

MAPPING THE NEO-AVANT-GARDE. THEORISING ART, LITERATURE, MUSIC AND FILM IN THE 1950S AND 60S

University of Edinburgh, September 23rd – 25th 2005

Friday 23rd September

David Hopkins (University of Glasgow)

**Welcome and Introductory Remarks: Theorizing the Neo-Avant Garde/
Quantifying 'Art' and 'Life'**

SECTION 1: 'CLASSIC' NEO-AVANT-GARDE ISSUES: 'ART' AND 'LIFE'

Mark Silverberg (Cape Breton University)

Working in the Gap between Art and Life: the New York School Process Poem

This paper will look at the concept of “process art” as a trend within various neo-avant-garde movements of the 1950s and 60s. “Process” refers to an important shift from end result (product) to creative behavior (process) that is highlighted in work such Jackson Pollock’s action painting, John Cage’s aleatory music, Merce Cunningham’s unscripted dance Events, Allen Kaprow’s Happenings and, of particular importance for this presentation, the “action poetry” of Frank O’Hara, John Ashbery, Kenneth Koch and others.

I will suggest that the aesthetic of process provides a useful way of re-thinking Bürger’s problematic central idea of the reintegration of “art” and “life” as a goal of the avant-garde. Process art calls for a re-ordering and re-thinking of these categories in that the significance of the action (life) and the object (art) are reversed. With the advent of process art it becomes harder and harder to tell what is “life” and what is “art,” and this productive confusion is a useful antidote to Bürger’s oversimplified theory that the avant-garde strove to reintegrate these overdetermined categories. This paper will read process art as a way of working aesthetically in “the gap” between art and life, as Robert Rauschenberg once put it: “Painting relates to both art and life. Neither is made. I try to act in the gap between the two.”

After providing a general sketch of process art, I will focus specially on one or two poems by New York School poets which take up the aporiae of life and art on the level of both theme and style.

Anna Dezeuse (University of Manchester)

'Junk Aesthetic' and Spectator Participation in the 'Neo-Dada' Work of George Brecht and Robert Rauschenberg

The widespread use of so-called ‘junk’ materials and the attempt to encourage active spectator participation are often cited as characteristics of ‘Neo-dada’ works in North America in the 1950s and early 1960s. The socio-political implications of these features remain, however, relatively unexplored, as many accounts of this period either content themselves with mapping out formal shifts and innovations with little analysis, or dismiss them as a-political repetitions of past avant-garde experiments. Close analyses of works by American artists George Brecht and Robert Rauschenberg, who were both associated with Neo-Dada circa 1960, will help me address the specificities of both their use of readymade materials and their interest in

the role of the viewer. Comparing their work to earlier artistic practices in the twentieth century, I will challenge Peter Bürger's critique of the neo-avant-garde by focusing on two of the features that he precisely associated with the 'original' political avant-garde project: its questioning of authorship, and its attempt to dismantle the distinction between producer and recipient. My analysis will demonstrate that Brecht and Rauschenberg were not only innovatively addressing these issues, but also sought to explore the gap between art and life in ways that were as effective as their predecessors.

Drawing on the artists' statements and other authors' contemporary reflections 'junk' and 'Neo-dada,' as well as recent reflections about the socio-political connotations of rubbish, and about the mechanisms of artist-participant interactions, I hope to map out some of the ways in which Brecht and Rauschenberg negotiated the complex nexus of relations between subjects and objects in a late-capitalist society. In particular, I will suggest that both artists were preoccupied with the connections between subjectivity, lived experience and the construction of knowledge. Comparing their approaches will shed light on some of the issues at stake in the dynamic polarities between order/disorder, value/junk, past/present, and activity/passivity.

Günter Berghaus (University of Bristol) **Neo-Dada Performance Art**

Neo-Dada was a term used in the late 1950s, usually pejoratively, to characterize creations that fell outside the domains of abstract art, absurd theatre, and surrealism. By the early 1960s, the works focussing on the quotidian aspects of late-capitalist, urban culture increased in number. Their exuberant energy, their critical focus on the emerging media society, and their novel forms of production and presentation revealed that they were much more than just a rehash of an earlier phase of the avant-garde.

