LEIDEN UNIVERSITY

Pro- or Anti-Autonomy

A Comparative Study of Notions of Avant-Garde by Clement Greenberg and Peter Bürger

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INTRODUCTION

Art-historical concepts are constructions of the field itself, and hence, there is no unanimity. 'Avant-garde' is such a construction. We can discern roughly two diverging paths concerning the understanding of the concept of avant-garde: one with a strong emphasis on formal aspects, the other characterized by political engagement. The basis for this divergence is what is understood as the function of avant-garde.

Since the use of the term 'avant-garde' in the discipline of art its meaning is interpreted differently from the original military use. In the military the term meant, quite literally, the advance guard, meaning the troops in front of the 'regular' army. The utopian socialist Claude Henri de Saint Simon first conceived of the use of the term 'avant-garde' in art. He envisioned a transformation of society with the artist in a leading role, helped by the scientist and the industrialist, in the text 'The Artists, the Savant and the Industrialist' (1825).[1] Its use in the domain of art creates a paradox: art historians conclude in *hindsight* who were the *frontrunners*. This procedure opens the door to disagreement; if a function is not determined prior to the activities, the results will always be subject to different interpretations. A clearly delineated function provides a unity which serves as a necessary precondition for the possibility of a military avant-garde, while it is exactly that lack of agreement concerning a unity in an art-historical avant-garde that permits the construction of different theories concerning avant-garde.

At least two theories in the visual arts claim to have found a unifying aspect which suggest some sort of cohesion within avant-garde. These two theories proved to be highly influential in the wider field of culture and will be scrutinized here. One theory is propagated by the art critic Clement Greenberg who expressed his views throughout his long career in the many short articles and essays in which he reflected on art works and art in general. Greenberg views the avant-garde as working to regain or maintain the quality of art by limiting itself to the essential elements of the art artists handle; these artists were the front-runners. In other words, the avant-garde focused on art and art alone, since 'art is there for its own sake'.[2] On the other hand we have literary theorist Peter Bürger, whose *Theorie der Avantgarde* (1974) states that avant-garde was opposed to the autonomy of art. According to Bürger, the ultimate goal of avant-garde was the reintegration of art in daily life; only then could art be socially useful again. Simply stated, there is a notion of avant-garde which views

[1] Rodriguez, 1998 (1825): 40. Saint-Simon's follower Olinde Rodriguez actually composed this text.
[2] Greenberg, 1999 (1971): 80.

art as autonomous, and there is a notion of an avant-garde that struggles to overcome a supposed autonomy.[3] Autonomy appears to be the bedrock in the construction of the concept of avant-garde. This suggests the diverging functions of avant-garde, as understood by Greenberg and Bürger, are rooted in the way these authors comprehend the autonomy of art.

How can two notions of avant-garde, which effectively exclude each other, 'exist' next to each other for decades in the discipline of art history? From the beginning of my academic education this situation has intrigued me. To make it even more incomprehensible, in the more general art-historical overviews, avant-garde is framed not as 'either/or', but as a single phenomenon, often without helpful explanation.[4] Understandably, a *general overview* has to summarize, to reduce complexities, but still, there is hardly any agreement on which characteristic or criterion of what is avant-garde within the cultural field, and at the same time it is written about as if we all comprehend the characteristic particulars. This treatment of avant-garde as if we all understand it in the same way suggests a desire to overcome the alternate positions. But how could we overcome the disagreement if it is rooted in the understanding of the autonomy of art? Admittedly, opposing views in the field of art history (or any other field for that matter) are by no means incidental, and could be productive, but this is a special case, for several reasons. First of all, the importance of the topic at hand. I would say that without a thorough understanding of avant-garde one cannot hope to understand the developments in the art of the last, say, 150 years. If avant-garde is in front of art, as its name suggests, it is partly constitutive of the art that follows. We find avant-garde in

[3] The words 'notion' and 'concept' seem to mean roughly the same, expressions of 'ideas'. However, 'concept' connotes something more 'founded' as an abstract model, where 'notion' seems to be a less developed understanding or belief. I see Greenberg's and Bürger's understanding of avant-garde as different notions of the concept of avant-garde.

[4] Consider, for instance, the way the term 'avant-garde' is used in Honour and Fleming's *The Visual Arts: A History* (2010). There is a 'pictorial avant-garde' (816), spoken of in relation with photographers 'joining up with the ranks', but also in explanation of Monet's painting *The Picnic* (1856-66): '…with this painting he tried to answer Beaudelaire's demand for an art of "modern life" by recording an everyday theme in a strictly objective, dispassionate spirit of on-the-spot observation. In its dual concern for contemporaneity of subject and optical truth, Monet's painting sums up the aims of the young avant-garde' (702). In the same book there is also mention of 'avant-garde gesture, a provocative and not simply an appreciative, still less aesthetic response' (773). As stated, these uses of 'avant-garde' do not necessarily compete, but are hardly comprehensible as a single concept. *Janson's History of Art* (2007) does provide a definition, but an extremely general one, which tells us too little to illuminate anything: 'the notion that certain artists are strikingly new and radical for their time.' (862). It does add that 'it was a movement preoccupied with the dramatic changes in society, and that its birth coincides with the great European-wide Revolution of 1848.' This 'movement' suggests a unity that is not found in the art of that and later times. *Art since 1900* (2012) takes another approach. Very 'postmodern', or in line with 'New Art History', the writers start out with an explanation of their different approaches. This results also in the treatment of Bürger's theory under the heading of 'The Social History of Art' (25), and Greenberg's position under 'Formalism and Structuralism' (33). So far, this is consistent. But the term 'avant-garde' as such is almost exclusively used in reference to an anti-traditionalist attitude in the rest of the book, which is only in accordance with Bürger's views, not Greenberg's. An exception is formed by the 'Roundtable' discussions (319-28), where Bürger and Greenberg are again treated as opposing each other.

a wide variety of cultural expressions which marks the importance of this concept. The abundance of innovations in art, due to the effort of avant-garde artists, and the extraordinary amount of discourse that is produced relating to or about avant-garde confirm its importance. Secondly, although our understanding includes possible different insights into the meaning or function of the avant-garde, in the case of avant-garde the disparate notions of 'to be autonomous or not to be autonomous' relate to its ontological core, forming the very essence of what avant-garde could 'be'. Retaining different readings that effectively exclude each other should result in two streams of art history, side by side, at the same time. Although such a situation would perhaps not be entirely bad, we observe that in written reality avant-garde is still often treated as a single phenomenon.

To be able to understand the relation between avant-garde and the autonomy of art, the surface of these very influential notions of avant-garde should be penetrated. Both what Greenberg and Bürger have to say about avant-garde will be examined in chapter one and two. In these chapters the claims of their views are tested on their strength. Greenberg's views will be the topic of the first chapter. The transformation of Greenberg's *functional* avant-garde ('Avant-Garde and Kitsch', 1939) into a highly *depoliticized* Modernism ('Modernist Painting', 1960) will form the direction of interest, since this is exactly the point where art's autonomy is discussed in relation to the supposed function of avant-garde. Greenberg's opinions about different developments in art that are usually considered as avant-garde will be highlighted.

Peter Bürger describes his understanding of the relation of avant-garde and the autonomy of art in his *Theorie der Avantgarde* (1974). The original German version of Bürger's book was followed by critical comments a year later from colleagues of diverse disciplines in Germany.[5] The publication of the English translation, ten years later, sparked discussion in the United States. Bürger's position will be examined with the help of the critical comments.

In the third chapter I will attempt to go beyond the 'case-studies' of the perspectives by Greenberg and Bürger, and concentrate on both a selection of more contemporary thinking about autonomy, and on a more original source of our understanding of autonomy. For the more recent views on the autonomy of art the work of Jacques Rancière and the combined efforts of the participants of the so-called 'Autonomy Project' will be examined. Avant-garde

[5] *Antworten auf Peter Bürgers Bestimmung von Kunst und bürgerlicher Gesellschaft* appeared in 1976. The educational diversity of the authors in this 'reply' on Bürger underscores the large field where avant-garde has an effect on: Roman Studies and Literature, German, Philosophy, Theology, Pedagogy, History (of Literature), Sociology, Theatre Studies, Political Studies, Sociology of Culture.

seems to have been vanished in our present day, but what about the autonomy of art? Has the understanding of the autonomy of art changed, compared to what Greenberg and Bürger thought of it? For a more original understanding of the term 'autonomy' it might prove useful to look at the way the term is understood by the person who is sometimes seen as the 'father' of the autonomy of art: Immanuel Kant (1724-1804). Both Greenberg and Bürger allude to Kant in their work, and it should be enlightening to learn how Kant interprets the autonomy of art. It was in *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (1790) that Kant defined art as '…eine Vorstellungsart, die für sich selbst zweckmäßig ist, und obgleich ohne Zweck…'.[6] This quote is sometimes understood as confirming the phrase 'art for art's sake'.[7]

Aside from the actual meaning of the word 'autonomy', which is quite literally 'self-regulation', autonomy has the connotation of 'apartness', of something disconnected. But in practical reality art is not exactly cut off from the rest of society. It might be useful to try to approach autonomy as a gradual phenomenon. For this, a term which is certainly not new, but often overlooked: 'aesthetic distance', might be helpful. Greenberg uses this term, but he seems to understand it as the detachment of other experiences in life, so, as if one steps over a mental border to 'be' in an aesthetic state of mind with which we can 'purely' experience and value the work of art on its own premises. 'Distance' however, is a gradual phenomenon. How much aesthetic distance do we need to experience an artwork? Is this perhaps relative to the subject? And in what way could the work of art play its role in this distancing? Aesthetician Edward Bullough introduced the term 'Psychical Distance' in 1912 and he states that Distance (Bullough capitalizes the term to distinguish the aesthetic, mental Distance from an actual spatial distance) is 'a factor in all Art'.[8] For Bullough the term transcends several oppositions 'which in their mutual exclusiveness when applied to Art soon lead to confusion'.[9] This is exactly the situation we find ourselves in, discussing an avant-garde which produces art either in complete autonomy, or an avant-garde which produces art to get rid of the autonomy of art altogether.

[6] Kant, 1922 (1790): §44 B179.
[7] See, for instance: http://www.arthistoryunstuffed.com/kant-art-for-arts-sake/
[8] Bullough, 1957 (1912): 95.
[9] Ibid.: 96.

1. CLEMENT GREENBERG: AVANT-GARDE ART FOR ART'S SAKE

Since the work of Clement Greenberg spans more than fifty years I will limit what to discuss here, focusing on Greenberg's comments concerning his understanding of avant-garde, specifically those which relate to the autonomy of art. Greenberg's first essays, 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch' (1939) and 'Towards a Newer Laokoon' (1940), will form the point of departure. The position Greenberg takes in these early essay already shows a shift, which culminates in the position that is stated probably most clearly in 'Modernist Painting' (1960). This is visible in his use of the term 'avant-garde' in the first few years of his career, before switching to the term 'modernism', favoring the latter term throughout the rest of his career.[10] Although Greenberg uses the term 'Modernism' or 'modernist art' in favor of 'avant-garde', he seems to mean the same art and artists with it. If the terms designate the same art and the same artists, why change the name? The change in terminology could be seen as analogous with Greenberg's shift in emphasis from the social aspects to the artistic elements. In 1979 he declares: 'The "avant-garde" was what Modernism was called at first, but this term has become a good deal compromised by now as well as remaining misleading'.[11] Opposing this close proximity of meaning of the terms modernism and avant-garde is critic Matei Calinescu: 'As for modernism, whatever its specific meaning in different languages and for different authors, it never conveys that sense of universal and hysterical negation so characteristic of the avant-garde'.[12]

In the first paragraph Greenberg's positions in the early decades of his career will be analyzed. What does it entail that Greenberg starts out in 1939 with an explanation of the political function of avant-garde, and then later, in 1960, he propagates an emphasis on the formal aesthetic value of art? How can we understand these positions? In the second paragraph the prominent place of Cubism in the work of Greenberg will be explored. What is the role of Cubism in what Greenberg views as the progressive development in modernist art?

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[10] Greenberg, 2003 (1980): 27. (Originally delivered as a lecture in Sydney, Australia, in 1979.) Greenberg capitalizes the term 'Modernism'. This appears as just a detail, but is not. In the English language it is a rule to write "*definable* historical periods" [my italics] with a capital. See: Kriszer & Mandell. *The Wadsworth Handbook*. Boston (Ma.): Wadsworth, 2014: 722. For Greenberg Modernism is a clearly demarcated period in art, usually beginning with Manet (See: http://www.sharecom.ca/greenberg/avantgarde.html). In this paper I will retain his use of the upper-case letter in the treatment of Greenberg's expressions. To my knowledge, Greenberg used the term 'modernism'(without capital) for the first time (in publication) already in 1941, discussing the poetry of Bertolt Brecht as the example of 'a kind of modern poetry that gets its character from a flavoring of folk or popular culture' (Greenberg, 1986 (1941): 49. 'This modernist poetry' seems to be much closer to kitsch, in this understanding, than its avant-garde opposite.

[11] Ibid.: 27.

[12] Calinescu, 1987: 140.

Connected with this the way Greenberg positioned his avant-garde or Modernism in relation to other movements in art will be discussed in the third paragraph. Especially the later works by Greenberg betray a vehement negativity towards certain other developments in art. What is the reason for this negativity?

1.1 Avant-garde culture as basis of Modernist aesthetics

Greenberg defined avant-garde in an essay that sketches the complex relation of art and politics. This might seem paradoxical, after introducing Greenberg's view of avant-garde as autonomous, but the detached position of avant-garde is explained historically. 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch' (1939) forms a rough historical description of the society in which an avant-garde could be born, as a reaction to a static state of culture:

> It is among the hopeful signs in the midst of the decay of our present society that we—some of us—have been unwilling to accept this last phase for our own culture. In seeking to go beyond Alexandrianism, a part of Western bourgeois society has produced something unheard of heretofore: avant-garde culture.[13]

Greenberg explains the raison d'être of avant-garde: '…the true and most important function of avant-garde was not to "experiment", but to find a path along which it would be possible to keep culture moving in the midst of ideological confusion and violence.'[14] This terminology betrays Greenberg's Marxism. Avant-garde (as a product of historical criticism brought to us by the Enlightenment), in his opinion, tried to circumvent the ideological struggle, much in the way Trotsky did, who, in opposition to Stalin, tried to save the (socialist) revolution in his own way.[15] The need for some sort of revolution lies at the basis of the idea of an avant-garde since the 1820s, when Saint-Simon first used the term avant-garde to express the ideas of socialism of the time. The artist would be in the forefront of a movement towards the greater welfare of all: 'We, the artists, aim for the heart and imagination, and hence our effect is the

[13] Greenberg, 1986 (1939): 6-7. 'Alexandrianism' is defined by Greenberg as: 'an academicism in which the really important issues are left untouched because they involve controversy, and in which creative activity dwindles to virtuosity in the small details of form, all larger questions being decides by the precedent of the old masters' (6).
[14] Ibid.: 8
[15] For Greenberg, the ideological confusion in his time consisted of the struggles between capitalism/fascism versus socialism/democracy. For his opinion: Greenberg, 1986 (1940): 38-41. Also, a short article on Greenberg's Marxism in the forties : http://www.newcriterion.com/articles.cfm/Clement-Greenberg-in-the-Forties-6111

most vivid and decisive'.[16] It was a call to unite the forces of artists, scientists and industrials, where an avant-garde of artists would guide social progress, with the power to present the imagined battle plan. Henri de Saint-Simon (1760-1825) was a 'proto-socialist', who took it upon him to organize the economic structure in the chaos of post-revolutionary France.[17]

So far, this does not read at all as autonomous art, as *l'art pour l'art*. On the contrary, this declares a very strong function for avant-garde outside of art itself, that is, aiding the larger body of culture. How did avant-garde achieve its goal? Greenberg explains:

> It has been in search of the absolute that the avant-garde has arrived at "abstract" or "nonobjective" art—and poetry, too. The avant-garde poet or artist tries in effect to imitate God by creating something valid solely on its own terms, in the way nature itself is valid, in the way a landscape—not its picture—is aesthetically valid; something given, increate, independent of meanings, similars or originals. Content is to be dissolved so completely into form that the work of art or literature cannot be reduced in whole or in part to anything not itself.[18]

It is a particular quality of Greenberg's writing that he is very self assured and seems to *prescribe* the way art should be made, while, under scrutiny, he is quite subtle and *describes* the way art was made, as he views it. For instance, in the paragraph above there is nothing that states that 'the absolute' avant-garde was in search of is actually the same as the '"abstract or "nonobjective" art' it arrived at. The statement *suggests* that abstract art is a logical outcome of the road taken by the avant-garde, thereby suggesting just as strong that there was only one avant-garde with a single goal, a single path that was followed, simply by leaving unmentioned other possibilities. With this 'explanation' Greenberg seems to say the same as Wassily Kandinsky did in 1913, while analyzing the development of his work away from direct representation of nature with the goal to create by 'pictorial means, which I love above all artistic means, pictures that as purely pictorial objects have their own independent, intense life'.[19]

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[16] Rodriguez, 1998 (1825): 40-41.

