THE SOCIAL HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE AESTHETIC AVANT-GARDE IN CONTEMPORARY CULTURAL PRODUCTION

by

Joanne M. Lyle

B.F.A., Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1979

THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF

THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS (COMMUNICATION)

in the Department

of

Communication

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

December, 1985

APPROVAL

Name: Joanne Marie Lyle

Degree: Master of Arts (Communication)

Title of Thesis: The Social Historical Development of the Aesthetic Avant-Garde on Contemporary Cultural Production

Examining Committee:

Chairperson: William D. Richards, Assistant Professor

Martin Laba
Assistant Professor
Senior Supervisor

Paul Heyer
Associate Professor

Jerald Zaslove
Associate Professor
Department of English

Date Approved: 6 December 1985

PARTIAL COPYRIGHT LICENSE

I hereby grant to Simon Fraser University the right to lend my thesis or dissertation (the title of which is shown below) to users of the Simon Fraser University Library, and to make partial or single copies only for such users or in response to a request from the library of any other university, or other educational institution, on its own behalf or for one of its users. I further agree that permission for multiple copying of this thesis for scholarly purposes may be granted by me or the Dean of Graduate Studies. It is understood that copying or publication of this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Title of Thesis/Dissertation:

The Social Historical Development of the Aesthetic Avant-Garde on Contemporary Cultural Production

Author:

(Signature)

Joanne Marie Lyle

(Name)

December 6, 1985

(Date)

ABSTRACT

The thesis examines the role, nature, and significance of the aesthetic avant-garde on forms of contemporary culture of the twentieth century. It is argued that the integration of aesthetic avant-garde strategies into expressive popular culture forms serves to "aestheticize" popular culture-based commodities.

The social communicative expressions of the aesthetic avant-garde are investigated from an interpretive approach, in that various theoretical perspectives are synthesized to establish the framework for the argument of this thesis. In this way, evidence is given that the aesthetic avant-garde has a subcultural base, that the oppositional and anti-structural tendencies of these subcultures form expressive patterns which are found in current popular production, and that the aesthetic avant-garde has modified and transformed cultural production in contemporary society.

It is argued that an understanding of contemporary popular culture forms is dependent on an analysis of the major impact that the aesthetic avant-garde has had on the structure and consumption of popular consumer culture.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION.

When considering popular culture forms in contemporary society, perhaps the most striking feature is the enormous rate at which these forms are produced and integrated in the market place. In the past 30 years the expressive range of popular culture has greatly expanded, both in terms of the variety of technological media used and the more varied and specialized markets and audiences that are addressed. Changes in the marketplace occur at a rapid pace, demanding very competitive and short–lived cultural commodities.

With the social consolidation of computers, sophisticated information systems, and the mass media, almost all aspects of popular culture are technologically mediated by our dominant contemporary mass media forms. Television, the recording and radio industries, and the film and video industries, for example, grew out of and rely upon technological development. As well, popular culture production cannot be adequately analyzed apart from technology, either on the level of economic relations or as information systems representing both powerful sources of knowledge (with reference to control and accessibility) and commodities.

Marketing practices, because of sophisticated market research and new media forms (music videos, etc.) have come to recognize the buying power of small and specific market and cultural segments of the population. Hence, advertising strategies are capable of isolating diverse target markets with seemingly blanket campaigns (called market segmentation in which advertisers can reach varied cultural markets by integrating a range of cultural references within one ad or an ad series). Some of the more attractive cultural markets that advertisers are interested in addressing (depending on their products) are youth subcultures and their many aesthetically and politically divergent sub–groups.

The attention that both entrepreneurs and advertisers give to youth cultures and their expressive leisure activities has supported a number of different approaches to the study of popular culture.

Traditionally, the subject has been addressed with a concern for the production and dissemination of popular culture forms; generally called the instrumental or technological sphere. More recently popular culture has been approached with an interest in the human dimension of cultural relations, generally called the expressive sphere. Both of these dimensions culminate in what Daniel Bell has called the "cultural contradictions of capitalism", because both spheres are evident in all aspects of cultural relations. He argues that advanced industrial societies (such as our contemporary society), tend to reinforce unresolved tensions — contradictions — by generating value-ridden trajectories which are ideologically incompatible. Clearly, our contemporary concern for technological and economic rationalism is separate and isolated from the cultural tendency to focus on individual and cultural expressive potentials. Differentiated subcultural spheres with opposing value spheres exist — all of which have differing motivations and biases, but which are institutionalized and mutually interdependent.

To be sure, there is much speculation about what this tension refers to and implies. However, regardless of the judgemental perspectives that popular culture attracts, it is generally accepted that popular culture forms are one manifestation of this tension.

Expressive Dimensions of Popular Culture Production

It is clear that an interdependent relation exists between the instrumental and expressive spheres of popular culture production. This relationship also suggests that the expressive sphere has been neglected in traditional media and sociological approaches to changes in cultural forms. Firstly, while the instrumental sphere determines the production, dissemination, and reception of popular culture images and commodities, these cultural items are only marketable because of the demand and consumption by the specific audiences they address. Cultural groups generate demands for expressive forms of popular culture. Secondly, the expressive sphere and consequently popular culture market (youth subcultures and expressive subcultures) is doubly important as it provides the enormous resource for marketable cultural images that comprise most popular culture forms. The articulation of leisure activities and stylistics within

the context of youth and subcultural definitions of lifestyles are the primary subjects for the production of certain popular culture forms. These subjects are selected, categorized, and framed within the marketplace and by members of the mass media for the purposes of popular culture commodity production. Commercial youth culture, central to the production of popular culture commodities, has become very adept in the selection of cultural artifacts and their re-contextualization in novel and innovative ways; in other words, marketable.

Birmingham School Studies: Implications

Much attention has been given to the commercial and cultural process whereby cultural stylistics are generalized, restructured, and interpreted for use in the commercial marketplace. The most notable studies have been made by the "Birmingham School", particularly because of the attention they give to the ways in which youth subcultures signify their group affiliations by appropriating commodity obects and using them in socially unprecedented arrangements to represent lifestyle artifacts.[1]

A brief discussion of the youth and subcultural study group which will be called the Birmingham School is necessary to introduce the parameters of the thesis argument. In essence, direct parallels will be made between the conscious stylistic significations motivated by the subcultural status of youth cultures and very similar stylistic signification consciously employed by aesthetic avant-garde movements which historically share similar status relations to society. Further, it will be suggested that much of the spectacular stylistic display of contemporary youth subcultures is derived from historic precedents

---

[1]By Birmingham School, I refer to the study group which was committed to studies of youth cultures and subcultures at The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, Birmingham University. Although there was a core group that participated in subcultural studies (John Clarke, Stuart Hall, Tony Jefferson, and others), others with indirect liasons have contributed to the collective writings of the Birmingham School's working papers (Paul Willis, Dick Hebdidge, Paul Corrigan, et al.). The appropriation of commodity objects by sub-cultures has been called 'bricolage' by this group. They extend Levi-Strauss's term in order to discuss the process of stylistic generation employed by post-war youth: "... the re-ordering and re-contextualisation of objects to communicate fresh meanings, within a total system of significances, which already includes prior and sedimented meanings attached to the objects used. John Clarke, "Style", Resistance Through Rituals: Youth subcultures in post-war Britain, eds. Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson, (London: Hutchinson & Co., Publishers Ltd., 1976), p. 177.

previously enacted by certain aesthetic avant-garde movements. Finally, it will be argued that these two examples of subcultures (spectacular youth and aesthetic avant-garde) share a similar relationship to the commercial marketplace of popular culture forms, expressed primarily through lifestyle or fashion commodities. Hence, it will be shown that the aesthetic avant-garde, is critical to the manifestations of contemporary youth cultural expression and ultimately popular culture commodification because of either similar or borrowed (from the aesthetic avant-garde) historical references, stylistic phenomenon, and anti-social activities.

The Birmingham School considers subcultural stylizations to be significant articulations of cultural and structural status, representative of a subculture's subordinate social and material life experience. Members of subcultures are viewed as participants in a social process, a discourse which expresses opposition to dominant social values and traditions. Because subcultural "bricolage" adapts and rearranges existent commodities into stylized patterns which carry new meanings, this process generates a stylistic fusion between commodity objects and the subculture. This objectification of commodity items identifies spectacular self-images for members of the subculture while defining their difference from other cultural groups.

However, because this discourse takes place at the level of commodity stylization — in the domains of fashion and music — the evolution of subcultural style is rife with complex consequences. On the one hand, stylizations serve to stereotype and identify youth as anti-social from the perspective of the media. On the other hand, these same expressive forms attract the commercial leisure and youth markets, which are both interested in producing commodities for consumption by the indigenous subculture as well as stylistic and fashionable variations for consumption by the general youth market.

This description of the process which transforms indigenous cultural forms to mass produced popular culture forms is generalized and simplistic. However, it serves to isolate an interface between forms of subversive cultural expression shared by a specific milieux and their diffusion into commercialized forms of popular culture.

The studies of the Birmingham School are important to the thesis argument as (1) they successfully argue that much of what we understand as popular culture phenomenon, including its stylistic and aesthetic forms, are derived from subcultural social motivations of subversive and anti-social behaviour; (2) they isolate that moment when subcultural expressive phenomena become integrated within large scale commercial marketing and contribute to change in popular culture trends; and (3) they consider the involvement of very different audiences and their participational motivations at different points in this process of popular culture production. Having broken with traditional sociological perspectives biased by instrumentality, their work gives credibility to a growing body of cultural theory concerned with the social origins of oppositional cultural expression, their manifestations in the social world and, finally, their integration into commodity forms of contemporary cultural expression.

The general arguments of the Birmingham School provide a theoretical undercurrent for the thesis argument, itself guided by a bias in which the expressive sphere of cultural production is considered the primary repository for contemporary cultural change. As a way of illuminating the thesis argument and its relationship to subcultural theory and popular culture production, one question needs to be asked. Considering the long history of youth subcultural movements in the post-war Western world and the repeated success in packaging and marketing expressive stylistics from one movement to another, what precisely is being marketed? What was so attractive, to the commercial youth market, about the 60's British "Ted" movement, for example? What was intrinsic to the late 70's British "Punk" gangs that motivated their integration into North American music and fashion industries? The legitimation of punk stylistics (toned down versions that represented the appropriation of identification through fashion, as oppositional stylizations generated by the real social conditions and experiences of the British subculture) in our culture radically altered the North American popular culture market and generated the recognition of a new cultural audience (consumers of punk stylistics) by advertising executives. Clearly expressive subcultures and their commodified articulations of lifestyle are a basis from which changes in popular culture forms are derived. The thesis is less interested in how this cultural process operates than in why. What characteristic references or stances are taken from expressive cultural phenomena and used in

popular culture production? Further, are there any primary sources from which youth cultures and the market place glean these references and stances? What attitude is common to these youth subcultures? Is there a consistent stance, ideology, historical reference, etc., shared by these spectacular youth cultures, which is, further, consistent with the interest of the commercial market?

An obvious consistency shared by youth movements is their subcultural status, hence they display a subordinate and generally oppositional or anti-social relation to dominant and traditional cultural forms. Generally considered flamboyant, youth subcultures are innovative if only because of their stylistic capacity as bricoleurs.

All of these features of youth subcultures share striking similarities with a much older subculture: the aesthetic avant-garde. The avant-garde movement has made itself socially evident since the advent of modernism, primarily through its characteristics of opposition. All modern forms of the aesthetic avant-garde have exhibited anti-traditional, anti-social, and anti-aesthetic — antagonistic — tendencies which are generally directed against the traditional modes and institutions that govern social life.

It is hoped that the avant-garde will be shown to share the subordinate cultural status and consequent motivations of our spectacular contemporary youth cultures. The thesis will demonstrate that the aesthetic avant-garde has had a similar relationship to the commercial marketplace. Stylistically oriented also, many aspects of aesthetic avant-garde subcultural phenomena have been selected and framed for the purposes of popular culture commodity production, by the media, youth subcultures, and the marketplace, alike.

The avant-garde, in a metaphoric sense, implies a progressively oriented innovation. Avant-garde movements have been guided by the premise, "being in advance of the time". Both spectacular and innovative, certain avant-garde stylistics, stances, and historically executed activities have been directly referenced, if not echoed, by contemporary youth subcultures and marketing campaigns for commercial

youth markets.

It will be argued that the aesthetic avant-garde, particularly the Dadaist, Surrealist, and Futurist movements, have provided fundamental images for indigenous forms of music, performance, and video activities in contemporary youth subcultures. The thesis will suggest that the aesthetic avant-garde has had a formative and pervasive effect on certain forms and phenomena of contemporary popular culture and, consequently, on contemporary cultural forms of expression. If, in fact, there are certain characteristics of youth subcultural leisure and life-style activity that are articulated through commodity stylizations and ultimately, popular culture production, the thesis will attempt to give evidence that not only do aesthetic avant-garde movements display this same discourse, they often provide the original models for youth subcultural stylizations. Indeed, the thesis will, I hope, demonstrate that the aesthetic avant-garde was the "pandora's box" [2] out of which came the anti-social and anti-structural techniques which were cultivated by, and later identified with, post-war youth subcultural movements. Finally, it is hoped that this thesis will point to a referential tendency in the expressive sphere of cultural forms in which the historic avant-garde has played an important role. Perhaps what has been previously identified as motivations for the frenetic pace of change that so characterizes forms of contemporary culture will be understood as concepts and tensions that belong to the history of modern ideas rather than simply the instrumental sphere of cultural production.

Method of Approach

The method of analysis used in the thesis is interpretive and it draws on a variety of sociological, anthropological, cultural, and aesthetic theories which direct the thesis argument. The brief introduction to a central argument of the Birmingham School, suggests a major theme of the thesis, with which the first two chapters are concerned: that the aesthetic avant-garde is understood as subcultural manifestations of

---

[2]Bernice Martin, A Sociology of Contemporary Cultural Change (Oxford, England: Basil Blackwell Publisher, 1981), p. 79.

the social conditions of modern society.[3] The first chapter relies heavily on the arguments of Renato Poggioli and Matei Calinescu. Both theorists provide a substantive history of the avant-garde (as opposed to a general history of art or a "Sociology of Art") and discuss the avant-garde from a sociological perspective. Primarily meant to identify shifts of context that have accompanied the use of avant-garde, historically, the core material of Chapter One is derived from a synthesis of the work of these two major contributors to sociological and historical assessments of the avant-garde.

Chapter Two, essentially a detailed analysis of avant-garde movements active early in the twentieth century, reviews Poggioli's analysis which represents these movements as giving subcultural form to a modern phenomena of difference and exception. This chapter introduces those avant-garde movements which are most central to the theoretical concerns within the thesis — Dadaist, Surrealist, and Futurist movements — extreme forms of the avant-garde spirit which have acted as the foundations for all succeeding aesthetic movements in the twentieth century. This chapter will give evidence that the historic avant-garde movements expressed, through opposition, real relations to modern society.

Chapters Three and Four are interrelated as they address the second major theme of the thesis. Firstly, Chapter Three introduces theoretical paradigms devised by Victor Turner in order to discuss and understand subversive cultural expressions as these expressions function as primary repositories for social change in social history. Chapter Four reviews Bernice Martin's thesis in which these same theoretical paradigms are used to develop a sociology of radical culture with which to examine examples of cultural expression in contemporary subcultural movements. Both Turner and Martin's work informs the development of the central argument of the thesis — that the avant-garde is central to contemporary cultural processes in that these movements act as creative social arenas and resources for cultural change.

A section of Chapter Four addresses the implications of style for contemporary tendencies in aesthetics, and popular culture production and consumption. It is suggested that style, as a form of

[3]The relevant studies of the Birmingham School are referred to and notated where necessary in the body of the thesis. Their work is not reviewed directly but is cited only insofar as their arguments support and reveal implications for the present study.

commodity and symbolic communication, is critical to an understanding of the means by which its bearers signify their relations to society. Further, style is understood as critical to understanding the means by which commodity forms have absorbed and merged aesthetic, subcultural, and popular culture domains for the purposes of symbolically attracting the greatest potential of buying markets.

The Fourth Chapter will conclude with a brief discussion of the debates that surround the cultural and commercial tendency to aestheticize life. Central to this discussion is an introduction to the positions that have generated the Modernism versus Postmodernism debates, which argue either in support of the integration of aesthetics and style as reference systems in popular cultural forms, or, argue against these tendencies because they sublimate the avant-garde and aesthetics into a pluralistic and liberal "neo-culture".

CHAPTER II

THE HISTORY OF THE CONCEPT AVANT-GARDE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL AND AESTHETIC MOVEMENTS PRIOR TO THE FIRST WORLD WAR

The avant-garde can be understood as an artistic sensibility in opposition to those that subscribe to traditional and classical values. An avant-garde movement or position characteristically insists upon destroying binding relations to past traditions for the sake of a belief in a progressive, and consequently better, future. As much as the avant-garde is a modern concept, the critical debate referred to as the "Querelle des Anciens et Modernes" should be regarded as the historical precedent to the hostile relations between the various traditional and "modern" camps of the past century.[1] The foes in this battle have changed, just as the social implications of the avant-garde have changed during its short history.

The intention of this chapter is to trace the subtle shifts of meaning that have accompanied the historical use of the term avant-garde. The texts of three authors, Renato Poggioli, The Theory of the Avant-Garde, (1968), Matei Calinescu, Faces of Modernity (1977), and Roger Shattuck, The Banquet Years (1977), will serve as guides for this etymological survey of metaphors. [2] These three authors have been selected primarily because they regard avant-garde movements as social, as much as aesthetic phenomena. The distinction is important, as traditionally art history has been viewed and studied as an insular history in which heuristic theories were oriented towards a self-perpetuation of aesthetic history. Correspondingly, social theory has traditionally viewed aesthetic activity as extra-social as it was difficult to transform it into empirical equivalents or classify as functional to a society's economic or political structure. In their respective analyses, Poggioli, Calinescu, and Shattuck give evidence that many aspects,

---

[1] Calinescu refers to this well-known debate which was current during the Eighteenth Century. This argument originated with the discovery of classic Greek artifacts in the Renaissance but peaked as a heated dicussion between members of the disciplines of philosophy and literature.

[2] Roger Poggioli, The Theory of the Avant-Garde (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press, 1968.); Matei Calinescu, Faces of Modernity: Avant-Garde,Decadence, Kitsch (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1977.); Roger Shattuck, The Banquet Years: The Origins of the Avant-Garde in France . 1885 to World War I (New York: Vintage Books; Random House Inc., 1968.)

aesthetic or extra-aesthetic, of modern culture have been shaped by the influence of avant-garde art.

As well, comments and clarifications of their respective arguments is introduced from articles written by Andreas Huyssen. Huyssen offers an insightful overview of the history of the avant-garde and its relationship to capitalist and technological production and the more recent mass culture.