Many of the American artists to whom the term Neo-Dada was applied worked in the performance medium and preferred the term Happening for their time-based creations. In Continental Europe, artists working in a similar vein called themselves New Realists. In Japan, the term chosen for this concept was Concretism, or the Japanese word for it, Gutai. In 1962, a second generation of artists continued this trend under the banner of Fluxus (but its first public performance in Düsseldorf again carried in its title the word "Neo-Dada"). Starting off in Germany with close ties to the Happening movement, Fluxus grew into a world-wide phenomenon and a well-organized network held together until the mid-1960s by George Maciunas. In this presentation, I want to define some of the characteristic traits of Neo-Dada performance art, discuss its relation to the Dada experiments of the period 1916-22, and establish to what degree the Happening and Fluxus movement was an original and innovative feature of the postwar avant-garde. I shall also use some exemplary Neo-Dada performances to examine Berger's claim that the neo-avant-garde never achieved the same degree of fusion of art and life as the historical avant-garde.

Saturday 24th September

SECTION 2: FORMAL/TECHNICAL EXPERIMENTATION

Claus Clüver (Indiana University)

The ‘Ruptura’ Proclaimed by Brazil’s Self-Styled ‘Vanguarda’ in the 1950s and 60s

In 1956/57, members of the recently founded artists’ groups “Ruptura” (Sao Paulo) and “Frente” (Rio de Janeiro) showed paintings and sculptures side by side with poster-poems by a number of writers in a widely debated “Exposição Nacional de Arte Concreta”. The poets had adopted the label “concrete poetry” for their work, which showed striking parallels to that of the visual artists. Vocal performances of these texts were given at concerts of “new” music, and a few composers began to set concrete texts to music. All these groups accompanied their production with manifestoes advocating a break with the traditions of mainstream art, including those derived from the 1922 “Week of Modern Art”, which had initiated an avant-garde movement that strove to adapt European models to the Brazilian experience. The young artists, writers and musicians claimed to represent a new avant-garde with strong formalist-constructivist-minimalist tendencies, exploring the potential of the materials of their media without narration, figurative representation, or self-expression. A demonstration of shared characteristics of their work will lead to an analysis of the manifestoes and programs and of the concept of a Latin-American avant-garde as developed in particular by the concrete poet and theorist Haroldo de Campos.

A consideration of the models extolled by the poets, from Mallarmé to Pound and Joyce, and a look at the role of model and mediator played by Max Bill and by Hans-Joachim Koellreuter as links to the Bauhaus tradition and the Schoenberg-Webern aesthetic, will require observations on the relations of the new generation to the avant-gardes of the first half of the century. My own assessment will confirm the self-proclaimed status of poets and visual artists as a Latin-American avant-garde while at the same time considering the Brazilians’ work of that period in a wider perspective more as an (innovative) culmination of certain Modernist tendencies.

Friedrich W. Block (Stiftung Brückner-Kühner, Kassel)

“movens” – The Aesthetics of Movement as a Programmatic Perspective

In 1960 the German poet Franz Mon edited a book with the title “movens”, which went on to become a milestone in the aesthetic re-orientation of Central Europe after the preceding catastrophes. The “documents and analyses of poetry, visual arts, music, architecture” were contrived as program, analysis and record of contemporary art. The key term “movement” was conceived of as not only “motion” or “kinetics” but also and particularly as the processual nature of art and information.

This paper will concentrate on the programmatic aspect of this project and reflect on its network of categories and arguments. The aesthetics of movement will be explored with the example of a unique artist, whose impressive work appeared for the first time in “movens” on an international scale: Carlfriedrich Claus (1930-1998) was a rare artistic character who realized the “movens” program in the context of a totalitarian communist system (GDR). Above all, Claus realized the “movens” program as radical aesthetic experiment, as a profound exploration of sign processes and self.

The discussion of these phenomena will be confronted with the concept of “neo-avant-garde” and its connotations of “repetition” and “failure” (Bürger, Enzensberger) which have dominated the German debate: Can the application of this concept to the aesthetics of movement be more than a polemic attribution?

Leigh Landy (De Montfort University)

1950s and 60s Experimental Music: The Second, Definitive Phase in the Emancipation of an Art Form

This presentation focuses, in the first instance, on three key trends of the period: organising sounds (e.g., Pierre Schaeffer), formalising sounds (e.g., Iannis Xenakis, Karlheinz Stockhausen) and disorganising sounds as it were (e.g., John Cage). In the latter case, links to the evolving counter-culture will be made. Other significant experimental music developments will also be introduced. Furthermore, two sub-themes will place these forms of experimentation into a cross-arts context: a) “Décalages” between discoveries amongst various art forms, and b) post 60s activities, particularly in terms of the above-named innovations’ impact.