[17] The introduction of the text by Rodriguez (note 7 & 17) states, about Saint-Simon: 'He moved instead to a Romantically inclined view of society as a living organism and began to develop the doctrine known as 'New Christianity'. It was as a consequence of this turn [from a more mechanistic view] that St. Simon came to accord a larger role to art and the imagination in the process of social change'. For more on St. Simon and the developing socialism: Booth, A.J. *A Chapter in the History of Socialism in France*. London: Longmans, 1871.

[18] Greenberg, 1986 (1939): 8.

[19] This is a quote by Kandinsky, according to a (press) release by the MOMA, January 1995, at the start of a exhibition of Kandinsky's *Composition* paintings in 1995. In *Reminiscences* (1913) Kandinsky explains the gradual process of the solution [that the aims (and thus the means) of nature and art are essentially, organically and by universal law different from each other] that 'liberated' him (reprinted in: *Modern Artists on Art*. ed. Robert L. Herbert. Mineola: Dover Publications, 2000: 17-39).

But how would 'creating absolutes' help avant-garde to 'keep culture moving'? Greenberg explains that to prevent 'the decay of our present society' avant-garde 'emigrated' to 'Bohemia' and took its position against 'the prevailing standards of society'.[20] Since the latter half of the 19th century a development is visible in painting 'towards greater emphasis on decorative and abstract qualities of pictorial art'.[21] This is what Greenberg views as the step towards detachment from society. Avant-garde artist somehow moved out of the social sphere, and into an artistic/aesthetic one.[22] Or, to rephrase that in a less literal sense: avant-garde rejected the political foundations of the bourgeoisie and positioned themselves in opposition to these ideas, favoring cultural goals. Detached from the social world, avant-garde directs itself to their own means, focusing on the medium: the subject matter of art becomes art itself. Still, this 'detachment' is, according to Greenberg, not to be taken too literal. The avant-garde remained paradoxically attached to society, for to thrive it needed the money of the higher classes: it remained linked with an 'umbilical cord of gold' to the elite.[23] This makes the autonomy of art relative.

We have already encountered different autonomies of art. The quoted passage concerning the abstractness of art seems to point to a certain independence of creating direct representations of the 'objective' world. Greenberg views avant-garde art as creating without connection to the social world whatsoever. There is also the autonomy of the 'movement' of avant-garde artists that somehow detached themselves from the social and political mores of the bourgeois contemporary society —but not from the money that kept them alive. It seems to be a peculiar combination of these two autonomies that Greenberg opposes kitsch with. The combination of avant-garde, the group of artists that distanced themselves from society, and the art they created, the art that uses the artistic means independent, autonomous, from the traditional conventions of representation, is opposed to that other product of culture, kitsch. With kitsch Greenberg means all expressions of culture for those with less sensibility for

[20] Greenberg, 1986 (1939): 7.
[21] Greenberg, 1986 (1941): 69. Often it is Manet who is specifically named as the beginning of this revolution in painting, which Greenberg labels 'the school of Paris'. However, in 'Towards a Newer Laocoon' (1940) Greenberg states: 'Courbet, the first real avant-garde painter . . .' Also, Manet's innovations were a reaction on the high standards set by Courbet (see: Greenberg, 1986 (1949): 276). The detachment Greenberg describes was a slow process, which was only anticipated in Paris in the 19th century. It was in New York that its alienation was truly completed, at the time when the high artists were not accepted as such (meaning Abstract Expressionism in the forties and fifties) (See: Greenberg, 1986, (1948): 194).
[22] Greenberg, 1986 (1939): 8. 'Retiring from public altogether, the avant-garde poet or artist sought to maintain the high level of his art by both narrowing and raising it to the expression of an absolute in which all relativities and contradictions would be either resolved or beside the point. "Art for art's sake" and "pure poetry" appear, and subject matter or content becomes something to be avoided like a plague.'
[23] Ibid.: 11.

'genuine culture'.[24] T.J. Clark commented on this in 'Clement Greenberg's Theory of Art' (1982). Clark makes an interesting point regarding the strict distinction Greenberg creates in 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch', between 'those values only to be found in art and the values which can be found everywhere else'.[25] Greenberg argues that the element that makes avant-garde art distinct from kitsch is the quality. In good art (that is, avant-garde art) the values are hidden, in bad art (kitsch) the human values are instantly recognizable.[26] According to Clark this distinction is 'negotiated', that is, it is the result of an 'interplay of these values and the values of art which made the distinction an active and possible one'.[27] To be able to experience and value certain 'difficult' art, there has to be some sort of 'consonance' with the experience of life itself. The values of art are not as separate as Greenberg suggests in 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch'. The 'tremendous interval that separates from each other avant-garde and kitsch', as Greenberg described it, appears not as rigid as he presented it.[28]

'Towards a Newer Laokoon' (1940) was published shortly after 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch'. In this essay Greenberg asserts his focus on aesthetic elements right from the start by expressing his respect for purism in art. As in 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch', Greenberg sketches a historical development of art, pointing to what he calls 'the confusion of the arts', a situation in which specific arts betray their 'own' medium in favor of incorporating elements of other media.[29] An example is painting which concerns itself with the literary, the narrative, thereby hiding the painterly means with illusion. Avant-garde becomes conscious of this confusion and recognizes that to be able to express nothing else than the pure sensation of the artwork, each art should define itself in the terms of the sense in which each art is perceived; accepting purity meant that all 'external' elements had to be excluded. This explains the focus on the medium, which had progressed to the state of the art in the period of Greenberg's writing as 'safe', that is, the different arts were independent of each other now, acting within their own limits.[30] In keeping with the military terminology, Greenberg expressed it as follows: 'The history of avant-garde painting is that of a progressive surrender to the resistance of its medium; which resistance consists chiefly in the flat picture plane's denial of efforts to "hole through" it for realistic perspectival space'.[31] This argument is reiterated in the famous essay

[24] Ibid.: 13.
[25] Clark quoting Greenberg, 1982: 150.
[26] Greenberg, 1986 (1939): 15-16. Greenberg compares a battlefield painting by Repin with a painting of a woman by Picasso.
[27] Clark, 1982: 151.
[28] Greenberg, 1986 (1939): 17.
[29] Greenberg, 1986 (1940): 23.
[30] Ibid.: 32.
[31] Ibid.: 34.

‘Modernist Painting’ (1960). In this essay Greenberg summarizes the ideas of ‘Avant-Garde and Kitsch’ and ‘Towards a Newer Laokoon’, but where these earlier essays were primarily concerned with the state of culture, ‘Modernist Painting’ remains strictly within in the field of formal aesthetic and material means. The ‘superior consciousness of history’ of ‘Avant-Garde and Kitsch’ is translated in ‘Modernist Painting’ as the self-criticism which was assigned with the dismantling of all elements that do not intrinsically ‘belong’ to the own medium of the different arts. Each art should abide by the limiting conditions of its own specific medium; transgressing these limits would result in confusion.[32] For painting mediumspecificity means most of all the emphasizing of the flat surface, its two-dimensional nature.

Greenberg’s historical sketch of the development of avant-garde shows a detachment from society. In ‘Avant-Garde and Kitsch’ this detachment is formulated quite sharp (‘emigration from society’) but in practice a necessary monetary connection remained. This autonomy is therefore a relative independence of a loose ‘group’ of artists, who did not agree with the prevailing standards of society. Greenberg describes their goal as to sustain the quality in art, which was dwindling towards a state of ‘Alexandrianism’. Then there is another form of autonomy, which is the autonomy of content, of subject matter. This latter form of autonomy gains prominence in Greenberg’s work from 1940 onward. It is the autonomy for which representation is abandoned, in favor of a free use of artistic means. But not entirely free, because with the liberation from the subject matter from reality there came also the limitation of the ‘own’ medium. This means a specialization, where the different arts concentrated on their ‘own’ medium—thereby gaining more autonomy in their ‘own’ field. So far, this explains how Greenberg left the political function of ‘his’ avant-garde and chose to focus almost completely on the development of formal elements towards mediumspecificity. This shift signifies a reason of why Greenberg chose to leave the term ‘avant-garde’ and resort to ‘Modernism’. Precisely because the term ‘avant-garde’ was loaded with political connotations (which Greenberg emphasized in his earlier essay), Greenberg deviates from it when he tries to direct the attention to the exclusive formal qualities of artworks. We will return to this in 1.3.

[32] Ibid.: 25. The point of ‘practical and theoretical confusion of the arts’ was the reason Greenberg could use the title ‘Towards a Newer Laokoon’, since it was Lessing who famously wrote about the *Grenzen der Mahlerei und Poesie,* or *Laokoon*, in 1766.

1.2 The exclusion of everything but Cubism

Greenberg was first and foremost an art critic. The essays where he build his judgments about artworks on his taste, were the essays where he was as a fish in water.[33] It was a special ability of Greenberg to write in a style that blends factual information with value judgments. We can observe this take effect in the way he promotes Cubism. Already from the early, more ideological essays, to the essays in the sixties, Greenberg saw a gradual emphasis on each art's own medium. The growing mediumspecificity, as a historical development, formed the criterion for good art; without it, the effort was mere kitsch. Cubism exemplified Greenberg's mediumspecificity best. But why Cubism? This seems a bit at odds with Greenberg's statements about abstract art in 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch', since Cubism is not specifically considered abstract art.[34] In what way does Cubism show what Greenberg saw as the development towards greater mediumspecificity?

The criterion with which to judge art for Greenberg was taste. Not exactly in the way we perceive taste in daily life, when we tend to say: 'it is a matter of taste', explaining our differences, but taste as a form of educated experience within a hierarchy of knowledge about art. This means taste can be improved by practice, by empirical experience. At the same time Greenberg viewed taste as intuitive, therefore involuntary: 'Your esthetic judgment, being an intuition and nothing else, is received, not taken. You no more choose to like or not like a given item of art than you choose to see the sun as bright or the night as dark'.[35] This ambiguity makes it hard to pin down solid criteria on which he based himself. It does, however, point to a way of opening oneself to the experience. For Greenberg, the first step in the judging of a give art work is the visual—excluding 'everything that actually happens, either to yourself or to anyone else'.[36] This exclusion of everything else is what Greenberg calls 'esthetic distance'. We distance ourselves from the practical reality when we experience something aesthetically. This detachment forms a necessary precondition. We will treat this topic, its origins in the characterization of the aesthetic judgment as disinterested by

[33] Greenberg, 1999: xiii. Charles Harrison's words in the introduction to Greenberg's *Homemade Esthetics*: 'Clement Greenberg was unquestionably the most influential critic of modern art writing in the English language during the mid-twentieth century.'
[34] Greenberg, 1986 (1939): 8. 'It has been in search of the absolute that the avant-garde has arrived at "abstract" or "nonobjective" art'.
[35] Greenberg, 1999 (1973): 7. This book is a collection of essays and transcripts of seminars given by Greenberg in the seventies. The seminars provided Greenberg with the opportunity to summarize and explain his position on the different topics he discussed during the seminars.
[36] Ibid.: 5. This involves 'a certain mental or psychic shift', a kind of distancing' (4-5). We will discuss this kind of distancing further in chapter three.

Immanuel Kant, and an explication of aesthetic distance by Edward Bullough, in chapter three. For now I should note that this is yet another form of autonomy, the independence of a part of ourselves when we experience something in an aesthetical way.

Distancing yourself from the practical reality also means excluding from your aesthetic experience the possible narrative (the 'content') in the painting before you. The focus is exclusively on the flat surface, and the distribution of paint in lines and forms and colors on that surface. What attracts and pleases the eye is a certain unity of these elements on the surface. This is the intuitive experience, the pleasure we receive from a certain unity, the sensation it creates is our aesthetic experience. It is the particular unity of these elements that make a painting good art. If the attention is not exclusively on these painterly means (this goes for both the artists and the observer), there cannot be such a unity, and, consequently, not good art. It was the avant-garde that examined the possibilities of their media, to sustain aesthetic quality of their work. Now we see the rough shape of how Greenberg formed his judgment of art in general and the reason for his focus on the medium.

Greenberg's explanation in 'Towards a Newer Laokoon' of how the 'surrender' to flatness had occurred throughout recent history takes the form of a formal description of the development of Cézanne's art through the different phases of Cubism. From the 'vibrating tension' which is the result of the 'struggle to maintain their volume' against the crushing flatness of the picture plane;[37] to deliberately emphasizing the physical flatness by adding illusionist elements—Greenberg is quick to state that these illusions are optical, not realistic—in order to preserve an element of depth. We have to agree with Greenberg that it was definitely an explicit goal of at least one of the two foremost Cubists to break through the traditional three-dimensional pictorial space.[38] The focus on the means of painting was clearly stated in 1917 by George Braque: 'The limitation of means gives style, engenders the new form and incites to creation', and also: 'The limited means are often the charm and strength in unsophisticated painting'.[39]

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[37] Greenberg, 1986 (1940): 35.

[38] Braque, in conversation with Dora Vallier (in 1954), stated: 'Traditional perspective gave me no satisfaction. …It operates from a single viewpoint which is never abandoned. Now the viewpoint is a minor consideration… I was above all attracted to making real the new sense of space that I felt.' Reprinted in: Cooper, D. *Braque: The Great Years*. Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, 1972. Aside from Braque, there were more and earlier remarks concerning the focus on de means of painting as opposed to the 'outside' world. A collection of those expressions is printed in: Antliff, M., Patricia Leighten. *A Cubism reader. Documents and Criticism, 1906-1914*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008.

[39] Braque's expressions were collected by his friend Pierre Reverdy and published as 'Thoughts and Reflections on Painting'. Reprinted in Chipp, Herschel B. ed. *Theories of Modern Art*. Berkely: University of California Press, 1968: 260.

The form of Greenberg's narrative concerning the primacy of Cubism in the development of avant-garde is important. In his essays he recounts a historical development of art, which is itself based on transformations in the social world. In for instance 'Abstract Art' (1944) and 'The Plight of our Culture'(1953), Greenberg claims very clearly that artistic transformations are a reaction on changes in the social structure. The independence of (avant-garde) art is very relative during these two decades. Although the social causes were mentioned lesser, especially since 'Modernist Painting', the dialectical form in which transformations in art follow each other remains the hinge in his explanation of avant-garde art. Cubism lends itself perfectly for Greenberg's description of the progressive 'undressing' of effects borrowed from other arts. It were the cubists Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso who attempted to master the conflict between the flat surface and the marks on that surface, which created the illusion of depth. Their investigation into the inconsistent nature of this conflict led them to invest all of their combined energy to continuously aim for new discoveries—like a pair of climbers roped together'.[40] Greenberg explains the various stages of development of these Cubist painters as the challenging of difficulties; challenges that they overcame. The most dramatic part in this evolution must have been the moment when Braque and Picasso affixed external material onto the surface which overcame the then widely diverged elements of surface and depth by pulling the depth out of the surface and in front of the surface (fig I.). Collage was born. Three-dimensional depth, the former enemy, had been overcome, by constructing it anew, onto the flat surface, which was now relegated to the background. What actually happens is that

> by its greater corporeal presence and its greater extraneousness, the affixed paper or cloth serves for a seeming moment to push everything else into a more vivid idea of depth than the simulated printing of simulated textures [of a prior phase of development, RV] had ever done. . . . Literal flatness now tends to assert itself as the main event of the picture, and the device boomerangs: the illusion of depth is rendered even more precarious than before.[41]

[40] A quote from Braque from 'In conversation with Dora Vallier', reprinted in *Letters of the Great Artists – From Blake to Pollock* (Richard Friedenthal, transl. Daphne Woodward,1963): 264.

[41] Greenberg, 1961 (1959): 69-80. The essay 'Collage' is by far the most illuminating I have read concerning the formal development of Cubism. Greenberg explains the many various steps of its development from his point of view of the progressing mediumspecificity which amounts to reinforcing the flatness of the picture surface for painting. It should be emphasized that although the literal use of means expanded in this development (by adding external elements), this remained within the art of painting, for Greenberg. Only when Picasso took it upon himself to create multiple flat surfaces *in the physical space in front of the picture plane* (in 1912), a new form of *sculpture* was invented: construction. This was yet another step in the development of Cubism.

Corresponding to the dialectical process, the negation was negated. For Greenberg, Cubism demonstrated the possibilities (and limitations) of the medium of painting more than any other style. This forms the justification for the way in which Greenberg very often measures artistic expressions to the work of the early cubists. When artists followed this example, or at least showed that Cubism was grasped, only then could they possibly move beyond that point (which was necessary, since the first cubists never really embraced abstract art), and create art that Greenberg deemed good, or important, or perhaps even 'major'.