The first section integrates observations made by Poggioli and Calinescu as they both, by somewhat different methods, devote much of their analyses to the historic use and changing meaning of the concept avant-garde. The first section then, is structured according to two premises whose underlying concern is the metaphoric thrust of the avant-garde in Europe until the Twentieth Century: (1) the necessity to analyse the etymological history of the term avant-garde, for the purpose of understanding its role as a familiar concept in modern cultural history; and (2) the importance of isolating major shifts of meaning which have occurred since its militaristic origins and have extended to apply to all aesthetically and politically revolutionary programs of the first few decades of the twentieth century in Europe. As well, it will be necessary to broadly sketch the political framework which tends to be closely associated with the avant-garde concept in the history of modern ideas.

The second section of this chapter will survey Shattuck's treatment of the avant-garde in France, at the turn of the twentieth century. His is an ethnographic perspective on the crucial role that the aesthetic avant-garde had in shaping the attitudinal foundations of modern society. Shattuck calls this period "The Banquet Years", a term meant to convey the spirit of the late nineteenth century in France which anticipated as well as extended into the twentieth century. He argues that the Banquet Years generated the metaphoric connotations for the modern and common usage of the term avant-garde.

Poggioli and Calinescu: A Survey of the Etymological History of the Avant-Garde Concept

Their Theoretical Perspectives

In order to introduce the subject of the thesis — the avant-garde and its relation to social and cultural forms — the avant-garde must be studied as a historical concept, one whose history of usage parallelled, if not chronicled, tendencies and ideas which have become central to our modern social experience.

With the increasingly popular use of the metaphor avant-garde in history, a change in the basic attitudes towards traditions of permanence, conceptions of beauty, and social relations to the past, present, and future occurred in the public sphere. Modern, modernism, modernity, and the avant-garde as a social manifestation of these philosophical terms, had much to do with these changes in value spheres. All these terms, essentially aesthetic terms, reflect an historical relativism which came to legitimate a reaction against eternal values with which to measure qualities of aesthetics and culture. How an aesthetics of transcience and obsolescence came to be culturally dominant will be discussed in the following sections. However, it is necessary to begin this analysis by reviewing the beliefs that inform Poggioli and Calinscu's reasons for arguing that, the avant-garde came to effect the history of modern ideas.

Poggioli regards avant-garde movements as mass psychological and social phenomena. The premises of the avant-garde are considered to be the motivating factors behind the formation of the avant-garde movements. These same premises constitute ideological trajectories quite distinguishable from the realms of philosophy or religion. He views these premises from a sociological perspective because,

> In the case of the avant-garde, it is an argument of self-assertion or self-defense used by society in the strict sense against society in the larger sense. We might even say that the avant-garde ideology is a social phenomenon precisely because of the social or anti-social character of the cultural and artistic manifestations that it sustains and expresses. (Poggioli, 1968:4.)

Poggioli is not concerned with aesthetic activities or objects made within the avant-garde tradition. Rather, his is a diagnostic analysis, concerned with the psychological and ideological effect of avant-garde movements on social forms of behaviour. It is emphasized that the avant-garde be viewed not only as a

modern aesthetic concept, but as a modern social concept crucial to many forms of cultural expression.[3]

It should be noted that Poggioli's text was written between 1946 and 1950, before the impact of the European avant-garde movements of the early twentieth century were truly absorbed into North American culture. As well, his theoretical arguments pre-date the critical debates between the avant-garde, modern, and post-modern camps. These exchanges were to seriously alter the theoretical usefulness of avant-gardism as a meaningful concept with which to discuss contemporary aesthetic and cultural movements.[4]

Calinescu, because his text was written much later than Poggioli's, offers a more current analysis of the social, political, and critical issues that have obscured a clear understanding of avant-gardism and modernism in relation to modern culture over the past twenty years.[5]

Calinescu's general position is similar to Poggioli's in that both assert that an analysis of avant-gardism must be executed within a cultural and sociological framework. Avant-gardism must be understood in relation to modernism and grouped together with the interrelated concepts of kitsch and decadence: "It is only from such an aesthetic perspective that these concepts reveal their more subtle and puzzling interconnections, which, in all probability, would escape the attention of the intellectual historian with a predominately philosophical or scientific orientation." (Calinescu, 1977:9.) The avant-garde, kitsch, and decadence are viewed as exaggerations and parodies of modernism. It is believed that the varying expressions of modernism represent varying degrees of a cultural shift from traditions of permanence to values which reflect a concern for the present, innovation, and transition.

---

[3]Attention will be given to this emphasis in Chapter Two of this thesis. The second chapter is primarily concerned with Poggioli's assessment of the "historic avant-garde" as subcultural and ideological movements.

[4]Attention will be given to the relations between the avant-garde and North American culture, as well as the debates between the avant-garde, modern, and post-modern opponents in the fourth and concluding chapters of the thesis.

[5]This is an important point as the thesis will argue that the avant-garde concept is critical to an understanding of certain developments in contemporary cultural traditions and forms. This argument will form the conclusion of the thesis.

Modern is an ancient term, yet, as the descriptive metaphor for our social epoch, modernism is little more than a century old. Historically, the concept of modernism is an ancient metaphor central to major philosophical debates committed to discerning or determining the destiny of a given society. In this way, modernism is perceived as a reaction to time–orientated values. Similarly, he argues that manifestations of modernity, including avant–gardism, can only be understood as reactions to the ideas of modernism and, ultimately, modern society itself. Further, Calinescu believes that avant–gardism, modernity's extreme aesthetic expression, addressed a crisis concept implicit in modernism: an opposition to tradition, and to the progressive and utilitarian ideals of modern civilization, and to itself, as the representative of a new tradition. Broadly conceived of as a culture of crisis and rupture, modernism's negation of traditional validity inspires the extreme tendencies of the avant–garde movement. Borrowing from the tradition of modernism, the avant–garde embraces anomalies, at once suggesting a new and radical futurism while remaining committed to a dramatic destruction of its own right to authority.

Etymological History of The Avant- Garde Concept

As a means of outlining the irresolvable contradictions inherent in the avant–garde concept and consequently, its tradition, both Calinescu and Poggioli give attention to the etymological history of the concept. Both maintain that the specific historical shifts in the metaphoric and literal use of the concept are crucial connotations which inform the spirit in which avant–garde movements have been proclaimed. The following sub–sections have been ordered to reflect the broad pattern of changes that have occured in the history of the use of the term avant–garde: (1) the first occurrence of the etonym in the French language of warfare; (2) the rhetorical use of the term by political and social reformists; (3) the metaphoric extension to include artistic and literary figures as messiahs for the cause of revolution and civil war; and (4) the emergence of a self–conscious and independent aesthetic avant–garde tradition in Western Europe — characterized by social extremism, anti–traditionalism, and anarchism.

"Avant–guerre", modified through usage as avant–garde (English common usage), has evolved as a concept during the past four centuries of French history. Although the original occurrence of the word in

French literature is subject to much controversy, it is generally accepted that avant-guerre, meaning "foreguard", can be dated back to the Renaissance as a term of warfare. (Calinescu, 1977:97.) Given its militaristic origins it is not surprising that the term became a common metaphor for revolutionary political thought in the years following the French Revolution. Up until the nineteenth century, avant-garde was cited extensively and exclusively in radical social literature as a term shared by various philosophical schools, all of whom also shared objectives of social reform. [6] The term was commonly used in the place of banners for utopian imaginations.

Calinescu cites an early document, written in 1581, in which the term is used to symbolize a group of poets as forerunners in the history of French poetry.[7] Employed as a poetic metaphor, the members of this avant-garde participated in the characteristic battle which directly anticipated the philosophical debates of the "Querelle", a century later. True to the original militaristic sense of the word, but coupled with the notion of progress, the passage which includes the term avant-garde is strikingly modern — reminiscent of many contemporary examples of progressively oriented political rhetoric,

> A glorious war was then being waged against ignorance, a war in which I would say, Sceve, Beze, and Pelletier constituted the avant-garde; or, if you prefer, they were the forerunners of the other poets. After them, ...joined the ranks. The two of them fought valiantly, ...so that several others entered the battle under their banners. (Calinescu, citing Pasquier, 1977:98.)

Decidedly a modernist, the author seems pleased to view his nation's poetics in terms of an evolutionary concept of history, accentuated by notions of a progressive supremacy. Using the avant-garde to convey a militaristic analogy, his writings expose the old antagonism in which the value of antiquity is opposed to a vision of the future.

---

[6]In fact, up until the 1930's, avant-garde was used interchangeably to refer to both a political radicalism and certain aesthetic movements. See Andreas Huyssen, "The Hidden Dialectic: The Avant-Garde —Technology — Mass Culture," The Myths of Information: Technology and Post-Industrial Culture, ed. Kathleen Woodward, Vol. 1: Theories of Contemporary Culture, centre for twentieth century studies, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (Madison, Wisconsin: Coda Press, 1980), pp. 151-164.

[7]Calinescu (1977:98) refers to Etienne Pasquier, Recherche de la France (1529 - 1615); revised and reprinted ed., Fuegere Edition, Recherches Chapter XXXVIII, (1849)

Pasquier's writings should not be de-contextualized from the language of history, a language of sixteenth century Europe which drew on the prevalence of feudal war. In this sense, avant-garde was used as a linguistic symbol rather than as a conscious stance against the period's tradition of poetics. Pasquier's use of "avant-garde" was meant to merely suggest a sense of change in literary styles and objectives. Calinescu points out that those who Pasquier claimed were members of the vangard were not conscious of their position. It is argued that self-consciousness is absolutely crucial to the spirit and definition of the aesthetic avant-garde since the late nineteenth century.

Calinescu attributes the coining of the phrase avant-garde, albeit as a strictly competitive metaphor, to Pasquier and argues that this first usage is one of many historical references which anticipated the modern characteristic of opposition which would become the major premise of the avant-garde.

The Use of Avant- Garde Within a Radical Language of Politics

The term avant-garde, predominately associated with revolutionary civil war, was widely used in political literature after 1790, in the years following the French Revolution. Understandably, the concept was attractive to various radical political movements because it suggested future-oriented and progressive militaristic philosophies.

The first social movement to encourage artistic and literary figures into their revolutionary ranks was the Saint-Simonists. The movement, originally founded by Saint-Simon, included associates who were actively writing and publishing between the years 1820 and 1825. In general, Saint-Simon assigned the artist to an unprecedented vanguard role in order to propogate his ideals of socialist reform, a position similar to what was to become known as "social realism" in the United States and Russia in the 1930's. [8] Saint-Simon's earliest writings proclaimed the avant-garde as political and aesthetic emissaries for the

---

[8]Calinescu makes this general point. However, Huyssen (1980), elaborates on the very different political and economic historical factors which influenced the use of social realism in different countries, both in Europe and North America. As well, see Serge Guilbault's exhaustive study on the impact of members of the Russian political avant-garde (Trotsky, and Stalin, for example) on American aesthetic movements of the 1930's. Serge Guilbault, How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War, trans. Arthor Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

dissemination of his didactic form of socialism. The artist was considered a useful member of the avant-garde, functioning as a disciple or soldier for Saint-Simon's cause.

A shift can be located in the later writings of Saint-Simon and his followers — the first indication that avant-garde was consciously used to signify a progressive social and political position. Artists, scientists, and industrialists were delegated to a tripartite ruling elite of the utopian social state of Saint-Simonism. Olinde Rodrigues, Saint-Simon's closest friend and supporter (Calinescu speculates that Rodrigues should be credited with the authorship of most of Saint-Simon's later writings) describes how the role of the artist in society had changed as a direct result of the messianic position of honour that the social organization of Saint-Simonism had bestowed on the artist:

> It is we, artists, that will serve as your avant-garde; the power of the arts is indeed the most immediate and fastest. We have weapons of all sorts: when we want to spread new ideas among people, we carve them in marble or paint them on canvas; we popularize them by means of poetry and music; by turns, we resort to the lyre or the flute, the ode or the song, history or the novel; the theatre stage is open to us, and it is mostly from there that our influence exerts itself electrically, victoriously. We address ourselves to the imagination and feelings of people : we are therefore supposed to achieve the most vivid and decisive kind of action; and if today we seem to play no role or at best a very secondary one, that has been the result of the arts' lacking a common drive and a general idea, which are essential to their energy and success. (Calinescu, citing Saint-Simon, 1977:103.)

The "general idea" obviously refers to the tenets of Saint-Simonism. However, Rodrigues' writings provide the first instance whereby an aesthetic form of the avant-garde is granted a social mission. More important than the elite positions of leadership granted to the members of the avant-garde was the consciousness of a potential to radically alter existent social structures.

It should be noted that there were blatant contradictions inherent in the position of the avant-garde within the hierarchy of Saint-Simonism, a dilemma that would continue to be reflected in the progressive position of later aesthetic and political manifestations of avant-garde movements.[9] Deemed an elite class, the Saint-Simon avant-garde were responsible for promoting an anti-elitist social movement committed to the equal sharing of life and prosperity among all members of society. Given the ruling position of the avant-garde, it is difficult to imagine this movement of social anarchy radically changing the quality and

[9]See the fourth and concluding chapters of this thesis for a discussion of this theme.

injustices of nineteenth century life.

Since as early as 1825, avant-garde had acquired connotations which were not explicit in its terminological usage. A primary association with socialist and anarchist political objectives had been established to suggest the following pursuits of avant-garde: (1) a self-conscious intention to be in advance of its own time; (2) a paradox exhibited by an elite avant-garde in social programs whose purpose was to eliminate social inequality; and (3) a predominately critical attitude towards past and existent social structures while emphasizing a progressive future orientation.

Throughout the revolutionary turmoil of nineteenth century France, and certainly by the time of the Paris Commune (1871), political connotations had become entrenched in the term avant-garde because of decades of propaganda which employed the term as a primary rhetorical metaphor. The concept had become essential to a radical language of politics which was to have a long tradition. The older use of the avant-garde signifying a militaristic struggle — a battle between oppressive traditions and the promise of a better future — was not to be left behind.

The Development of a Politically Independent Aesthetic Avant- Garde Tradition

It is generally acknowledged that until the last quarter of the nineteenth century, literary and artistic figures did not claim that the concept of avant-gardism defined an aesthetic stance independent of political programs. The sixteenth century writings which Calinescu cites should be regarded as a rupture, an early and isolated instance in the history of a concept which has traditionally been viewed as strictly utilitarian.

There is convincing evidence, however, that a romantic tradition in literature whose adherents believed in an avant-garde role of poets, was active in the early 1800's. (In fact, Poggioli argues that the avant-garde and romantic traditions cannot be separated.) [10] Shelley was perhaps the most prominent

---

[10]One of Poggioli's major themes, is that the avant-garde is an extension of the earlier Romantic tradition. See Poggioli, (1968). This same position is held by Bernice Martin (1981), whose arguments will be reviewed in the fourth chapter of this thesis.

member of this group of poets, whose writings roughly coincided (temporally and metaphorically) with the early theories of Saint-Simon. Expounding on the potential of the poet as a social harbinger of the future and instrument of social change, Shelley's stance, even though his intentions differed, echoed that of Saint-Simonism. Without specifically using the term avant-garde, Shelley alluded to its literal application, writing: "The poet is the unacknowledged legislator of the world." (Calinescu, citing Shelley, 1977:105.) Shelley argues further that the Poet's imagination would have a "moral effect" upon the ideas of man, acting as "heralds" because their minds would act as metaphoric, "mirrors of futurity". (Calinescu, citing Shelley, 1977:105.) A progressive and liberal individualist, Shelley believed the imagination to be the supreme avant-garde tool for social change; a moral virtue consistent with humanistic idealism and guided by spontaneous inspiration.

The obvious differences between the future-oriented social role of the artist specified in Saint-Simonism and Shelley's poetry lay in the emphasis of the former to instigate social and political reform and of the latter on the power of a romantic and imaginative poetics to envision an undefined utopian state. Shelley's perspective on an avant-garde poetic tradition was not an isolated instance of an individual's romanticism. Rather, Shelley's ideas should be recognized as a contribution to the development of what was later to become a politically independent aesthetic avant-garde tradition — an idea which was to crystallize in a hybrid of the romantic movement (symbolist movement) and the "art for art's sake" arguments at the turn of the twentieth century. [11]

Not until at least 1860, and increasingly until the twentieth century, do politically independent French artists transfer, "the spirit of radical critique to the domain of artistic forms ." (Calinescu, 1977:112.) Calinescu argues that the increased aesthetic appropriation of the avant-garde metaphor is indicative of a modern disposition towards radical social thought. This phenomenon is regarded as a natural progression from the historical demands of social theorists for a politically and aesthetically responsible public. A further consideration is that artists and literary figures had a need to borrow from

---

[11]See Calinescu, (1977), and Peter Burger, Theorie der Avantgarde (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1974).

the established traditions of rhetorical political language in order to condemn the constraints of the traditional sanctions for artistic and cultural expression. Enthusiastic artists began to label themselves as avant-garde in order to challenge public expectations and explore a new sense of freedom. The notion that to revolutionize art would be to also revolutionize life and social forms of communication and behaviour was expressed, not without a heavy reliance on a previously established rhetoric.

The Instable Alliance Between The Political and Aesthetic Avant- Garde Traditions

Aesthetic and political avant-garde insurgents merged briefly during the late nineteenth century (from approximately 1870 to 1880). Artists had themselves become revolutionaries, anxious to condemn society and become active in social/anarchist movements. Arthur Rimbaud's writings serve as an example of an intention to integrate advanced social and aesthetic concerns with new aesthetic forms. Rimbaud believed that all past and existing traditions must be challenged. He writes, "The newcomers are free to condemn the ancestors. ...the poet should strive to become the seer, to reach the unknown to invent an absolutely new language." (Calinescu, citing Rimbaud, 1977:112.) Rimbaud's sentiments recall Shelley's belief that the poet become the harbinger of the future, an idea first expressed much earlier in the century. In addition to continuing this tradition of progressive romanticism, Rimbaud emphasizes an ideological stance — a consciousness — of the formal structures of society necessarily understood in relation to the concerns of a poet or artist. Rimbaud gave concrete shape to the modern concept of the avant-garde as a revolutionary moment or phenomenon, in which the past is condemned in lieu of a socially reformed future. In this sense, the modern interpretation of avant-garde carries vestiges of a radical critique and practice.

Poggioli suggests that the demise of 'La Revue Independante', a journal which catered to rebels from the artistic and political community, was a contributing factor for the abrupt termination of the liason between the two critical factions. Calinescu argues against this, giving substantial evidence that the avant-garde was primarily, and continued to be, politically inspired.[12]

---

[12]The belief that the avant-garde is politically inspired has led to the debate between the advocates of Postmodernism and Modernism as correct definitional concepts for cultural and

A slight division between the two avant-gardes did occur in the late nineteenth century, due to the aesthetic avant-garde community's refusal to conform to the propogandism of the political activists. Avant-garde artists tended to reject the narrow political means for achieving an anarchist state, attempting rather to mock the sympathies and expectations of the general public that social reformists were so eager to conscript.

Calinescu discusses an historical event which contributed to the separation of a distinct political avant-garde tradition. In 1878, "L'Avant-Garde" was published by Pyotr Alekseevich Kropotkin in Switzerland. This magazine was meant to accomodate all progressive social and political theorists. The positive connotations of the concept were considered attractive to the growing adherents of Marxism. Although avant-garde was used metaphorically in literature which advocated the theories of Marx and Engels, it was not specifically used until 1902, in the writings of Lenin. Lenin's article, 'What is to be Done', (1902) employed avant-garde to define the Communist Party as, "...the avant-garde of the working class." (Calinescu, citing Lenin, 1977:114.) Consequently, avant-garde came to be implicitly associated with the Communist Party of the Soviet Union as well as all other social states which have direct political affiliation with the Soviet Union.