Bruce Elder (Ryerson University)

Hollis Frampton: ‘Zorns Lemma’

Hollis Frampton released his film *Zorns Lemma* in 1970. The film soon became renown, among other reasons for its use of a predetermined process to generate the shape of the film’s central, and longest, section. The experience of viewing the film depends in large measure on tracking the evolution of this shape, conditioned by a process whose character is readily apprehensible. I begin this paper by considering a topic the film has prompted other theorists to consider, *viz.*, the radical implications of a form that arises through the use of an apprehensible, predetermined process. Many artists and commentators in the 1970s welcomed the use of conceptual structures for liberating art-making from the belief that an artworks’ form was determined by the medium in which it was realised. But what, then, would prompt an artist to prefer using one structuring process over another? Certainly the intricacy of the resulting form is one factor. But, through commentary on *Zorns Lemma*, I propose another, *viz.*, the intertextual associations the conceptual structure evokes and the richness of their historical implications. To argue this, I point out what few other commentators have noticed, *viz.*, the hermetic and Pythagorean notions that prompted Frampton to select the process he used.

SECTION 3: RELATIONS TO POPULAR CULTURE/QUESTIONS OF CONTEXT

Keith Aspley (University of Edinburgh)

Radio and the Avant-Garde/Neo-Avant-Garde: Robert Desnos and Philippe Soupault

The role played by radio in the progression from the historical avant-garde to the post-war neo-avant-garde is being studied through the particular cases of two members of

the surrealist movement, Robert Desnos and Philippe Soupault, and involves consideration of the osmosis between high and low culture. Desnos was recruited by Paul Deharme, one of the pioneers in France of 'l'art radiophonique', to work for his company Information et Publicité. One of his most famous early commissions was the promotion of a programme featuring the pulp-fiction arch-criminal Fantômas, which became a serious creative work, 'La Grande Complainte de Fantômas'. Another of his important cultural projects was the 'Cantate pour l'inauguration du Musée de l'Homme', for which his libretto was set to music by Darius Milhaud. However, some of Desnos's most 'cutting edge' work in radio was found in the adverts he devised, e.g. for the Vermifuge Lune.

After the war Soupault 'came back from the dead' ('Journal d'un fantôme') and re-invented himself, not so much in programmes designed to make poetry more accessible to the public as in a series of radio plays which display his ability to translate theory into practice in a new genre (e.g. 'Etranger dans la nuit', inspired by the Sinatra hit 'Strangers in the Night'). Boundaries between highbrow and lowbrow were re-drawn; and the national institution, radio, that was generally hostile to the avant-garde in France between the wars, was brought on board in a neo-avant-garde mode.

Ben Highmore (University of the West of England, Bristol)
Domestic Anxiety and Avant-Gardism: Richard Hamilton's Interiors

The London based Independent Group can be seen as a re-assertion of avant-gardism in the face of what they saw as a petrified modernism that had become official doctrine (particularly in the powerful postwar figures of Herbert Read and Roland Penrose). The purposeful privileging of degraded materials (US comics, for instance), as well as references to the anti-formalism of art brut, connect them to the historical avant-garde, but in ways that are crucial for understanding the particularity of neo-avant-gardism in postwar Britain.

Richard Hamilton's interiors – particularly the installation 'Gallery for a Collector of Brutalist and Tachiste Art' (Ideal Home Exhibition 1958) and the series of interior collages and paintings of 1964 – suggest an anxiety around both avant-garde painting and domesticity. Not only is Hamilton facing a moment when 'advanced, radical art' can easily be subsumed within modern domestic environments, but that environment itself is being encroached on by a ranger of social and physical forces and fears (radiation, radio, TV, lifestyle commodities, and so on). This paper will explore Hamilton's work; his relationship with Duchamp; as well as his extra-artistic experiences (involvement in CND, for instance) as a way of re-theorizing the relationship between the avant-garde and neo-avant-garde in the context of the prevailing cultural climate of advancing cold-war capitalism.

Tania Ørum (University of Copenhagen)
Minimalism as a Road to Cross-Aesthetic Experiments: The Danish Avant-Garde of the 1960s

The minimalism of the sixties is a logical continuation of the modernist explorations of the specificity of the art forms and media, but at the same time it signals the wish to move the artworks out of the art sphere and into an open dialogue with the public. By reducing the craft element traditionally associated with the respective art forms and developing new aesthetic parameters, minimalism also opens the door to cross-

aesthetic experiments, permitting composers to write visual poetry, writers to produce sculpture, painters to portray the alphabet and people from all the arts to collaborate in performing happenings, arranging architectural and urban interventions, and making collective films, sound experiments and experimental operas.