Important and striking in Greenberg's explanation of avant-garde's mediumspecificity is the exclusion of everything outside of the framework of Cubism. By choosing this particular framework as an a point of reference, Greenberg assures himself of the correctness of his interpretative model—as if this was the template. This becomes clearer when he progresses the argument towards abstract art:

> Indeed, a good many of the artists . . . who contributed importantly to the development of modern painting came to it with the desire to exploit the break with imitative realism for a more powerful expressiveness, but so inexorable was the logic of the development that in the end their work constituted but another step towards abstract art, and a further sterilization of the expressive factors . . . All roads led to the same place.[42]

Although the large wave of new art movements that would not fit into Greenberg's model was yet to come, already, in 1940, it would have been obvious that this was a highly reductive model. Aside from excluding all art that did not develop in the direction of abstraction, the argument is circular. The artists that Greenberg views as contributing importantly are chosen with the result of abstraction in mind. Hence, the 'inexorable logic' is only logical because this development consists only of elements that fit the criteria—progressive abstraction—that were stated beforehand. The logic depends on examples that fit the theory. The effort Greenberg took to construct this model fitted his practice as a critic who favored the rise of Abstract Expressionism in the United States. During the forties and fifties Greenberg explained and justified his favorable opinions concerning the new American painting by emphasizing the unbroken line between Cubism (and prior to that, the Old Masters) and the 'logical' outcome of the artistic investigation and focus on painterly means that Cézanne and the Cubists developed.

[42] Greenberg, 1986 (1940): 37.

Obviously, Greenberg's description is nowadays not regarded as the definite road travelled by innovative art, but as one of many possible descriptions of the different roads art travelled.[43] In Greenberg's own time already, Harold Rosenberg (1906-1978) positioned himself against Greenberg's view of an unbroken development of the history of (modern) art in an essay that interpreted an originality in some American painters, for whom the canvas began to appear 'as an arena in which to act'.[44] Less focused on formal descriptions and more concerned with the individual subjective states of the artist Rosenberg saw avant-garde as a radical break with tradition. Although Rosenberg's position deviates firmly from Greenberg's on these points, in a sense, Rosenberg emphasizes the autonomous character of art even more than Greenberg does, when he states that 'the gesture on the canvas was a gesture of liberation, from Value—political, esthetic, moral'.[45] Here, the independence of the artist's individual creativity is key in the production of art, not the resulting artworks themselves, since 'the new painting has broken down every distinction between art and life'.[46]

The image of art as an island, concerning itself progressively with art and art alone is reinforced by Greenberg's sketch of a progressive development of art, as well as by the contemporary art critic Rosenberg, who opposes the progressive development, but emphasizes the artists individuality. So far, the concentration on the material work and the artists leads to an intensification of art's autonomy.

1.3 Avant-garde versus Avant-gard*ism*

Two elements of the discussion so far will meet each other in this paragraph: Greenberg's preference for the term 'Modernism' over 'avant-garde', and the 'problem' of the developments in art that did not follow the 'logic' of his artistic Modernism. As it happens, the reason Greenberg favored 'Modernism' over 'avant-garde' is rooted in his aversion of those developments in art that did not fit into his framework. The later Greenberg took Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968) as his opponent from 1968 onward, to explain that Duchamp's art, and

[43] If there is something to be said of the reception of Greenberg's ideas it is that he is 'the most notorious, celebrated and disputed of American critics', which means that everybody seems to have (had) an opinion. (See: http://www.sharecom.ca/greenberg/wilkin.html) It is often quite difficult to extricate the opinions of the man from the opinions of the ideas.
[44] Rosenberg, 1952: 22.
[45] Ibid.: 23. Of course, mentioning the liberation from value, especially the value of the aesthetic, was a direct attack on Greenberg. From this essay onward, Rosenberg and Greenberg remained in conflict throughout their careers.
[46] Ibid.: 23. It is Bürger who will claim that the destruction of the distinction of life was the main goal for avant-garde.

that of his followers, is inferior. It were the new movements in art that drove Greenberg in the defense. Especially Pop could in no way be fitted in his model of Modernism, and was therefore not relevant for 'good art'. However, the popularity of the new art, which Greenberg traces back to Duchamp and Dada, had to be adressed since these expressions tried to skip the border from low-quality to high-quality art.

Duchamp is to blame for this travesty. Greenberg explains the differences in types of avant-garde again historically.[47] It started out with an avant-garde that was simply against the academic rules the French Salons abided by, from the middle of the 19th century onward.[48] Although at first the originality or newness of art was the crucial factor in the high quality of that art, in the following decades 'innovation and advancedness began to look more and more like given, categorical means to artistic significance *apart* from the question of aesthetic quality'.[49] This was especially the case with the Italian Futurists, who exploited newness in art as an end in itself. This is what Greenberg calls 'avant-garde*ness*'. In the next phase the responsibility of Duchamp comes to the fore. This is what Greenberg terms 'popular avant-garde'[50], or 'avant-gard*ism*'.[51] With avant-gardism 'the shocking, scandalizing, startling, the mystifying and confounding, became embraced as end in themselves and no longer regretted as initial side effects of artistic newness that would wear off with familiarity'.[52] For Greenberg, theses side effects were never aesthetic, but merely suggestive means to obtain artistic significance. Greenberg states that most avant-garde rhetoric is based on misunderstandings of which the most constant is the claim that every new phase of avant-garde art is to finally close off the past art, and radically start anew. In this sense an 'advanced-advanced art' came to the fore, or, an avant-garde which countered the former avant-garde.[53] An example is the bicycle wheel mounted on top of a stool, made by Duchamp in 1913, which seemed 'designed to go Picasso one better' in the direction of the 'startling difficulty' which Duchamp seem to have—wrongly—attributed as the impact of Cubism.[54] Greenberg accuses Duchamp, and his later followers, of a kind of academism which disguised itself as advanced art. Instead of following the lead of 'truly' avant-garde art, what the

[47] In this sense one could read this as a correction of 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch', 1939), since it deviates from the history Greenberg sketched then. The social causes that led to the emerging avant-garde are, in the new version, largely omitted in favor of predominantly aesthetic developments.
[48] The Pre-Raphaelites in Great Britain and the Realists in France (represented by Gustave Courbet) are regarded as among the first to challenge the rules of the national Academies.
[49] Greenberg, 2003 (1971): 6.
[50] Greenberg, 1993 (1969): 301. Originally delivered as a lecture in Australia in May 1968.
[51] Greenberg, 2003 (1971): 7.
[52] Ibid.: 7.
[53] Ibid.: 5.
[54] Ibid.: 10.

majority of 'regular' academic artists did, with its 'emphasis on "purity"', Duchamp's avant-gardism showed, on a theoretical level, 'that " raw" art could be formalized, made public, simply by setting it in a formalized art situation, and without trying to satisfy expectations—at least not in principle'.[55]

We have seen that Rosenberg criticized the aesthetic as the (only) value for art, and Duchamp himself also did not agree with Greenberg's assessment of his work with aesthetic criteria. Greenberg judges the readymades from his criterion of the visual aesthetic of the object, which is the sole criterion for art in Greenberg's view, but that is beside the point; according to Duchamp the point of the readymade is 'simply the fact that it exists'.[56] The precondition of 'purity', the exclusion of any non-material aesthetic element in the judging of art for good art, increasingly drew fire from critics and artists.

Positioning Duchamp in the enemy camp of academicism, thereby opposing the avant-garde that progressed towards more mediumspecificity, helps to emphasize Greenberg's arguments. Philosopher Graham Harman summarized Greenberg's critique on Duchamp in 'Greenberg, Duchamp, and the Next Avant-Garde' (2014): 'art avoids academicism when its content manages to reflect or embody the possibilities of its medium, rather than presenting content as an isolated figure whose ground can be taken for granted'.[57] The lack of mediumspecificity, which should exclude all interest in any content, makes Duchamp's art (and that of his 'followers') inferior. Although Greenberg accepted some of Duchamp's work as 'major', even in its opposition to synthetic Cubism, the problem remained the lack of quality in his art, caused by the lack of mediumspecificity—the very element Greenberg viewed gaining autonomy. Duchamp's art academicism, disguised as avant-garde, led to

[55] Ibid.: 16, 13.
[56] From an interview, as recounted in an article by Thomas Girst for *tout-fait*, an online journal devoted to Marcel Duchamp studies. See: http://toutfait.com/issues/volume2/issue_5/articles/girst2/girst1.html#_ednred2
[57] Harman, 2014: 260. As an aside: Harman goes on to connect Greenberg's focus on the medium with Heidegger, since he (Heidegger) was the philosopher who pointed in the direction of the hidden nature of things: 'what is visibly present in the world appears only against a hidden background from which it draws nourishment' (262). This connection rests on a definition Greenberg gives of the academic as 'art that takes its medium for granted'(Greenberg, 2003 (1980): 28). This connection is valid on this point, in the sense that Greenberg's theory focused on that which is usually invisible, but which forms the possibility of presenting the visible. Nevertheless, I doubt that Heidegger would have been pleased with this connection. Heidegger's point does not seem to lie in presenting a hidden ground of things, but instead on the completeness of things, by pointing out that there are several ways in which we experience things. In *Sein und Zeit* (1927), Heidegger explains that there is an interconnectedness of us and things—*Welt*. Things present themselves as *Vorhandesein* or *Zuhandensein*, depending on our relation with it. Heidegger's main point seems to be the interconnectedness, and the way we can open our self to/in this, not the focus on the hidden element, in this case the *Zuhandene*. In later works Heidegger expands on his conception of *Welt* by adding first *Erde* (*Urpsrung des Kunstwerkes*, 1936), later he speaks of *das Geviert: Erde, Himmel, Göttlichen und Sterblichen* ('Das Ding', 1951). These works point out that the elements discussed are not to be understood as isolated. That is quite the opposite of Greenberg's severe emphasis on the importance of art's material elements.

confusion among the public, who accepted that the new art styles formed the new avant-garde. Attempting to avoid such confusion was probably another argument for Greenberg's decision to use the term 'Modernism' instead of 'avant-garde'.

Greenberg observed a concentration on material aspects in the art of his time, and understood this as a step in a development wherein art concentrated itself increasingly on its material means. As a critic, he took this development and used it as the criterion to judge the quality of art. The problem with that is not just Greenberg's criterion to separate 'good' from 'bad' art, but his understanding of art as merely a material product—his interpretation of the material configuration as the sole aesthetic qualities. Aside from the limitations of the framework of artistic Modernism he constructed, Greenberg's general understanding of art is extremely reductive. It seems that, 'to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence', or, in other words, to gain autonomy, art was to be minimized, downgraded to material objects.[58] In 'Modernist Painting' (1960) Greenberg identified Modernism with the use of characteristic methods pertaining with each medium of the different arts. This self-criticism, as Greenberg views it, was executed with the aim of high quality. In 1979, Greenberg added this:

> It also belongs to my definition of Modernism that the continuing effort to maintain standards and levels has brought about the widening recognition that art, that aesthetic experience no longer needs to be justified in other terms than its own, that art is an end in itself and that the aesthetic is an autonomous value. It could now be acknowledged that art doesn't have to teach, doesn't have to celebrate or glorify anybody or anything, doesn't have to advance causes; that it has become free to distance itself from religion, politics, and even morality. All it has to do is be good as art. This recognition stays. It doesn't matter that it's still not generally—or rather consciously—accepted, that art for art's sake still isn't a respectable notion. It's acted on, and in fact it's always been acted on. It's been the underlying reality of the practice of art all along, but it took Modernism to bring this out into the open.[59]

The lack of direct connection to other spheres in society is understood by Greenberg as art's autonomy, that much seems clear. As a result of the greater concentration on formal aspects of art the understanding of the public diminished. The widening stretch to traditional content, the subject in art, correspondently widened the gap to the public. The element of reception—specifically the autonomy of the aesthetic judgment—is not yet discussed; this will be a part of chapter three. For now, we can conclude that avant-garde art became increasingly difficult

[58] Greenberg, 1993 (1960): 85.
[59] Greenberg, 2003 (1980). The paradox of art for art's sake becomes visible in this quote. While art is an end in itself, at the same time the quality of that art (which 'has to be good' as its only task) is based on the aesthetic experience of the viewer.

to understand for laypeople which only strengthened the illusion of an independent status of art. Greenberg's earlier position concerning the social effects of art seems to have completely vanished. All that matters is the aesthetic quality of art, which, for Greenberg, is only based on the material aspects of art. This shift in the way Greenberg understands the development and focus of avant-garde/Modernist art characterizes the artificiality of his interpretative model. The discussion about whether to use 'modern' or 'avant-garde' also took place outside of Greenberg's writings. When the Museum of Modern Art in New York professed to devote the museum to 'art in our time' in 1939, the American Abstract Artists (organization) reacted with a pamphlet, critically questioning this vague and all-encompassing description of 'art in our time', and the terminology of 'modern': 'What does "modern" mean?', and 'Shouldn't "modern" conceivably include the "Avant-Garde"?' (fig. II).

Greenberg observed a motion in modern art, which he interpreted as a 'logical' development towards specialization of the different arts. He understood this as the strengthening of art's autonomy. By framing the mediumspecificity as the deciding criterion of Modernist art—formerly known as 'avant-garde'—and connecting this with the quality of art, he effectively associated the quality of 'pure' and independent art with Modernism. All other developments in art that did not follow this scheme were not autonomous and inferior.

2. PETER BÜRGER: AVANT-GARDE VERSUS AUTONOMY OF ART

Despite a partly shared ideological background in Marxism, and despite the agreement this background seems to have provided in the understanding of avant-garde as developing historically and gaining a critical consciousness, the goals Clement Greenberg and Peter Bürger assign to each of their avant-gardes could not be further apart. We have seen that Greenberg took the autonomy of art in general as a condition, and at the same time as an ultimate goal in the development of (Modernist) art, to maintain and to reinforce that autonomy by emphasizing the limitations of each artistic medium. How does Bürger understand the relation between avant-garde and the autonomy of art?

Peter Bürger, writing his *Theorie der Avantgarde* in 1973, treats the topic completely different from Greenberg.[60] This is possibly due to the fact that Bürger is a literary theorist, Greenberg a critic. Where the work of Greenberg seems to hide the artificial structure of a composed theory, Bürger's acknowledges a focus on theory, in his attempt to create 'a categorical frame' to analyze avant-garde.[61] Bürger views avant-garde as a reaction against the increasing autonomy of the institution of art. In the first paragraph I will try to answer the question what autonomy means, for Bürger, and what he means by this 'institution of art'. Next, Bürger's description of avant-garde's strategies to achieve their goals will be analyzed, including the critique his account received. This critique can be divided in two parts: first the comments in Germany (collected in a publication which appeared in 1976), and ten years later the comments from the United States, after the publication of the translation *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1984). Where the first wave of criticism was mostly pointed to some generalizations in the theory, the second wave was directed against the distinction Bürger made between an original avant-garde and the imitators, labeled by Bürger as 'neo-avant-garde'. This distinction arose from Bürger's contention that the original avant-garde failed to achieve its main goal. The third paragraph will be devoted to what he means by that failure.

2.1 The autonomy of the institution of art

Bürger describes avant-garde art as the art that reacted against the increasing autonomy of art. Actually, this is just a part of Bürger's general thesis, which could be described as stating that the categories of bourgeois art became recognizable only with the advent of avant-garde. The

[60] I will be mainly using the English translation (1984).
[61] Bürger, 1984: xlviii.

self-critical stage introduced by avant-garde exposed the autonomous status of art. Therefore it is from the point of view of avant-garde we should look back to the former periods in an effort to explain the developments.[62] How does Bürger understand this autonomous status of art? The autonomy of art reached its peak at the end of the 19th century, 'when the separation of art from the praxis of life becomes the decisive characteristic of the autonomy of art'.[63] Although the institution of art was already fully formed a century before that, the defining difference that leads to the avant-garde is the loss of art's functionality in daily life, a phase that is called 'Aestheticism, where art becomes the content of art'.[64] Unfortunately, Bürger provides no clear examples of the art that befits the category of 'Aestheticism'.[65] He does view Aestheticism as a necessary precondition of the avant-garde intentions: 'Only an art the contents of whose individual works is wholly distinct from the (bad) praxis of the existing society can be the centre that can be the starting point of a new life praxis'.[66] This suggests art that completely favored the aesthetic over the social;[67] it coincides roughly with the point in time where Greenberg views the starting point of 'his' avant-garde/Modernism. It seems that what Bürger labels as 'Aestheticism', with its emphasis on purely aesthetic aspects, is what Greenberg views as Modernism.

