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

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

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

1. Research Problems

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

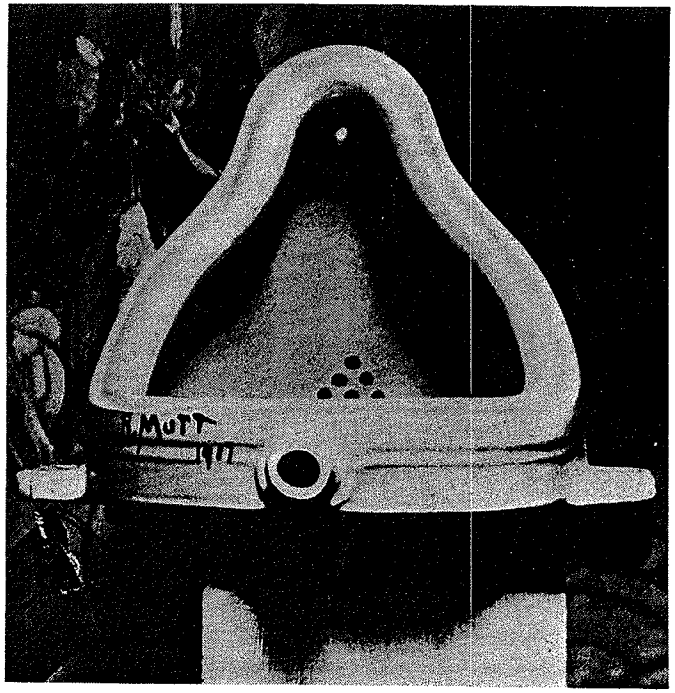
With the help of Herbert Marcuse's theoretical formulation concerning the twofold character of art in bourgeois society (sketched in chapter one), the avant-gardiste intent can be understood with particular clarity. All those needs that cannot be satisfied in everyday life, because the principle of competition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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter Four
The Avant-Gardiste Work of Art

1. On the Problem of the Category 'Work'

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

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

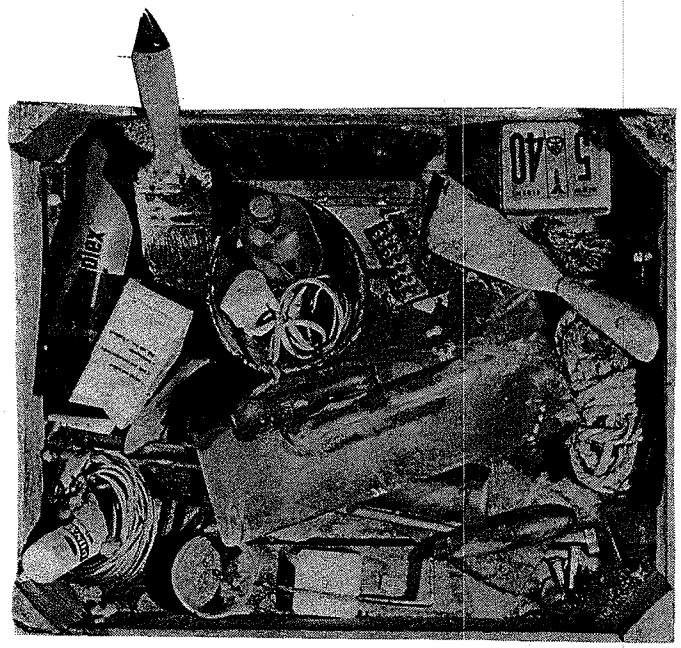
Theoreticians who consider the category 'work' null and void could answer this argument by pointing out that in the historical avant-garde movements, forms of activity were deployed that cannot be adequately subsumed under the category 'work': the Dadaist manifestations, for example, which made the provocation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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

2. The New

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3. Chance

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4. Benjamin's Concept of Allegory

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

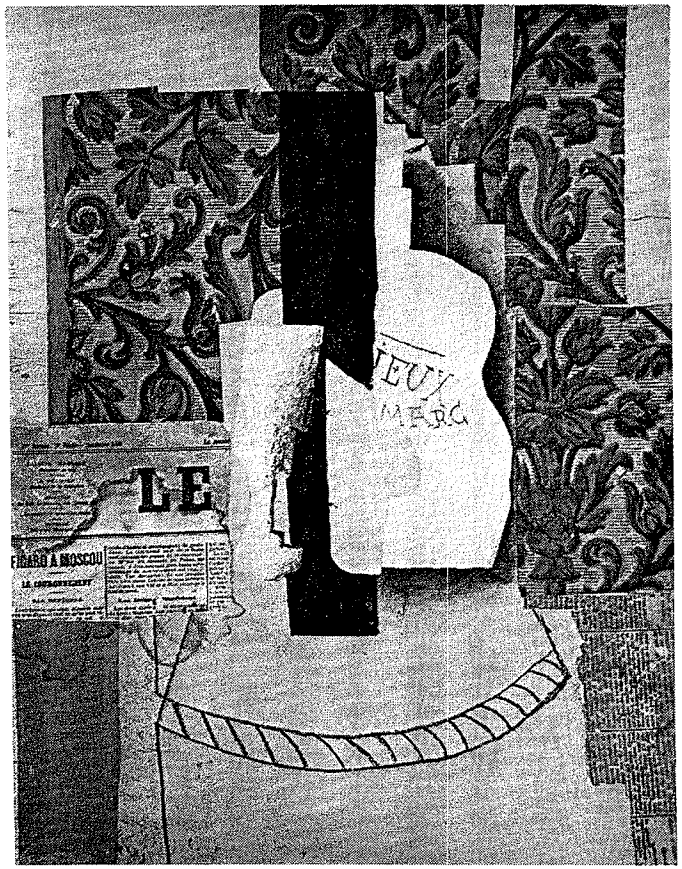
it is possible only to a limited extent to speak of the work as a whole as the perfect embodiment of the totality of possible meaning.