The cross-aesthetic approach as well as the existential, social and political implications of the formal reduction are characteristic of the avant-garde of the 1960s.

My examples will be drawn from the Danish avant-garde of the 1960s.

**Michael Corris (Newport School of Art, Media and Design, Univeristy of Wales)
The Dialogical Imagination: The Conversational Aesthetic of Conceptual Art.**

It is a commonplace that the practices associated with Conceptual Art undermined the interpretive competencies of the spectator by presenting in the place of art a linguistic framework that aimed to reflect critically on the conditions of art's consumption and production. By substituting a kind of reading for looking, the expectations of the spectator were frustrated and challenged. Conceptual artists had assumed that late modernist art - typically, painting and sculpture - presented the spectator with few options to engage with the work of art as other than a highly refined entertainment that effectively confirmed the cultural standing of the spectator and the superiority of the enterprise of modernist art as the preeminent aesthetic experience. The most radical of the Conceptual artists sought to render redundant the competencies of the spectator by quite literally removing the art object from view. In place of an art object whose media identity was secure and of sufficient external complexity and detail, Conceptual Art substituted text, ephemeral performances, banal photography and installations virtually indistinguishable from the environment in which they were sited. For this occasion, I would like to discuss those practices of Conceptual Art that sought to dispense with the spectator entirely through artistic strategies that foreground the act of conversation, interactivity and a radical application of intellectual resources associated with the task of indexing and information retrieval. What, then, might we plausibly say about such an encounter where the knowledge, memory and cultural values of the spectator become constitutive elements of the artwork? Under such conditions of engagement, can one sensible speak of a work of art at all? If so, what might the 'work' be that a work of art of this sort aims to do? This question - by no means an original inquiry - has been raised in various forms and in diverse contexts by those seeking to understand the social dimension of the practices of Conceptual art of the 1960s and 1970s. I wish to consider it anew in the context of the practice of Art & Language and against the arguments advanced in a rather more oblique manner, by the current Tate Modern exhibition, 'Open Systems: Rethinking Art c. 1970'

Sunday 25th September

SECTION 4: POLITICAL AFFILIATIONS: GENDER, COUNTER-CULTURE, ECOLOGY

**Kath Swarbrick (University of Edinburgh)
Gender Trouble? Body Trouble? Reinvestigating the Work of Marisol Escobar**

Born in Paris of Venezuelan parents, Marisol Escobar makes a distinctive contribution to neo-avant-garde productions in 1960ies New York. Her two striking areas of participation, fashion photography and sculpture, present contemporary critics with an enduringly enigmatic combination. Associated through both with the marginalized feminine or indeed, feminized margin, Marisol's significance is eclipsed in the 1970ies, only to reemerge in the 1980ies and after, following new theories which read her output in the context of sexual stereotyping and "gender trouble". This paper proposes a reinvestigation of Marisol, highlighting a different relation between her sculpted figures and her affiliation with haute couture, which raises the question as to whether the now familiar association of Marisol with gender trouble is supported by the evocation in her work of a deeper issue which underlies it and for which I propose the term "body trouble". A demonstration of the latter in Marisol's work might also serve to illustrate an instance in which the post-war neo-avant-garde contributes to "comprehending" in a later phase, gender issues explored in an earlier phase by the historical avant-garde, redefining a significant aspect of neo-avant-garde activity.

Gavin Butt (Goldsmiths College, University of London)
You Cannot be Serious! The Queerly Aesthetic Avant-Garde

This paper will reassess the received view of the neo-avantgarde as a hollow reprise of early avant-gardisms by looking carefully at constructions of the 'serious' and the 'authentic' which have been deployed in artistic and critical discourses to downgrade various forms of post-war art.

I will consider the ways in which such markers of value have been highly gendered and sexualised in relation to constructions of heterosexual masculinity, evident in the routine ways in which some avant-gardists and their champions have dismissed some forms of neo-avantgarde art as effete, if not homosexual. Focusing upon New York art in the 1950s and early 1960, I will consider how some forms of neo-avantgarde work might cause us to rethink such a 'straight' judgemental attitude by presenting a decidedly *queer* approach to serious subject matter and earnest forms of expression. I will therefore be concerned less with trying to recoup such work for any belatedly 'serious' appreciation, and instead consider how – in its avowedly 'trivial' forms of address and supposedly 'inauthentic' modes of expression – much neo-avantgarde work might be seen to queer the terms of a straight and serious culture of avant-gardism, especially in its paradoxical production of an authentic avant-gardism precisely through the performance of supposedly 'inauthentic' forms of identity and presentation.