The implication of Bürger's explanation is that the autonomy of art did not happen overnight. The developing autonomy, which culminated in Aestheticism, started already in the feudal sphere, as a reaction to changes in society (market mechanisms, secularization), transforming the ideas artists had about their activities. Art progressively disconnected itself from other social domains like economy and politics. Bürger sketches a historical overview with three steps:[68] 1) sacral art is still completely integrated in daily life, specifically in religion. Craftsmen produce objects collectively; 2) courtly art still has a strictly definable function—it has to be representational (of the courts)—but its detachment from the religious domain (to a certain extend) can be seen as a form of emancipation. The artist becomes an

[62] Ibid.: 19. As a foundation for this point, Bürger invokes Gadamer's *Wahrheit und Methode* (1960), which he interprets on pages 4-6.
[63] Ibid.: 49.
[64] ibid.: 49.
[65] In *The Decline of Modernism* (1992) Bürger explains Aestheticism in opposition to naturalism: 'The aestheticist critique of naturalism provokes a corresponding counter-critique since the aestheticist writers assume a particular concept of the subject as the only valid one. According to their view, the subject is utterly individual and does not actively engage either with other subjects or with the objective world and is only capable of comprehending the objective world as a symbol which refers in turn back to the subject' (97).
[66] Bürger, 1984: 49-50.
[67] Ibid.: 33. '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 centre of the works of Aestheticism.'
[68] Ibid.: 47-48.

individual with relatively unique skills; 3) genuine bourgeois art forms the objectification of this class. Production and reception of art are completely individual and this forms the precondition for a removal of art from the daily practice of life. When bourgeois art finally reaches the stage of self-reflection, complete autonomy is a fact. This development is connected to the development of aesthetics as a distinct field of Philosophy. By placing art outside the realm of daily life, because its activities were supposedly different from all others, art gains freedom from the pressures of daily life. Through the philosophy of Kant and Schiller the detached status of the aesthetic field was further secured during the 19th century.

At the end of the 19th century art was 'wholly' withdrawn from society and had lost contact with daily life.[69] Bürger explains that a new social subsystem emerged, the 'art institution', which 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'.[70] This would at least include museums, the art market of galleries and buyers, and the canon of art history. In a later publication, *The Institutions of Art* (1992), Peter and Christa Bürger add that the historical character of Bürger's theory of avant-garde presupposes an evolution of categories and therefore a 'suprahistorical definition' of the institution of art remains problematic.[71] The meaning of what is exactly the institution of art is therefore not stable; very generally, it is 'to refer to the conditions under which art is produced, distributed, and received'.[72] The problem of the autonomy of art is that art lost its function within society. Art had no impact on society when it situated itself on an island. For Bürger, as for Greenberg, the avant-garde functions as a form of self-criticism. However, different from Greenberg, Bürger views the avant-garde as addressing itself to art as an institution, which means the avant-garde turned against its most distinguishing mark, 'the status of art in bourgeois society as defined by the concept of autonomy'.[73]

Bürger uses Marcuse's 'The Affirmative Character of Culture'(1937) as support for the claim that although there was always the possibility for art to be critical of society, the fact

[69] Ibid.: 23. In the original publication (1974: 29) Bürger states: 'Erst nachdem die Kunst sich Tatsächlich *gänzlich aus allen lebenspraktischen Beziehungen herausgelöst hat*, wird die fortschreitende Herauslösung der Kunst…erkennbar' [my italics]. This declares a complete independence.
[70] Ibid.: 22.
[71] Bürger and Bürger, 1992: 5.
[72] Bürger, 1984: 30. This specific definition is quite dismal and paradoxical. The borders of the institution of art are stretched to the utmost, while at the same time this institution is characterized by its disconnectedness (in the sense of lacking social impact). In *The Institutions of Art* it is stated to mean: 'a set of basic assumptions and norms in a given historical context that validate particular literary practices and denigrate others' (xiv). In *The Decline of Modernism* (1992) Bürger specifies that 'the literary institute does not signify the totality of literary practices of a given period', but has certain features: it (the institution) develops an aesthetic code, it forms a boundary against other literary practices, and it claims validity.
[73] Ibid.: 22.

that art was cut loose from society also meant that the community could be relieved of taking actions: after all, art was outside of society, it was a different domain.[74] Expressing a better world in works of art could be seen as criticizing the existing order, but at the same time, it could absolve us of taking action.[75] The problem of this duality is precisely the division of the beautiful from the necessary.[76] The ideal, superior world is sketched in works of art, in a domain that is separated from the world of daily praxis. Precisely because of the segregation of an ideal 'culture' (the world of art) and a 'civilization' (the actual world) in which one has to struggle for existence on a daily basis, everybody could realize this 'eternally better' world, within him- or herself.[77] This method of criticizing society did not have enough impact, and for this reason the avant-garde attacked the autonomous status of art, in an act of self-critique. When art would no longer be autonomous, critique concerning society could be useful again. A condition for the possibility of critique from within is the formation of a completely distinct domain for art, Bürger states.[78] However, this distinct domain is nevertheless always a part of the social reality.[79] What Bürger tries to define here, is the autonomy of *the institution of art* as the incapability of art to influence daily life—to which the avant-garde reacts. This is not the same kind of autonomy that Greenberg meant. The 'complete' autonomy of art is, in Bürger's view, only complete to the extent in which art is socially functionless. This seems quite difficult to ascertain with any certainty, since even the (dis)pleasure in the aesthetic qualities of the work of art could potentially produce a social effect.

Another problem with the acceptance of a 'complete' autonomy, within a historical developmental framework, is the fact that, as a fixed category, autonomy does not permit historical evolution. Derived from the original Greek, autonomy means something like 'self-ruling'. When, as Bürger explains this, autonomy is historically developed, it would mean that the autonomy of art was actually controlled by other influences, outside art. Although slightly

[74] Ibid.: 12, 50. See: *Negations. Essays in Critical Theory*. Transl. J.J. Shapiro. Boston: Beacon Press, 1968: 65-98.
[75] Bürger and Bürger, 1992: 8. 'On the one hand, art is called upon to be the alternative to the real world, which it can be only if set up in total opposition to that world; on the other, it is precisely this isolation that puts art in danger of becoming "empty play"'.
[76] Marcuse, 1968: 65.
[77] Ibid.: 70. 'By affirmative culture is meant that culture of the bourgeois epoch which led in the course of its own development to the segregation from civilization of the mental and spiritual world as an independent realm of value that is also considered superior to civilization. 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 realizable by every individual for himself "from within", without any transformation of the state of fact. It is only in this culture that cultural activities and objects gain that value which elevates them above the everyday sphere'.
[78] Bürger, 1984: 17. '…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-gardes respond.'
[79] Ibid.: 39.

hidden, we cannot look past this contradiction, and Bürger acknowledges this: '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)'.[80] This means that the 'complete' autonomy is not as complete as we might have thought, since autonomy itself is quite ambiguous.

Differentiating even more, Bürger explains that if we accept 'apartness from society' as an essential trait of art, we would have to accept the concept of art for art's sake.[81] But this is not what Bürger's wants. For Bürger 'autonomy 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'.[82] Bürger wants to keep the complexity of the category of autonomy, its function of denoting the detachment, and simultaneously hiding the recognition of this reality.[83]

While acknowledging the relative nature of the independent status of art, Bürger seems to hold on to proclaiming the 'complete' autonomy of the institution of art. His historical sketch needs this 'complete' break with tradition to make his theory convincing. Bürger's understanding of autonomy differs from Greenberg's. Greenberg identifies autonomy with 'art for art's sake', while Bürger renounces this view because it accepts the autonomous state of art as its nature, and not as a result of historical development. This could be the origin of their subsequent different notions of avant-garde. The comparison I stated in the introduction appears unjustified, since we are comparing apples and oranges. Not only is the opposition 'art for art's sake' versus art with social impact not entirely correct, but Bürger and Greenberg have different presuppositions about the autonomy of art, and subsequently the function they observe in 'their' respective avant-gardes.

2.2 Attacking art

How did avant-garde react to the autonomy of the institution of art? Bürger explains that the ultimate goal of the avant-garde was the reintegration of art in life. Not an integration in the

[80] Ibid.: 46.
[81] Ibid.: 35.
[82] Ibid.: 36.
[83] Ibid.: 36. As an aside, the terminology Bürger uses, 'autonomy both reveals and obscures', reminds of Heidegger's *Verbergung* and *Entbergung*, although Bürger does not mention him.

life where art had distanced itself from, the life of constant competition and utility, but an integration where art could be the basis for a new way of life. Art could be an example for a new, transformed praxis of living, where 'values such as humanity, joy, truth, solidarity', which were preserved in the separate art domain, could be brought back into life again.[84] Those values could only be preserved in art because of art's separation from other domains of life, where the means-ends rationality reigned. To reintegrate these values in daily life, the avant-garde pointed their arrows towards the criteria that determined whether something was art or not. Avant-garde artists directed themselves to the very foundations of art. Instead of the usual transposition of art styles, the new displacing the former, avant-garde attacked art as a whole, thereby taking aim at the art-institute as a whole. This means that avant-garde did not demand that the content of art works should become socially relevant, but 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'.[85]

In practice the avant-garde used different tactics. One of those tactics was the negation of the individual creation. Here we stumble upon a direct opposition with Greenberg's conception of avant-garde: Bürger illustrates these tactics with the artist explicitly mentioned by Greenberg as *not* belonging to his notion of avant-garde/Modernism, who instead places the work of this artist under the heading 'avant-gard*ism*'—as a 'wannabee' avant-garde. Bürger, however, sees *Fountain* (1917) by Marcel Duchamp as a prime example of the attack of avant-garde on the autonomy of art. The signature 'R. Mutt' is placed on a porcelain urinal, a mass produced product, chosen by the artist. The traditional idea concerning the crafting of a work of art, inspired by individual creativity (genius), is mocked by the act of submitting an *objet trouvé* for an art exhibition. It contradicts the idea of the makeability of the work of art, it negates individual creativity by signing an mass-produced article, by giving it a title. The act of submitting this readymade is more a manifestation of art, than it is a work, in the sense of a product of craft. This manifestation attacks the traditional ideas of the artwork without a function, the whole idea of aesthetic criteria with which artworks were judged. Suddenly the distinction between the complete purposelessness of artworks and the direct utility function of products in our daily life is effectively blurred.

[84] Ibid.: 50.
[85] Ibid.: 49.

Another tactic avant-garde used to radically question the ruling principles of art is directly involving the audience in the 'creation' of art.[86] The active participation of audience in the creation and reception of art blurs the supposed boundaries between artist and audience, between art and life.[87] This might be the most logical and effective place to start when art as a separate domain is to be demolished. Dada manifestations are probably the best example of this.[88] The public was motivated, provoked, to participate in all kinds of activities that, in themselves, cannot be distinguished from the activities of daily life. Bürger extends the tactic which criticized traditional distinctions between producer and recipient of art to surrealist art. André 'Breton's [instructions] for the writing of automatic text have the character of recipes', Bürger explains; the recipient is suggested to actively participate in the process of creating such text—not 'as artistic production, but as part of a liberating life praxis'.[89] And Bürger extends his notion of the intentions of avant-garde even further:

> 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.[90]

A comparison with Rosenberg is easily made. Both emphasize the break in tradition, as manifested in the new methods of art. But the comparison stops there. In fact, Bürger's avant-garde stands in opposition with both Greenberg's and Rosenberg's, since their diverging views of the fifties and early sixties were not as diverging as at first these appeared to be.[91] All of them wrote about avant-garde (or Modernism), but each focused on different

[86] 'Creation' has the unfortunate connotation of the actual making of a 'thing', while what Dada 'created' were more manifestations than finished products, works.
[87] The collective nature of the provocations also seem to negate individual reception.
[88] For instance, this description by Tristan Tzara of a production which took place on May 26, 1920: 'For the first time in the history of the world, people threw at us, not only eggs, salads and pennies, but beefsteaks as well. It was a very great success. The audience was extremely Dadaist. . . . The audience was so excited and the atmosphere so overcharged that a number of other ideas merely suggested took on the appearance of reality'. (reprinted in: Young, A. *Dada and After: Extremist Modernism and English Literature* (1981): 29.
[89] Bürger, 1984: 53.
[90] Ibid.: 109, note 4. Bürger includes further: Italian Futurism, German Expressionism and even Cubism, since it 'calls into question the system of representation with its linear perspective. For this reason, it is part of the historical avant-garde movements, although it does not share their basic tendency (sublation of art in the praxis of life)'.
[91] Critical research into the writings of Greenberg and of Rosenberg has shown that their similarities have been 'obscured' (Kozloff); also, the differences these critics observed in painting, sometimes described as the 'Appolonian-Dyonisian dialectic', is actually not as easy to detect in the works of the artist they championed at the time (especially the opposition Willem de Kooning vs. Jackson Pollock). For an insightful article inspired by

aspects of the development of art. Where Rosenberg is concerned with the expression of the individual artist and Greenberg purely with the distribution of formal elements within the work, Bürger is primarily concerned with the idea of a common goal and the new means of art that were used to reach that goal.

The critique that followed Bürger's *Theorie* in Germany was aimed primarily at the methodology, and the way in which Bürger understood the theories of other thinkers. The latter concerns the way in which Bürger understood the practice of montage as described by Walter Benjamin, and Bürger's reception of what Theodor Adorno viewed as the autonomy of art. I will not discuss these topics, but it is useful to look at some of the remarks in relation to the avant-garde Bürger described. Most interesting for the current topic are the comments by Burkhardt Lindner, who questions the rupture between autonomy and avant-garde. According to Lindner this rupture is artificial, because the avant-garde did not succeed in destructing the institution of art, but, contrary to their efforts, avant-garde had 'die institutionelle basis von Kunst freigelegt'.[92] There is no rupture, since avant-garde never got out of the institution of art, it remained inside. By exposing the autonomy of the institute of art, avant-garde continuously emphasizes that particular autonomy, instead of destructing it. In this sense, avant-garde forms a strong continuation of the existing art institute. Therefore, we should instead speak of 'Umschlagphänomene', regarding the attempt to liquidate the institute of art—a reversal in the way Marcuse meant: while attempting to negate, the affirmation takes place.[93] Also difficult, according to Lindner, is the construction of the supposed unity of the 'historical' avant-garde, forging together 'teils von einander isolierte, teils einander bekämpfende Gruppierungen.'[94]

In a later reply, 'Avant-garde and Neo-Avant-Garde. An Attempt to Answer Certain Critics of the Theory of the Avant-Garde' (2010), Bürger admits that 'the category of a break is less precisely delineated on a theoretical level than the thesis about the attack on the art institution to which it refers'.[95] Also, there is less of a unity he suggests in his *Theorie*, when he admits that Surrealism 'is less suited to a theory of the avant-garde'.[96] However, Bürger holds that there was no effort to *destruct* the institution of art, instead, avant-garde aimed to *sublate* (*Aufheben*, in the Hegelian sense) art, into the daily life praxis. Still, Bürgers

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an exhibition (2008) that tracked the ideas these critics represented in art, see: http://www.neh.gov/humanities/2008/julyaugust/feature/the-critical-moment

[92] Lindner, 1976: 76.

[93] Ibid.: 83.

[94] Ibid.: 76.

[95] Bürger, 2010: 704.

[96] Ibid.: 704. One would expect Bürger to be aware of this prior to the writing of his *Theorie* in 1974, since he completed a large study of French Surrealism in 1971.

admittance that the radical break is not entirely a break undermines his thesis severely. The fact that not everything he suggested fits exactly in the theory does not necessarily mean that we cannot use this framework, but it does mean that the criteria it introduces are less convincing. It also confirms our earlier conclusion that, since there is no complete break with tradition, there is no complete autonomy of art, as Bürger perceived this earlier. The problem here seems to be the fact that, although every theory is a construction, when the elements do not exactly fit, the theory is exposed as such, as artificial and circular. Bürger's theory is based on criteria that are evidently based on real, existing avant-garde claims, like the manifests of the Futurists and Dada present.[97] However, Bürger's theory of avant-garde has to achieve a high level of abstractness in its attempt to encompass all different individual elements, and this will always bring strong generalizations with it. Although many manifestations will appear to be justly incorporated in the theory (since the theory is based upon the empirical evidence of these), there will also be instances where the theory does not apply.

