

X. 6 May

Peter Bürger, Theory of the Avant-garde [1974]

-Art into life

What is, for Peter Bürger, the historical avant-garde?

Dada, Surrealism, Russian avant-garde after October revolution

What are the common features?

-Do not reject individual artistic techniques and procedures of earlier art...

--But rather they reject that art in its entirety...

-Radical break with tradition.

-In their most extreme manifestations, their primary target is art as an institution such as it has developed in bourgeois society

What about cubism?

-Part of historical avant-garde because it questions linear perspective that had prevailed since the Renaissance...BUT it doesn't share basic tendency: sublation of art in the praxis of life

So, what is the institution against which dada, and the avant-garde, react?

Important passages:

-22/ distribution apparatus

Status of art in bourgeoisie society as defined by the concept of autonomy

-Bürger draws heavily upon Marx, and trains his basic premise along Adam Smith's theory of wealth and Marx's theory of labor

-Adam Smith: it is not specific forms of labor but labor as such that creates wealth.

- Bürger extrapolates his theory of avantgarde from this:
- 17/ historical avant-garde movements all react against aestheticism

What is aestheticism?

Important passage:

- 22/ detached from the praxis of life.
development of pure aesthetic

Many art historians would like to marginalized avant-garde...but what is important about avant-garde?

- Certain general categories of the work of art were first made recognizable in their generality by the avant-garde
- Avant-garde sensitizes the recipient

Bürger mentions the writings of Walter Benjamin. What is the 'aura' that he talks about?

Important passage:

- 27/ unique phenomenon of distance
uniqueness
authenticity

How is it lost?

Important passage:

- 27/ through changes in techniques of reproduction

Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956)

-Brilliant wit, his outspoken Marxism, and his revolutionary experiments in the theater have made Brecht a vital and controversial force in modern drama.

-In his early plays, Brecht experimented with dada and expressionism, but in his later work, he developed a style more suited his own unique vision.

The Measures Taken [1930]

Who are characters?

-The vanguard

What are scenes?

What is plot?

-Narrative recounts the measures taken to deal with an upstart

What do you think this play is about?

-Individual (young comrade) vs. collective

-Don't fall prey to pity, just follow party dictate

-It's about propaganda

Important passages:

-Machiavellian cynicism

18/ correcting mistakes

-“The song of commodity”

24/ I don't know what man is. All I know is his
price

But Brecht was a Marxist through and through. What is the purpose of his cynicism?

-Brecht doesn't celebrate commodification of man. He is stating that this is a fact, and he wants audience to react to this reality.

-“change the world: it needs it”

Important passage:

25/ what vileness should you not suffer to annihilate
vileness?”

What are the classics?

-Classics encompass the totality of misery

If the agitators want to protect the classics, are they avant-garde?

Individual (young comrade) vs. collective

Important passage:

26/ comrade: their suffering is unendurable

Agitators: suffering is not enough

What can the collective do that the individual can't?

-Party will outlive the individual (28)

-'in praise of the party' (29)

How does drama conclude?

-Comrade agrees that he must be thrown into lime pit

What makes him capitulate?

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