I will focus on the work of the New York School of poets, centred around Frank O'Hara, and the social, sexual, and artistic links with a broader field of queer avant-garde artists including painter Larry Rivers, correspondence artist Ray Johnson, and collagist Joe Brainard. My comments on these artists will be set against the broader backdrop of the queerness of the New York avant-garde at this time including the figures Jasper Johns, John Cage, Merce Cunningham, Agnes Martin, Robert Rauschenberg, Nell Blaine, and Andy Warhol.

Frances Stracey (University College London)
Destruktion-RSG-6: Towards a Situationist Avant-Garde Today

This paper critically analyses the Situationist International's concept of a renewed model of avant-garde praxis, as developed in their 1963 exhibition called *Destruction-RSG-6*, held at the Galerie Exi in Denmark. In a crucial, yet much overlooked, catalogue essay, 'Towards New Forms of Action in Politics and Art', Guy Debord presented a distillation of earlier Situationist writings on the avant-garde that, I argue, still generates productive conclusions. This includes a 'constructive' model of avant-garde practice that rejects the 'nihilistic' tendencies of 1920s Dadaism and Surrealism, as well as the 'spectacle of negation' associated with the so-called neo-avant-gardes of the 1960s, such as Happenings. It also provides a novel avant-garde temporality, one that takes place immanently, in the 'now' of time, but which involves a complex overlapping of past and present revolutionary moments. Debord calls this process the 'reversible connecting factor' whereby past, outmoded and forgotten avant-garde actions are salvaged through connections with current acts of cultural negation – but without recall to any lost originary avant-garde moment, contra Peter Bürger.

In order to explain and develop the SI's model of immanent critique, and to show how their avant-garde theory takes practical form, I focus on the following exhibited works: Debord's series of painted 'Directives'; J.V.Martin's 'Thermonuclear Cartographs' and Michele Bernstein's 'Alternative Victory' series. These are analysed as practical instantiations of the concepts of 'positive negation', 'denial', 'black humour' and 'the false document', all of which play an important part in Debord's elaboration of the SI as the 'latest' avant-garde.

Hubert van den Berg (University of Groningen)

Towards a "Reconciliation of Man and Nature". Aesthetics, Nature and Ecology in the Historical and Neo-Avant-Garde

Avant-garde art is often regarded as a turn away from nature, due both to the special predilection of the avant-garde for technology and metropolitan life and to the rejection of conventional mimesis. As such, Peter Bürger came with the hypothesis that a fundamental opposition to any attempt of an (aesthetic) "reconciliation of man and nature" marked the (historical) avant-garde. Partly drawing on Bürger's suggestion others concluded regarded the avant-garde as "anti-nature" (Jauss) or marked by a basic "hostility toward nature" (Böhme).

Whereas indeed some sections of the avant-garde might have been "anti-nature", one can observe in the avant-gardes of the 20th century also a line of tradition reaching from the early 20th century avant-garde, among others in the work and programmatic of the artists like Arp, Schwitters and Lissitzky to developments after the Second World War, among others in so-called Land Art, in the works of Richard Long and Andy Goldsworthy, in which avant-garde art is not defined and practiced as a rejection, but – instead – as a genuine new overture to nature.

This ecological 'tradition' is marked not only by an obvious continuity from the early to the later avant-garde (e.g. their common rejection of conventional ways of artistic nature representation), but also by obvious programmatic and practical changes in the course of time. In several respects, (certain tendencies in) Land Art radicalizes (and in some ways: starts to realize) the concepts developed in the early avant-garde concerning a different stand towards nature.

SECTION 5: THEORETICAL REFLECTIONS

Martin Puchner (Columbia University)

The Avant-Garde is Dead; Long Live the Avant-Garde! Reflections on New York City from the 60s to the Present

This paper investigates the fate of the neo-avant-gardes in New York City during and after the sixties. The particular perspective I offer is that of the manifesto. Since the manifesto was one of the paradigmatic genres of the historical avant-garde, it can serve as an index of the repetitions, differences, and new forms invented by various avant-garde groups and individuals during the sixties and beyond. In particular, I will examine the relation between collective, political manifestos, such as the Black Panthers Manifesto, isolated political statements such as Valerie Solanas' SCUM Manifesto, and theater manifestos, such as those published by the Living Theatre.