In 1905, Lenin published Party Organization and Party Literature, a handbook which conclusively eliminated all aesthetic connotations of the concept avant-garde from the Party's definition and application of the term. Any activities which did not directly contribute to the political function and mechanisms of social democracy were condemned:

> Down with non-partisan literature. Down with literary supermen. Literature must become part of the common cause of the proletariat, a 'cog and a screw' of one great Social-Democratic mechanism set in motion by the entire politically-conscious avant-garde of the entire working class. Literature must become a component of organized, planned and integrated Social-Democratic work. (Calinescu, citing Lenin, 1977:114.)

---

[12](cont'd) aesthetic developments in contemporary society. Certain theorists argue that due to the co-option of the aesthetic avant-garde by mainstream culture and cultural merchandising, the avant-garde is politically impotent, "fait accompli", and an innapropriate definitional concept for trends in contemporary society. This debate, discussed in the thesis Introduction, will be elaborated on within the context of the thesis arguments in the concluding chapter.

Within Party orthodoxy, reference to an aesthetic avant-garde literature was considered a confusion of terms, a contradiction of the idiomatic use of avant-garde as the edifying guide for social practice. Hence, the notion of an aesthetic avant-garde was blasphemous to the strict adherents of party policy. Extending well into the twentieth century, avant-garde was used to signify a politically correct stance for members of the Social-Democratic organization.

An abrupt but brief divorce between the aesthetic and political avant-garde traditions did occur. Accordingly, the avant-garde is perhaps best understood as representing three historical traditions, all of which share some mutual premises and etymological vestiges of meaning. [13]

Anticipation of the Twentieth Century

Pertinent to a discussion of avant-garde traditions is an ethnographic perspective given by Roger Shattuck of the thirty year celebration (1885 to 1914), which marked the turn of the twentieth century in Paris. Originally written in 1958, but revised in 1967, The Banquet Years is a portrait of an era in which elements of flamboyance, bohemianism, and anxious anticipation of the twentieth century crystallized in the form of truly modern aesthetic avant-garde movements. "The Banquet Years" should be understood as Shattuck's literal description of the three decades in which Parisians cultivated the banquet as the supreme social ritual and symbol of status and display which dominated all social action. The banquet was an accepted status event which attracted artists and aristocrats alike.

It is argued that the Banquet Years comprised a social and philosophical era which was to shape the attitudinal foundations of modern art, society, and culture. The year 1885 is noted as a pivotal point at which the direction of cultural and artistic activities shifted dramatically, largely due to a general

[13]For an analysis of the historic avant-garde tradition see Andreas Huyssen, "The Search for Tradition: Avant-Garde and Postmodernism in the 1970's*," New German Critique 22 (Winter 1981): 23-40 ; Peter Burger, "The Significance of the Avant-Garde for Contemporary Aesthetics: A Reply to Jurgen Habermas," New German Critique 22 (Winter 1981): 19-22. For an analysis of the American avant-garde tradition (roughly, the years 1925-1965) see Serge Guilbault (1983).

celebration of the twentieth century which laid to rest the momentum of the nineteenth century. The year of Victor Hugo's death (1885) was commemorated with an elaborate state funeral and wake, a monumental pageant in which the teeming excitement, gaiety, and theatricality of the new era was first exhibited: "By this orgiastic ceremony France unburdened itself of a man,...and a century. (Shattuck, 1967:5.) ...Along a discernible line of demarcation they freed themselves from the propulsion of the nineteenth century and responded to the first insistent tugs of the twentieth." (Shattuck, 1967:18.)

Shattuck maintains that the spell of the period was due in large part, to the city itself, a city whose inhabitants tended to live halfway between the old and the new. The spirit of the city was committed to a sense of the moment: the present. The Banquet Years were the epitome of the modern spirit, an expressive period which supported the intense theatricality and scandals of the aesthetic avant-garde.

Favoured as an international cultural centre, Paris was dominated by the worlds of fashion and theatre, sporting an atmosphere of passion and indulgence. The "Good Old Days" were enhanced by the predominance of salons, cafes, and cabarets which had become central to the lifestyle of gaiety and frivolity. Paris was hosting international exhibitions and expositions for scientific and technical advancements. The city had become a centre for intellectual experimentation, scientifically and creatively.

Aside from the atmosphere of the city itself, Shattuck considers the turbulence of anarchistic activity a major factor in the development and of the character of the aesthetic avant-garde movement. As an extension of anti-militarism after the 1871 war, the anarchist movement was a vestige of the previous twenty years of Republican wars, which were widely felt throughout the provinces. By the 1880's, anarchism had gained extensive public support. By 1894, Parisians had become horrified by the magnitude of destructive bombings and public displays of political defiance of the Third Republic. Popular support of overt violence dwindled. However, the effects of the anarchist movement remained, exemplified by an increased tendency to challenge any formally traditional social, aesthetic, or political position.[14] There was a general desire for a "new vision" which was prompted by the recognized

[14]Perhaps this same challenge can be located earlier in the literary tradition, particularly in the writings of Baudelaire.

corruption of the small and eroding upper leisure class as well as the promise and invitation of progressive changes during the twentieth century.

The cafe and cabaret had become the favoured environments — stages — for literary and artistic banquets, celebrations, and performances. The cafe had come to represent a lifestyle throughout the Banquet Years, teeming with social activities that entranced members of Parisian "society" and artists alike. The sense of purpose within the cafe was flavoured with an overwhelming element of shock, a humourous and mocking criticism which was the response by artists to the atmosphere of social commentary and anarchistic activity. The range and variety of cabaret activities exploited the challenge, excitement, decadence, and corruption of the era. Artistic experimentation was explosive and highly competitive. Artistic and literary figures tended to band together in order to have maximum social impact, a greater share of the cafe activities, and a more pronounced and scurrilous publicity. Groups formed around those cafes and individuals who most clearly represented attitudes of non-conformity. The "Hydropathes", "Bohemia de Murger", "Theatre d'Ombres", and "Bohemia de Chat Noir" became the darlings of Parisian entertainment, constituting the first truly aesthetic forms of the avant-garde movements.

The formation of the "Salon des Refuses" is generally regarded as crucial to the beginning of the modern aesthetic tradition (1868, the year of the first and only Salon loosely corresponds to Calinescu and Poggioli's citations of the 1870 decade as significant to the definition of an alternative aesthetic and, modern art). Refused by the official jury of the annual Salon exhibition, a group of artists were granted a separate showing by state intervention (Napoleon III was the responsible official). Because numerous works shown were considered as mockeries of social norms, as well as of individuals in government offices, the Salon des Refuses was discontinued.

A precedent had been set. By 1884, there was such a large demand for public exposure of art work divorced from the definition of acceptable and mainstream art, the "Societe des Artistes Independants" was founded. This organization also offered non-juried alternative exhibitions which were highly

successful, primarily because of the recognition and support given to the experimental activities which had developed in the cafe, bistro, and literary cabaret. The cafe and cabaret, coupled with the Salon Independantes, was the environment which fostered the growing sense of independence of the avant-garde. Determined groups of artists in pursuit of innovation for its own sake, developed contentious attitudes towards the world and a fierce sense of loyalty to their community. The Latin Quarter was not simply the section of Paris which housed the "boheme". Rather, the district represented a new aesthetic - offering a stage for artists whose outrageousness was echoed in their lives as well as their art - a creation of a stylistic which extended well beyond the established boundaries which had defined social and artistic expression. The self-proclaimed members of the avant-garde remained dedicated to a fusion of lifestyle and artistic activities due to the collaborative climate of the Latin Quarter. The demonstrative energy and bohemianism which evolved into and characterized the avant-garde during the Banquet Years generated a great rejuvenation of the arts.

Shattuck suggests that the aesthetic avant-garde, during the Banquet Years, was responsible for changing the relationship between "la belle epoch" and the art produced — introducing the concept of modernism to twentieth century culture and altering the relationship between the work of art, the spectator, the artist, and the world. Most importantly, "The cultured public, no longer dominated by the salon , gradually came to realize that there existed a small group of people thinking and creating beyond the pale of ordinary behaviour." (Shattuck, 1967:25.) Societies throughout the Western world were feeling the effect of the avant-garde which had emerged as a powerful aesthetic movement during the Banquet Years. Distinct movements had begun to coalesce around the development of schools which coupled ideological pursuits with aesthetic concerns. The collaborative spirit of the Banquet Years prevailed, a spirit which encouraged an intermingling and exchange amongst even the most prominent and diverse avant-garde figures. Everything was happening, everywhere and at once. Extaordinary aesthetic gestures challenged the vestiges of all nineteenth century social expectations, graces, and ideas. In England, D.H. Lawrence had published his explosive novel, Sons and Lovers. In New York, the European curated Armoury Show was received with public outrage. The Futurists were actively

publishing their infamous mainifestos in France and Italy. "Simultanism", "Orphism", and "Cubism" were becoming dominant cenacles in Paris. Members of the newly formed Surrealist and Dada movements were mocking audiences in Paris and Germany. Publication of scandalous and innovative French literature was substantial. Collaborative work exchanged by those involved with music, theatre, and dance was instrumental in launching eccentric and historically renowned careers.

Summary

The avant-garde, having become manifest in a multitude of movements, schools, and genres, could not be contained by any one school of thought. It was the product of a society in transition, a celebration of change and the age of modernism which was both dedicated and grandiose in its mockery of the past. This survey of the involvement of the aesthetic avant-garde movements with social forms reflects a role that the avant-garde played in the beginning of the history of modern culture. The avant-garde was at the centre of ideas and tendencies which were to contribute greatly to the symbols, references, and stylistics that have come to form a cultural matrix of the twentieth century.

Since the turn of the century, the avant-garde concept has been primarily associated with a position of innovation and change in aesthetic movements. It is precisely this position which, in deviating from past traditions of social and aesthetic action, tends to carry the vestiges of previous connotations of radicalism, politicalism, and anarchy. It will be argued that these features, coupled with the progressive ideals of the industrialized twentieth century and modernism, have contributed to the status that the avant-garde holds as a source and concept central to the contemporary tendencies of many popular culture forms.

CHAPTER III

A SURVEY OF POGGIOLI'S PERSPECTIVE OF THE HISTORIC AVANT-GARDE

This chapter will address the major characteristics of those European aesthetic movements earlier referred to as the "historic avant-garde", specifically, Futurism, Surrealism, and Dadaism.[1] The intention is to isolate four psychological postures or moments which epitomize the motivations, objectives, and tendencies of the historic avant-garde: activism, antagonism, nihilism, and agonism. These psychological postures will be viewed as the representation of group attitudes manifested in relation to modern society, in essence, as sociological facts. The four postures form a sociological framework for analyzing the relation of the historic avant-garde to the history of modern art as well as the manner in which the avant-garde is situated in the modern history of social ideas. It is hoped that by discussing the historic avant-garde movements in this manner the argument of this chapter will reveal a sociological perspective of forces within modern society which have been utterly neglected by traditional and historical sociological studies.

Poggioli's treatment of the aesthetic avant-garde movements will be the primary source for the following discussion. (Poggioli,1968.) His observations of the historic avant-garde, from a stictly sociological perspective, acted as a precedent in art history and theory. It should be noted that his text can be considered to have anticipated the "Sociology of Art".[2] He does not subscribe to the art historical

---

[1]The term, "historical avant garde" is introduced by Peter Burger (1974), to refer to Dadaist, Surrealist, and the post-revolutionary Russian avant-garde aesthetic movements. His term has been modified slightly to "historic avant-garde" to refer to the same movements, but to make a clear distinction between these movements and others in the history of the avant-garde (movements which both preceeded and followed Dada, Surrealism, Futurism, etc.). In the fourth and concluding chapters, it will be demonstrated that the historic avant-garde has become a primary reference for the production of certain forms of popular culture because of the subcultural, anti-structural, and oppositional characteristics of the historic avant-garde.

[2]Refers to the writings of Hauser and Duvignaud, both of whom introduced a general tendency towards a sociological perspective on art and its production. The Sociology of Art was a prominent discipline from 1950-1980 (approximately), but is now considered to be an inadequate theoretical tool for resolving misunderstandings about the relations between art, culture, and society.

tendency to itemize and historicize art production within the linear development of a specific period of art history. Indeed, he is not concerned with art objects at all. Rather, his interest is in the motivations underlying the formation of the aesthetic avant-garde movements and their sociological consequences. Similar to the underlying premise of the sociology of art, Poggioli's writings attest to a dialectical relationship between society and the production of art and culture as forms of social expression.

Poggioli's Theoretical Premises

"Psychological motivations" refers to both individual and group expressions of a state of mind. As already noted, the historical avant-garde was founded on ideological programs and constituted numerous movements. The four postures characterizing the movements in general are represented as group phenomena. Nonetheless, as movements, the avant-garde must be understood as consisting of individuals, who, consciously or unconsciously, engage in "...joining that art by a series of bonds to the society within which it succeeds in working, even if by opposition, and which it partly expresses even while denying it." (Poggioli, 1968:103.) That the historic avant-garde artist is a product of modern society and that he belongs specifically to the social conditions of the early twentieth century is considered a fact by Poggioli. Similarly, that members of early twentieth century society tolerated the "art of exception" as an anarchistic display of non-conformity, is recognized. (Poggioli, 1968:106.)[3]

Surveying the social and historical conditions in which such iconoclastic movements can exist and express themselves, it is noted that, "avant-garde art can exist only in the type of society that is liberal-democratic from the political point of view, bourgeois-capitalistic from the socioeconomic point of

[3]Poggioli considers art which is non-conforming and trangressive of social norms from a perspective similar to Victor Turner. See Victor Turner, Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society (London: Cornell University Press, 1974); The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co., 1969); "Frame, Flow, and Reflection: Ritual and Drama in Public Liminality," Performance: in Postmodern Culture, eds. Michel Benamou and Charles Caramello, Vol 1: Theories in Contemporary Culture, center for twentieth century studies, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (Madison, Wisconsin: Coda Press, 1977), pp.35-55. Turner would consider this art form an expression of "anti-structure". Refer to Poggioli (1968:106), as well as the third chapter for a discussion of Turner's pertinent theories and metaphors.

view." (Poggioli, 1968:106.) Since Romanticism, all aesthetic avant-garde movements have flourished under these same general social conditions.

Consequently, it is argued that the twentieth century can generally be recognized as a tolerant century in which many subcultural and minority cultures have found avenues for social expression. Although Poggioli suggests that it follows that this acceptance of diversity and difference in the twentieth century is due to a general condition or acceptance of anarchy, it might be more accurate to state that this century encourages competition and pluralism. These characteristics, so radically divergent from social conditions governing behaviour in recent centuries, can be attributed to factors which include changed socio-economic conditions and aesthetic values. On the one hand, capitalist economic relations tend to endorse the consumption of material products, as the motivations and means to economically sanctioned social status, and social mobility: aspirations which are generally confused as equal means to self-realization and self-gratification. As well, the work ethics implicated in the business acumen are coupled with an increasing emphasis on leisure, a recent phenomena of modern society which reinforces pleasure and escape through compulsive consumption. Although simplistic, this explanation is meant to describe the economic machinery which motivates competition. On the other hand, modernism, a philosophy intrinsic to all aspects of twentieth century life, devalues enduring, time-honoured traditions. Instead, modernism promotes a liberal perspective in which no one tradition, life-style, or philosophy is more valuable or "right" than any other. Together, capitalist economic relations and the ideals of modernism act as pre-conditions for a competitive principle of immediacy around which patterns of difference — as expressed through life-styles, subcultures, and aesthetic positions — coalesce.

Hence, the avant-garde, as a manifestation of these conditions, is considered to be a subculture. The existence of aesthetic avant-garde subcultures is premised on a relation of opposition to a majority culture — that is, society itself. As a subculture which has deviated from the mainstream of social values and conditions, the avant-garde embraces alienation as another factor in its social differentiation. Engaged in a conflict between two cultures, the avant-garde is, at once, a victim and self-determining:

> ...theoretically, it is not that society against which the avant-garde means to react, but against the civilization it creates and represents. The specific historic reality it opposes is... mass culture, seen as pseudo-culture. Faithful to qualitative values, the artist facing the quantitative values of modern civilization feels himself left out and rebellious. This state of mind also has practical social consequences, but above all it provokes a particular pathos in the soul of today's artist. ... Hence his dreams of reaction and revolution, his retrospective and prophetic utopias, his equally impossible desire to inaugurate new orders or to restore ancient ones. (Poggioli, 1968:108.)

It should be noted that Poggioli's conceptual typology of psychological states and his perception of the social condition of modern society is derived from Marx's concept of social and psychological alienation. (Poggioli, 1968:109-110.) As a source for the collective manifestation and rationalization for subcultural positions, Poggioli believes alienation to be a primary factor underlying the emergence of the multitude of minority cultures during this century. Ideological positions in opposition to society at large are viewed as general representations of the pathos of modern man.

A definition of the historic avant-garde as "movements" is crucial to understanding its close relationship to social and cultural production. Distinguishing the historic avant-garde from the traditional descriptive metaphors for aesthetic tendencies in art history, schools, cenacles, or currents, Poggioli states that since the impact of Romanticism on cultural forms of the nineteenth century, most modern aesthetic groupings should be referred to as movements. "Movement" is a particularly appropriate term for the historic avant-garde, as its protagonists conceived of their activities from an historically conscious and socially reflexive position. Founded on ideological programs, members of the historic avant-garde movements transcended the boundaries of art and aspired, "...toward what the Germans call Weltanschauung. ... the movement, instead, conceives of culture not as increment [as in the static and technical objectives of a "school"] but as creation - or, at least, as a center of activity and energy." (Pogggioli, p. 20.) In other words, members of the historic avant-garde believed themselves to be mediators of social history, extending their voice from the passive sphere of artmaking and aesthetic polemics to cultural and civic life.

Historic Avant-Garde: Definition of the Psychological Postures

Poggioli, in his outline of the motivations of the historic avant-garde, correlates specific psychological postures with tendencies characteristic of each separate movement. Together the psychological postures are believed to constitute a dialectic of the avant-garde movements, in that they are interrelated manifestations of the condition of alienation. Defined here briefly, the psychological postures include: activism, the perspective from which a movement develops merely for the sake of action and potential change, but not necessarily for the strict objectives of programs; antagonism, the motivation by which a movement forms in order to take action against traditions or social authorities; nihilism, the dynamism of action which drives the movement beyond its original objectives and rationale; and agonism, the movements' acceptance of its own irrationality and impotence as a result of nihilism. Activism and antagonism represent the avant-garde ideology and, the logic which generates and maintains the movements. Agonism is a psychological condition of the members of the movements, and nihilism can only be appreciated from a socio-psychological perspective which would view the movements in relation to other social currents. Together, these psychological postures comprise the dialectic, or raison d'etre, of the avant-garde movments.