2.3 Failure of the avant-garde

After the publication of the English translation of his work, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, Bürger receives a sharp commentary from Benjamin Buchloh. Buchloch holds it against Bürger that his sketch of the development and aims of avant-garde does not conform to the historical situation: 'One wished that Bürger had expressed some awareness of how patently absurd it is to reduce the history of avant-garde practices to *one* overriding concern—the dismantling of the false autonomy of the institution of art—which he sees as the driving force of Dada (Berlin, Zürich and New York), Russian Constructivism, and French Surrealism.'[98] Although Bürger admits that Buchloh locates a shortcoming in the *Theory*, he reiterates that 'A *history* of avant-garde movements would have to represent those differences [between futurism, Dada, surrealism and constructivism] . . . *theory* pursues other goals'[my italics].[99] The shortcoming Bürger admits to concerns the post-avant-garde situation of art. It is exactly the way Bürger portrayed the neo-avant-garde that lights up many fires in the critical responses to his theory. One sentence appears to be the problem: 'The neo-avant-garde

[97] For the Dada-manifests see: http://www.arthistoryarchive.com/arthistory/dada/Dada-Manifesto.html; for the manifest of the Futurists: http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k2883730/f1.image
[98] Buchloh, 1984: 19. Buchloch provides individual examples of artists that did not—according to him—have that aim, such as Heartfield, Dali, Picabia.
[99] Bürger, 2010: 703. '…in short that the author has not written a history of avant-garde.'

institutionalizes the avant-garde as art and thus negates genuinely avant-gardiste intentions'.[100]

So far, we have seen how Bürger views the avant-garde and how it expressed the desire to overcome the lack of social impact, which is Bürger's interpretation of the autonomy of art. But what about the results of the avant-garde efforts? Bürger is quite clear to state that the avant-garde project failed.[101] How does he come to that conclusion? The first step is to shed light on what Bürger means with the prefixes 'historical' and 'neo' in the debate concerning avant-garde. Bürger separates an 'original', *historical* avant-garde, with the intention of sublating art into the daily life praxis, from the gestures of a *neo*-avant-garde, which employs the same techniques, but their expressive power was lost since these techniques had already been incorporated by the institute of art. These tactics could no longer be used to transcend art.

The project of the historical avant-garde is marked by an intriguing paradox: the manifestations of the avant-garde were embraced as works of art: 'The provocation that was supposed to expose the institution of art is recognized by the institution as art'.[102] In other words, the greater the success, the bigger the failure. The sublation of art failed because avant-garde art was accepted as *art*, thereby resisting the attack. There is an inherent contradiction here. Avant-garde artist made art to attack the art-institution, but as soon as their art was recognized as art, the avant-garde gesture empties out. Therefore, failure was inevitable. Because, if avant-garde art was not recognized as such, and thus, not successful, it would have had no hope to sublate art.

Still, despite its failure to overthrow the art institution, the work of the avant-garde did have its importance. Its political goals remained unreachable, but artistically the avant-gardes were immensely successful, according to Bürger.[103] The importance of avant-garde art is especially visible in the destruction of the 'organic' work of art. Avant-garde artists opposed the traditional, organic, symbolic work of art, by creating nonorganic, allegorical works of art. For Bürger, the category of the work of art is based on the unity of parts and whole that traditionally came to us unmediated, in the form of the finished material product of the ideas of the artist, bearing a coherent meaning. The organic work of art rests on a necessary connection between the meaning of the parts and the whole. With the avant-garde, the relation

[100] Bürger, 1984: 58.
[101] Ibid.: 53-54. Also: Bürger, 2010: 700-707.
[102] Bürger, 2010: 705.
[103] Ibid.: 700. Bürger acknowledges that some ('the most lucid') artists were aware that their political project was unrealizable.

of the parts to the whole changed. The nonorganic work—for instance, manifestations—helps the parts to 'emancipate' themselves from the whole; there is no longer a necessary connection between the meaning of the parts and the whole.[104] The avant-garde manifestation still rests on the unity of parts and whole, but this unity is mediated by the circumstances, the moment, the recipient. By deliberately withdrawing meaning from their nonorganic works of art, avant-garde artists intended to shock their audience. The aim of that shock was to direct the viewers attention to their lives, subsequently inspiring them to change their life.[105] Assuming the point concerning the deliberate withdrawing of meaning by the artists Bürger refers to is valid, his contention that the traditional organic work of art is an unmediated unity however, is not entirely correct. There is always the mediation of the recipient and of time to take into consideration; this applies to both organic and non-organic works of art. One could even argue that the instigator of the non-organic work has some intention with the manifestation he or she commences—even if depending on chance, for instance—just as the creator of the organic work of art has an idea he or she aims for. This is not necessarily a problem for Bürger's distinction between organic and non-organic works of art, since these can be conceived of as different,[106] but we should not lose sight of the artificial way Bürger attemts to solidify his thesis. Bürger emphasizes that while the social effects were not realized, their methods (resulting in these non-organic works) changed the history of art all the more: 'the failure of the avant-garde utopia of the unification of art and life coincides with the avant-garde's overwhelming success within the art institution'.[107] With the acceptance of avant-garde techniques, their social intentions were accepted as aesthetic elements by the art institution. Ultimately, this meant the victory of the 'autonomous' art institute.

By adopting the methods and techniques of their predecessors the historical avant-garde was revived by the neo-avant-garde. But the neo-avant-garde fails even worse. The neo-avant-garde fails precisely because it reapplied the same methods and techniques of the historical avant-garde: it makes them inauthentic. Their failure is that they situated their

[104] Bürger, 1984: 79-80. Bürger explains: 'The organic work of art is constructed according to the syntagmatic pattern; the individual parts and the whole form a dialectical unity. . . . The fundamental precondition for this type of reception [where we understand the parts through the whole, the whole trough its parts] is the assumption of a necessary congruence between the meaning of the individual parts and the meaning of the whole. This precondition is rejected by the nonorganic work. . . . 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'.
[105] Ibid.: 80.
[106] Ibid.. Bürger's distinction is not merely the difference between the (semi-) permanent physical entity of the work of art versus the temporary manifestation. He includes the 'new' expressions of montage, and also those that rely less on a preconceived ideas of 'meaning', like 'écriture automatique', where chance plays an important role.
[107] Bürger, 2010: 705.

aesthetic practices *within* those sanctioned by the institution, in contrast with the historical avant-garde.[108] Examples of neo-avant-garde are few, and not specifically discussed in the text by Bürger. Images of artworks by Spoerri, Warhol, and Magritte illustrate the pages where Bürger describes neo-avant-garde art.[109] Bürger explains that when Duchamp sent in his first readymade, *Fountain*, it referred to the category of the 'work' of art, and formed, in the simple fact of the signature that marks a certain individuality on a mass-produced product, a provocation. Once the avant-garde 'succeeded' in the acceptance of a provocative gesture, it loses its power, it turns into the opposite: affirmation. Exhibiting ready-mades after its provocative force is annulled, means to affirm the opposite, that is, individual creativity. With their repetitive use of methods and techniques already institutionalized, neo-avant-garde artists negates the project of the historical avant-garde, which, for Bürger, means a failure.[110]

Substantive critique comes from Hal Foster. In *The Return of the Real* (1996) Foster comprises his critique in an alternative view on the neo-avant-garde. His criticism is pointed predominantly towards the rupture Bürger describes. This brings with it an understanding of history that begins and ends somewhere 'punctual and final'.[111] In contrast, Foster views the understanding of the historical avant-garde only by and through the neo-avant-garde. Foster builds his argument with the help of the concept 'Nachträglichkeit', a model that he derived from the French psychoanalytic Jaques Lacan.[112] Foster explains the importance of the postponed effects of an event in relation to the historical avant-garde. In effect, Foster does the same as Bürger when he states that the neo-avant-garde is responsible for our understanding of the historical avant-garde. Bürger's thesis is that the preceding development of art as a phenomenon in bourgeois society can only be understood from the standpoint of the avant-garde; Foster states that we can only understand the historical avant-garde trough the later neo-avant-garde.

Another element of Foster's critique is the way in which Bürger views the point of attack by the historical avant-garde in the direction of the institution of art. According to

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[108] Ibid.: 707.
[109] Bürger, 1984: Daniel Spoerri, *Who knows Where Up and Down Are?*, 1964 (p. 58); Andy Warhol, *100 Campbell's Soup Cans*, 1962 (p. 63); René Magritte, *The Ready-Made Bouquet*, 1956 (p. 64). In 2010, answering some critics of his work, Bürger merely mentions some neo-avant-garde artists—without discussing specific works—in response to Benjamin Buchloh and Hal Foster (710, 713).
[110] Ibid.: 57. 'We characterize that [post avant-garde] phase by saying that it revived the category of work and that the processes invented by the avant-garde with antiartistic intent are being used for artistic ends.'
[111] Foster, 1996: 10.
[112] Ibid.: 28. Foster discusses different models of temporality that have their source in Freud and were later developed by Lacan, amongst others. He uses the concept of 'deferred action' (a translation of the original 'Nachträglichkeit') analogous to its use in the reconstruction of psychic trauma. A trauma exists of two parts, where the first part can only become clear through the second part.

Foster the historical avant-garde attacked the conventions of art, not the institute as a whole. The difference is that '…the institution of art may *enframe* aesthetic conventions, but it does not *constitute* them.'[113] Although Foster has a point here, especially in the nuanced way he explains this, this does not rule out the general point of attack by the avant-garde, since the convention may not exactly constitute the art institute, it does form a large part of it.[114] For Foster this point illustrates his arguments concerning the 'repetition' and 'recurrence' of the historical avant-garde, which could only gain importance with and through the neo-avant-garde.[115] The exact degree in which the conventions of art are part of the institution of art remains unclear.[116]

The discussion in which the historical avant-garde and the neo-avant-garde are compared exposes an evolution of the understanding of the avant-garde from its focus on social improvement where the aesthetic is the subservient element—a mere necessary evil to achieve the greater goal—to a situation whereby the social element is clearly undermined by the focus on the free use of artistic material and techniques. From 'liberating aesthetic potential from the institutional constraints which block its social effectiveness'[117] to 'the false actualization of their utopian project in the aestheticization of everyday life', in the eyes of Bürger.[118] This evolution makes a fixed, overarching theory concerning avant-garde less plausible.

The problem with the discussion concerning the failure of the avant-garde is that Bürger states this failure as element in his theory, while the commentators focus on the historical reality of this supposed failure. In practical reality, the sublation of art into life was only one of many different goals by different artists. Since Bürger later admitted that the cohesion he suggested with his theory was not entirely as unified as first portrayed, it can also not be stated that its project completely failed. And even if the historical avant-garde can be said to have failed in reaching a relatively common goal, Bürger does not adequately explain why he thinks that 'the' (supposedly unified) neo-avant-garde has the same goal. Bürger

[113] Ibid.: 17.
[114] Ibid.: 17. Foster explains: 'As the first neo-avant-garde recovers the historical avant-garde […] the effect of which is less to transform the institution of art than to transform the avant-garde into an institution.' (21); as a result '…this becoming institutional prompts in the second neo-avant-garde a creative analysis of the limitations of both historical and first neo-avant-garde.' (24).
[115] Ibid.: 28. '…the avant-garde is never historically effective or fully significant in its initial moment.'
[116] Ibid.: 17. Foster explains: 'Obviously convention and institution cannot be separated, but neither are they identical. On the one hand, the institution of art does not totally comprise the institution of art (this is too determinist); on the other hand, these conventions do not totally comprise the institution of art (this is too formalist)'.
[117] Bürger, 2010: 696.
[118] Ibid.: 705.

presupposes an evolution of the category of the work of art, instigated by the historical avant-garde, which, in combination with the presumed goal, forms the criterion to be part of that avant-garde. However, the neo-avant-garde is only mentioned in relation to their use of the same or comparable techniques, which not necessarily means that their goals aligned with those of the 'original' avant-garde. Since the institution of art seems to have changed, and a connection of art and life has occurred (however 'false' Bürger views this connection), it is hardly strange to assume that the goals of the neo-avant-garde were different than those of their predecessors.

3. AUTONOMY

So far, two influential positions concerning the relation of autonomy and avant-garde are discussed. The category of avant-garde art is constructed as either the embodiment of the autonomy of art (Greenberg), or as its nemesis (Bürger). But how is the relation between art and autonomy understood in more recent times?

I have chosen two 'cases' to gain insight into the contemporary understanding of autonomy. The first is the work of Jacques Rancière. Rancière's work shows a concentration on the relation between art and politics, revealing the lack of a fundamental distinction between those.[119] This would mean the notion of the autonomy of art understood as an independent or separate domain cannot be held. Partly inspired by Rancière's work autonomy became the topic of an international 'Autonomy Project' which started in 2010. This forms the second case study. The project aims for a new and contemporary understanding of autonomy. I will try to ascertain whether these more contemporary views differ from the views we have discussed earlier, and if so, in what way these differ.

The name Kant is already mentioned in the previous chapters, both in relation to the views of Greenberg and those of Bürger. Their understanding of the autonomy of art is, to some extent, based on Kant's work. The same is the case for Rancière's work. In the introduction of *Aesthetics and its Discontents* (2004) Rancière describes Kant's formula of '"disinterested" aesthetic judgment' as one of the grounds of the almost constant attacks on aesthetics in general.[120] To understand the recent debates better, Kant's understanding of autonomy is the first station—he is, after all, sometimes seen as the father of the autonomy of art.

It seems that autonomy has been used and understood—by Greenberg and Bürger—more in the sense of its connotation of independence, of a separation from other elements, than in its original meaning of self-regulation. We experience this latter meaning for instance in the sphere of politics. The political autonomy of nations, which means the ability for a nation to create its own rules, without direct interference of external powers, is emphasized not only by the comprehensive and complex network of national organizations, but also by a

[119] Rancière, 2009 (2004): 1-15. In his 'Introduction' Rancière explains that 'for art to exist, what is required is a specific gaze and form of thought to identify it' (6). It follows that '"Aesthetics" is not the name of a discipline. It is the name of a specific regime for the identification of art'(8). 'It is a way of thinking the paradoxical sensorium that henceforth made it possible to define the things of art' (11). In short, aesthetics is a regime of thought that functions as a particular 'matrix of discourse' that pertains to the identification and (re)distribution of art, or, in general, 'forms of sensory experience' (14).
[120] Ibid.: 1.

strictly delineated borderline. These organizations and borderlines are, however real in our world, mere institutional facts, or social constructions. This is stating the obvious, but it is important to highlight the artificial nature of the way in which different authors have tried to define autonomy in opposition to its surrounding elements. Ironically, the term 'autonomy', in the sense of independence, can only be understood in its relation to the surrounding or competing elements. Since autonomy depends on the relation with the surrounding elements, how could we understand more accurately the *degree* in which autonomy is active? In practical reality autonomy is characterized by its graduality. With the help of the essay '"Psychical Distance" as a Factor in Art and an Aesthetic Principle' (1912) by William Bullough a more nuanced view of autonomy will be explained.

I will discuss these topics chronologically: the first paragraph is devoted to Kant's understanding of autonomy, in the second paragraph Bullough's understanding of aesthetic distance will be analyzed, and in the last paragraph some more recent views concerning the autonomy of art will be taken up.

3.1 Kant's autonomy of art

The way in which Kant treated autonomy is not straightforward. There is of course his famous definition of Enlightenment: 'Aufklärung ist der Ausgang des Menschen aus seiner selbst verschuldeten Unmündigkeit'.[121] Here, *Unmündigkeit* means dependence. The message is that we should make ourselves less dependent, think for ourselves. Kant also stated about the autonomy of the will: 'die Beschaffenheit des Willens, dadurch derselbe ihm selbst (unabhängig von aller Beschaffenheit der Gegenstände des Wollens) ein Gesetzt ist'.[122] This form of autonomy forms the basis for Kant's categorical imperative. Kant regards autonomy in these instances as 'freedom from domination, both by other persons and by one's own inclinations'.[123] In other words, autonomy refers to the capacity to think and act individually, to make decisions free of outside force. Completely in line with Kant's investigations into conditions of possibility, these definitions of autonomy form a precondition, a necessary step towards a certain freedom. This is important because we must let sink in that Kant's project was not empirical. Although we should strive for autonomy to gain a certain freedom, we can, in practical reality, never attain complete autonomy. Complete autonomy, in the sense of

[121] Kant, 1784: http://gutenberg.spiegel.de/buch/beantwortung-der-frage-was-ist-aufklarung-3505/1
[122] Kant, 1870: 67. https://archive.org/stream/immanuelkantsgru00kant#page/n75/mode/2up
[123] Guyer, 2003: 81.

independence from others, cannot even be a goal, since autonomy depends on our human needs and inclinations, which includes things to do and people to interact with. There is a wide gap in stating autonomy as an absolute and abstract, theoretical *a priori form*, and as a practical relative *matter*. This confirms our discussion so far, that autonomy, in practical reality, can only be understood as relative.

But how does Kant understand autonomy in the field of aesthetics, a field that was actually just born by the time Kant discussed the status of the aesthetic judgment for the first time in 1790?[124] In his *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (1790) Kant starts out with the claim that we experience the beautiful as disinterested. There are three kinds of satisfaction (*Wohlgefallen*): the pleasant (*das Angenehme*), the good (*das Gute*) and the beautiful (*das Schöne*).[125] The first two depend not only on the representation but on the actual existence of the particular object and its relevance to the judging subject; only the satisfaction of the beautiful is indifferent and merely contemplative. For Kant, the purity of the judgment of taste is based on its disinterestedness. When we judge a machine, we do this with reference to its functionality: does it do what it is supposed to do? When we judge the way someone treats her animal, we do this with reference to our morality. Only when we judge something, say, a flower, without concern for its actual use or existence, purely its form, only then a judgment of taste is formed. Autonomy, understood in this sense, is a precondition for a 'pure' judgment of taste. But in this sense being devoid of interest in the object does not mean we lose the connection with the beautiful object. On the contrary, the aesthetic experience opens us up for the actual thing in its pure self, without being suppressed by our desires and intentions. The disinterestedness of the aesthetic experience means the beautiful can remain itself, in its own beauty.

