the Invisible Committee. It resuscitates the avant-garde's signature genre, the manifesto, in a blistering anarcho-autonomist critique of the contemporary global order. The text's call to action tries to dissolve any residual twentieth-century vanguardism in the very act of negating the category of authorship, with its "invisibility" metaphor and the accompanying claim that the manifesto's ideas are drawn directly from the multitudes themselves: "This book is signed in the name of an imaginary collective. Its editors are not its authors. They were content merely to introduce a little order into the common-places of our time, collecting some of the murmurings around barroom tables and behind closed bedroom doors."⁴⁹ More than mere conceits, these gestures towards authorial self-dissolution are part of a larger strategy of struggle, or perhaps more properly an anti-strategy, aiming to "Turn anonymity into an offensive position" — the point being that identifiable and visible groups open themselves to police repression or market appropriation, and meanwhile exploitation has reached a such a point of saturation that resistance could conceivably begin anywhere, or everywhere at once. It remains to be seen whether this anti-organizational politics, based as much on Deleuzian lines of flight as coalitions of anti-globalization activist groups in recent years, can overcome its very formlessness, or what Ernesto Laclau has called the lack, in the figure of the resistant multitude, of a theory of articulation.⁵⁰ For my purposes here, the issue raised by *The Coming Insurrection* is the tension between its imagination of a creative, adaptable, distributed resistance and the apparently still-necessary act of writing a manifesto, which is perhaps better stated as a contradiction between content and form, or ends and means; in this text's case, a disavowed vanguardism seems to by necessity reappear at another level, in the performative contradiction of an anti-vanguardist manifesto.

Still, if the political horizon of these movements is a genuinely globalized capital,

then how does the concept of the avant-garde resonate outside the West? This raises a theoretical legacy that routinely excludes non-Western avant-gardes, both historical and contemporary. To fully appreciate the challenge to the concept of the avant-garde from the non-Western world, I want to draw from George Yúdice's "The Avant-Garde from the Periphery" (1999). Yúdice argues that if an essential element of avant-gardes is the imaginative proximity of social revolution, in Perry Anderson's phrase, then this insight needs to be tempered by a global perspective that de-emphasizes the 1917 Bolshevik revolution as the *sine qua non* of a strictly Western avant-gardism. Anti-colonial revolutions and uprisings swept across the non-Western world in the early twentieth century, particularly in Latin America and the Caribbean, and each adapted avant-gardist techniques to its specific circumstances. Focusing particularly on Nicaragua and Brazil in the 1930s, Yúdice shows how avant-gardism was often combined with indigenous and ethnic traditions in order to create national cultures that would contest the deterritorializing forces of imperialism. In many cases, peripheral avant-gardes were enthusiastic about the forces of modernization and development which in those contexts contested the rule of an older oligarchy. That legacy has made the contemporary reception of "global" avant-gardes problematic: the tendency is for Western art institutions to delegitimize them by a double strategy of ghettoization — metropolitan exhibitions themed on "third-world" avant-gardes — and ideological misinterpretation, reading many of them as examples of colonial mimicry of Western forms, with any subversive or revolutionary potential in these non-Western avant-gardes negated by the nationalisms and postcolonial statisms with which they are often imbricated.⁵¹ At base this is a formalist reading of global avant-gardism that forgets the critical and social dimension that constitutes avant-gardist practice as such, and the importance of historically specific understandings of the various social forces — revolutionary nationalism, imperialism, decolonization, modernization, community, ethnic identity — that compose the political field in which these avant-gardes respond. It is worth noting, meanwhile, that the revolutionary nationalisms of peripheral avant-gardes is a mirror image of the pro-modernization, revolutionary nationalist projects of some key Western avant-gardes, like the Futurists, whose exclusion from Bürger's and others' selective histories of the avant-garde begins to make more sense. In this case, action at the periphery reveals the truth of the centre, as statism and modernization were, at the time Bürger took up the avant-garde concept, impossible to reconcile with a leftist position.