Activism : The Activist Moment

In the previous chapter, it was noted that the avant-garde implied a militaristic strategy or stance. Activism describes this psychological force which borders on an idolatry of action. The development and momentum of the aesthetic avant-garde movements is governed by activism as a means to an end, the logic sustaining a need for social recognition of the movements. Activism is simply descriptive of the form by which, "often a movement takes shape and agitates for no other end other than its own self, out of the sheer joy of dynamism, a taste for action, a sportive enthusiasm, and the enthusiastic fascination of adventure." (Poggioli, 1968:25.)

Activism can be understood as the psychological concept of adventure, a tendency towards action and activity which underlies a generalized impetus in both twentieth century culture and politics. In the purely political use of the term, activism is reflected in the emphasis on activity without regard for method or ultimate purpose. Terrorist and direct action groups are contemporary examples of this dynamism which originates as an individual impulse, and can become the binding orientation of any social or subcultural political grouping.

With reference to the historic avant-garde, the Futurists were similarly grounded in the psychological posture of activism. Interested in cliched gestures of motion, rather than aesthetic creation, the Futurists incorporated any image or idea into their predominately conceptual framework that referred to motion, action, or violence. The machine, vehicle (train, automobile, motorcycle, or airplane), speed, and physical sport were favourite Futurist metaphors for action which they exalted to the level of the aesthetic cult. This futurist aesthetic, directly symbolic of the activist moment, tends to reduce art to a mere sensation, or at worst, sensationalism. The Futurists are perhaps an extreme example of the tendency to vulgarize aesthetics through a simplistic conceptualization (as often as not, meant as a critique of the predominate images of modernism they embraced) although all aesthetic avant-garde movements could be accused of the same sort of reductionism. [4]

Avant-garde activism indicates a typical formal attribute of modern social movements in which blind gratuitous activity is rationalized through aspirations to social reform. The phenomena of activism, modernism, and futurism cannot be readily separated or isolated from any of the historic avant-garde movements. Nor can they be separated in an analysis of the predominant features of modern society.

---

[4]See Martin's discussion of the restricted formal options available for redirecting and reconceptualizing aesthetic activities and processes in Chapter Four of the thesis (pp.64-68).

Antagonism : The Antagonist Moment

Activism is considered to be inherent in the term avant-garde, as well as inherent as a fundamental motivating factor of any modern movement. Introduced as the most predominant feature of the aesthetic avant-garde, it is argued that antagonism is a permanent avant-garde attitude of hostility to historic and social order. There are two forms of avant-garde antagonism, often complementary and often diffused. One is directed towards social and aesthetic traditions whereas the other is aimed directly at the general public.

Antagonism : Anti- Social Expression

Antagonism is introduced within a general discussion of the psychological forces which implicate the individual and the group in a posture of opposition. Accordingly, alienation created by hostility to a social order tends to act to unify similarly alienated individuals into social movements — the avant-garde movement specifically. This apparent contradiction is described as the sectarian spirit of the avant-garde. A solidarity of purpose is achieved by the shared alienation and anarchistic temperament of members of the avant-garde, regardless of the potential for large differences between the political ideals of individuals or movements (for example, the right-wing, almost fascistic aspirations of the Italian Futurists as opposed to the dandyism of Oscar Wilde and his followerers). This contradiction is framed in terms which could adequately justify the formation and existence, according to recent subcultural theorists, of contemporary subcultural movements: [5]

> On one hand, the anarchistic state of mind presupposes the individual revolt of the 'unique' against society in the largest sense. On the other, it presupposes solidarity within a society in the restricted sense of that word... . Malraux, in his Psychologie de l'art, acutely perceived such factors at work in the art world: 'Now it seems that the artist defines himself by breaking away from what precedes him, ... But each artist brings to the fraternal and isolated clan his own conquests and they separate him more and more from his own

[5]This quotation is decidedly reminiscent of the definitions of subcultures which typify the premises of members of the subcultural and stylistic study group of the Birmingham School. Just as Poggioli and Malraux recognize that the anarchistic state of mind of a member of an aesthetic movement defines himself according to significant differences from others, so does the Birmingham school define youth subcultural movements as subcultures according to an opposition through difference. See Hall and Jefferson, (1976).

particular environment.' (Poggioli, citing Malraux, 1968:30–31.)

The understanding that an artist is declassed by virtue of his difference and integrated to an aesthetic and subcultural milieu predates the studies of youth subcultures which were premised on stylistic differences and written during the 60's and 70's. The avant–garde then, should be understood as a subculture, a group–oriented movement defined by its antagonistic relationship with society, as much for its internal solidarity as its subversion of social conventions. The many modes of avant–garde antagonism generally represent a non–conformism, a perversion of established rules of conduct. What is most important is the nature of the defiance exhibited by all the avant–garde movements, an attitude so consistent that it has become the cohesive trademark of the avant–garde. Avant–garde antagonism was directed not only to the history of ideas which preceeded each movement but, more specifically, to existent social conditions and the history of social customs — structural imperatives of social action.

Exhibitionism, eccentricity, and provocation are external manifestations of the social condition of alienation which acts as the binding force for the subcultural milieu of the artist. It is precisely this psychological state of the aesthetic avant–garde movements which provokes antagonism towards the general public (those divorced from the concerns of the artistic community). From seemingly harmless exhibitions of eccentricism and dandyism, avant–garde antagonism can readily become defiant, scandalous, and seriously provocative. The Surrealists, whose activities often bordered on terrorism, serve as an example of a more extreme tension between the avant–garde and the public: "Breton [Andre Breton, the unofficial spokesman for the Surrealist movement responsible for the composition of most of the movement's manifestos], for example went futurism one better when he defined 'a volley shot into a crowd' as the 'surrealist act, par excellence.'" (Poggioli, citing Breton, 1968:33.) The socio–psychological antagonism between the artist and public can be viewed as relatively insignificant in light of an extremely antagonistic aesthetic and philosophical position which does not even deem to consider social relations. In this view, aesthetic activities constitute, "a cosmic, metaphysical antagonism: a defiance of God and the universe." (Poggioli, citing Rimbaud, 1968:33.) [6]

---

[6]Poggioli refers to Rimbaud's extreme disdain towards the public and traditions — a denial

The expressions of difference and dissatisfaction of the historic avant-garde can be directly linked to the modern phenomena of physical violence which is often attributable to groups similarly disenfranchised by society. The relationship between antagonism and terrorism is clearly an external manifestation of social conditions which also contribute to the development of subcultural movements. Poggioli, displaying the different forms through which an antagonism towards social custom is expressed, believes these manifestations to be significant symbols of a spiritual and psychological condition which has permeated most aspects of social life. However, the avant-garde is a concrete example of a subculture which consistently exhibits this tension or provocative attitude against society. This is an important point. While antagonism is peculiar to avant-gardism, as a tendency it reflects a larger socio-psychological malaise — a condition of our modern society.

Antagonism : Anti-Tradition, The Father/Son Antithesis

The aesthetic avant-garde found yet another useful enemy, by virtue of opposition and difference, in the tradition by which advice from the "generation of the fathers", is venerated. Since the nineteenth century, the father-son antithesis has been a popular model for understanding the modern social and political conflict between the experience and opinions of differing generations.[7]

The father-son antithesis is a useful model for discerning the cult of youth which is a predominant feature of the aesthetic avant-garde, too often expressed as regressive infantilism (particularly in the case of the Dadaist movement, whose title has been defined as meaning, "onomatopoetic baby-talk").[8]

The idolization of youth was evident aesthetically and psychologically in the activities of the historic avant-garde, made obvious by the tendency to treat art as a game, in the context of playful

---

[6](cont'd) of having any form of a socio-psychological relation to the world.

[7]Poggioli credits Ivan Turgenev as the first to develop a theoretical perspective on this oppositional phenomena. As well, Ortega y Gasset's analysis of modern social attitudes towards generations is discussed by Poggioli (Poggioli, 1968:34-35).

[8]Although Tristan Tzara claimed to have found Dada in the dictionary, the lexicographers Hartzfield and Darmesteter, can be credited with defining Dada as such. See Poggioli, (1968:36).

attempts to address social and political issues. This attitude anticipated a tendency of the American avant-garde movements since the 50's to make art about life and to equate art and life as a theoretical premise. The historic avant-garde aesthetic consisted of a compendium of toys used as tools for opposition to classicism, social norms, and traditional aesthetic objectives. The prevalence of nonsense verse, child-like drawings, characters reminiscent of children's fables, and crudely animated cartoons in Dadaist presentations of art/ performances are examples of images which underline this ludic perspective.

More important than the blatantly selected symbols and activities culled from a child's play room, was the role that the emphasis on youth played in an exaggerated avant-garde antagonism. Deriving his ideas from linguistic theory, Poggioli notes that children's jargon is often attributed to an expression of opposition to the seemingly arbitrary expectations of an adult world. Similarly, the historic avant-garde maintained a parallel antagonism by deliberately constructing and using a private jargon which separated its members from the communications conventions of the outside world — the language of the general public. The language and idioms used by the historic avant-garde movements as expressions of multiple oppositions includes new paradigms against old conventions, youth against the ideas, values, and forms of expression of their father's generations, child against the adult world, and the artist against the public, or society.

Aesthetic and linguistic hermeticism functioned as the major stylistic device through which antagonism was directed by the avant-garde subcultures towards all extraneous social groups. Just as the obscurity of modern poetic writing styles is often conceived of as a reaction to the practical urbanity of public speech, the idiomatic expressions of the historic avant-garde were used as reactionary but corrective devices for "...the linguistic corruption characteristic of any mass culture." (Poggioli, 1968:37.) Hostility is extended to all public and political opinions of the common individual in society.

In essence, the historic avant-garde took a position of protest against all socially accepted and dominant forms of authority long before the solidification of ideological programs which distinguished one movement from the other. Directly related to and in pursuit of the spirit of modernism, the historic

avant-garde condemned not just the ancient past but all preceding generations. Anti-traditionalism was not invented by the Futurists whose Italian name was "antipassitism" (translated as "down with the past"). It was a feature of modernism, in general, and all the avant-garde movements in particular. Intent on ignoring or destroying all previous traditions of art-making, the avant-garde claimed a vanguard position which, in itself, was a negative polemic, "bound, on the purely psychological level, to what we call avant-garde nihilism ; on the sociological level, however, it is joined to antagonism toward the public; on the aesthetic level, to the unpopularity of modern art, its hermeticism." (Poggioli, 1968:54.)

While the general tendency of the historic avant-garde movements was anti-traditionalism, this manifestation became one of its many conventions. The practice of establishing new cultural paradigms operates similarly to the manifestation of fashion in that the innovative and new images predicted by fashion have a tendency to sway designers and consumers to comply with a particular stylistic until the acceptance of a newer image establishes a new tradition. The beauty of art has been described as, "...a brief gasp between one cliche and another." (Poggioli, citing Ezra Pound, 1968:82.) It is this sort of paradox that serves to reduce the avant-garde vanguard polemic into a set of predictable conventions.[9]

Antagonism is understood as the reason for the unpopularity of the historic avant-garde movements, an audience reaction that its protagonists accepted and flaunted, in a typical inversion of traditional objectives of audience appreciation. Similarly, Poggioli believed antagonism to be the cause and effect of tensions which separated the avant-garde artist and society.

---

[9]See the section on Style in Chapter Four of the thesis, in which aesthetics and fashion are discussed in the context of a contemporary competition for communication, "style", and an audience (pp.73-80). In the same section of the thesis, see the discussion of the processes by which the art-world generates new "avant-garde" styles — entelechy, the principle of infolding, and the marketplace.

Nihilism : The Nihilistic Moment

Nihilism is the descriptive term for a state of mind which can be discerned in all aesthetic avant-garde movements. The activities of the Dadaists were almost exclusively nihilistic, a fundamental aspect of a state of mind which articulated hostility through hermetic nonsense.

The theory of psychological postures suggests that each psychological state reciprocates each other in a dialectic of sociological motivations (Poggioli, 1968). Given this interdependence, nihilism can be understood as an extreme psychological extension of the other postures.

The nihilistic tendency of the Dadaists reflected an aesthetic temperament revolting against art, morality, society, and itself, as a self-proclaimed member of the avant-garde. An inversion of itself, Dadaism was a paradoxical and self-destructive gesture, an attack that extended beyond aesthetics to all human values. The Dadaists did not invent nihilism as a fashionable aesthetic between the two World Wars. As a psychological distortion of a social world, nihilism endures to this day as a reflection of a state of alienation which individuals and subcultures experience. Nihilism was inherited by the Surrealist movement after the demise of the Dadaist movements. As the destructive force in a socio-psychological dialectic, nihilism is understood as the factor which helped to dissolve both the Dada and Surrealist movement.

However, nihilism is not the final position of an avant-garde movement before it becomes a moment in the history of the avant-garde. Rather, nihilism is considered a transformative phase which represents that moment of extreme tension caused by antagonism between the artist and social tradition and convention. Nihilism is critical to the experience of contemporary avant-garde movements, as a part of the process in which innovative styles and aesthetics come to displace their precedents.

The nihilistic posture of the avant-garde exists as an expressive reaction to social and cultural problems, a posture which has not altered its essential content during its history as a socio-psychological phenomenon of modern society. Avant-garde nihilism exists as a state of mind, a reflection of a reaction

to the society that it opposes: "The motivations for this revolt appear simultaneously under the different guises of reaction and escape: reaction against the modern debasement of art in mass culture and popular art; escape into a world very remote from that of the dominant cultural reality, from vulgar and common art, by dissolving art and culture into a new and paradoxical nirvana." (Poggioli, 1968:64.)

Agonism: The Agonist or Futurist Moment

The nihilistic tendency of the historic avant-garde movements can be understood as a consistent and sadistic feature. Agonism, because it describes the momentum that maintains the display of manifestations of alienation of the avant-garde movements, can be understood as a masochistic tendency common to the aesthetic avant-garde.

Agonism is deeply implicated in the historic awareness of the protagonists of the avant-garde, a consciousness which contributes to the recurrence of aesthetic avant-garde movements since the nineteenth century. Agonism can be understood as an idolization of history, a tendency which is also a characteristic of the avant-garde.

Defined as a representation of a state of mind in pathos, agonism is dedicated to a comprehension of itself in relation to history: a history of the past, the present, and most importantly, the future. This moment can best be understood in the context of futurism, as an aspiration towards concrete historical change which is a tendency of both modernism and avant-garde movements. Avant-garde agonism manifests an immolation of self to a kind of historic fatalism. Thus, agonism functions as an attempt to transcend an individual's immediate social relations for the sake of a future, idealized, and presumably better, social structure and condition for social relations. The contemporary myth which depicts the artist as a victim/hero (of society at large and subcultural objectives, respectively) has tended to obscure this relation between the phenomena of agonism and futurism in avant-garde movements. The avant-garde artist, however, does not, consciously or unconsciously, socially invalidate him/herself for posthumous recognition, but rather, consciously attempts to secure the posterity of an avant-garde tradition.

It should be noted that agonism, a primary posture of all avant-garde movements, must also be viewed as a predictable convention. As a seemingly destructive tendency of the avant-garde, agonism psychologically maintains a continuing historic tradition. Agonism, then, functions similarly to antagonism and nihilism. The psychological tendency of agonism is pathological by nature, reflecting an inherent consciousness that sacrifice and denigration of a particular avant-garde movement's aesthetic action and ideology will form a matrix to be used by future avant-garde movements. Agonism cannot be separated from the father/son antithesis, a predominant theory in discussions of modern culture and the historic avant-garde.[10] By denying its past and present concerns, at the same time as viewing itself as a precedent for future generations, the avant-garde perpetually legitimates and reinforces its existence as well as its subcultural objectives of transition and change.

All past avant-garde movements (including the Russian Futurists) have categorically failed to achieve their historic mission to initiate radical social change. Although there are numerous reasons why the avant-garde was, and is, politically unsuccessful, an obvious reason is their conscious tendency to simply act as precursors to future aesthetic and social forms. The idea of a "precursor" is historically anachronistic, at the same time it is a central and influential myth of the avant-garde.

The concept of the precursor is considered erroneous — a position whereby the avant-garde conceived itself as futuristically anticipatory as well as an arbitrator of history because of its history of ancestors, all of which chronicled the past and acted as precedents for the present. This conception is problematic for two reasons. Firstly, within this logical construct, the anti-historical and anti-traditional tendencies of the avant-garde can readily be reduced to mere gestures. Secondly, such a deterministic concept cannot define and constitute a historical reality. Regardless of the inherent problems of the precursor concept, it was, and is, an important and powerful idea that has taken on metaphysical and mythical qualities; so pervasive is it, that it continues to shape the attitudes of aesthetic avant-garde protagonists as well as sugcultural movements in modern society. In effect, the avant-garde artist conceives of him/herself as an intermediary in the process of history and valuable only as a component in

---

[10]For a discussion of the father/son antithesis see pp. 34-36 of the thesis.

the metamorphosis of spiritual revolution.

The concepts of transition, precursor, and futurism are viewed as interrelated psychological roots for the expression of avant-garde agonism. That the sacrificial impotencey of the agonistic posture is most often voiced in avant-garde manifestos and through poetic confession underlines the means by which such an arbitrary and mythic position becomes idealistically convincing:

> But the metaphysical and mystical intensity of the precursor myth grows in geometric proportion when the initial relationship is replaced (the present-past, operating in favour of the present contemporary age and the generation to which we belong) by an inverse relationship (present-future, where, following the dictates of the agonistic spirit, the current generation and the culture of our day become a subordinate function of the culture to come). (Poggioli, 1968:71.)

Agonism : The Decadent Moment

An underlying premise of Poggioli's thesis is that a historical continuity aligns the older tradition of romanticism with avant-gardism. In endorsing this argument, he suggests that both traditions exhibit tendencies of decadence. A similar historical awareness is shared by decadent and and aesthetic avant-garde movements and can be respectively understood in terms of a romantic nostalgia for the past, through the precursor concept so common to avant-gardism.

Poggioli argues that although a decadent sentiment often, but not always, dismisses the anti-historical and anticipatory tendencies of the avant-garde, decadence should not be considered hostile to the crisis of modernism in contemporary society. Rather, decadence and avant-gardism are merely two extremes of a psychological desire for social change. For this reason, futurism, decadence, and avant-gardism are considered intrinsically related to twentieth century modernism. Two authors confirm the relation between these seemingly contradictory tendencies of modern aesthetic movements. Whereas the Russian poet, Vyacheslav Ivanov, defined the feeling of being decadent as similar to the feeling which accompanies being the last practitioner of a very long tradition, Bontempelli understood the avant-garde as the initiators of new expressive forms (either by actively creating new aesthetic traditions or anticipating them).

Thus, there is little difference between a decadents nostalgia for a new infancy, or primitive condition, and a futurist's anticipation of a new generation — a new and revitalized youth. Both aspire to transcend the self and one's larger social relations. Both equally attempt to establish a condition from which a future renaissance can be nourished. (Poggioli, 1968:76.)