5. Montage

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

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

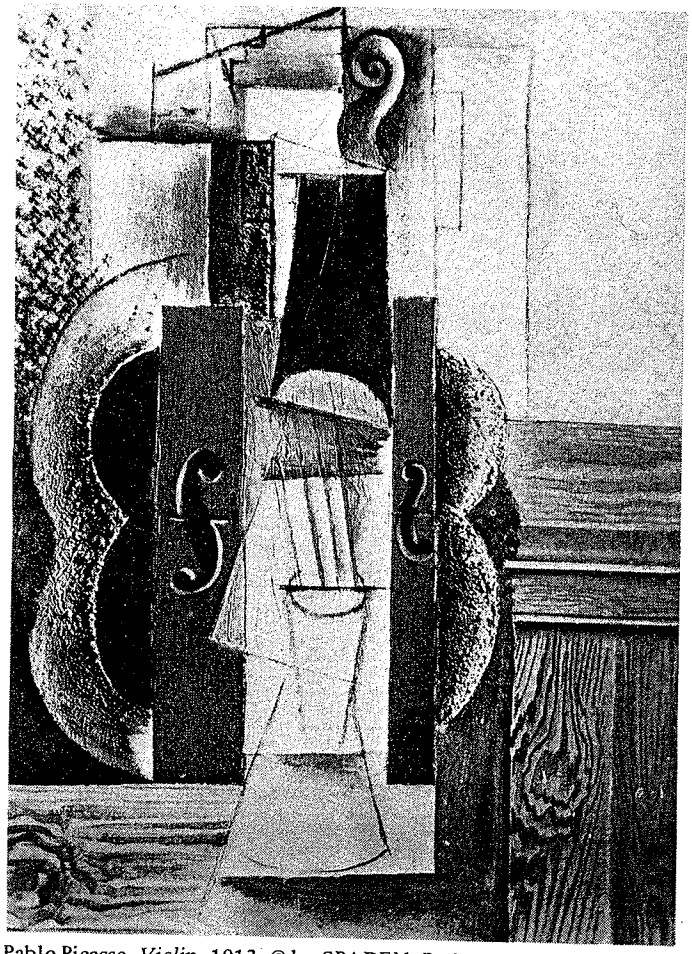
Although montage is thus a technical device given with the medium itself, it has the status of an artistic principle in painting. It is no accident that, apart from 'precursors' who can always be discovered after the fact, montage first emerges in connection with cubism, that movement in modern painting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



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

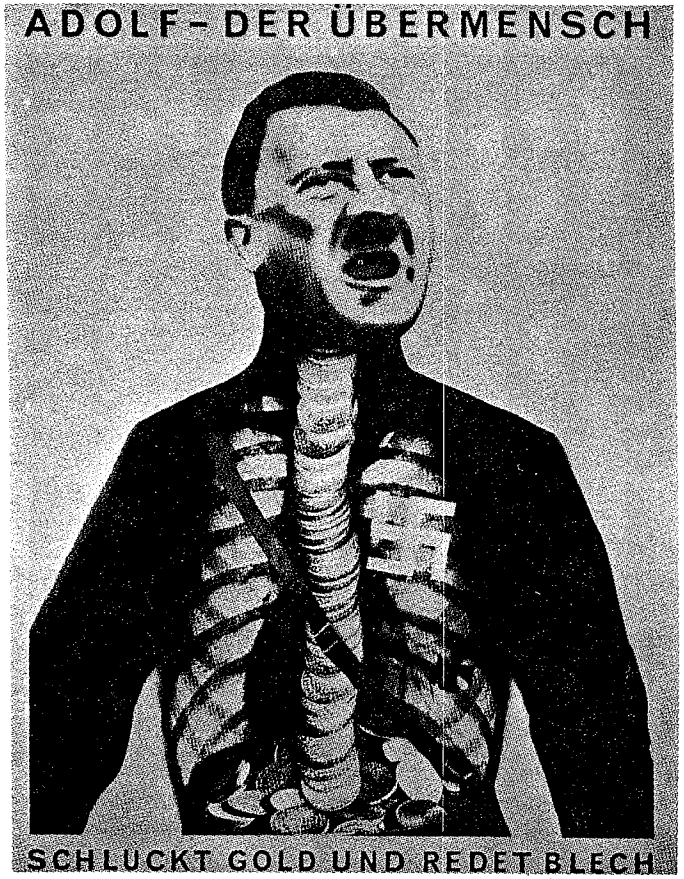
in paintings of the same period that dispense with the technique of montage.[26]

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



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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter Five Avant-Garde and Engagement

1. The Debate between Adorno and Lukács

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

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