Yúdice argues for a "conjunctural" sense of avant-gardism, which would include all of the different social forces just mentioned: "It is possible, by a postmodern turn, to rethink the avant-gardes as not constituting a particular moment in the history of modernity but, rather, a transformative power that is generated whenever the conjunctural circumstances allow for it."⁵² Yúdice's conjunctural reading immediately complicates Bürger's historicism, which relies on a Hegelian "unfolding" of the aesthetic sphere as such, to the point of its terminal, avant-gardist moment of crisis

— a complaint against Bürger that has been raised by several critics.⁵³ On Yúdice's reading of Latin American avant-gardism, "The struggle for local autonomy proceeded according to a distinct logic of its own: the logic of community building. This logic included the creation of coherent meanings, cultural identities, and social solidarities — or organizing the relations of gender, class, and ethnicity. That is, we must be careful not to assume that the forces of [capitalist] integration [of a world market] were, themselves, the driving forces of twentieth-century global development. That would only reduce world history to the history of western domination."⁵⁴ I would like to suggest that Yúdice's concept of peripheral avant-gardes can stand as exemplary sites of value struggles: not struggles over value in the narrow sense of beliefs or ethics, but the conjunctural struggles over the ways in which labour and reproduction are organized and valued within a capitalist system. From Yúdice's perspective it becomes clearer why the avant-garde form was tied to statist articulations in the early century and in decolonizing zones, and then to anti-state, anti-institutional critique in the West after 1968: each of these conjunctures has its own reigning value regime, which avant-gardes, in some sense by definition, contest.

Meanwhile, the historical dimension of de Angelis's concept is important here, too: by tying the question of value to non-capitalist spheres, modeled on a notion of the commons that fights capitalist enclosure and the imposition of private property, the avant-garde concept connects to a series of struggles that precede its apparent start date, somewhere around 1900, and survive past its demise after May 1968. Further, it may well be that Bürger's apparent "self realization" of the avant-garde is some sense a genre effect, a consequence of their resuscitation and extensive use of the manifesto form, from the Futurists forward. As Janet Lyon argues, the manifesto can be traced back to the Diggers' and Levellers' responses to the enclosures of the commons in seventeenth-century England, and the exclusion of the poor from the newly formed Parliament; these manifestos themselves have to be understood as a paradigmatic case of a "value struggle," in which a social form of commoning was forcibly displaced by a new regime of property and rent, and the manifesto was critical to the articulation of non-capitalist values.⁵⁵ Finally, those contemporary manifestations of post-avant-gardism, which want to create a para-political, relational space out of the current institutional framework of art, and alternately to heal, oppose, or travesty the usual market relations and forms of gallery spectatorship, are all directly foregrounding this question of the struggle over value and social reproduction. The Futurists' call to re-value art's social effects and its capacity to produce new life and new social relations, though refined, has not yet been surpassed.

In his subsequent book *The Expediency of Culture*, Yúdice uses an ethnographic methodology to spell out how value struggles operate in the era of the real subsumption of cultural work. In that text, Yúdice's few remarks on the avant-garde raise two related problems with it in the context of present-day art practice: its all-or-nothing criteria of social change, where art's effectivity is judged solely by its transformative