Summary

The historic avant-garde used art as a strategic weapon to effect change in the bitter and confused environment of war-torn Europe. However incongruous and irrational the manifestos, performances, and dream images of the historic avant-garde movements, they displayed a rationalism that reflected the broken physical world which surrounded them. Their destructive propaganda and aesthetic tactics were targeted at the sacred aesthetic conventions of the past, as well as the economic, social, and political conditions of the old (pre-war) world. Merging the ridiculous with the serious and aesthetics with social and political criticism, the historic avant-garde was at once a public art while bound to the world of art by hermeticism and absurdity. It can, and will be argued, that the historic avant-garde, particularly the Dada movement, significantly informed the major ideas of twentieth-century art and cultural production.

The roots of the historic avant-garde are demonstrated in those movements of the past few decades which emphasized art as idea, action, and representations of life as opposed to the production of sanctified art objects for commodification. It has been remarked that Dada's nihilism was instrumental rather than fundamental.[11]

Representing various forms of alienation, whether social, economic, cultural, or historical in nature, the ideological programs of the historic avant-garde clearly display their place in the modern history of social ideas — the modern phenomenon of difference and exception. These movements embraced the extreme anti-classical spirit of modernism, a consciousness of their historicism in relation to the past and

[11]See Lucy Lippard, ed., citing Robert Goldwater, Introduction to Dada's on Art (Eaglewood cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1971), p. 1.

foundations for the future.

CHAPTER IV

VICTOR TURNER'S MODELS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE AND PROCESS

The main objective of this chapter is to examine and interpret anthropological and cultural theories which address the relevance and force of marginal and subversive cultural expressions on social relations. Victor Turner's anthropological paradigms serve to isolate seemingly extra-social genres of social action, specifically aesthetic and subcultural activites, and represent these genres as creative and generative arenas for social change.(Turner, 1974; 1969; 1977:35-55.) He has explicitly related his conceptual schema to recent aesthetic and youth cultural movements of the Western world, in that these movements tended to develop in the interstices of central institutions and economic processes. Further, it can be argued, that these types of iconoclastic movements have the capacity to subvert, call into question, and, in time, ratify significant social structures and symbols for social interraction.

Turner's interest in the creative dimension and potential for change inherent in historic and contemporary expressive cultural forms provide theoretical insights for the study at hand. His theoretical argument is invaluable to sociological perspectives which attempt to address the existence, function, and meaning of artistic, religious, and ritualistic experience in societies. Because Turner regards contemporary aesthetic avant-garde forms as examples of his models — both in terms of their expressive and transitional capacities — a discussion of his theories will help to reinforce the argumentative thrust of the present study: that the aesthetic avant-garde has had a pervasive effect on certain contemporary popular culture expressive forms, forms which have altered some of our fundamental social values and assumptions.

As well, this introduction to Turner's theories will act as a prelude to the fourth chapter of the thesis in which Bernice Martin's sociology of radical culture will be reviewed. In essence, Martin integrates Turner's premises and paradigms to establish a view of certain expressive patterns which characterize cultural movements and expressive forms evident in contemporary Britain. [1]

---

[1]See Chapter Four of the thesis and Martin, (1981).

Turner developed a series of models and paradigms in order to understand the importance of individuals and groups whose activities do not conform to a society's structural, economic, and political characteristics. His paradigms and theories impart a necessary perspective on the manifestation of social change which has shaped our social history and is a fundamental characteristic of modern social life.

Both an anthropologist and contemporary sociologist, his paradigms apply equally to the ritual enactments of tribal societies and the recent developments of subcultural (counter-culture, drug-culture, and the most recent of subcultural formations) and stylistic (aesthetic, avant-garde, and popular culture) definitions of lifestyle. Turner is concerned with what these parallel public rituals reveal about how individuals feel about their immediate social relations, their social conditions, and, to some degree, their relation to nature and the world around themselves.

Central to Turner's view, and that of this work, is the belief that the iconoclastic tendencies of the historic avant-garde were a manifestation of the condition of social transition prevalent since the Industrial Revolution and throughout the twentieth century. It can be argued therefore, that cultural movements exhibiting behaviour that is disharmonic with social structural imperatives can be understood as representing legitimate, creative, and socially grounded expressions of human action, behaviour, and expression.

The existence of marginal and socially critical movements in a social history are too often regarded as "polluting" or "dangerous" by those schools of thought committed to maintaining the structural-functionalist classifications of a social order. (Turner, 1969:109.) An alternative perspective views the emergence of anarchical social expression as integral to an understanding of social process. Such a theoretical model of social history would incorporate and be mediated by both structural and anti-structural phenomena. Clearly, this dialectical model is formulated by Turner. He is concerned with alternative forms of cultural expression which are generated outside of the social structural dimensions, how these forms govern the behaviour of social groups, and how these new articulations are given recognition in a social history. Turner argues that anti-structural phenomena are often far more revealing

of social relations than the traditional anthropological model which views ritualistic, religious, and culturally based symbols as reflecting social structure and functioning to maintain social integration and conformity (a social theory generally attributed to Radcliffe–Brown).

Turner's major paradigm, anti–structure, can be roughly contrasted with the structural imperatives of human social bonds. He defines structure as, "...all that holds people apart, defines their differences, and constrains their actions, including social structure in the British anthropological sense." (Turner, 1974:47.) Anti–structure can be described as any social action that is outside of, or in between, the brackets of social structural organization. Turner's formulation of society as both an expression of anti–structure and structure will be examined for its analysis of the means by which seemingly antagonistic social action can be understood as arising from and giving shape to a social history. The metaphors "liminality" and "communitas" will be introduced as major anti–structural phases and modalities (respectively) within Turner's grand theory of social process, "The Processural View of Society".

The majority of examples which Turner uses to illustrate anti–structural modalities and phases were rituals of simple societies. In his later, multi–disciplined writings he both suggests an application and applies these paradigms to more contemporary social movements, particularly those within the genres of the arts, sciences, religion, and politics. By extension, he views the avant–garde movements as theoretically precise examples of expressions of social anti–structure and liminality in which new forms of social action are generated.

Metaphors and Paradigms

Most of Turner's theoretical terms and perspectives hinge on the elaboration and qualification of his metaphoric usage. His metaphors are derived from a variety of scientific traditions and recombined to impart a very specific meaning. Like many theoreticans in the social and empirical sciences, he is most wary of the means by which metaphors and paradigms tend to become established laws for understanding

and measuring social behaviour. The formation of a metaphor must follow I. A. Richards' "Interaction View"; that is, in metaphor, "we have two thoughts of different things active together and supported by a single word, or phrase, whose meaning is resultant of their interaction." (Turner, citing Richards, 1969:29.) In emphasizing the dynamics of semantic meaning and interpretation functionally inherent in the construction of a metaphor, the metaphor tends to remain generative and creative rather than becoming a staid empirical law.

The following sections will indicate the theoretical and humanistic position from which he formulated his theory of a processural view of social history. All of the paradigms and metaphors pertinent to this analysis will be examined in order to extend Turner's view that while individuals are most often conditioned into accepting certain patterns for social behaviour, the human capacity for creativity provides the initiative and the potential to innovate other ways of relating and thinking.

This capacity to stand aside from structural imperatives is clearly what Turner calls socially anti-structural phenomena. Whereas the conditions accepted most often by individuals and groups are structural definitions of social behaviour, motivations for innovation and change are found in "liminal", or crisis phases in a social history and represent a conscious generation of new social forms of behaviour. The social bonds which accompany liminal phases are referred to as "communitas" by Turner — human relations above and beyond the structural relationships of a society, in that they represent direct and generic human bonds. Liminal phases occur most often when societies are in transition between major social structural orderings. His primary interest is in those transitional phases of a social process during which real transformations of social relationships are given license to occur. Liminality and communitas will be examined as metaphors which illustrate the pattern and function of the aesthetic avant-garde movements in the nineteenth and twentieth century.

Anti-structure acts as an umbrella or root-archetype by which to perceive liminal phases of communitas relations in interraction with the formal structure and social bonds of a society's history. Turner insists that historically, both anti-structural and structural modalities of social expression can be

discerned in any given society. This interpretation of a social history comprised of distinct units of time representing turbulant and ordered phases, constitutes Turner's view of social processes.

> All [my metaphors] are pervaded by the idea that human social life is the producer and product of time, which becomes its measure – an ancient idea that has had its resonances in the very different work of Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, and Henri Bergson. (Turner, 1974:23–24.)

Turner does not theoretically conform to any of the aforementioned humanistic scientists. However, he shares their belief that a social history is in a state of constant flux, is developed dynamically, and is dependent on conscious human interaction. Accordingly, Turner departs from the positivist approach which regards a society as a static system of categories and classifications. He argues that a society must be regarded as "a world in becoming" because social/cultural systems create their own meaning and existence only through human interraction (he does not use "becoming" in the same sense as cultural evolutionists who imply organic growth). (Turner, 1974:30.) It is believed that societies do not demonstrate such a uni-directional causative principle. The choice of metaphor is not meant to stress the unified theory of order and change proposed by the British school of social anthropology. (Turner, 1974:31.) Rather, it emphasizes the dynamics of human relations and the consequences of their action for the production of culture as opposed to the production of nature. In other words, the vast potential for changing human relationships is the logical extension of the dynamics and consequences of social action.

A study of the endless variety of social action, representing conflict, criticism, and persistency as forms of social relations and social bonds, offers an accurate perspective of the history of a social order created and measured by human experience. Culture is not preordained or determined by structures, standards, or inflexible social positions, but is the result of conflicting or concurring human volition. A society is not a static and coherent whole but changes according to the needs of individuals and groups, in that, "Coherent wholes may exist (but these tend to be lodged in individuals heads, sometimes in those of obsessionals or paranoics), but human social groups tend to find their openness to the future in the variety of their metaphors for what may be the good life, and the contest of their paradigms." (Turner, 1969:14.)

Turner suggests that history has proven the human desire and capacity to alter and improve human relations, to change the normative status structures that most often guide human relations and forms of social action. This desire to strip away the status restrictions of social relations and manifest new metaphors and paradigms for social action has been called, "the evolutionary life force" of a social history. (Turner, citing Bergson, 1969:128.) Bergson's phrase is equated with an "open morality" and contrasted with what Bergson terms a "closed morality"; the normative system of bound and formal structural relations. (Turner, citing Bergson, 1969:128.) Open and closed morality correspond closely with Turner's definition of informal and formal social bonds. His respective metaphors are "communitas", as an expression of anti-structural bonding in a liminal social phase, and "societas" (social structure).

The fundamental issue which differentiates Turner's perspective from the traditional schools of socio-anthropological thought is his lack of emphasis on social structure as the primary measurement for understanding human relations within a social history. Together, structure and anti-structure constitute the modalities by which human social relations are enacted. One modality is not emphasized over the other. Rather, only through understanding history as a dialectical process between social anti-structural and social structural human action can a humanistic social science perceive the change and constancy which mark a social history. He warns the social sciences to recognize and maintain both modalities as active paradigms in order to view social processes in a realistic and undistorted fashion, without excessively emphasizing either modality:

> What is certain is that no society can function adequately without this dialectic. Exaggeration of structure may well lead to pathological manifestations of communitas outside or against "the law". Exaggeration of communitas; in certain religious or political movements of the leveling type, may be speedily followed by despotism, overbeaucratization, or other modes of structural rigidification. (Turner, 1969:129.)

Processural View of Society

Turner's metaphor's are generally derived from the sociological and anthropological models of Arnold Van Gennep. In particular, Van Gennep's seminal work on "rites of passage" is interpreted as a

demonstration that human culture is motivated by three distinct phases of movement governed by time. [2] Van Gennep and later, Turner, argued that this tripartite movement in time is the process which exemplifies all social action. .

Van Gennep developed his processural theory of social action (1907), from observing ritual behaviour in "primitive cultures". He had begun to discern a pattern which he felt characterized most ritual enactments, specifically in initiation rites. His term, "rites of passage" refers to a fundamental process of division which serves to illuminate and facilitate moments of cultural transition. Rites of passage rituals tend to separate changes of social status for individuals and groups according to a tripartite temporal structure. These three transitional phases are: separation, behaviour signifying a discontinuity from formal social bonds; margin or limen (coined as marginality or liminality by Turner), a realm between previous and future structural imperatives; and reaggregation, the completion of passage and reincorporation of the individual, group, or culture into a clearly defined social structure. Of particular focus for Van Gennep was the relationship between the changes of social order and their definition by temporal phases. The liminal phase was critical to the notion of rites of passage, as it provided a legitimate interstice between both structural norms of a society as well as old and new status positions, "...the possibility exists of standing aside not only from one's own social positions but from all social positions and of formulating a potentially unlimited series of alternative social arrangements." (Turner, 1974:13-14.)

What Van Gennep perceived was a consistent crosscultural script which bracketed three phase units, and endorsed a social license for innovation, subversion, and profane travesty of the prevailing social order. He observed that rites of passage provide an arena for the human need to experience ideas, values, and symbols extraneous to major structural categories of social experience of a culture. Because rites of passage rituals are bound by the normative structures of everyday experience, the temporal structure of these rituals serve to: (1) resolve social conflicts; (2) affect the status position of the individual

---

[2]Arnold Van Gennep, The Rites of Passage, trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1960).

or group enacting the ritual; (3) perpetuate the axioms of a culture without seriously disrupting them; and (4) provide a vehicle for the possible generation of alternative models for social relations which would be absorbed by a culture in the process of reaggregation.

Similarly, Turner found Van Gennep's rites of passage model pertinent to his analysis of the Ndembu tribe in Zimbabwe.[3] Virtually all of Turner's early anthropological fieldwork concentrated on discerning the applicability and implications of Van Gennep's theories on tribal myth, rituals, and cultural action. Having since become engaged in comparative studies of tribal, religious, and contemporary social processes, he argues that Van Gennep's models extend from traditional rites of passage rituals to most extra-ritual social experience. Turner developed, "an interpretation of the liminal or marginal phase as existing autonomously, an independent and sometimes enduring category of people who are 'betwixt and between'." [4] In other words, liminal phases do not only occur as temporal units in rituals, but also in social history. He recognizes specific types of individuals and social groupings who, because of their interests and pursuits, characteristically exhibit liminal tendencies. In this sense, liminality is understood as a multivocal metaphor for human sources of innovation, revitalization, and critical self-reflexiveness ("self" meaning social), and consequently social change in a cultural history.

Turner's examples of those enacting liminal, liminal-like, or anti-social gestures are directly linked to periods of social upheaval and would typically include medieval and modern millenarian or revivalist religious movements, most anarchical and innovative movements within the genres of arts, sciences, and politics, and such recent contemporary phenomena as counter-cultural and subcultural youth movements. Historically, the individuals who could be understood as liminal types include religious martyrs, shamans, gypsies, court jesters, immigrants, and all those within the natural and philosophical sciences whose theories challenged the accepted ideas of the organization of nature and its relation to man. The

---

[3]See Turner (1969). He spent two and a half years completing his early fieldwork on this tribe in what was then known as North Western Zambia.

[4]Barbara Meyerhoff, "Rites of Passage: Process and Paradox," Celebration: Studies in Festivity and Ritual, ed., Victor Turner (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institute Press, 1982), pp. 109-139.

examples of liminoid types from our modernist era include youth subcultural groups, mystics, advocates of Eastern mysticism as well as psychedelic drug usage, popular culture legends from music and arts genres, innovative theatre groups, and others.[5]

Liminality and anti-structure are positive concepts for Turner. They represent a generative centre in which cultural participants impose a meta-language, critique, or questioning of cultural standards and ideals in an attempt to validate a more meaningful and immediate social experience. Cultural forms then, are significant expressions which would be deemed anti-structural, or perhaps meaningless, to those who subscribe to a positive functionalist perspective on social organization. Because of this functionalist tendency in society and in social theory, the contributions to social process made by anti-structural or alternative movements are often ignored:

> ...what have been regarded as the "serious" genres of symbolic action - ritual, myth, tragedy, and comedy...are deeply implicated in the cyclical repetitive view of social process, while those genres which have flourished since the Industrial Revolution (the modern arts and sciences), though less serious in the eyes of the commonality (pure research, entertainment, interests of the elite) have had greater potential for changing the ways men relate to one another and the content of their relationships. Their influence has been more insidious. (Turner, 1974:16.)

Traditionally, "social" has been identified with social structural laws. His perspective argues for the recognition of two types of social expression, to be found in processural units or when the history of a society is examined over a period of time. His processural theory incorporates evidence that there is a historical link between structure and anti-structure, that social experience has a formal dimension as well as an informal and creative dimension. Because certain types of social action are only indirectly related to economic or industrial institutions of society, these liminoid genres are not disengaged from society.

---

[5]Turner distinguishes liminal phases from liminoid genres in order to make the distinction between different societies and their dominant social organizations. Liminal phases characteristically take place either in tribal or agrarian societies. Liminal phenomena are part of ritual enactments, tending to display the collective experience of a group over time. Liminoid phenomena tend to occur in complex societies where individuals can voluntarily enter into differing types of human relations. Tending to have mass cultural effects, liminoid phenomena can be collective or individually determined. Liminoid activities generally arise out of leisure activites and foster competition for recognition, and audiences hence generating subcultural and economic encumbrances. See Turner (1977:50-51).

Turner's position is central to the larger argument of this thesis. His paradigms argue for a sociologically responsible analysis of the seemingly extra-social genres of action embodied by aesthetic avant-garde movements:

> Once this [the processural view of society which would incorporate both structural and anti-structural genres of social action] has been recognized, it will be possible for the social sciences to examine more fruitfully than hitherto such cultural phenomena as art, religion, literature, philosophy, and even many aspects of law, politics, and economic behaviour which have hitherto eluded the structuralist conceptual net... . (Turner, 1974:269-270.)

Turner suggests that anti-structural symbols , rather than reflecting structure, contribute to change and the creation of new or altered structural laws which guide social behaviour.

Summary

In the late 70's, Turner was one of numerous theorists who both attended a symposium on post-modernism and contemporary performance art, and contributed essays to a journal which was dedicated to the activities, panels, and discussions which took place at the symposium. [6] In the context of academic and multi-disciplined forays into the cultural and social implications of film, theatre, performance, literature, and mixed media art, and other highly visible contemporary aesthetic forms that have recently taken on the role of event, Turner is acknowledged to have valuable insights as to why these forms play such a prominent role in our cultural landscape. He is considered to have made accessible and explored the ritualistic and expressive dimensions of contemporary aesthetic and symbolic cultural communicative forms.

On the one hand, Turner's theoretical work facilitates a recognition of liminal and liminoid genres, specific to their manifestation in expressive cultural forms, as articulations of human needs, relations, conflicts, and criticisms. He argues as to the fruitfulness of these marginal articulations as areas for

---

[6]Symposium took place in 1977. See Michel Benamou and Charles Caramello, eds., Performance: in postmodern culture,Vol 1: Theories in Contemporary Culture, centre for twentieth century studies, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (Madison, Wisconsin: Coda Press, 1980). This is the journal which documents the symposium events and includes contributative essays from a variety of disciplines.

further scientific and humanistic research. Further, his observations point to a need to recognize expressive forms of anti–structure and liminality as sites in which new visions and models for social relations are often generated. Having located cultural forms in which conflict and social transition occur, his arguments make possible the development of different theories and understandings of factors that contribute to social change. In this way, Turner gives functional and sociological credence, as well as literacy, to the expressive and symbolic domains of human communication, from tribal rituals to contemporary aesthetic and subcultural activities.