It is Kant's transcendental aesthetic that led to the understanding of an isolated status for art which forms the basis of Greenberg's aesthetic views. The work of the later Greenberg is more concerned with aesthetics, compared to his activities as an art critic. During the seventies he gave a series of seminars at Bennington College (Vermont, U.S.), followed by several publications of his hand, in which he explored his views. The texts of the seminars and the publications were later bundled in *Homemade Esthetics* (1999) and here we find Greenberg's thoughts about aesthetics best explained. For the later Greenberg there is no art

[124] The 'birth' of aesthetics is often ascribed to Baumgarten (1714-1762), due to his book *Aesthetica* (1750). However, Plato already discussed something alike aesthetics, as distinct from other ways of bringing forth, in his *Republic* (around 300 BCE).

[125] Kant, 1922 (1790): this regards the first moment (of four) of the judgment of taste, §1-5. For the English I have used the translation by J.H. Bernard (London: Macmillan, 1914) available on: http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/1217

without the judgment of taste.[126] Kant's criterion of disinterestedness appears in Greenberg's aesthetic distance—mentioned in chapter 1—as the differentiating gap, the border, between regular intuition and aesthetic intuition.[127] What we should not forget, however, is that although Greenberg's aesthetic distance is based on Kant's differentiation of the aesthetic from the moral and the useful, Greenberg, as an art critic, limits himself exclusively to the arts. In his work the field of the aesthetic has somehow fallen together with the field of art. The characteristic artificiality of the work of art is, in contrast to the beautiful we find in nature, never completely compatible with a 'pure' aesthetic judgment, simply because the work is made for a reason, hence, an interest. Strictly speaking, the field of art cannot be a part of aesthetic beauty as Kant described in his 'Analytic of the Beautiful'.[128] Kant investigates general and necessary 'pure' preconditions, which, in their purity, reside in another sphere—Kant was very much aware of this fact.[129]

Nevertheless, both Greenberg and Bürger (and many others) derive their understanding of the autonomy of art from Kant. Philosopher Casey Haskins argues in 'Kant and the Autonomy of Art'(1989) that the autonomy of art, as derived from Kant, is interpreted in different ways and he explains the main difference in views as either 'strict autonomism' or 'instrumental autonomism'.[130] For Haskins Kant's third *Critique* belongs in the latter camp. His argument is based on a brief passage in section 44 of the *Critique of Judgment*: 'beautiful art is a mode of representation which is purposive for itself, and which, although devoid of purpose, *yet furthers the culture of the mental powers in reference to social communication*'[my italics].[131] This sentence suggests that although (beautiful) art is autonomous, in the sense that it has not been made with a purpose (besides being beautiful), it does have an effect on its surroundings. This effect is not purposive, since only the aesthetic effects are intended, but nevertheless, as an unintentional byproduct 'the contemplation of

[126] Greenberg, 1999 (1978): 62.
[127] Ibid. (1973): 4, 73-74.
[128] The 'Analytic of the Beautiful' is the title of the first book of the *Critique of Judgment*, which comprises Kant's analysis of the four moments of the judgment of taste.
[129] Kant, 2004 (1788). In 'Theorem IV' (§8) of *The Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant explains the autonomy of the will. In 'Comment I' he adds: 'For the law of pure will—which is free—places the will in a sphere entirely different from the empirical one, and the necessity expressed by the law, since it is not to be a natural necessity, can therefore *consist only in formal conditions* [my italics] of the possibility of a law as such' (49). 'Formal' means that it exists only in its textual form, not existing as such in practical reality. http://www.morelightinmasonry.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Kant-Critique-of-Practical-Reason-Cambridge.pdf
[130] Haskins, 1989: 43.
[131] Ibid.: 43. The German states: 'Schöne Kunst dagegen ist eine Vorstellungsart, die für sich selbst zweckmäßig ist und, obgleich ohne Zweck, dennoch die Kultur der Gemütskräfte zur geselligen Mitteilung befördert'.

works of art exerts an influence of an as yet unspecific nature upon social life'.[132] The functional effect of art seems to be hidden within its autonomous character.

Philosopher and art historian Mark Cheetham has a different opinion. In his research into the reception of Kant's work in the field of art *Kant, Art, and Art History* (2001), he views Greenberg's work and ideas in some sense 'concurrent' with Kant's.[133] Cheetham finds the general direction of Greenberg's writings, especially the theoretical works of the young Greenberg, and his work concerning aesthetics in the seventies, very Kantian in its insistence on purity and in the 'personal discipline needed to achieve his vision of modernism and describe its details'.[134] Cheetham explains that Greenberg *chose* to interpret Kant in his own way—he did not misunderstand Kant—to justify his own theories. Despite being empiricist, Greenberg refused to comment on art's interest outside its own formal limits. In this sense Greenberg 'can be seen to be carrying out Kant's mission to preserve humanity through the universality and purity of the aesthetic'.[135] Cheetham's assertion of the shared mission is thus based on Kant's analysis of the validity of our cognitive principles in their basis in human nature, and Greenberg's sole focus on art, considering it autonomous since 'it's there for its own human sake, sufficient to its own human self'.[136]

Although it is difficult to point to the exact connection between positing a theoretical faculty with which we could judge something 'ohne alles Interesse',[137] and the practical status of the work of art, let alone the complete autonomy of the field of art (as is suggested in the phrase 'art for art's sake'), we cannot deny a historical transformation did take place. Since the aesthetic judgment is designated as distinct from other judgments, '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', as Bürger views it.[138] Kant's understanding of autonomy as a necessary precondition of a specific form of judgment in a theoretical explanation evolved to a dominating principle in the field of art. One particular drawback of Kant's rigid theoretical distinctions is the understanding of autonomy as an exact position. We should ask ourselves if

[132] Ibid.: 44.
[133] Cheetham, 2001: 5. With 'concurrency' Cheetham means 'the specific temporal and "placed" contexts in which his [Kant's] ideas are received'.
[134] Ibid.: 98. Cheetham means 'adopting a Kantian regimen in applying constantly the principles of self-criticism and regulative formalism to art. Practically, for both Kant and Greenberg if they were to live up to those precepts, this would mean the sequestering of art from its social and political matrix to avoid impure disciplinary mixtures'.
[135] Ibid.: 91. 'His crucial debts to Kant—the notions of autocritique, aesthetic autonomy, and the primacy of form—could then be judged as interdependent components of a strategic humanism shared by both [Kant and Greenberg]'.
[136] Greenberg, 1999: 65.
[137] Kant, 1922 (1790): §5, 48.
[138] Bürger, 1984: 42.

a less-severe interpretation could perhaps better fit the practical understanding of the autonomy of art.

3.2 The gradualism of autonomy

Greenberg was a critic before anything else. It is in the way he judges aesthetic elements we find the specific form of autonomy he derived from Kant. Although Greenberg mentioned Kant as early as 1941, Greenberg elaborated on his interpretation of Kant in the nineteen seventies. Especially the Greenberg we meet in *Homemade Esthetics* (1999) shows us the way he perceived Kant's *Critique of Judgment*.[139] We have touched the topic of aesthetic experience in the discussion about Greenberg's focus on the unfolding of Cubism, which embodied the progressive mediumspecificity he viewed as the driving force of Modernism. For Greenberg, the central element in the possibility of an aesthetic experience is a certain detachment. The aesthetic experience is a special kind of experience, 'the experience of experience'.[140] The difference with other forms of experience lies in the fact that other forms of experience can be experienced aesthetically; 'aesthetic experience is the experience of experience' itself.[141] The aesthetic experience is characterized by aesthetic distance. This distance forms a necessary condition for the aesthetic experience:

> The distinction between the esthetic and the extra-esthetic is installed by what has become to be called "esthetic distance.""Distance" here means the detachment from practical reality, the reality we live in ordinarily, reality at large, the reality that's shot through with behavior and consequences and information. . . . Esthetic distance lets you watch, behold, experience anything whatsoever without relating it to yourself as a particular human being with your particular hopes and fears, interests and concerns. You detach yourself from yourself.[142]

We see that Greenberg bases his understanding of the aesthetic experience on the distinction Kant introduced between aesthetic and other judgments, the relation to oneself. Aesthetic distance provides us with the possibility, it forms the bridge, to experience something

[139] It might be interesting to analyze the differences in the way Greenberg 'used' the different *Critiques* by Kant. For instance, Greenberg's first use of Kant is derived from the first part of the third *Critique*. Greenberg's (in)famous remarks at the beginning of 'Modernist Painting' are derived from Kant's introduction of the first *Critique*, where Kant explains that critique on reason necessarily leads to scientific knowledge (B23). The later Greenberg then draws extensively on the third *Critique* again, but now from a larger portion of the book than just the 'Analytic of the Beautiful'.
[140] Greenberg, 1999 (1975): 41.
[141] Ibid.: 41.
[142] Ibid.: 73.

(potentially everything) aesthetically. Greenberg did not invent the term 'aesthetic distance', however. Research into the phenomenon of distance in art was done by the aesthetician Edward Bullough, who published his paper '"Psychical Distance" as a Factor in Art and an Aesthetic Principle' in 1912. It was Bullough who explained this Distance with the example of a fog. This fog, however annoying or frightening it can be, can nevertheless be a source of 'intense relish and enjoyment'.[143] Bullough explains:

> Thus, in the fog, the transformation by Distance is produced in the first instance by putting the phenomenon, so to speak, out of gear, with our practical, actual self; by allowing it to stand outside the context of our personal needs and ends—in short, by looking at it 'objectively', as it has often been called, by permitting only such reactions on our part as emphasise [sic] the 'subjective' affections not as modes of our being but rather as characteristics of the phenomenon.[144]

The parallels with the way in which Greenberg used the term 'distance' are obvious. But Bullough extends his research in the way Distance works. In the quote we see how Bullough opposes the 'objective' and the 'subjective', which provides the basis of the difference between the aesthetic and practical considerations. But how does this work within ourselves? What operates the internal mechanics of this Distance?

Bullough expands on the gradual nature of Distance: 'it differs not only according to the nature of the *object*, which may impose a greater or a smaller degree of Distance, but varies also according to the *individual's capacity* for maintaining a greater or lesser degree'.[145] Unlike Greenberg's explanation, Bullough's Distance seems to form a broader internal 'area', a kind of no man's land, where we slide 'outside' ourselves. With the help of the notions of 'over-distance' and 'under-distance' Bullough overcomes two seemingly isolated extremes when appreciating a work of art: 'one is that of regarding the "practical side" as irrelevant to a proper appreciation; the other is instrumentalism: treating the work purely as a vehicle for presenting moral or political problems'.[146] This suggests that the relation between aesthetic distance (as Bullough understands it) and autonomy is proportional: the increase of Distance means the gaining of the autonomy of the work of art; decreasing Distance would mean lesser autonomy. Ideal for the appreciation of the work of art, Bullough

[143] Bullough, 1957 (1912): 94.
[144] Ibid.: 95.
[145] Ibid.: 100.
[146] Hanfling, 2000: 91.

surmises, is 'the utmost decrease of Distance without its disappearance'.[147] This phrasing not only contains the characteristic gradual nature of aesthetic distance, but also its paradoxical foundation. Decreasing the ('spiritual') aesthetic distance needs an increase of the ('practical') distance of time and space: when we are so engrossed in, say, a performance, we tend to lose our sense of time and place.[148] This inversely proportional relation of the aesthetic and the practical means the aesthetic distance is both outside of us (in actual space and time) and inside of us (our experience): 'the aesthetic distance, then, from which we must necessarily contemplate the work of art, is both finite and infinite, external and internal, sensible and supersensible'.[149]

Bulloughs attention to its variability exposes the different degrees of Distance various arts can 'have'. Dance, for instance, offers a strong 'lure to under-distancing', where some other forms of art, which express general truths or allegorical meanings, suffer a greater risk of being 'over-distanced'.[150] But although Bullough roughly divides the different arts between over- and under-distanced, he acknowledges that this is not without ambiguity. Music, for instance, cannot be so easily labeled. Where it concerns so-called 'heavy', classical music, one might say this has the risk of being over-distanced—for many people. 'Light', popular music has often the opposite effect of becoming 'merely' amusement.

The nuanced way Bullough describes the different degrees of aesthetic distance benefits the discussion concerning autonomy. His explanation of Distance affirms a certain segregation of the aesthetic, while at the same time it forms the relatively and variable connection between the aesthetic and ourselves.

In 'Paradoxes of Aesthetic Distance' (2003) philosopher Oswald Hanfling points out that, within the distinctions Bullough discerns, we should also look at the way in which the Distance can develop. The extent in which Distance operates not only depends on the horizon of the viewer, and also not just on the deliberate intentions of an artist; aside from these

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[147] Bullough, 1957 (1912): 100. Bullough calls this 'the antinomy of Distance' (98).
[148] The theoretical understanding of 'immersion' as 'the phenomenon of getting lost, involved or drawn into storyworlds created by literature, film and other media' seems quite apt to describe what Bullough explains. See: http://www.jltonline.de/index.php/conferences/article/view/517/1350.
[149] Michelis, 1959, 12. We find this nuance also in Kant, in his acknowledgement and explanation of the ambiguity in the way we speak of outside and inside. Kant discerns the empirical from the transcendental: we cannot know the transcendental, and the experience of the empirical always depends on space and time *which are both only to be found in us* [my italics]. Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft.* (1781) A373. The German: 'Von ihm [der transzendentale Gegenstand] aber ist auch nicht die Rede, sondern von dem empirischen, welcher alsdann ein äußerer heißt, wenn er im Raume, und ein innerer Gegenstand, wenn er lediglich im Zeitverhältnisse vorgestellt wird; Raum aber und Zeit sind beide nur in uns anzutreffen'. This is not the place to enter this topic, but it is intriguing that Distance, as Bullough understands it, encompasses subject and object (and is probably more original).
[150] Bullough, 1957 (1912): 104-5.

elements there are 'contributions that come from changes in linguistic usage and in the web of associations in which a word is embedded'.[151] Hanfling explains that we seem to enjoy difficulties in a poem, and that therefore the use of unfamiliar words in a poem can contribute to its aesthetic quality. Our current unfamiliarity with certain words, however, does not necessarily mean that these words would have been unfamiliar when the poem was written. The point Hanfling adds is that when a work is too difficult, we cannot appreciate it since we cannot access it; when it is too easily accessible, it could be regarded as kitsch.[152] Here we meet avant-garde again. This point was claimed earlier by the young Greenberg, when he distinguished avant-garde from kitsch (in 1939), and again when he criticized Duchamp for wrongly assuming that difficulty in itself was what Cubism drove, as discussed in chapter 1.[153] Hanfling interprets Bullough's variability of Distance in the terms Greenberg used, and although this confirms some element of opposition between the difficult, less accessible art and the popular, commercial art, his point is that our understanding is based on an individual and evolving relation.

Hanfling also exposes different *kinds* of aesthetic distance which, in the work of Bullough, seem to be treated as one, in an essay titled 'Five Kinds of Distance' (2000). The distance from practical concerns, the distance between the feelings of characters in a play and the audience, the distance between reality and art, the distance between the work of art and its audience, and the distance between the work and the artist can all be subsumed under Bullough's heading of Distance, but have their own characteristics which can be seen apart from each other, as well as connected with each other. The extent in which we can identify ourselves with a fictitious character, decreasing our distance from that character's feelings, for instance, enables us to hold our attention, thereby increasing our distance to the practical side of things. The distances of time and space, although not explicitly treated by Bullough, play an important role in the judgment of art. Anachronism in art leads to over-distancing, since it entails the use of elements from the past—'the products of art then become artificial'.[154] On the other hand, without history, focusing entirely on actuality, means under-distancing. Within a particular kind of distance we can shift easily to another kind; Distance is as dynamic as our feelings and ideas that the experience of the outside world trigger. As there are several

[151] Hanfling, 2003: 186.
[152] Ibid.: 176.
[153] Greenberg, 2003 (1971): 10.
[154] Michelis, 1959: 30. Walter Benjamin discusses this point in his famous essay 'the Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (1936). He defines *aura* (of natural objects) as 'the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be' (section III). The 'destruction of the aura' can be understood as the process of diminishing distance, by getting closer literally and figuratively—in a 'passionate concern for overcoming each thing's uniqueness by assimilating it as a reproduction'(III).

different forms of autonomy, there are several different forms of (aesthetic) distance; sometimes interconnected.