social power and not by its more micropolitical effects in raising the visibility of oppressions or helping communities constitute localized responses to global capitalism; and the inevitable avant-garde gesture towards a “real” social life outside of political representation or artistic institutionalization, a space whose political effectivity, let alone its ontological status, Yúdice rightly questions.⁵⁶ His analysis of Latin American activist art and popular culture — maquiladora documentaries, baile funk, AIDS activism, and other complicated responses to the globalization of economy and culture — all take for granted that these practices can only take place with the assistance of supranational bodies like UNESCO, international biennales, and NGO-sponsored events like inSITE. For Yúdice, the question of these cultural forms’ social effectivity is not overdetermined by their institutional involvement, but is a complex site of negotiation between funding agencies, artists, communities, and international audiences — and Yúdice’s methodology here is exemplary, tracing out the “meaning” of specific art exhibitions from the conflicting testimonies by artists, granting agencies, community responses, and so on. That said, the very integration of culture into the production of a global order raises the issue most central to his book, where culture is now treated as a “resource” within global circuits of production and exchange (9-10). Yúdice doesn’t mean by this to extend and globalize the indispensable but well-worn Frankfurt School thesis on culture’s commodification, but rather that culture is, like any other key “natural” resource, now put to use in the management of life itself. For example, in a logic that connects border art exhibitions in Mexico to urban galleries in America, art is increasingly used as an indicator of “social health” in depressed economic zones, and exhibitions used as proof for a community’s ability to attract capital investment. This plays out as urban “revitalization” and “renewal” strategies — what Manuel Castells calls the ability of art infrastructure to “give life” to urban zones⁵⁷ — and the identification of “creative capitalism” as a motor of development in de-industrialized and “dead” city cores.⁵⁸ The use of life and death metaphors in gentrification discourses is hardly incidental, as this functionalization of art for development purposes has arisen precisely during the period of a prolonged attack on welfare state provisions of social assistance, which brought with them their own idea of how life and populations were to be managed. What Yúdice’s book offers, beyond its own remarkable analysis of Latin American art and activism, is a framework to connect artistic practice to the dominant modes of biopolitical governance that are key to understanding our own historical moment and our own organization of production, in which immaterial labour is increasingly the hegemonic form of value creation in post-Fordist economies.

All of this points back to the Futurists’ alternative criteria for aesthetic value, or the concept of life that, for them, acted as an outside to liberal capitalism. It raises important questions about how aesthetics resides at the center of a political desire for new forms of life, though these can no longer be, as they were for the Futurists, considered external to capitalist accumulation, nor can they be tied to

state-revolutionary ideologies. Two conclusions follow — one necessary, and one speculative. The first is that a reconsideration of avant-gardes as value struggles aligns them, today, with a different model of resistance: value struggles of different scales contest global capitalism's extraction of surplus value and its organization of social reproduction, from occupations, anti-austerity and anti-privatization strikes, struggles against intellectual property regimes, right down to local phenomena like urban agriculture initiatives and community support networks. These register a continuous process of struggle against capitalist enclosure, or what de Angelis calls "an ongoing tension in the social body."⁵⁹ Any practice that stakes out a temporary "outside" to recuperation by capital and the state is now, by virtue of its capacity to imagine of a new form of life and organize social reproduction differently, aligned with how the avant-garde has historically challenged capitalist value regimes. A reciprocal point is that today's social struggles have an important prehistory in the itinerary and transformations of the avant-garde over the course of the twentieth century, and this history is worth reclaiming.

The second conclusion follows from Yudice's suggestion that culture is now a resource, and therefore seen as part of a larger strategy of the biopolitical management of life and populations. If, as I've argued, the struggle over life and reproduction has been an object of the avant-gardes over the past century, some questions need to be asked: wasn't the avant-garde interested in the politicization of life all along? That is, doesn't the avant-garde's interest in merging art and life put it on the same trajectory as biopolitics, in which, as Foucault conceived of it, a "whole political network became interwoven with the fabric of everyday life"?⁶⁰ However counterintuitive the connection, there is at least a starting point in their overlapping histories: Foucault's genealogy of biopolitics is notably concentrated in the modernist period, from the deployment of political technologies of population management over the course of the nineteenth century (mortality rates, pensions, hygienics, and so on) to their transformation into the biological state racisms that were suspended, or displaced, at the end of World War II. Is the avant-garde's wished-for transformation of "life-praxis" part of this biopolitical genealogy — part of this diffusion and internalization of power, which has arguably become the dominant mode of power in a present-day society of control?⁶¹ Following the periodization I outlined above, the historical avant-garde comes onto the scene during a first, nation-based articulation of biopolitics, where the nation-state's institutional expansion is posited as the solution to a growing number of deficiencies in the prior mode of social reproduction, bourgeois liberalism, whose very remoteness from "life" was precisely the complaint of the historical avant-gardes. After the midcentury realization of biopolitical state forms, but before the subsequent institutional critiques of the Keynesian regulation of social life, and the ways these critiques were repurposed by a resurgent neoliberalism to scale back the institutional security of "life" under the midcentury nation-state in favor of greater flexibility, precarity, and self-management — these, and not only the logic

of commodification, make up the “politics” against which the avant-garde needs to be defined.