On the other hand, his work has contributed immensely to an understanding of the historic avant–garde movements and their relations to modernism, the history of modern ideas that have shaped the twentieth century, and consequently, contemporary cultural and social patterns of expression. Whereas the previous chapter discussed what can now be called the anti–structural and liminal dimensions of the historic avant–garde, the following chapter will review what Turner's perspectives suggest for a sociological theory of radical change and how the anti–structural and liminal characteristics of the aesthetic avant–garde came to effect and alter contemporary expressive forms that frame recent social experience.

CHAPTER V

REVIEW OF BERNICE MARTIN'S TREATMENT OF CONTEMPORARY CULTURAL CHANGE: AN APPLICATION OF TURNER'S THEORIES

Part one of the thesis discussed the avant-garde as a social phenomenon, as well as a cultural movement within 'modern' European history. The preceding chapter introduced those theoretical premises within Victor Turner's cultural anthropology which pertain to an understanding of social processes, particularly as they give rise to alternative and creative forms of social relationships. This chapter will synthesize these theoretical propositions. Bernice Martin's, The Sociology of Contemporary Cultural Change (1981), will be reviewed and assessed in terms of two applications to the thesis: (1) Martin's application of Victor Turner's paradigms and theories to an analysis of specific contemporary cultural movements and subcultural forms of expression; and (2) Martin' argument that the counter-cultural movements of the last few decades were heirs to a tradition of modernity which directly employed avant-garde ideological positions as well as techniques and practices which were decidedly anti-structural in nature. In this way, Martin's analysis substantiates the main premises of the thesis argument in which (1) the aesthetic avant-garde is understood as a subcultural movement, and following this, subcultural practices are analyzed in terms of the expression of social forms and alternative social relations and social practices; and (2) the contribution of the anti-structural tendencies of the aesthetic avant-garde to the artillery of practices and alternative models for social change is recognized as those exercised by counter-cultural and contemporary youth and subcultural movements.

Martin's argument can best be understood as an analysis of a cultural transformation which she believes has altered the daily practices, habits, and experience of individuals in contemporary Western society. The counter-cultural movement is identified and isolated as a major agency in the process of cultural change which has occurred in the past few decades. The successes and failures of the counter-culture are not important. Rather, the counter-culture is viewed as an international movement whose previously radical motifs have become deeply embedded in the fabric of Western culture.

Consequently, she argues against these motifs as mere moments in our social history and examines the means by which they became significant and instrumental to the symbolic vocabulary of mainstream social life.

Essentially, Martin supports Turner's suggestion that the counter-culture was one of many examples of anti-structural cultural expression in the contemporary Western world. The first section of this chapter then, will outline her theoretical premises and sources as a means of demonstrating how her sociology of radical symbolism came to embrace the theoretical insights offered by Turner.

A second section will be devoted to her interpretation of Turner's metaphors, specific to anti-structure and liminality. It will be shown that her metaphors, "ambiguity" and "infinity", imply the same parameters of meaning as liminality and anti-structure.[1] Martin's principal subject, symbolic forms of expression which characterize the interests, needs, and social relations of post-war youth movements, will be discussed in light of counter-cultural activities — anti-structural and liminal tendencies — as a cultural phenomena which expanded and reshaped the expressive potential, norms, and values of Western society.

While examining the tendencies of boundary and structural desecration which identified these counter-culture movements, Martin is most concerned with the heavily commercialized industries which grew from, and capitalized on, the expressive genres of the movements. These industries were instrumental to the incorporation of previously revolutionary symbols, which were exercised within the context of the avant-garde tradition, into the mainstream of North American and European culture by the mid-1970's. Specific attention will be given to Martin's discussion of the arts and their contributions to the commercialized culture and leisure industries. It will be argued that the cultural changes that have occurred over the last few decades reflect renewed patterns of anti-structural expressive forms which echo

---

[1] Martin frames and qualifies her thesis with passages and themes from the writings of Thomas Mann (novelist) and W.H. Auden (poet and essayist). Infinity and ambiguity derive from their writings but are used within a perspective biased by the theoretical implications of Turner. Although Mann and Auden are considered as her spiritual mentors, their contributions to the formulations of her argument are beyond the scope of this thesis.

the activities of the historic avant-garde movements of the early twentieth century. Martin suggests that the aesthetic avant-garde supplied the counter-culture, the political underground, and the student movements with alternative models for social interaction with which to initiate social change. Many of these divergent models and symbolic systems were derived from the anti-structural motifs and positions displayed by the historic avant-garde. In surveying Martin's assessment of the main agencies of cultural change during the post-war decades, examples of aesthetic and subcultural practices will be shown in order to support the viability and contemporary application of Turner's paradigms for a sociology of radical change — as evidenced in contemporary expressive cultural forms.

Martin's sociology of culture is historically and culturally specific to England. However, she argues that the most prominent features of the counter-culture movement were a continuation and permutation of the principles of Romanticism, a tradition which has been fundamental to North American and Western European culture since the advent of modernism. [2] Consequently, while Martin recognizes the pitfalls of making direct parallels between expressive forms from different cultural contexts, she points out that counter-cultural phenomenon occurred at roughly the same time in England, North America, and Western Europe. Each of these countries shared the same traditions of modernism, Romanticism, and advanced capitalism. It is on this basis that this thesis generally applies Martin's theoretical propositions and conclusions to an international experience of cultural transformations in Western culture.

Martin's Sociological Premises

As a symptom and product of processes of cultural change, the counter-cultural movement is viewed as a phenomenon which expanded and helped to shape the expressive potential of contemporary social life. Martin's primary objective is to develop a sociological interpretation of the symbolism of

---

[2]Romanticism as a 'cultural contradiction of capitalism' (Bell, 1976), and an ideological trajectory of the expressive revolution is pivotal to Martin's argument. The premises of the Romantic tradition and their relevance, or realization, as tendencies of modernism, avant-gardism, and subcultural stylistics will be discussed as necessary for the argument of the thesis.

cultural radicalism.

Martin's task is not an easy one. No single sociological or anthropological tradition accomodates cultural expression as a viable means of measuring and understanding a social history. Accordingly, she describes her search for a theoretical position as interpretive and informed from an interdisciplinary perspective. Surveying the history of the social sciences, she concludes that the rational premises coveted by sociology led to a predominant belief that mythic, symbolic, and cultural forms of expression were epiphenomenal to structural aspects of social experience.

While anthropology has concentrated on the study of primitive societies, it has been traditionally more capable of treating myth and symbol as significant. Consequently, anthropology, the sociology of religion, and the more recent discipline of cultural anthropology, contribute theoretical approaches to cultural and symbolic social experience. Weber and Durkheim, perhaps more than all other theorists of sociological and anthropological thought, inform the theoretical concern for cultural and symbolic forms of expression and their capacity to articulate social experience. Their influence is readily observable in current cultural anthropology as well as Martin's theoretical assumptions: "Like Max Weber, I am inclined to take culture seriously and to consider ideas, norms and values as powerful patterns which may facilitate, deflect, transmute and perhaps even preclude the development of possibilities which lie in the structural arrangement of societies." (Martin, 1981:1.)

Clearly, the sociological parameters necessary for an assessment of symbolic systems of meaning would necessarily be different from traditional structural or qualitative sociological analyses. Martin is convinced that culture and its expressive forms do not necessarily exist within the auspices of normative or accepted spheres of social interaction. Rather, cultural and symbolic forms of expression are often models for alternative social arrangements. Cultural forms, particularly marginal or subcultural types, more often express opposition, difference, and criticism to the larger social world and the patterns of social laws that structure a society. Hence, the emphases predominant in the social sciences render her proposed subject problematic:

> The problem was a dual one. Crudely rationalistic and, even more, crudely qualitative 'scientific' sociology often found the symbolic an embarrassment unless it could be reduced to the statistical analysis of tastes, of religious beliefs, of political attitudes and the like. The idea that cultural and symbolic behaviour might have some central relevance to life and therefore to sociological theorizing, that it might be something more fundamental than a frill or an expression of something else 'more real', were assumptions equally foreign to vulgar positivist and vulgar Marxist prejudice. The slippery Protean nature of the symbolic was the other half of the problem. (Martin, 1981:30–31.)

There is a distinct similarity between Martin and Turner's arguments against the rationalist and positivist tendency in the social sciences to view a society and its cultural forms from the perspective of its normative structural definition. [3] Of equal importance is the similarity between her reading of Weber and Victor Turner's argument that social relations are dynamic — that human experience originates in and sustains processes involving change in social relations, independent of and interdependent with, structural relations.

Finally, the problems inherent in determining meaning in symbolic systems of communication, precisely because of the impossibility to reduce symbols to simple and unqualified meanings, is acknowledged. It will be shown that much of her sociological argument is directed towards an understanding of the interpretation and perception of symbolic systems as they articulate social relations in cultural forms of expression. Martin attempts to construct a sociological approach to the radical symbols which comprise much of post–war subcultural expression. The most characteristic feature of these movements is an anti–structural vocabulary (which includes gestures, symbols, and rituals), in themselves symptoms, heralds, and agents of structural changes in Western societies. She emphasizes Turner's concern with the forces that give way to differentiation of cultural experience and expression, the means by which subversive rituals and symbols function as a cohesive measure for smaller collectives within society, and the processes which legitimate and diffuse a radical vocabulary of expression within social practice.

---

[3]Refer to Chapter Three of the thesis (pp. 42–52), which outlines Turner's disdain for a purely structural and static interpretation of social forms. Turner's paradigms and observations are fundamental to Martin's analysis. This will become evident within the progression of this section and chapter of the thesis.

In short, Martin synthesizes and applies Turner's argument. Liminal moments and anti-structural movements have the potential to act as mediums for shifts in cultural experience, whether affecting subtle or dramatic change. Turner's dialectical model for social change is considered by Martin to be an appropiate alternative or addition to the limitations that she feeels exist in traditional structural approaches to sociology.

An Approach to Symbolic or Mythic Forms of Cultural Phenomena

The Nature of Cultural Symbols

A major hurdle which confronts any attempt to assess cultural symbols from a sociological perspective is, "the slippery Protean nature of the symbolic". (Martin, 1981:30.) Symbols and myths representing cultural experience can rarely be reduced to one definitive translation. Connotations attached to symbols make a verbal or analytic explanation complicated. This is particularly true of cultural symbols and, more importantly, the nature of culture. This point is crucial to Martin's hypothesis in which she insists that "...culture is a receptacle for symbolic artifacts which, once historically created, can be and indeed inevitably are recharged over time with new permutations of symbolic meaning and relevance." (Martin, 1981:28.) This concept of cultural process echoes a point argued in the first chapter of the thesis: that the avant-garde, as a metaphor for a certain type of social consciousness, carried different resonances of meaning due to historical re-contextualizations which emphasized changing social, aesthetic, political, and psychological functions. The significant meaning of a cultural symbol changes according to a changed historical context, altered rules and practices of articulation, and altered needs, associations, or perceptions imposed by those individuals for whom these symbols are significant.

Ambiguity, the metaphor Martin uses to indicate the unlimited potentials operative in symbolic systems, perhaps best describes how symbols carry layers and permutations of meaning. Ambiguity is considered to parallel the expressive and interpretive potential that is suggested by Turner's concept of liminality. Correspondingly, ambiguity is meant to imply that realm of human experience which is

expressed and experienced outside the domains of social structure. Ambiguity is a difficult term because it addresses the multi-vocal nature of symbolic systems of meaning and is used in a variety of contexts which carry different implications. [4]

Symbolic phenomenon is not merely ambiguous by interpretation, it also creates ambiguity. The mere categorization of social experience with a symbolic device partly domesticates experience which would otherwise be outside definition (what Martin calls the infinite, or chaos). Regardless of the multiplicity of meaning, or residual meaning that a symbol imparts, its identification and use acts as one of many frames for human experience. In her emphasis on the protean nature of the symbol, as well as its function in the categorization of human social reality, she cites Paul Ricoeur who focuses on the ambiguity of the extra-linguistic symbol: "It is the raison d'etre of symbolism to disclose the multiplicity of meaning out of the ambiguity of being." (Martin, citing Ricoeur, 1981:29.)

Three Fundamental Propositions that Frame Martin's Argument

One of three premises that underly the argument is the assumption that man is a symbol-using animal who employs tools of classification in order to organize and structure experience. Rather than assess symbolic usage from a rationalist perspective (i.e., what are the explicit meanings underlying a symbolic form), Martin is interested in how symbols are used to represent social experience. In this way, much of her analysis stems from the recently recognized sociological discipline in which culture and society are considered to be constructed, organized, and framed by social experience.[5]

---

[4]The notion that symbols are multi-vocal by interpretation is pivotal to Turner's analysis of cultural and symbolic expression in social history. He argues that one symbol might represent many relations of ideas from a variety of conceptual domains and historical moments of social experience. He refutes the belief that symbolic references reveal a single logical order. Thus, he rejects the use of structuralism as an exclusive model for discerning meaning in mythic or ritualistic behaviour. Martin has precisely the same argument against semiological analyses of culture, particularly those theories which draw from the insights of de Saussure, and more recently, Levi Strauss: that the ambiguity and cultural implications for symbolic meaning make it very difficult to analytically determine the precise signifier and signified of a symbol.

[5]Recognized as the 'Sociology of Knowledge'. This reference pertains to the writings of Peter Berger, Thomas Luckmann, Erving Goffman, Dan Sperber, and Clifford Geertz.

Peter Berger's discussion of "marginal" social experience is central to understanding the motives underlying the framing of social experience as perceived social realities. He employs the term "nomos" to refer to the symbolic construction of systems of meaning, and the term "anomie", to refer to the threatening and unknown aspects of unnamed, or simply non-practiced, social experience. (Martin, citing Berger, 1981:3.) Berger understands nomos and anomie as polarities in the social perception of social realities. Essentially, Berger's terms parallel Turner's metaphors for modalities of social experience, structure and anti-structure. Integrating Berger and Turner's observations, Martin equates anomie with ambiguity — consequently, ambiguity represents all that structure and order is not. Symbolic devices are understood as boundaries erected against alternative and threatening realities — a means by which members of society construct and selectively share cultural meaning.

Certain notions taken from the work of Dan Sperber and Clifford Geertz are central to Martin's analysis of the way in which symbols and their content are shared between members of a given culture. Although employing different metaphors, these two theorists share similar theoretical models for discerning the process by which symbolic forms articulate cultural meaning. Whereas Sperber emphasizes the implicit knowledge carried in "conceptual representations", Geertz advocates what he calls a "thick description" of cultures, in which symbols implicitly impart conceptual knowledge, classifications, and associations which interact at a variety of levels to inform and motivate individuals to act in culturally correct ways.

Sperber argues that symbols cannot be understood by applying the same structures or codes of representation that govern language usage. Rather, he proposes that the symbolic be conceived of as a "cognitive phenomenon", a form of implicit knowledge which is composed of complex representations and metaphors. In other words, a symbol cannot be reduced to translated correlates of unequivocal meaning, but must be viewed as extensions and articulations of incomplete interpretations. Further, Sperber suggests that the symbolic operates as a process in which attention is focused on metaphoric evocation. In this way, meaning is metaphorically constructed, resembling the implicit coherence suggested by the concept "bricolage" (concept derived from Levi-Strauss), as well as Martin's discussion of the Protean

nature of the symbolic. Sperber discusses the process whereby cultural classifications of conceptual representations are integrated implicitly into symbol systems. In effect, he suggests that implicit knowledge fills the gaps which exist in fragmented systems of cultural classifications which have accepted meanings. Knowledge at the evocative level is incomplete, merely an assorted collection of classifications and symbols which change the coherency of perception through use. Thus, symbolic systems are cumulative, contingent upon knowledge implicitly and explicitly carried by members of the culture at different points in time.

Martin is committed to the idea that man's symbolic activities are essential to human nature and primarily employed to order and define social reality. This notion draws from Geertz's premises. Geertz argues that the way in which symbols are shared and experienced by individuals and social groups is essential to understanding the function and perception of symbolic representation:

> The drive to make sense out of experience, to give it form and order, is evidently as real and pressing as the more familiar biological needs. And this being so, it seems necessary to continue to interpret symbolic activities – religion, art, ideology – as something other than what they seem to be: attempts to provide orientation for an organism which cannot live in a world it is unable to understand. If symbols, to adapt a phrase of Kenneth Burke's, are strategies for encompassing situations, then we need to give more attention to how people define situations and how they go about coming to terms with them. (Martin, citing Geertz, 1981:33–34.)

Geertz not only insists that symbolic activities are fundamental to the articulation of human life experience, he emphasizes the role that "motivation" plays in symbolic processes and their social interpretation. Geertz proposes that while a symbol evokes concepts, it also imparts an "aura" of motivations and feelings which "lie in the realm of the vaguely felt". (Martin, citing Geertz, 1981:34.) Cultural symbols, in this view, cooperate as systems of content which govern the significance and patterns of interpretation of the symbolic form. Geertz's observations reinforce the notion that cultural symbols are conceptually imperfect, subconscious, and ambiguous while contributing to a coherent system of information that effectively informs the moods and actions of men.

The second premise of Martin's argument is organized around a notion that the human condition is decidedly ambiguous. Society, as a whole, as well as its myriad of social groupings, provide individuals

with both a sense of community and dictate appropriate social behaviour and correct interpretations of social experience. [6] In other words, sacred spheres, including behaviour that is sanctified as correct, operate also as a "negative and controlling" force. (Martin citing Durkheim, 1981:35.) [7]

Martin's third premise argues that it is precisely these contradictions of human experience that are articulated by symbolic forms of communication. In encountering ambiguity, we try to invoke order and meaning by conceptually representing experience with conceptual symbols whose very nature is ambiguous and incomplete.

However, Martin stresses that ambiguity is not meaningless, per se. Rather, symbols still function as communicative tools, as "codes", which are understood by cultural members who share a symbolic and conceptual vocabulary. Symbols operate as systems and codes, however, her defined systems differ from that of language structure in the semiological perspective. Systems and codes are interpreted as operating informally and changing according to the needs of communities using them:

> At one level, therefore, they [symbols] must be treated as codes which follow certain rules and which rely on a knowledge – albeit largely implicit – of the shared praxis of social and conceptual classification. (I use 'praxis' rather than 'principles' here in acknowledgement of the fact, stressed by Sperber, that systematic uncovering of the implicit principles is seldom culturally institutionalized:the principles are normally embedded in practice.) In a loose rather than a strictly semiological sense then, symbols form codes, the rules and definitions of which are subject to constant change through use. (Martin, 1981:36.)

Examples of systems of cultural communication which operate in this way are commonplace. They include those classifications through which we discern the difference between cultural forms such as dance, music, painting, religion, etc.. These examples do not share formal rules or definitions but are implicit. They are practiced in such a way that permutations of certain dance forms, for example, are, through usage, accepted and perceived as established cultural symbols.