The further course of this new manifesto-driven avant-garde of the 60s emerges is reflected in the foundational journal of performance studies, TDR, which participated in the manifesto-craze of the sixties and which tried to preserve this craze during the seventies and eighties, a time that witnessed a decline in manifestos. TDR's meandering path through this cultural terrain can thus indicate the transformations of the 60s avant-gardes in New York City up to the present.

Dafydd Jones (Cardiff University)

'Jeder kann Dada': The Repetition, Trauma and Deferred Completion of the Avant-Garde

My knowledge of the world, it has been said, has no value except when I act to transform it. The deliberate attempt at transformation carried through the avant-garde project and into the neo-avantgarde was, and continues to be, a spontaneous act which necessarily locates itself in the immediate extensions of lived experience, and in the event struggles with a theoretical pessimism that rounds on and relocates the contest from the edges of discourse to the very heart of the mechanism of authoritarianism. The problematic of the avant-garde (neo or otherwise) is well rehearsed. Mann, for instance:

[t]he avant-garde is one mechanism of a general organisation of social forces that operates in large part by means of the careful distribution of differences, imbalances, oppositions, and negations, and that regulates them through a variety of more or less effective discursive agencies in the so-called public sphere and along the margin itself. (Paul Mann, *The Theory-Death of the Avant-Garde*)

The question of the viability of avant-garde/neo-avantgarde practice from a position of apparent marginality, then, must be taken as a point of departure. Responding to it necessitates revised readings of the neo-avantgarde, addressing its widely touted and heavily criticised (Bürger, Duchamp, Huelsenbeck et al.) "repetition", for instance, which by its deliberate and strategic deployment arguably functions as integral to the

entire project. The repetition of avant-garde strategies from the 1920s, through their subsequent traumatic impact, is no longer posed as the fatal error of the neo-avantgarde but rather as its most penetrating device (Foster). Further, the same repetition indicates that not only is the closure placed upon the avant-garde theoretically preemptive (in the assumption that the project is complete and secured in history, evidenced by the term “neo-avantgarde” itself), but that by its successive continuation of the project it is equally preemptive to impose the closure of the 50s and 60s upon the neo-avantgarde. The viability and “radicalism” of radicalised cultural practice, I submit, critically resists such closure and demands the continually deferred completion of the dada [avant-garde] neo-avantgarde project.

John Roberts (University of Wolverhampton)
Avant Garde After Avant Garde

The theorization of the post-war avant-garde is inseparable from the reception of the avant-garde's social and political defeat; and, paradoxically, in the sixties at the point where the avant-garde was being reconstituted and rehistoricized as a political project across various artistic practices (structuralist cinema, the Situationist International, conceptual art) the historical and conceptual framework of key works from the 1920s and 1930s were being made available for the first time. Thus a striking discrepancy or conflict is put in place: at the same time as the concept of the avant-garde is being made available conceptually to a new generation - let us remember artists in the sixties and the seventies had very little working knowledge of Soviet and Weimar avant-garde practice - it was also being abandoned as a viable model theoretically. The post-war neo-avant-gardes, therefore, are not simply failed rehearsals of discredited older practices, but the affirmation of what is judged to be living and productive and available to further development. As such the concept of the avant-garde is actually given work to do, rather than revisited as a 'style'. This sense of the neo-avant-garde as a product of critical and productive misrecognition is absent from Bürger and Hadjinicolaou, because the category of historical failure outweighs any redemptive model of practice, reinscription and interpretation.

In this respect the contribution of Adorno in the first wave of discussion on the avant-garde in the sixties is crucial to understanding the lopsided direction this debate took, and the limitations of Bürger and Hadjinicolaou and contemporary anti-avant-gardists. In *Aesthetic Theory* (1970) Adorno recognises the historical defeat of the Soviet and Weimar avant-garde's and the impossibility of art's critical sublation into life. But, rather than sacrificing the negativity of the avant-garde to some untroubled notion of 'political art' or conservative restitution of an older modernism, he rearticulates the question of the avant-garde on the terrain of art's autonomy. He argues, that with the consumerist assimilation of art into the capitalist 'everyday' and with the erosion of an older notion of modernist autonomy, both autonomy and the avant-garde are mutually transformed.

This paper will examine these arguments and counter-arguments from the sixties and seventies for a defence of the avant-garde today.