Notes

1. The date is Peter Wollen’s, who cites the breakup of the Situationists as having “brought to an end an epoch that began in Paris with the Futurist Manifesto of 1909” (124); see his *Raiding the Icebox: Reflections on Twentieth-Century Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1993). Other prominent critical works that agree in substance with this view of the avant-garde’s demise include Perry Anderson’s *The Origins of Postmodernity* (London: Verso, 1998), Matei Călinescu’s *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism* (Durham: Duke UP, 1987), and Andreas Huyssen’s *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1986).
2. For example, in Hardt and Negri’s *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2000), which rests on the premise that a distributed, nomadic general intellect is the present moment’s model of political resistance, replacing vanguards looking to seize state power.
3. On the postmodern imperative to enjoy, see Slavoj Žižek’s *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor* (London: Verso, 1991).
4. A recent issue of *New Literary History* indicates that the question of the avant-garde is due for critical re-evaluation. My essay here aims to contribute to that project. The issue’s editors describe the following starting point, today: “Looking beyond a restricted vocabulary of innovation and exhaustion, resistance and commodification, a number of the following essays assess diverse forms of avant-garde activity in terms of what they make possible, rather than rushing to quantify their ultimate success or failure. Even those essays wary of retaining the term “avant-garde” as a synonym for experimental aesthetic or political activity remain interested in exploring how various forms of such activity persist under contemporary conditions. In either case, this shift in focus requires dislodging certain beliefs about the nature of social institutions and the dynamics of historical change.” Quoted in Rita Felski and Jonathan P. Eburne’s “Introduction,” *New Literary History* 41.4 (2010): viii.
5. Alain Badiou, *The Century*, trans. Alberto Toscano (Cambridge: Polity, 2007) 132.
6. Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (New York: Continuum, 2004) 29. Rancière’s interest is in disarticulating the avant-gardes from their historical connection and setting them back into an expanded mapping of how aesthetic forms precede and determine political visibilities and constitution: “In short, there is the idea [of avant-gardes] that links political subjectivity to a certain form: the party, an advanced detachment that derives its ability to lead from its ability to read and interpret the signs of history. On the other hand, there is another idea of the avant-garde that, in accordance with Schiller’s model, is rooted in the aesthetic anticipation of the future” (29). In that second capacity, avant-gardes typify the “aesthetic regime” of modernity, in which Bürger’s central antinomy — the self-destruction of aesthetic autonomy — is recast as the beginning point of modern art, for which a demand for autonomy — or complete freedom from political determination — and a demand for heteronomy — or the ability to effect political change — determine the contradictory poles between which twentieth-century aesthetics is constituted. In this sense, Bürger’s antinomy becomes Rancière’s basic condition of art in the twentieth century, and so not the sign of a failed political project. See also Rancière’s “The Aesthetic Revolution and Its Outcomes: Emplotments of Autonomy and

Heteronomy,” *New Left Review* 14 (2002): 133-51.