---

[6]This position is indebted to Durkheim's discussion of contradictions that exist in social life. More specifically, Martin draws from his interpretation of the effects of aspects of social life that are deemed sacred by society — that the sacred is a symbolic arena in which the binding force of shared ideas are celebrated and yet remains out of bounds for members of that society.

[7]One is reminded of Turner's discussion of paradox and contradictory meanings exhibited in the enactment of rituals. Turner's interpretation of how conceptually contradictory symbols operate in ritual activities will be discussed in the following pages.

Martin defines symbolic systems as informal and culturally practiced systems of meaning. Each symbol implies a range of multiple polarities or conceptual opposites (multiple because, as argued above, symbols are ambiguous and multi-vocal). In this sense, Martin draws from Levi-Strauss' model of binary opposites that comprise a conceptual logic for cultural systems. Similarly, Turner argues that rituals consist of two polarities of conceptual orders of references. From his perspective, one symbolic pole is concerned with social rules and normative classifications of social order. The opposite set of symbolic references represents the expressive and sensory needs of a human physical nature. As mentioned previously, he views the ritual process as a symbolic arena for the exchange and resolution of two diametrically opposed, but symbiotic typologies of human concerns and social expressions. The articulation of the dual implications of symbols serves to transcend socially conceived relations of difference and to reinforce a sense of community.[8]

In order to understand the usage of symbols, particularly as they are used in radically different ways, Turner's paradigms provide models for perceiving the nature of symbol systems and the consequent potential for inversions of symbols and their interpretation. As such, Martin's metaphors correspond closely to Turner's paradigms structure and anti-structure. Whereas Turner's models are "grand", and meant to theoretically encompass a variety of symbolic implications, Martin's symbolic polarities are specific to more precise nuances of conceptual meaning. They include: society/individual, external/internal, structure/formlessness, order/disorder, control/freedom, boundaries/boundarylessness, hierarchy/equality.

Viewed separately, each symbol within each set, relies upon its symbolic opposite to qualify and impart meaning — one concept cannot be fully understood without its opposite. Consequently, systems of symbolism impart a "double sense" — a symbiotic relation inherent in the system of dualities which

---

[8]What Turner would call 'communitas'. Communitas is defined as the characterization of relationships particular to liminal aspects of the ritual process. Communitas represents anti-structural social bonds which differ from the everyday experience of comraderie. Turner states that, 'It [communitas] tends to ignore, reverse, cut across, or occur outside of structural relationships.' Turner, (1974:274.) Thus, communitas is generally spontaneous, concrete, non-teleological, and considered the real source of the relations between social, cultural, and marginal systems.

makes precise interpretation difficult: "...thus one ineradicable ambiguity of symbol systems rests in that symbiosis." (Martin, 1981:37.)

The function of a symbolic system is to reinforce values held by a social group. The act of celebrating a socially valued symbol recalls its association with certain dominant social ideas. This process tends to stigmatize the possibility of associating the inverted polarity with the socially valued polarity of a symbol. Symbolic activity neutralizes the potential of the "negative" concept. However, this pattern of symbolic validation is not necessarily an effective means of promoting and maintaining the hierarchical position of one dominant and acceptable symbolic meaning:

> Any symbol of legitimation is ... in double danger. First it must draw attention to the polar opposite in the classification system ... and second, it points up the imperfections where the present actuality and an ideal version of that actuality fail to coincide. In short, the same symbol simultaneously and necessarily masks the reality. (Martin, 1981:38.)

The Consequences of the Use of Symbolic Systems as Mediators of Social Interests

Ambiguity cannot be said to dominate the outcome of social relations. A perfect correspondence rarely exists between symbolic systems and the group that employs them to represent their needs and interests. [9] However, it is argued that an, "elective affinity" correlates the pattern of social relations in a group or a society and its pattern of symbolic expression. (Martin, 1981:38.) It is precisely this affinity which provides a body of symbolic forms through which social experience is negotiated. Assumedly then, the patterns which exist between social relations and vocabularies of symbolic systems are fundamental to social process. Thus, the social relations which arise from the tensions and ambiguities which typify symbol systems should be a primary object of study to those interested in social change.

---

[9]Martin makes it very clear that symbolic systems should not be viewed from a simplistic and functionalist perspective. Consequently, she also rejects the argument of the Frankfurt School and its intellectual traditions — the argument that cultural expressions of the radical kind are representations of a struggle with 'capitalist cultural hegemony'. She calls this argument, as well as one which would reduce alternative sub-cultures to reactions against class, 'absolutist'. (Martin, 1981:38)

Clearly, symbol systems tend to express either satisfaction or frustration with social systems, in interaction with particular political and economic relations of power. For symbol systems to facilitate communicative power, they too, become institutionalized in the process of drawing upon available social resources. The success and effectiveness of symbol systems as communicative forms depends upon the strength embodied by their institutionalization as well as the social demands for other symbolic forms of communication.

Several characteristic techniques are listed in which discontent with aspects of a social system are symbolically expressed. Her initial discussion is of symbolic forms that offer, "...the experience of hope and euphoria through the creation of an alternative sacred centre in the effervescent social solidarity of the out-group." (Martin, 1981:39.) Political movements serve as an example of subcultural bonds which are sustained by alternative symbols. As well, the counter-culture's major symbols of individualism and anti-structure bonded its participants in a subculture which was opposed to traditional social values.

The second characteristic means by which symbols are used to suggest alternate social relations is achieved by an inverted interpretation of symbol systems. This is the tendency to exchange accepted symbolic polarities for the negative symbol (refers to the binary nature of symbolic systems already discussed). However, because of the multiplicity of interpretations that one symbol system may invoke, this is not as simple as it seems. The potential range of interpretation of a symbol system is vast and may consist of many contradictory images.

Another type of inversion redefines a sacred model as existing in a profane realm. A symbol must first become universally available (most notably through marketing and the media) in order for it to be used as a "transgression of" the previously sacred symbol by a marginal group. The most obvious examples of this type of redefinition and use of previously tabooed images occurs in popular music, most notably in the oppositional symbolism of "cock", "glitter", and "metal" "rock" music of the late 1970's. (In fact, all rock-and-roll traditions display this anti-structural symbolic inversion.)

Escape is the third technique which is metaphorically termed the "infinity" and the "abyss" to refer to the phenomenon of symbolic escape from the dominant ideals of society, which was so popular during the 60's and 70's emphasis on drug use, communal living, and sexuality. (Martin, 1981:40.) The counter-culture, due to its dominant ideology of individualism and use of drugs and sexuality as sacred but escapist metaphors is a blatant example of a subcultural use of the "atavistic moment". [10] Three major sources for subjective escape are listed: sex, sacred experiences (religion, mysticism, and drugs), and violence. All three sources are problematic as they tend to be intrinsic to society and, thus, contained by the institutions of marriage, the military, and religions. Either these same symbols are framed and neutralized by social institutions or used to represent powerful experiences of alternative social relations. Depending upon whether an institution or an alternative group claims these symbolic arenas, symbols can be used to reinforce social structure or can be used as anti-structural symbols. More than anyothers, these central symbols can attract a profane order of activities:

> They are the central foci in religion and the arts because of the intensity and range of their symbolic message... . Clifford Geertz's penetrating analysis of cock fighting in Bali is a perfect example of the process of ritualizing just the most powerful and tabooed forces (sexuality and animality) into a rigidly framed and codified sacred game. (Martin, 1981:40.)

The institutionalization of anti-structural symbols into an acceptable activity of Balinese culture is just one example of the means by which societies convert potentially threatening symbols. This same process of symbolic conversion often serves to reinforce the dominant values which characterize the existing society.

Adorno argues that capitalist societies are singularly adept at aligning symbols which represent alternative social experience with life-style commodities orientated to specific markets. Martin argues that all societies share this tendency. However, capitalism has its own particular method of neutralizing the negative potential of anti-structural symbols. Their conclusions about this process differ substantially. Adorno's position is critical in that capitalism creates the illusion that consumer relations, in the context of the leisure market, are real human relations. Therefore, these relations are mystified and false, at the

---

[10]Daniel Bell and Theodor Adorno's discussions of the atavistic moment through subjective and cultural forms of experience are well known. Whereas Bell believes that the pursuit of individual experience is an escape from society, Adorno argues that the escape is from the conditions of capitalist social relations. Martin believes that subcultural and symbolic forms of escapism are phenomena which are not intrinsic to capitalist societies alone.

same time as securing individuals to the marketplace and its system of economic relations. The illusion of choice and escape is fostered, purely because of their seductive powers of symbolic relations, by the economic structure of capitalism. Nonetheless, Martin's primary interest remains with the ambiguity that colours the illusionistic images that capitalism promotes. This ambiguity rests on (1) the nature of the symbolic process itself; and (2) the precarious position that the dominant social structure must take in relation to the alternative symbolic images that it endorses.

A few questions arise from her observations. Firstly, is the process of symbolic commodification strictly a constructed image which only serves to reinforce the vested interests of a society? Following this, how does one account for the emergence of subcultural groups which exist only because they have enlarged their social voice with anti-structural symbols predicated on hopes of alternative social relations? Secondly, can one assume that symbols of disorder and chaos wield the potential to affect social relations, regardless of their appropriation by established social institutions? It is argued that symbols acquire power primarily through institutionalization. Symbols become imbued with the interests of their institution as well as the sentiments of the social group that the symbol originally represented. Undoubtedly, once institutionalized, threatening symbols are either compromised (their potential), or their potential is diffused. However, small but effective shifts in consciousness are likely to take place. Analyses of historical change in institutional policies and practices tend to support this assertion, as does the theoretical implications for change in Turner's processural view of social history.

A paradoxical tension often governs the relationship between symbolic systems and their institutionalization. A self-defeating pursuit of power would be the extreme form of this tension. For example, individualism was the dominant idea and symbol of the counter-culture movement, which expressed itself within the context of subcultural relations — in opposition to — society. Weber's discussion of the institutionalization of charismatic figures in the sociology of religion illustrates how the original meaning of a symbol can be absolved within this process. In attempting to attract a larger social voice and audience the charasmatic figure attracts an institutional form. In doing so, the original potency of his/her message and personage is lost within the structure of the movement.

Perhaps the extreme consequence of this social phenomena is what Kenneth Burke terms the "principle of entelechy" — the attempt to diminish ambiguous tensions between symbolic meaning systems and their institutional forms. Essentially, this can be understood as a nihilistic reduction of symbols or ideas to an absolute or abstract form. For example, the belief in individualism would refuse its invocation in a group, community, or society. Martin states that while attempting to dispell ambiguity, this form of reductionism invites total confusion. In destroying the binary function of a symbol system, this process logically leads to meaninglessness, and hence, destroys communication. While this process has been entertained by numerous avant-garde movements, notably Dada, the consequences have never been quite this drastic. Instead, the anti-structural symbols are over-emphasized, contributing to their becoming, "...the symbolic focus of belonging, the sacred language of identity for a new, purified community which stands over against unregenerate society, a new spiritual elite set apart from the children of darkness." (Martin, 1981:42.)

Most millenarian and contemporary subcultural movements identify themselves in just this way, a phenomenon which Mircea Eliade terms the "myth of the elite". Eliade observes that any individual capable of perceiving the entelechial principle which dictates certain avant-garde anti-structural expression takes the position of being a member of the "elite". A member has, "...the advantage of being at once spiritual and secular in that it [the movement or subculture] opposes both official values and the traditional churches." (Martin, citing Eliade, 1981:43.) But, he argues that this position is an attempt to escape social reality into a mythic or sacred time. In essence, avant-garde movements that pursue this elitist stance in relation to the uninitiated (society) anticipate a renewal of symbolic and artistic forms, a chaotic regression to primitivism. It is precisely because of this intrinsic pursuit for a new Utopian state, or redefinition of symbolic codes, that he sees similarities between the modern avant-garde and initiation rites of archaic or primitive societies.[11]

---

[11]Poggioli's discussion of the motivations underlying the four psychological postures of the avant-garde (Poggioli, 1968), and Eliade's suggestion that the myth of the elite is a central factor of the avant-garde's subcultural existence are strikingly similar. In particular, Poggioli introduces notions that include the myth of renewal, and an elitist position in which self-sacrifice is endorsed in active anticipation of social change. Poggioli, too, perceives the avant-garde as representing an escape from existing social conditions into sacred or mythic

The Arts: Martin's Discussion of the Avant-Garde

As noted previously, Martin considers the expressive forms and techniques of the avant-garde the crucible of anti-structural activities which informed the counter-culture and more recent youth movements. Perhaps the most consistent feature of subcultural activities since the mid-twentieth century has been the tendency to attack sacred and symbolic boundaries of social conventions which frame the experience and identity of society's members. Traditional values and inherited assumptions were viewed as repressive forms of social control by the counter-culture, whose members saw themselves as prophets who could free society by subverting and violating traditional forms of social order.

These attacks on what Martin calls "boundaries of control", were also performed by avant-garde artists of the 1960's. Issues of form and style had long since been relegated to history in lieu of iconoclastic attempts to expand arenas for aesthetic expression.

While shocking to the majority of society's members, none of these gestures of attack were new to the 1960's. Martin argues that the counter-culture and avant-garde were heirs to a tradition of Romanticism which originated with the onset of modernism in the nineteenth century. Not one anti-structural gesture displayed in the 60's was truly innovative, but were derivations of the same techniques that had been explored within Romanticism or its various branches of modernist aesthetic traditions, most notably the historic avant-garde. The significance of the generation of "enfants terribles" of the 1960's and 1970's lay in their success at pushing subversion techniques to such an extreme that the attention of a larger audience was gained — that of society itself.

The Romantic movement originated with the development of industrial capitalism, marking the beginning of the modernist era. A major shift took place in the sphere of production which removed craft skills from the patronage system of the church, court, and aristocracy (all artistic activity had previously been highly integrated into these traditional systems) and placed them within an open market. As well,

---

[11](cont'd) experience through a manipulation of symbolic systems.

all modes of production became differentiated, specialized, and semi-autonomous. The conception of art and artist radically changed. No longer bound by tradition, many aesthetic subjects and pursuits became possible. However, the buyer now controlled production, a condition which detached the artist from the economic sphere and contributed to the creation of what Martin calls "...'the new cultural class', ...defined by their purely expressive raison d'etre. In short, they became expert producers of liminal images, exactly as Turner argues." (Martin, 1981:86.) Liminal is used here, in the sense that artists were no longer integral or functional within social, economic, or traditonal cultural production. Artists were "betwixt and between" social relations.

The concept bohemianism did not exist prior to this shift in artistic production. Prior to this time, there was no relationship between the image of an artist and a particular type of lifestyle. Bohemianism is a modern invention, a pervasive concept which lies behind the endorsement of change in stylistic frontiers that is so characteristic of our century. In this century, the bohemian lifestyle has come to be just as representative of artistic creativity as artistic activity. This notion has been important to all counter and youth cultures since, particularly those that aspired to eliminate the distinction between life and art by incorporating aesthetics into a pop stylistic.

All modern aesthetic movements are viewed as logical extensions of the Romantic movement. Martin's discussion of the characteristics of Romanticism recalls Calinescu's assertion that the avant-garde movements be understood as varying reactions to traditional aesthetics and social assumptions, as well as to the ideas of modernism. The mythic image of Janus is used to illustrate the ideological concerns of Romanticism. One side of the face represents the Romantic inclination for disorder and ecstasy. The other, representing classicism and traditionalism, displays order and control. Janus is a useful model in that he, too, is of the order of a symbolic system of meaning. The modern arts have tended to favour the "negative" symbols in this symbol system, disregarding the sacrosanct.

Subversive Options of the Avant- Garde

Shortly after the inception of Romanticism and the modernist era, it became clear that the consistent violation of traditional aesthetic forms would have the effect of destroying form itself (already discussed by Martin as the logical extension of ambiguity, achieved by pursuing the principle of entelechy to an extreme). A formal and technical impasse was recognized by early twentieth century artists. This same formal problem has been recognized at numerous points in the history of modern art.[12] Historically, three distinct directions have been taken as options for rerouting the Romantic aesthetic canons.

The first has been described as the principle of entelechy. Martin calls this the "breaking of the code"; the destruction of form which is achieved by invoking ambiguity to an extreme. Schoenberg's experiment with atonality is an example of this deliberate exercise in reductionism, initiated by a complete violation of the traditional rules governing composition. As mentioned previously, the Dada movement is a good example of this option, as it shattered the aesthetic traditions in existence up until 1912 (approximately). More important though, is the use that aesthetic and subcultural movements since, have made of Dada techniques of subversion. For Martin, the Dada movement cannot be underestimated for its effect on the expressive enclaves of modernism:

> Dada deliberately embraced meaninglessness, incomprehensibility, the destruction of art itself, in a gesture which, with studied ambiguity, might be a joke, a revolutionary cry, a ritual of purification or a signal of in-group elitism. Dada is one of the most powerful influences - far more powerful than Marx, for instance - on the aims and techniques of the counter-culture of the 1960's in its recipes for the disruption and destruction of codes and its equation of meaninglessness with ultimate meaning. (Martin, 1981:83.)

The second option is often exercised within the wake of excessive iconoclasm and consequent dissolution of a particular aesthetic form. At this stage, a need for order becomes a solution to the exhaustion of an old style or tradition. Most often, radically new points of departure are inititiated, which tend to be based on an aspect of experimentation left unresolved by the preceding avant-garde. For

---

[12]The most recent example is the use of the term postmodernism, to designate a shift in aesthetic emphases in the early 1980's. Postmodernism represents a strategic attempt to avoid a similar impasse by redirecting and redefining the frames for contemporary aesthetic expression. See pages 80-87, as well as the Conclusion of the thesis for a discussion of postmodernism and strategies for contemporary cultural production.

example, Schoenberg's twelve tone musical notation system was considered a formal but innovative idiom, which followed the period of studied ambiguity in which he experimented with atonality. As a characteristic stage in the history of modern art, order and convention became the solutions to the anti-structural impasse of the avant-garde.

The third is essentially a sub-section of the second option and is characterized by a "play on", or focus, on a particular tradition or materials used for aesthetic expression. As a preoccupation with form itself, this pursuit often displaces the subject matter for a meditative concern with processes. This activity, considered by many to be a process of dehumanization, tends to disassociate the artist and audience from a direct involvement with the subject and emphasizes a cerebral manipulation of process, activity, or materials of aesthetic production. Martin suggests that this particular technique is a primary source for irony and narcissism in modern cultural and aesthetic production. Jorge Lois Borges is a practitioner of a slick and playful treatment of either a single subject and its cultural ramifications or the narrative form in which he works, "...whose play on the machismo legend serves to puncture by ironically celebrating the coercive Romanticism of that particular myth. Alternately, it can become high (or low) camp, as in pop art, where no one knows whether the magnification of admass vulgarity is a wry comment on the form or an excuse to enjoy its shiny shallow content." (Martin, 1981:84.) Warhol is a similar case in point, in the sense that his work has always led to confusion as to whether he was cerebrally or socially incestuous, simply vacuuous or socially very astute, addressing high art or popular culture concerns/audiences, or, composing a witty and self-possessed charicature of commercial idolatry.