Although our excursion into the area of aesthetic distance may seem a digression from the discussion concerning avant-garde and the autonomy of art, it is not. The focus on the relation between subject and object helps to see there is no validation in the understanding of an avant-garde that is completely autonomous or completely opposed to such an autonomy. Contemplating the various nuances of aesthetic distance shows our association with objects is a dynamic and complex one, depending on circumstances. If we accept the terminology of aesthetic distance as the measure of the degrees in which we experience an object (or an event) aesthetically the line between what is aesthetic and what is not becomes an individual affair. The degree in which we perceive art as art in our own experience is the degree in which art is autonomous—at a certain moment in time. It means that theories concerning avant-garde should take into account the individual volatile agility of the aesthetic experience. Instead of theorizing either the intentions of artists, or the products of avant-garde, as both Greenberg and Bürger do, researching the reception side of avant-garde art appears more productive, more nuanced and is more in tune with the way we experience art.

3.3 Autonomies of art

Although they differ significantly, Greenberg and Bürger both seem to weave their respective theories from an understanding of autonomy as ‘independence from’ instead of its more literal meaning of ‘self-regulation’. The autonomy of art—as independence, as separateness—is pursued by an extreme focus on the formal means of every individual art form (as Greenberg views the core development of Modernism), or it has be denied since its distinctiveness negates art its practical influence in society (which is what Bürger’s avant-garde aims for). What is left of this understanding in contemporary debates concerning art and its autonomy? We cannot seriously ask for the status of avant-garde in contemporary debates, since the avant-garde is bereft of life by postmodernism, which rejects totalizing theories of goal-oriented developments by unified groups of artists. Instead of the focus on the relation of the avant-garde and autonomy I will give attention to a more present understanding of the autonomy of art. Two case studies can help discover at least some wisdom.

Much of the work of the philosopher Jacques Rancière discusses the relation between politics and aesthetics. He views the social and political system of our society as founded on the ‘distribution of the sensible’, which is ‘the system of self-evident facts of sense perception

that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it'.[155] In the set of implicit rules Rancière describes something can be in common, while at the same time it can be exclusive. How is this seeming inconsistency conquered? Rancière actively opposes traditional notions in art by introducing a new scheme of 'regimes' of art. It is the regime, as a system of identification, that—much like the 'institution of art' Bürger describes—determines whether a particular expression is art or not.[156] The shift from one regime to another, as well as the transformations within a regime, presuppose 'democratic emancipation', that is, at least some level of equality.[157] Rancière discerns three of those regimes in history: first there was the ethical regime of art, where the arts are judged for their common use in society; then the representative regime, which rises art above what is 'common to the community' and begins to emancipate itself; and the aesthetic regime, the current situation.[158] Rancière explains that in this new regime

> it is necessary to abandon the lazy and absurd schema that contrasts the aesthetic cult of art for art's sake with the rising power of industrial labor. Art can show signs of being an exclusive activity insofar as it is work. . . . The cult of art presupposes a revalorization of the abilities attached to the very idea of work. However, this idea is less the discovery of the essence of human activity than a recomposition of the relationship between doing, making, being, seeing, and saying. Whatever might be the specific type of economic circuits they lie within, artistic practices are not "exceptions" to other practices. They represent and reconfigure the distribution of these activities.[159]

Rancière seems to have found the middle ground between an understanding of strict autonomy and the fight against the autonomy of art. Not only does his explanation directs our attention at the contingency of the concepts of art and aesthetics, but he also targets the relation of aesthetics with other fields of society and experiences—personal as well as in society. It helps us to understand that autonomy can only exists in heteronomy, and vice versa. The individual (person or discipline) can only create *own* rules within a system that

[155] Rancière, 2004 (2000): 12.
[156] Rancière, 2009 (2004): 6-7.
[157] Ibid.: 3. 'Democratic emancipation is a random process that redistributes the sensible coordinates without being able to guarantee the absolute elimination of the social inequalities inherent in the police order'. With 'police' is meant 'the organizational system of coordinates that establishes a distribution of the sensible or a law the divides the community into groups, social positions, and functions' (3). For more concerning equality, see 51-56.
[158] Rancière, 2004 (2000): 42-45.
[159] Ibid.: 45.

already has a law; at the same time the system of rules can only exist on the presupposition of that ability to create own rules. For art to exist as a 'distinct', autonomous field, it can only be understood within a larger whole of society—'independence' and 'detachment' in this context are terms that suggest a definite state of affairs, which cannot be strictly the case. Rancière circumvents these connotations by cleverly introducing new terms, overcoming the extreme positions. It shows us the artificial and reductive nature of placing theoretical labels.

Following this 'new' understanding, several authors and artists—from within the field, the institution of art— collaborated to expand on the paradoxes concerning the autonomy of art, in the so-called 'Autonomy Project'. This project intends to 'act as a conduit for fresh and radical insights by both emerging as well as more seasoned thinkers, writers and contemporary art practitioners on and around the subject of autonomy'.[160] The project facilitated several events where the autonomy of art was debated in its practical and theoretical forms. In the three 'newspapers' the project has produced so far, the different positions of the debates are assembled and explained. The starting point of most of these opinions is generally the opposition we discussed so far:

> On the one hand it [autonomy] has been marginalized within a formalist tradition that saw art as a special and separate category, occupying a referential world of its own . . . On the other hand, a fundamentally left-wing tradition of critical theory has insisted upon the fundamental impossibility of any form of autonomy, artistic or otherwise, pointing to the overriding social, political and economic circumstances that condition our individual existence within a community.[161]

The rethinking of autonomy by the participants of this project flows in different directions. And although the authors of the newspapers all seem to make an effort to rethink autonomy, many stay trapped inside the opposition. Charles Esche for instance, emphasizes the apartness of art: 'the field of art remains a tolerated enclosure'—while acknowledging its ambivalent status: 'it is also limited and constrained by institutional and governmental systems'.[162] From this position, where art is not completely instrumentalized, and at the same time not completely isolated, Esche views it as art's task to overcome the traditional paradigm of art ('modernity') and indicate other possibilities 'in works of art that engage a public'.[163] Not surprisingly, museum-director Esche sees the museum as the space where a new paradigm can

[160] The Autonomy Project, 2010: http://theautonomyproject.org/newspapers
[161] Byrne, 2010: 14.
[162] Esche, 2011: 6. 'Being autonomous carries the constant danger that art becomes marginalized in the social, political and economic discourse in which it takes part'.
[163] Ibid.: 7.

be established. However, by reiterating the status quo and emphasizing that no new *effective* paradigm is found, his position actually reinforces the opposition.

The importance of the Autonomy Project is the fact that the authors include their own horizon in their views. The own position within the discipline is acknowledged which means that the autonomy of art is necessarily ambiguous: once we write about art, we treat is as distinct from other elements. But since we also work with art on a daily basis, even depend on art for these (different) activities, either as an amateur or a professional, art has a definite function outside of its intrinsic value. Accessing autonomy from individual positions results in some interesting 'forms' of autonomy: 'operational autonomy'(Thomas Lange), 'subjective autonomy'(Clare Butcher), 'shifting autonomy' (Steven ten Thije), 'necessary autonomy' (Thomas Lange), to name but a few. This confirms not only a certain evolution of our understanding of autonomy, but also the importance of the position from which art is approached. Autonomy seems to have grown from a static position or attitude which described a certain relation in its difference, to a dynamic process where it is becoming more and more difficult to perceive the 'own' field from another. Sven Lütticken sketches the dynamic transformation of the autonomy of art as a dialectical scheme. 'Modernist autonomy' is the name for the autonomy Clement Greenberg defended (as we discussed in chapter 1). Lütticken describes the reaction to 'the sham that is modernist autonomy' from art groups like De Stijl, the Surrealists, the Situationists and Fluxus as an attempt to negate the former autonomy, and calls this 'avant-garde autonomy' (this would include part of the 'historical' and part of the 'neo-avant-garde' as understood by Bürger).[164] The third step of the dialectical move is a 'critical autonomy', where artists attempt to overcome the desire for 'pure' art, but also the revolutionary attempts to negate art (artists as Daniel Buren, Marcel Broodthaers and Hans Haacke are examples mentioned). But the development does not stop where the traditional dialectical scheme stops. The institutional critique of the latter phase shifts towards the subject, 'towards the site of subjectivation'.[165] Lütticken suggests a 'performative autonomy' where 'the specificity of individual practices needs to be incorporated into the constellation of interrelated performances and/or acts, situated at the fraying edge of art'.[166] What he reiterates is the abolishment of the distinction between work and play, between the artistic act and any act, between art and life. Lütticken takes the 'general performance' to be the form that combines 'one's quasi-dramatic self-performance' and 'one's economic

[164] Lütticken, 2010: 34.
[165] Ibid.: 37.
[166] Ibid.: 38.

achievement'. The current economic system makes the differences between work and pleasure difficult to distinguish, Lütticken explains; ultimately, we will be unable to distinguish between 'objective economical pressures and subjectivities that are constantly updated, upgraded , remodeled'.[167] Despite this assertion, Lütticken goes on to explain that certain acts can be both social/political, or aesthetic, depending on the context. So, when art discusses its own place in society, or, in other words, when art 'problematizes the relationship of autonomy with heteronomy', thereby making autonomy visible, it can be termed aesthetic.

The contemporary thinkers we discussed here understand the autonomy of art in more diverse and nuanced ways, in comparison to the simple 'to be or not to be - autonomous'. While Rancière circumvents the limiting connotations of 'autonomy' (such as 'independent' and 'distinct') with the help of alternative terminology, the thinkers of the Autonomy Project take a more 'head on' approach. In comparison with the views of Greenberg and Bürger these contemporary thinkers distinguish themselves especially by recognizing a more authentic understanding of the autonomy of art as the possibility and activity of creating its own rules, instead of the derived understanding of autonomy as an independent field in society or an independent experience.

[167] Lütticken, 2013: 100.

CONCLUSIONS

One of the questions raised in the Introduction was how two notions of avant-garde, which effectively exclude each other, could remain in existence in the field of art history. We have found that the theories of Greenberg and Bürger, exemplary of understanding avant-garde as either completely autonomous or fighting to annihilate the autonomy of art, do not necessarily form an opposition. Greenberg and Bürger start their respective theories from different presuppositions concerning the nature of the relation between art and autonomy, which leads to completely divergent descriptions of avant-garde, each with a very distinct concentration on precisely the element that the other excludes.

More fundamental therefore is the question concerning the relation between avant-garde and autonomy. We followed Greenberg's evolving understanding of a political avant-garde which detached itself from society during the latter half of the 19th century, to the Modernism that is completely and exclusively concerned with the formal means pertaining to each art. The change in terminology goes hand in hand with this change in function: where avant-garde stood for efforts to keep culture moving forward, Modernism occupied itself solely with artistic specialization. Although a concentration on artistic elements does not necessarily exclude an effort to elevate culture in general, Greenberg explains the *sole* concentration on formal artistic elements as the only criterion for his Modernism. For Greenberg the autonomy of art is exemplified by the progressive specialization of art's formal aesthetic elements, fortifying its position. The shifting position has consequences for the understanding of autonomy. The autonomy of the avant-garde, as Greenberg described it in 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch', was an (incomplete) detachment of bourgeois society, thereby renouncing the ideas of that society. The autonomy of Modernism is rooted in the almost complete functionlessness of art in general—'art has only to be good'—and, yet another form of autonomy, as the independence of the different art forms from elements of other art forms (mediumspecificity). Greenberg never makes explicitly clear why his early conviction of the political function of avant-garde vanishes, or is replaced by this intense focus on the formal means of different art forms. It is not even merely the specific focus on material elements of art that is particularly surprising, but for Greenberg the formal, material means are equated with the aesthetic in art. Art is only its material expression, for Greenberg. That makes the distance from Greenberg's position in 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch' much greater. He is adamant about this solitary focus on formal elements by Modernist artists, for which he sees the instigators of Cubism as the prime example. Cubism forms the prototype of Modernism

because it progressed through stage after stage from naturalistic representation to the complete concentration on the formal elements of its medium, excluding everything else. This reduction avenged itself all the more when the particular artistic developments Greenberg perceived as the driving force—mediumspecificity—were slowly pushed into the background during the sixties and seventies. Greenberg condemns those artistic developments that did not fit 'his' Modernism, such as Dada and the developments following Dada. The lack of 'purity' in the work of those artists that did not follow the 'logic' Greenberg observed as the guiding development of Modernist art was the reason to castigate these artists. Especially the figure of Marcel Duchamp receives critique from Greenberg, from the late sixties onward.

A movement like Dada forms the exact embodiment of the avant-garde Bürger conceives. 'His' avant-garde searched for ways to elevate art into the daily praxis of life. The autonomy of art is understood by Bürger as a detached position from which there was no influence possible on the life in society. In this sense both Greenberg and Bürger understand autonomy as distinct, detached, independent from other spheres of society. But Bürger conceives of autonomy as a specific autonomy of the institution of art where avant-garde reacted upon. This institution of art is understood as comprising the ideas about art, and the production, distribution and reception of art; its autonomous status prevents art from having social effect. For Bürger the autonomy of art means the lack of social effect art has because of its disconnected status; art is an island. Two problems with his theory come to the fore: the first is Bürger's definition of the institution of art. This is too imprecise to delineate the detachment of this institution, which he claims is a necessary precondition for the development of an avant-garde. Secondly, there is the claim of the lack of social impact of 'institutionalized' art. Even if it is the case that art which is considered as such for its aesthetic qualities is perhaps not directly functioning at the front of social activism, we can never determine (beforehand) if a work of art does not have a particular influence on people that could go on and create some sort of social relevance (I recall T.J. Clark's *The Painting of Modern Life* (1984) establishing this point quite firmly). If not directly, all art can, potentially, generate the impulse to have social impact.

Bürger's description of avant-garde practices is precise and illuminating. Bürger explains the methods avant-garde used to counter what he interprets as the restricting autonomy of art, by 'creating' artworks that seem to evaporate the distinctions between the artwork and its creator, between the artist and the public. But Bürger's avant-garde was never intended to live forever. Since the goal was to elevate art into the daily praxis of life, the two possible outcomes of that aim both lead to the end of avant-garde. Success means the end of

the autonomy of the institution of art, resulting in the nullification of the function of avant-garde; failure means the project of avant-garde was infeasible—utopian. For Bürger, the 'original' avant-garde failed because their efforts were hailed as art and taken up into the institution of art, securing a complete victory for that institution. The following 'neo-avant-garde' failed even more painfully, because their actions were inauthentic. Despite their best intentions, the neo-avant-garde negates the intentions of the original avant-garde by presenting their efforts *as art*. What was in its original manifestation meant as a provocation, can, when repeated, never again attain that status: it becomes its opposite, an affirmation of the very thing the original avant-garde attacked. Bürger's views concerning the failure of the neo-avant-garde are severely contested. An important line of arguing in the critique towards Bürger is his presupposition that the goals of the neo-avant-garde were similar to those of the historical avant-garde, which forms the basis for Bürger's renouncement of the neo-avant-garde efforts. By accepting the categories of avant-garde and autonomy as evolving, as Bürger does, it is inconsistent to apply the exact same criteria and goals of the historical avant-garde onto the neo-avant-garde. Bürger should have accounted for the possibility of transformed intentions.

Greenberg and Bürger share a basic understanding of the autonomy of art as meaning a relatively independent domain within society, but where Greenberg's Modernism embraces this autonomy as something to defend, Bürger's avant-garde interprets it as preventing desired social effect. Both seem to hold a supposed originality as one of the most important characteristics of avant-garde or Modernism.[168] Greenberg perceived of those artistic developments that did not follow the progressive mediumspecificity as 'avant-garde*ness*', which for Greenberg refers to making art that utilizes newness in art as an end. Bürger shows the same disdain for 'betraying' originality when he belittles the efforts of the neo-avant-garde (in the name alone already) as inauthentic.

The point of departure was the assumption that Greenberg and Bürger hold positions at the extreme end of the understanding of avant-garde's function. 'Setting aside', for a moment, the fact that Greenberg started his career out describing a history of a utopian avant-garde, and focusing on his Modernism, two important interpretative models of the developments in modern art are discussed. One of those explains the importance of art in terms of its effect in our social world, the other explains art exclusively on formal grounds. We can consider these two approaches as roughly coinciding with what is called 'social art

[168] Rosalind Krauss (formerly a 'disciple' of Greenberg) exposes the originality of avant-garde as a myth in her *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and other Modernist Myths* (1985).

history' and 'formalist art history'. At the same time we can also understand it as two sides of the same coin. Because all art, for whatever purposes it is made or utilized, has aesthetic qualities. And all art, notwithstanding the concentration on formal elements, is expression. And when people express themselves, they address others. Therefore, all art is always political, and it always has aesthetic qualities.

The ambiguities we discovered so far in the understanding of autonomy suggests a complexity that surpasses the explanations Greenberg and Bürger provide. For them, the autonomy of art is seen as a necessary condition for social effect (as Greenberg's early essays seem to suggest); or as relatively detached from other social activities but sufficient to itself (as Greenberg's later essays suggest); or as preventing the possibility of social effect (as Bürger views it). Understanding the autonomy of art as the detachment and independence of the domain of art poses problems in the practical way we speak of it. For instance, all legislation concerning art that is deployed by external domains, such as a government, denies the autonomy of art, if we understand this autonomy as 'independent' and 'detached'. On the other hand, every time we speak of art, we confirm a certain difference, an apartness from other domains of society.