7. For Futurism’s affiliation with anarchist and syndicalist groups, see Günter Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics: Between Anarchist Rebellion and Fascist Reaction, 1909-1944* (Providence: Berghahn, 1996) and Giovanni Lista, “Marinetti et les Anarcho-Syndicalistes,” *Présence de F. T. Marinetti: actes du colloque international*, ed. Jean-Claude Marcadé (Lausanne: Editions L’Age D’homme, 1982); for Futurism as essentially protofascist, see Alice Yaeger Kaplan, *Reproductions of Banality: Fascism, Literature, and French Intellectual Life* (Minneapolis: U Minnesota P, 1986) and Roger Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism: The Sense of a Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). Much of the controversy over Futurism’s politics has to do with the movement’s internal dynamics. It was far from a univocal movement, despite F. T. Marinetti’s imposing presence, but even when it appeared to be speaking in a single voice, Marinetti’s simultaneous political affiliations with the Italian Nationalist Association on the right and anarcho-syndicalist groups on the left is an insurmountable barrier to critical attempts to reduce Futurism to a single political camp. More recent appraisals have avoided politically reductionist conclusions by stressing the movement’s own self-difference over time and between geographically distinct Futurist groups: see Walter Adamson, *Avant-Garde Florence: From Modernism to Fascism* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1993). For my part, instead of the impossible project of taking the aggregate of these statements and calculating some kind of median political position, or deciding on the truth or falsity of various Futurist positions, I want to understand Futurism in terms of the political statements it made possible: that is, in terms of how it imagined politics otherwise, and specifically how it imagined undermining hegemonic liberalism by displacing politics onto the terrain of life.
8. Bruno Corradini and Emilio Settimelli, “Weights, Measures and Prices of Artistic Genius — Futurist Manifesto 1914,” *Futurist Manifestos*, ed. Umbro Apollonio (New York: Viking, 1973) 135-149.
9. Corradini and Settimelli, “Weights, Measures and Prices of Artistic Genius” 145.
10. Corradini and Settimelli, “Weights, Measures and Prices of Artistic Genius” 146.
11. Corradini and Settimelli, “Weights, Measures and Prices of Artistic Genius” 149.
12. Pierre Bourdieu, “The Forms of Capital.” *Handbook of Theory of Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. J. E. Richardson, trans. Richard Nice. (Westport: Greenwood, 1986) 250.
13. On Futurism’s early years (and prior names), see Günter Berghaus, Introduction to *Critical Writings* by F. T. Marinetti (New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 2006) xviii. All quotes on Futurism as a living art are from Umberto Boccioni, Carlo Carrà, Luigi Russolo, Giacomo Balla, and Gino Severini, “Manifesto of the Futurist Painters 1910,” in *Futurist Manifestos*.
14. Georg Simmel, *The Conflict in Modern Culture, and Other Essays* (New York: Teachers College P, 1968) 13.
15. Massimo de Angelis, *The Beginning of History: Value Struggles and Global Capital* (London: Pluto, 2007).
16. Value struggles encompass any struggle for the commons in de Angelis’s writing, from anti-austerity protests to daily reproductive activities. He writes, “capital’s value practices [are] in perpetual struggle with other value practices. [Capitalism] is also preservative of the rules generated by enclosures, because through repetition subjects tend to become normalized to them. Yet this is a normalisation that does not abolish conflict among value practices, but that turns this conflict into the driving engine of the evolution of the organisational form of capitalism while basic processes of homeostasis keep social forces and conflicting value practices coupled together. In other words, *in the daily reproduction of our livelihoods we are involved, knowingly or unknowingly, willingly or unwillingly, in a form of civil war cutting*

across the social body.” De Angelis, *The Beginning of History* 81.

17. “Mais il faut aussi souligner tous les signes de rapprochement des deux logiques de l’art et du management qui s’accumulent espécialement depuis les années 80. [...] Le manager est ainsi en passé de devenir le meilleur allié de l’artiste après avoir été considéré comme son bourreau.” Eve Chiapello, *Artistes versus managers: le management culturel face à la critique artiste* (Paris: Métailié, 1998) 205, 211. [“But it is also necessary to underline all the signs of a reconciliation of the two logics of the art and management which have accumulated, particularly since the Eighties. [...] The manager is thus in the process of becoming the best ally of the artist after being regarded as his antagonist.”]
18. Hal Foster, *Design and Crime and Other Diatribes* (London: Verso, 2002) 121; George Yúdice, *The Expediency of Culture: Uses of Culture in the Global Era* (Durham: Duke UP, 2003). Yúdice writes, “the evolution of arts administration since the 1960s has increasingly encouraged artists to become better service providers. This refunctionalization is not limited to the United States but is a characteristic of the role of artists as catalysts for cultural citizenship in the new cultural policies throughout Latin America and many other regions” (319).
19. See Matthew Jesse Jackson’s “Managing the Avant-Garde,” *New Left Review* 32 (2005): 105-16, for a brief survey of recent “revolutionary” business tracts, which, he argues, are the latest development in “the last century’s contest between ‘artists and managers’ — one that has been increasingly resolved by a tendency to merge, or even trade places, as the arts become more commercialized while business recuperates their discarded mythology of creative individualism” (107).
20. Rosabeth Moss Canter, “The New Managerial Work.” *Harvard Business Review* (1989) 89.
21. Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis: U Minnesota P, 1984). Bürger writes: “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-a-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” (50).
22. The passage quoted in the previous note continues: “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.” Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* 50.
23. On the dynamics of recuperation, Boltanski and Chiapello write: “Capitalism attracts actors, who realize that they have hitherto been oppressed, by offering them a certain form of liberation that masks new types of oppression. It may then be said that capitalism ‘recuperates’ the autonomy it extends, by implementing new modes of control. However, these new forms of oppression are gradually unmasked and become the target of critique, to the point where capitalism is led to transform its *modus operandi* to offer a liberation that is redefined under the influence of critique. But, in its turn, the ‘liberation’ thus obtained harbours new oppressive mechanisms that allow control over the process of accumulation to be restored in a capitalist framework. Cycles of recuperation thus lead to a succession of periods of liberation by capitalism and periods of liberation *from* capitalism.” Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2005) 425.
24. Boltanski and Chiapello: “Hence it can be said, without exaggeration or paradox, that if capitalism

attempted to recuperate the demand for authenticity underlying the critique of the consumer society (by commodifying it, as we have seen), in another respect — and relatively independently — it has, with the metaphor of the network, assimilated the critique of this demand for autonomy, whose formulation paved the way for the deployment of reticular and rhizomorphic paradigms. This contradictory double incorporation tends both to acknowledge the demand for authenticity as valid and to create a world where this question is no longer to be posed. And this, as we shall see, underlies the existential tensions — inextricably psychological and ethical — felt by people engaged in the process of accumulation.” Boltanski and Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism* 452.

25. Chiapello writes, “Ces deux dernières décennies, qui ont vu la mode de la culture d’entreprise dans les années 80 et celle du réseau et de la confiance dans les années 90, doivent être vue comme une période de profond bouleversement du management et de ses préceptes puisque ont été célébrés des formes difficiles à maîtriser, faisant appel à l’affectivité des personnes et à leur histoire sociale, qui sont autant d’aspects que le management scientifique des débuts aurait bien voulu ignorer. Il faut encore montrer que ces nouvelles formes ne sont pas de simples ajouts à une liste de pratiques managériales, traditionnellement très éloignées des fonctionnements des mondes de l’art. Elles accompagnent en fait une évolution en profondeur de la définition centrale du management.” Eve Chiapello, *Artistes versus managers* 215. [These last two decades, which have witnessed the culture of the enterprise of the ’80s and that of the network and trust in the ’90s, must be seen as the period of a profound overturning of management and its tenets, since what has been celebrated are difficult forms of control that appeal to people’s emotions and their social history, which are aspects that, from its beginnings, scientific management would have preferred to exclude. It remains to be shown that these new forms are not simple additions to a list of managerial practices, traditionally very distant from the workings of the worlds of art. They actually accompany a profound evolution of the core definition of management.]
26. Hardt and Negri, *Empire* 269-76.
27. From Tom Peters, *Liberation Management: Necessary Disorganization for the Nanosecond Nineties* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1992): “Finally, get turned on. Or follow your bliss, or whatever. Vacuous advice? Perhaps. But the practical implication is this: In a knowledge-based economy, you must — to survive — add some special value, be distinctively good at something. And the truth is, we only get good at stuff we like. [...] Ain’t nobody going to take care of you on the job in a big company anymore: It’s not dog-eat-dog out there anymore, it’s skill-eat-skill. If you’re not skilled/motivated/passionate about something, you’re in trouble!” (757-58). Other instant classics of the business-self-help genre: Tom Peters, *Thriving on Chaos: Handbook for a Management Revolution* (New York: Knopf, 1987); Richard Tanner Pascale, *Managing on the Edge: How the Smartest Companies Use Conflict to Stay Ahead* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990); Robert H. Waterman, Jr., *The Renewal Factor: How the Best Get and Keep the Competitive Edge* (Toronto: Bantam, 1987). The crisis in finance capital of 2007, however, has had its effects on management too: some have called for a walkback from the edge of neoliberal crisis-theory to an older form of structured management and vectors of real productivity. See Jack Buffington, *The Death of Management: Restoring Value to the U.S. Economy* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2009).
28. Jameson writes, “late capitalism in general (and the ’60s in particular) constitute a process in