History has shown us that art has broken free from the bounds of religious commissions, and some art, especially the art we usually subsume under the name 'avant-garde', has broken free from what was accepted as (good) art, at the time it was made. Perhaps the term 'emancipation' fits better to designate these developments in art, since this has the connotation of an ongoing process, where the use of the term 'autonomy' designates a certain complete state of affairs. The term 'emancipation' not only does justice to the gradual nature of developments, but at the same time it confirms the relation with surrounding elements. Emancipation is based on comparing positions; and, different from autonomy, these positions do not necessarily oppose each other.

Jacques Rancière makes use of the term 'emancipation', providing a more nuanced understanding of the relation between art and life (politics). He describes the evolving relation of art and politics in terms of the transformations of 'regimes' of art. Artworks are not so different from other works in society, they consist merely of reconfigurations of the relation between man and what it is that man perceives and creates.

The work of Edward Bullough also provides nuance. His topic is the 'place' we obtain whenever we perceive something aesthetically. 'Distance' is the name for the relation we have with what we perceive and its nature is gradual, depending on the thing perceived, and on the person perceiving. The later Greenberg expressed himself also about this specific

aesthetic experience, but again, his position is an extreme one. Greenberg fixates what he calls 'esthetic distance' as the detachment from practical reality, reducing the original relative and ambiguous nature of an aesthetic experience. The distinctness of the aesthetic experience is probably one of the foundational elements of any general understanding of the autonomy of art. This apartness is based on Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, wherein the aesthetic judgment receives a special position. However, Kant's criterion of disinterestedness is often interpreted as meaning that we completely disconnect with the object of beauty, resulting in the detached state which is then labeled 'autonomous'. But the exclusion of our interest in the beautiful does not necessarily mean that we detach ourselves from the beautiful, it can mean the opposite, that we open ourselves up for the beautiful itself, *as it is*, unconstrained by our desires. It is in this opening up that we can experience art in its multidimensional nature.

Part of the multitude of dimensions is examined by the participants of the 'Autonomy Project'. The autonomy of art is discussed from different perspectives from within the field of art. Comparing the more recent understanding of autonomy with Greenberg's and Bürger's we discern a significant difference. Less attention is given to an understanding of the autonomy of art with strict notions as 'distinct', 'independent' and 'detached', and more is contemplated on the different ways in which art creates its own rules as a result of its changing environment and/or to effect these surroundings.

Contemplating our question concerning the relation of avant-garde with autonomy, we cannot fail to notice that there is no contemporary avant-garde discussed. Connecting the lack of a contemporary avant-garde with the more recent understanding of the autonomy of art as the ability and possibility of creating rules, suggest that the existence of an avant-garde is limited to a sphere where autonomy is thought of as a detached and relatively isolated realm. Once we stop to think of the autonomy of art as determining a disconnected status of art (from society), the function assigned to avant-garde vanishes from existence. If the autonomy of art is no longer thought of as disjoined from society, there is no purpose for an avant-garde to attack or defend that separate territory. The relation of avant-garde with autonomy appears to be a precarious one; only if we understand the region of art as relatively removed from society we can understand an avant-garde as a group of artists united in their devotion to act upon that isolated status. Still, treated as relative and understood in a nuanced way, the autonomy of art remains useful, since, in practical reality, there is the field of art—within society, but in several senses different from other domains. Avant-garde did not survive postmodernism, which renounces the idea of progress in art. But aside from that, the notions of avant-garde by Greenberg and Bürger have shown clearly that developments in art cannot—and should not—

be pigeonholed by artificial theories that reduce the variety, the interconnectedness and the graduality of artistic developments.

ILLUSTRATIONS

Fig I: Georges Braque, *Fruit Dish and Glass*, 1912. Charcoal and cut-and-pasted printed wallpaper with goache on white laid paper, mounted on paperboard. 62.9 x 45.7 cm. Leonard A. Lauder Cubist Collection.

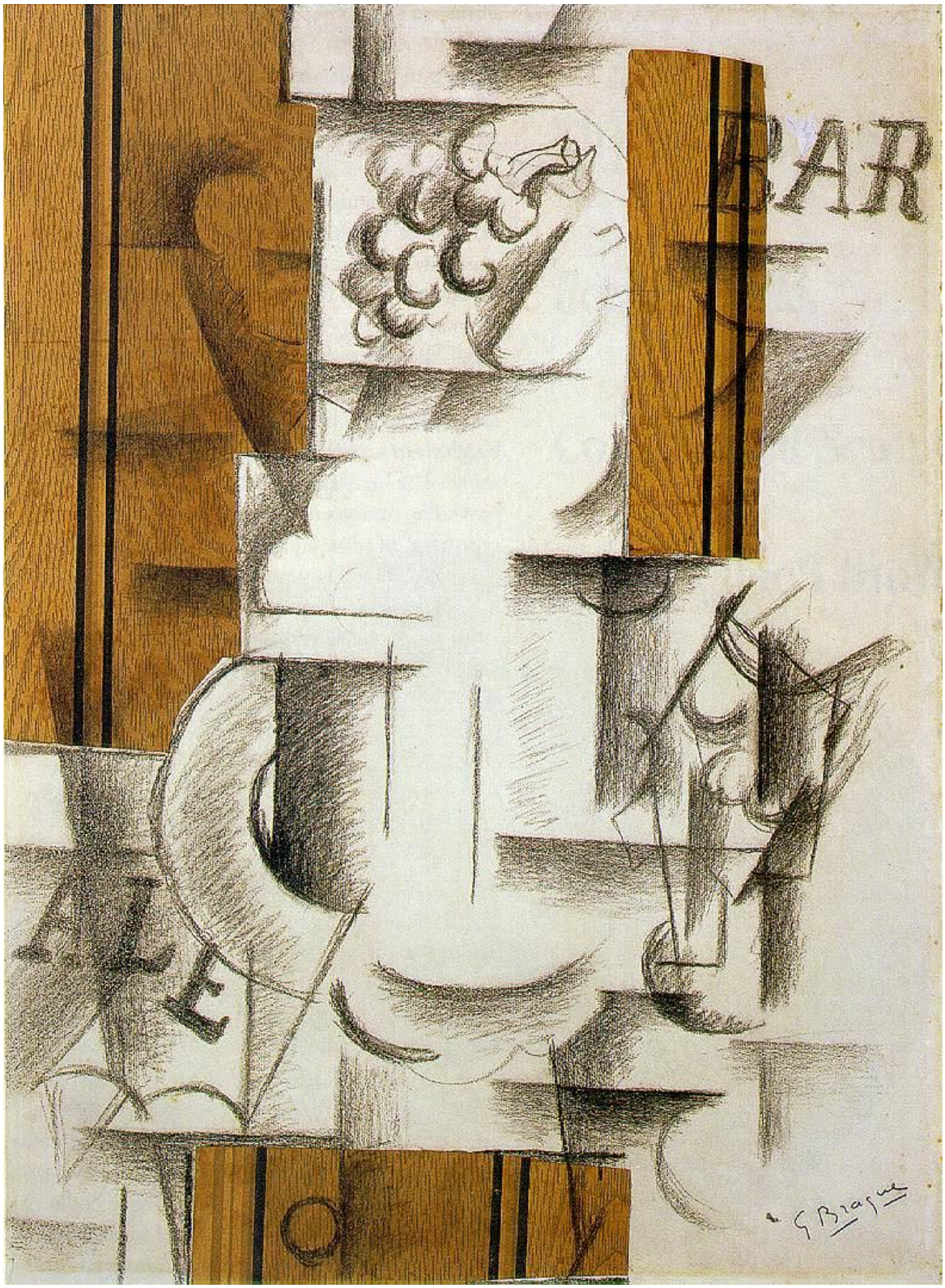
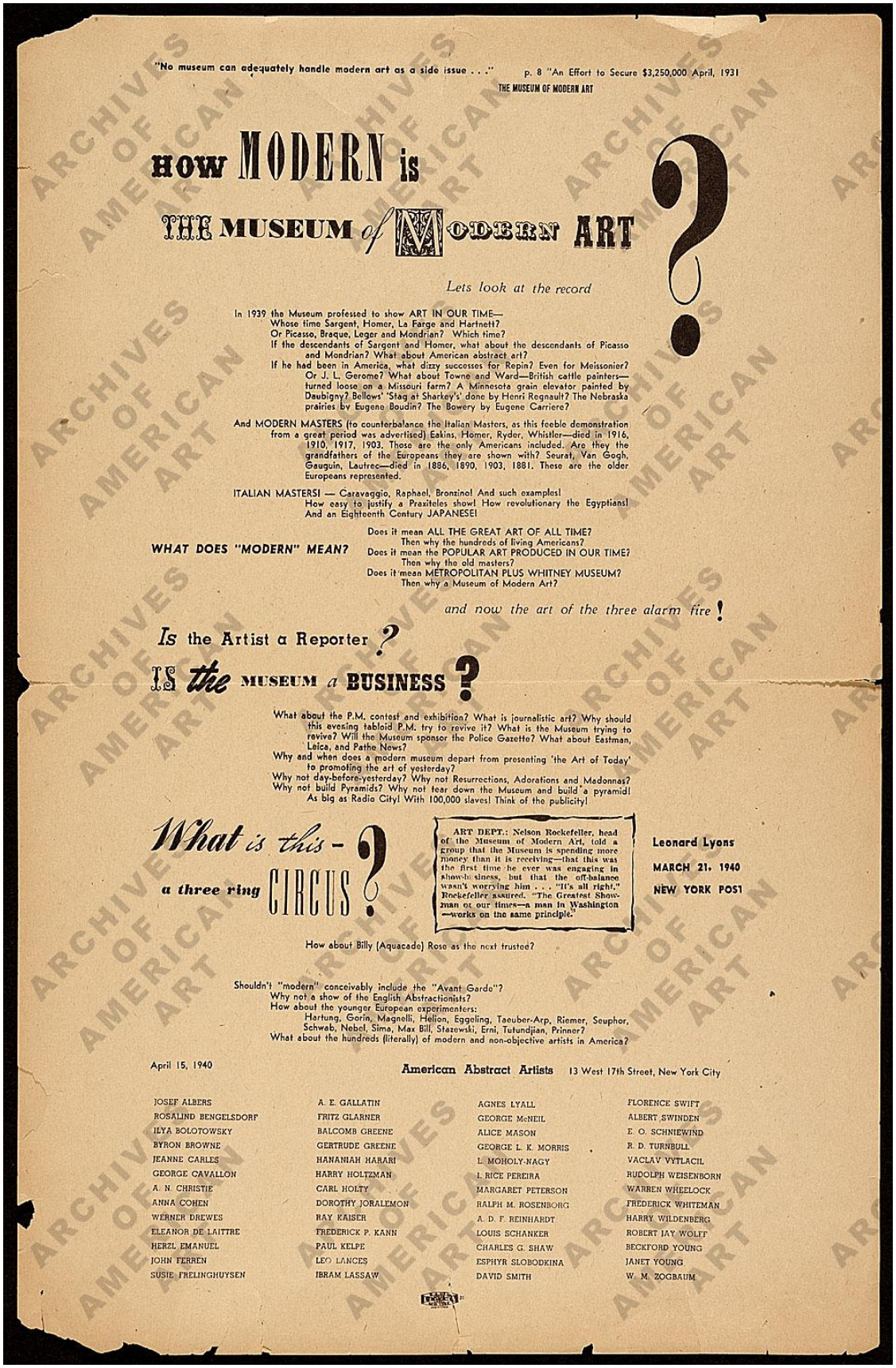


Fig II: American Abstract Artists, *How Modern is the Museum of Modern Art?*, April 15, 1940. Poster. 41 x 28 cm. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institute.



"No museum can adequately handle modern art as a side issue . . ." p. 8 "An Effort to Secure $3,250,000 April, 1931
THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

HOW MODERN is THE MUSEUM of MODERN ART ?

Lets look at the record

In 1939 the Museum professed to show ART IN OUR TIME—
Whose time Sargent, Homer, La Farge and Hartnett?
Or Picasso, Braque, Leger and Mondrian? Which time?
If the descendants of Sargent and Homer, what about the descendants of Picasso and Mondrian? What about American abstract art?
If he had been in America, what dizzy successes for Repin? Even for Meissonier? Or J. L. Gerome? What about Towne and Ward—British cattle painters—turned loose on a Missouri farm? A Minnesota grain elevator painted by Daubigny? Bellows' 'Stag at Sharkey's' done by Henri Regnault? The Nebraska prairies by Eugene Boudin? The Bowery by Eugene Carriere?

And MODERN MASTERS (to counterbalance the Italian Masters, as this feeble demonstration from a great period was advertised) Eakins, Homer, Ryder, Whistler—died in 1916, 1910, 1917, 1903. Those are the only Americans included. Are they the grandfathers of the Europeans they are shown with? Seurat, Van Gogh, Gauguin, Lautrec—died in 1886, 1890, 1903, 1881. These are the older Europeans represented.

ITALIAN MASTERS! — Caravaggio, Raphael, Bronzino! And such examples!
How easy to justify a Praxiteles show! How revolutionary the Egyptians!
And an Eighteenth Century JAPANESE!

WHAT DOES "MODERN" MEAN?

Does it mean ALL THE GREAT ART OF ALL TIME?
Then why the hundreds of living Americans?
Does it mean the POPULAR ART PRODUCED IN OUR TIME?
Then why the old masters?
Does it mean METROPOLITAN PLUS WHITNEY MUSEUM?
Then why a Museum of Modern Art?

and now the art of the three alarm fire !

Is the Artist a Reporter ?

IS *the* MUSEUM *a* BUSINESS ?

What about the P.M. contest and exhibition? What is journalistic art? Why should this evening tabloid P.M. try to revive it? What is the Museum trying to revive? Will the Museum sponsor the Police Gazette? What about Eastman, Leica, and Pathe News?
Why and when does a modern museum depart from presenting 'the Art of Today' to promoting the art of yesterday?
Why not day-before-yesterday? Why not Resurrections, Adorations and Madonnas?
Why not build Pyramids? Why not tear down the Museum and build a pyramid! As big as Radio City! With 100,000 slaves! Think of the publicity!

What is this – *a three ring* CIRCUS ?

ART DEPT.: Nelson Rockefeller, head of the Museum of Modern Art, told a group that the Museum is spending more money than it is receiving—that this was the first time he ever was engaging in showmanship, but that the off-balance wasn't worrying him . . . "It's all right," Rockefeller assured. "The Greatest Showman of our times—a man in Washington—works on the same principle."

Leonard Lyons
MARCH 21, 1940
NEW YORK POST

How about Billy (Aquacade) Rose as the next trustee?

Shouldn't "modern" conceivably include the "Avant Garde"?
Why not a show of the English Abstractionists?
How about the younger European experimenters:
Hartung, Gorin, Magnelli, Helion, Eggeling, Taeuber-Arp, Riemer, Seuphor, Schwab, Nebel, Sima, Max Bill, Stazewski, Erni, Tutundjian, Prinner?
What about the hundreds (literally) of modern and non-objective artists in America?

April 15, 1940

American Abstract Artists 13 West 17th Street, New York City

JOSEF ALBERS	A. E. GALLATIN	AGNES LYALL	FLORENCE SWIFT
ROSALIND BENGELSDORF	FRITZ GLARNER	GEORGE McNEIL	ALBERT SWINDEN
ILYA BOLOTOWSKY	BALCOMB GREENE	ALICE MASON	E. O. SCHNIEWIND
BYRON BROWNE	GERTRUDE GREENE	GEORGE L. K. MORRIS	R. D. TURNBULL
JEANNE CARLES	HANANIAH HARARI	L. MOHOLY-NAGY	VACLAV VYTLACIL
GEORGE CAVALLON	HARRY HOLTZMAN	I. RICE PEREIRA	RUDOLPH WEISENBORN
A. N. CHRISTIE	CARL HOLTY	MARGARET PETERSON	WARREN WHEELOCK
ANNA COHEN	DOROTHY JORALEMON	RALPH M. ROSENBORG	FREDERICK WHITEMAN
WERNER DREWES	RAY KAISER	A. D. F. REINHARDT	HARRY WILDENBERG
ELEANOR DE LAITTRE	FREDERICK P. KANN	LOUIS SCHANKER	ROBERT JAY WOLFF
HERZL EMANUEL	PAUL KELPE	CHARLES G. SHAW	BECKFORD YOUNG
JOHN FERREN	LEO LANCES	ESPHYR SLOBODKINA	JANET YOUNG
SUSIE FRELINGHUYSEN	IBRAM LASSAW	DAVID SMITH	W. M. ZOGBAUM

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