which the last surviving internal and external zones of precapitalism — the last vestiges of a noncommodified or traditional space within and outside the advanced world — are not ultimately penetrated and colonized in their turn. Late capitalism can therefore be described as the moment when the last vestiges of Nature which survived on into classical capitalism are at length eliminated: namely the Third World and the unconscious. The '60s will then have been the momentous transformational period when this systemic restructuring takes place on a global scale." "Periodizing the '60s," in *The Ideologies of Theory: Essays 1971-1986* (Minneapolis: U Minnesota P, 1988) 207.

29. Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* 90.
30. Renato Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Cambridge: Belknap, 1968); Hans-Magnus Enzensberger, "The Aporias of the Avant-Garde" in *The Consciousness Industry: On Literature, Politics and the Media*, trans. Michael Roloff (New York: Seabury, 1974) 16-41; Leslie Fiedler, "The Death of Avant-Garde Literature," *The Collected Essays of Leslie Fiedler*, vol. 2 (New York: Stein and Day, 1971) 454-61. The standard surveys of criticism from the definitional moment of the avant-garde in the 1960s are Andreas Huyssen's chapter "The Search for Tradition" in *After the Great Divide* 160-78, and Matei Călinescu's "The Crisis of the Avant-Garde's Concept" in *Five Faces of Modernity* 120-25.
31. Classical sources for this shift include Alfred D. Chandler, *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business* (Cambridge: Belknap, 1977) and James Burnham, *The Managerial Revolution: What Is Happening in the World* (New York: John Day, 1941). For a critical history, see David Harvey's "Fordism" chapter in *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989) 125-140.
32. Manfredo Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development* (Cambridge: MIT P, 1976). Tafuri singles out Breton as one artist-intellectual who resisted the functionalization of culture by industry. In his second Surrealist manifesto (1924), Breton marks out the very tension that would later be the basis of Bürger's antinomy of the avant-garde: thought "cannot do other than oscillate between the awareness of its perfect autonomy and that of its strict dependence" (qtd. in Tafuri 64). Breton ultimately pushed for art's critical autonomy, as opposed to, for example, Russian Constructivism, for whom art as propaganda posed no great worry. See Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia* 63-68.
33. Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia* 69.
34. World systems theorists recognized in the 1970s that the export of "development" was part of a global accumulation strategy, consistent with older imperialisms. See, for example, Samir Amin's *Unequal Development: An Essay on the Social Formations of Peripheral Capitalism* (New York: Monthly Review, 1976), and "Accumulation and Development: A Theoretical Model." *Review of African Political Economy* 1.1 (1974): 9-26.
35. Notably Andrew Hewitt, *Fascist Modernism: Aesthetics, Politics, and the Avant-Garde* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1993) 6.
36. Roland Barthes, *Critical Essays*, trans. Richard Howard (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1992) 67.
37. In Apollonio (ed.), *Futurist Manifestos 197-200*.
38. Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia* 98.
39. Gramsci, "Americanism and Fordism," in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International, 1971) 279-318.

40. Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone, 1995) 41.
41. Frank writes: “The countercultural style has become a permanent fixture on the American scene, impervious to the angriest assaults of cultural and political conservatives, because it so conveniently and efficiently transforms the myriad petty tyrannies of economic life — all the complaints about conformity, oppression, bureaucracy, meaninglessness, and the disappearance of individualism that became virtually a national obsession in the 1950s — into rationales for consuming.” Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism* (Chicago: U Chicago P, 1997) 31.
42. On Situationism and council communism, see Wollen, *Raiding the Icebox* 120-57.
43. Blake Stimson and Gregory Sholette, “Introduction: Periodizing Collectivism,” *Collectivism after Modernism: The Art of Social Imagination after 1945*, ed. Stimson and Sholette (Minneapolis: U Minnesota P, 2007) 13.
44. For Bourriaud, “present-day art is roundly taking on and taking up the legacy of the 20th century avant-gardes, while at the same time challenging their dogmatism and their teleological doctrines. [...] It was based on conflict, whereas the imaginary of our day and age is concerned with negotiations, bonds, and co-existences.” Nicholas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods (Dijon: Presses Du Réel, 2002) 36.
45. Bishop writes: “relational art is seen as a direct response to the shift from a goods to a service-based economy” (54). Claire Bishop, “Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics.” *October* 110 (2004) 54.
46. Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* 36.
47. On Tiravanija, see Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* 25, 30. On Sierra, see Bishop, “Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics” 73.
48. Bishop’s observation of the audiences of these exhibitions forces her to conclude that despite its ambitions, relational aesthetics essentially “permits networking among a group of art dealers and like-minded art lovers.” Bishop, “Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics” 54.
49. Invisible Committee, “The Coming Insurrection,” *Support the Tarnac 10* (accessed 9 March 2010) n.p. <<http://tarnac9.wordpress.com/texts/the-coming-insurrection/>>.
50. Ernesto Laclau, “Can Immanence Explain Social Struggles?” in *Empire’s New Clothes: Reading Hardt and Negri*, ed. Paul A. Passavant and Jodi Dean (New York: Routledge, 2004) 21-30. A similar critique of the non-strategic character of the multitude can be found in Leo Panitch and Sam Gindin, “Gems and Baubles in *Empire*.” In *Debating Empire*, ed. Gopal Balakrishnan (London: Verso, 2003) 52-60.
51. For critiques of this tendency, see Elizabeth Harney, “Postcolonial Agitations: Avant-Gardism in Dakar and London” *New Literary History* 41.4 (2010): 731-51, and Geeta Kapur, *When Was Modernism: Essays on Contemporary Cultural Practice in India* (New Delhi: Tulika, 2000).
52. George Yúdice, “Rethinking the Theory of the Avant-Garde from the Periphery” in *Modernism and Its Margins: Reinscribing Cultural Modernity from Spain and Latin America* ed. Anthony L. Geist and Jose Monleon (Minneapolis: U Minnesota P, 1999) 74.
53. Yúdice’s conception here bears some similarities to Hal Foster’s better-known critique of Bürger, which also argues, although from an internalist and Western art-historical perspective, for a more flexible historiography to the concept of the avant-garde. But this temporal flexibility comes with a cost; Foster’s critique wants to redeem neo-avant-gardes of the 1950s and ‘60s and open

the possibility of future ones, but to do this he draws from psychoanalytic concepts of return, deferred action, and compulsive repetition to frame the avant-garde as a traumatic hole in the signifying order that is periodically reiterated by subsequent avant-gardes. The cost here is any sense of the “conjunctural circumstances” Yúdice refers to above; historical analysis recedes behind a poststructural, traumatic model of a more or less involuntary mechanism of repetition. Contrast this to Yúdice, who is careful to temper his historical and geographical expansion of the concept of the avant-garde with the material circumstances of decolonization in which they occur. See Hal Foster, “What’s Neo About the Neo-Avant-Garde?” *October* 70 (1994): 5-32.

54. Yúdice, “Rethinking the Theory of the Avant-Garde from the Periphery” 56.
55. Janet Lyon, *Manifestoes: Provocations of the Modern* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1999) 16-23.
56. Yúdice explores the limitations of Bürger’s *Theory* for contemporary activist art throughout the book by implication, but explicitly in a discussion of inSITE “border art” exhibitions in the 1990s. See Yúdice, *The Expediency of Culture* 316-24.
57. Quoted in Yúdice, *The Expediency of Culture* 19.
58. Yúdice, *The Expediency of Culture* 16.
59. De Angelis, *The Beginning of History* 28.
60. Foucault, “Lives of Infamous Men,” *Power: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984*, ed. James D. Faubion, trans. Robert Hurley et al., Vol. 3 (New York: New Press, 2000) 159.
61. Gilles Deleuze, “Postscript on the Societies of Control,” *October* 59 (1992): 3-7.