As an objective shift to considerations intrinsically pertaining to the process of making art, this pursuit also produced traditions of minimalism, primitivism, abstraction, and certain genres of conceptual art.

A variation on this third option for redirecting aesthetic forms has only recently occurred, due to a growing awareness on the part of the avant-garde of theoretical developments in the social sciences. In particular, structuralism had a large impact on certain avant-garde traditions. Fascinated by the idea that

expressive codes (like language) have their own structural rules, many artists took the position that they, as artists, were only tools for an independent and autonomous communication process. Artists, writers, and film-makers believed that if they destroyed the code, only then would they be guaranteed a truly creative aesthetic role. Members of the "nouveau roman" and "nouvelle vague" movements attempted to enact this "...counter-terror of the terrorism of language". (Martin, citing Robbe-Grillet, 1981:84.) Martin considers these attempts ironic as these artists were merely repeating traditions of anti-structure and deliberate ambiguity. The impasse was not challenged or met. Rather, the result was a self-conscious layering of anti-structural symbolism which further divorced the communication process from the artist.

Style

Prior to the late nineteenth century, aesthetic techniques and styles changed very gradually, always in response to specific social change or technical developments which affected the material production of particular art forms. Style and function, which had previously been taken for granted, became aesthetic issues only with the onset of modernity. Modernism sanctified change as its official canon. Martin suggests that this "positive" attitude was due, on the one hand, to the nature of industrial society and the necessity to adapt to the rapidly increasing acceleration of change in technology and social organization. On the other hand, she credits the Romantic preference for innovation over convention as having a decided affect upon the central feature of modernism, in which "...style as the taken for granted, inherited way of doing things, learned from the master and enshrined in common practice, gave way to a contest of styles in which innovation and originality came to be valued for their own sakes." (Martin, 1981:86.)

Clearly, the proliferation of styles which characterizes our age of modernism leads to a problem of interpretation. If, as Martin argues, art is a form of communication as a system of signs, the audience must be literate in the code or language of a particular aesthetic style. This same point was argued by Gombrich, whose discussion of Impressionism and its implications for audience interpretation caused a

dilemma of how to view art at quite an early stage in the history of aesthetic modernism. (Martin, 1981:86.) The Impressionists were innovative in that they were concerned with representing, with paint, what the human eye truly sees in differing light conditions. The attempt to eradicate memory and traditional modes of perception from painted representations were missed by audiences who could only perceive the images from established conventions of painting. The audience had to adjust to another way of "seeing" in order to understand what the Impressionists were painting.

Thus, every new style of aesthetic expression must be accompanied by shifts in interpretation and perception in order for communication to occur. Because of the proliferation of styles in our contemporary world, Martin suggests that the problem of interpretation has become a permanent feature of our social experience, particularly as it relates to subcultural and aesthetic activity. This has given rise to a flood of competitive styles within the avant-garde, a penchant for stylistic differentiation which serves to reinforce elitism and accelerate shifts from one stylistic device to another. With reference to Ezra Pound's belief that art resembles a series of cliches (cited on p. 36 of the second chapter of the thesis), Martin states that, "Being different and confounding the philistine and bourgeois become signs (if not the automatic guarantee) that one is on the right creative lines: as soon as the public adopts a new code it is time to find another." (Martin, 1981:87.) In other words, avant-garde movements are aesthetically "correct" when premised on an obscurity and ambiguity of communicative codes. Once an audience outside the privileged aesthetic collective is capable of reading, seeing, or hearing — interpreting — these codes, other stylistic devices are pursued.

On the other hand, this tendency towards an inaccessibility of meaning does not contribute to communication per se. Rather, many avant-garde styles tend to compete for obscurity, establishing a commentative metacommunication between members of distinct stylistic genres. In order to maintain this "discussion" or "game", movements are forced to promote an understanding of their intentions and aesthetic codes amongst the art community. The result of the attempts, by the avant-garde, to validate and, at the same time, communicate the intentions underlying ambiguous gestures, was most obvious in the 1960's and 70's. At this time, art and language groups as well as certain genres of avant-garde music

emerged, issuing symbolic and linguistic theories and thick instruction manuals to accompany their aesthetic activity and guide audiences and performers, alike, through the interpretation and performance of their work. Artists no longer believed themselves capable of communicative expression through strict aesthetic forms and felt the need to supplement their activities with theoretical explanations. Martin argues that this tendency led to an inversion of aesthetic communicative practices, in that an emphasis was placed on form over content in the context of linguistic form functioning as aesthetic activity.

This practice became pushed to its logical extreme. Art objects became more minimal while their theoretical foundations became more elaborate (i.e. conceptual and language art of the 1960's and 70's). The important point to be made here, is that once an audience understands the legitimating theory, it is capable of perceiving and imposing meaning on even the simplist of art objects (i.e. minimalism) by virtue of its theoretical implications. This is a necessary stage in the development of a style, from its obscurity, to its establishment through recognition, to its rejection. Called the "principle of infolding" by Arthur Koestler, this process is related to Burke's principle of entelechy as well as Gombrich's belief that each stylistic deviance is premised on an attempt to resolve a problem made evident in the preceding style. Koestler argues that there are two options available once an aesthetic style has been established. It must either pursue a logical exaggeration or a minimalism of expressive intentions. This stylistic process is inherent in the fundamental ideas of modernism and is descriptive of both cultural and aesthetic stylistic development. As well, it illustrates the process through which systems of symbols are communicated between the avant-garde and its audience:

> Given the high value that modern culture places on originality, every repetition brings only ennui - hence what he [Koestler] calls the 'law of diminishing returns'. Koestler sees the second of these options , the technique of streamlining or minimizing the constituent elements in the style, as the source of a recurrent tendency to leave more of the creative process to the audience/reader/consumer. It's a common stage in the development of a style. (Martin, 1981:89.)

Koestler reasons that styles, once accepted, must take one of these options to avoid redundancy and maintain an innovative status.

Martin believes that styles fall into the realm of "cognitive phenomenon" (concept adapted from Geertz), rather than operate simply according to an infolding process. Once a particular code and its theoretical underpinnings are established, more and more of the artist's code or intentions are implicitly understood by an audience. Because of the implicit nature of the communicative system, the audience perceives aesthetic codes as a "particular cueing system". Further, the notion of audience participation in the creative process is a tacit technique of boundary violation, rather than a consequence of the process of infolding. As a particular characteristic of the avant-garde theatre, happening, performance art, music, etc., the subversion of traditional spatial and conceptual relationships between a performer and an audience has become a well defined style in the contemporary history of modern art.

In the past few years, the merging of different art forms and hence, of different expressive codes, has added a new dimension to the process of interpretation. The blurring of boundaries between once distinctly different art media has made it necessary to interpret an artists intentions by amalgamating two or more systems of symbols. Thus, depending upon an audiences respect for the traditional definitions of art forms, avant-garde art is either perceived as totally ambiguous and nonsensical, or, by experiencing a work through the necessary codes, is considered a rewarding and rich experience. More importantly, Martin views the integration of art media as evidence of another Romantic anti-structural technique: the destruction of boundaries between art genres themselves.

Again, although multi or mixed media events were common pursuits of the Dada, Futurist, and Surrealist groups in the 1920's and 1930's, the integration of aesthetic, theoretical, and political activities since the 1960's has expanded and, to a large extent, blurred the boundaries between art and culture. Perhaps more than any one factor, this anti-structural and anti-definitive strategy has contributed to "...an evolved Modern system of perception, or even, a Modern attitude of looking." (Sischy and Celant, 1982:34) The marketplace, flooded with stylistic differentiation, has become an arena which challenges the audience to comprehend varied cueing systems, folk and aesthetic histories, and symbolic dialogues which are charged with cumulative histories of information. In using the term marketplace, Martin refers to two interrelated processes within the realms of: (1) aesthetics; and (2) marketing and commerce. Firstly, she

refers to Koestler's principle of infolding, in which, operating at an accelerated rate since the 1960's, styles quickly exhaust themselves as innovative expressions. Secondly, she refers to the changing relationship between the positions of the avant-garde and popular or mass culture. Either realm is characterized by stylistics which are permutations and connotations of anti-structure in which the traditional definitions of art and culture are challenged,

> ...all spinning swiftly to their briefly fashionable climax. When this happens the aspiration to exclusiveness becomes absurd, or at best heavily compromised, as the market (in this sense literally the entrepreneurial populizers) finds it necessary to be alert to catch the newest, the latest, the coming style. ... Epater le bourgeois, instead of producing an esoteric incomprehensibility, shocks by creating a camp copy of commercially popular styles. It is only distinguishable from the vulgarity of the real thing by its accompanying theory. (Martin, 1981:90-91.)

The aesthetics of style is demonstrated similarly in avant-garde, popular culture, and leisure stylistics. Art for the masses and art for the moment determines the strategies of the art market and the marketplace, alike.

Contemporary Strategies: Style and Popular Culture

The strategy in the art world to merge art forms effects the definitions of art and the interpretation of aesthetic intentions, and, most importantly, how avant-garde art, previously a high art form recognized only by a specialized and informed audience, came to enter and affect the public (larger and less specialized audience) domain. "Artforum", a slick art magazine which traditionally reviews the most current and established developments in visual art, published an editorial and accompanying articles which address this issue and its implications for marketing and popular culture. (Sischy and Celant, 1982:34-35.)

The authors, Sischy and Celant, agree that indeed, developments in contemporary art straddle the worlds of commerce and mass culture. They suggest that current artmaking stems from a tradition of mannered pop art, one which shares the anti-structural and Romantic tendencies which are crucial to Martin's argument. Whereas autonomous high art has historically been opposed to popular art forms and is dependant upon hierarchical distinctions between high and low or elite and vulgar art with which to

define itself, pop art

> ...broke down the antagonisms and illusions of such distinctions (which were the products of the marketplace as much as of ideology). Roy Lichtenstein claimed comic strips, Claes Oldenburg appliances, James Rosenquist billboards, and Andy Warhol promotion legends. The interest that artists showed in popular culture and its accompanying technology was not a brand of philistinism. It was based on a decision to suck up commercialization, to channel its images and make new images of them that in turn could go back to the public. (Sischy and Celant, 1982:34.)

The idea that an avant-garde aesthetics, in the form of pop art, had a strong impact on popular culture images and marketing strategies is by no means new. Popular culture forms, and their mutual influences on each other, have received a great deal of attention (particularly in alternative journals) over the past few decades. What is striking about Martin's contributions to the subject is that she argues that pop artists were heirs to the anti-structural tradition of the historic avant-garde: Dadaism, Futurism, and Surrealism. Further, she argues that many aspects of this tradition are in evidence as stylistic devices and ideological trajectories of the contemporary mass media and popular culture. One can consider the avant-garde historical tradition an archeology through which essential features of the historic avant-garde are transmuted into more modern movements.

Although reacting to very different social and aesthetic traditions, pop art and the historic avant-garde share striking similarities, primarily in that they employ explicit anti-structural gestures. Pop artists, too, proclaimed anti-structure as their insignia, evident in their use of highly commercial advertising images within a claimed context of high art.

Warhol serves as an accessible example of this specific aesthetic history in that he extends and popularizes and his use of blatant anti-structural techniques. His work embraces equally, the concerns of the political underground of the counter-culture, the avant-garde, as well as the mass media, specific to advertising, fashion, and popular music. He is capable of retaining an idolicized role as a "hot" avant-garde artist while being an icon for popular consumption. The consequences of his art production denies the traditional notion of "le auteur" (the creative and autonomous artist), in that he sends a look-alike to represent him on his lecture tours and employs others to execute his "original" silk screens.

He either inverts or makes sexual identities ambiguous within many of his silk-screen images. His films often project isolated close-ups of homosexual and heterosexual interactions, and auto-erotic stimulation. As well, he dismisses the mythic totems which would normally consecrate the Hollywood conception of the actor/actress by using drifters, prostitutes, etc., who simply act out their lives. His work plays with mythic or liminal time and his images are composed of both profane and vulgar social symbols. Peter Gidal, a close friend and promoter of Warhol (author of numerous books about Warhol), has written that his friend intentionally subverts social assumptions by examining banal rituals, constantly refusing to accept accepted frames for social experience.[13]

Warhol shares similarities with Dali, in particular, through his use of images and techniques from culturally despised forms of "low" culture (screen idols, sensationalism, and street culture concerns within the context of slick advertising techniques). Warhol saturates his art and the audience with vulgarity — is culturally resurrected as a hero.

Undoubtedly, Warhol has become a legend, a cultural idol whose audience extends through all demographic segments of the population. His personal image and art activities/events act as a mnemonic device charged with symbols referencing the past (the aesthetic history of the avant-garde — specifically the historic avant-garde —as well as cultural events, symbols, and rituals) and the future (indicating possible aesthetic, stylistic, marketing, and political strategies). Our culture and economic system tends to consecrate individuals as icons for cultural consumption. Laurie Anderson, Marilyn Monroe, and John Lennon are some of the more obvious examples of icons whose manipulation and reconstruction of banal, low, or common cultural symbols places them (the individual and the symbol) in the public sphere, from which they can be marketed for public consumption.

As a culture, we are both extremely conscious of our history (in a cliched, generalized, and referential way) and quite oblivious (ignorant by choice) of the historical context of meaning and use that

---

[13] Peter Gidal, Andy Warhol: Films and Paintings (New York: Dutton & Co., Inc., 1971).

contributed to the significance of our history of cultural symbols. More than anything else, history informs our use of cultural symbols and their production. Sischy and Celant address this particular issue by assigning a photograph of high fashion (designer label: Issey Miyake) to the magazine cover. The editors anticipate a query as to what fashion, particularly an example of clothing which is reminiscent of traditional Japanese, Chinese, and early American cultural representations of the idealization of female beauty, have to do with contemporary visual art.[14] Described by the metaphors, iron butterfly, cage, corset, second skin, and Samurai armor, it takes little imagination to realize that this "dress" speaks of the history of sexual and physical manipulation — a political history of the degradation of the human body for the ideals of perfection emulated by the fashion industry. This is important to the authors as is the recognition of, "the moral, social, and art-historical projections onto this highly connotative appearance." (Sischy and Celant, 1982:35.) Fashion is discussed in a way that illuminates the representation of symbolic messages and the process by which they are consumed as referential information in contemporary society. Fashion, because of the demand for new styles and new symbolic messages on a seasonal basis, is an exaggerated example of cultural production. However, it is simply one genre amongst many that operate in the same way, functioning as

> ...a system of abstract signs which have no meaning beyond that determined by a maximum acceleration and proliferation of messages. ... The perpetual turnover of style resurrects previous models. If Modernism's vision of the future has been identified with hostility to the past, then fashion's continual, reckless ingestion of the phantom of history could be what makes it a Modern idea–in fact an idea that relates to the most recent developments in art, be they in architecture, film, music, painting, or photography. ... Such hyperconsciousness of historic styles, such facility with their renderings, recall the Mannerist attitude, which today is based not on originals, but on reproductions that transform art into legend–Pop icons. This kind of redesign, in fashion as well as in art, revamps figures, ... (Sischy and Celant, 1982:35.)

Style, as the generation of symbolic systems, which articulates tendencies in fashion, aesthetics, and life–styles, depends on historical styles which are manipulated to reflect a self–conscious sense of modernism and innovation.

---

[14] Editor's note in Sischy and Celant (1982:1). Cover: Issey Miyake, 1982 Spring–Summer Collection, rattan bodice and nylon polyester skirt. The rattan is split, colored, and polished. It has been formed to follow the line of the body and bamboo has been woven in to hold the curve in place, and prevent the rattan from separating. Produced with the collaboration of the bamboo artist Kosuge Shochikudo. Photo: Eiichiro Sakata.

Clearly, contemporary attempts to redesign historical aesthetic and cultural styles reveals a shift in the way our modern era views its history and its future. This mannered pop tendency owes much to marketing practices whose history includes: (1) the co-option of pop art by the advertising industry and; (2) the youth sub-cultural articulation of image and identity achieved primarily through the appropriation and fetishization of commodity objects. [15]

Such a historical consciousness of preceding models suggests that major shifts have occurred in the contemporary avant-garde that diverge from the foundations of the historic avant-garde. [16] Traditionally, the avant-garde was premised on a hostile relation to past traditions, in which the present anticipated, illuminated, and constructed the future. The purpose of the historic avant-garde was to challenge traditions which reinforced the bourgeois institutionalization of culture and its dictation of very specific parameters for art-making, as well as the role and function of art in the early twentieth century. Intent on destroying the reified relations between culture and art, the historic avant-garde (specifically the Dada and Italian Futurist movements) embraced technology as a means of critiquing an existent ideology of high culture which was reinforced by capitalist instrumentality, as well as the progressive impetus that these modern technological developments offered. Integrating both technology and the technological imagination in their artistic activities, the historic avant-garde alternatively drew critical attention to the destructive aspects of technological progress (in the context of strategical warfare developments of World

---

[15]See John Clarke, et al., in Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson, eds., (1976). In the past 30 years the marketing industry has changed its focus, relying more and more on the articulation of leisure activities as well as the stylistic usage of commodity items that identify lifestyles within youth and subcultures.

[16]The question as to whether avant-garde can be used as a term to describe a contemporary reality is rather complicated. The debate shifts according to one's polemics and consequent position in relation to capitalism, political theories of change, and historical and cultural dispositions which advocate either theories of rupture and difference or teleological continuity. I choose to use avant-garde in a contemporary context. For further discussion, see the Conclusion of the thesis. Also see Huyssen (1981:23-40.), for a perceptive analyses of this debate.

War I).[17] The movements celebrated modernism while acting as adversaries to the rationalism which motivated the central thrusts of modernism. More than anything else they sustained a sense of difference which many credited with the potential to effect political and social change. As Hans Magnus Enzensberger has argued, the express purpose of the historic avant-garde was to "sever political, social, and aesthetic chains, explode cultural reifications, throw off traditional forms of domination, liberate repressed energies." (Huyssen, citing Enzensberger, 1980:7.) [18]

Andreas Huyssen, while supporting Enzensberger's general argument, presents an analysis of the traditional avant-garde in which he is hesitant to thoroughly discredit the avant-garde as a contemporary metaphor for cultural tendencies and also attempts to redress the historical tradition of the avant-garde as a rich resource and heritage. [19] He argues that the historic avant-garde's hostility to its own cultural history was not simply a rejection but, more accurately, an attempt to arrest a process of conformism. Further, he suggests that conformism has replaced the original subversive thrust of the historic avant-garde in contemporary avant-garde movements, making the historic avant-garde an essential tradition of Modernism and integral to Western culture itself. Accordingly, any dialectic that might have continued to exist between the avant-garde and mass, or, popular culture, in the twentieth century has become diffused. However, the historic avant-garde's uncompromising attack on enlightened rationalism and representation — their preceding history — should not be seen as an attempt to destroy history. Truly conscious of their roles as modernists, the historic avant-garde were acutely aware of the

---

[17]See Huyssen (1980:151-164.), for a discussion of the influence of technology on the avant-garde and the rise of mass-mediated culture in the twentieth century.

[18]Enzensberger's assessment is crucial to the Modernism vs. Postmodernism debate. He argues that the avant-garde has been co-opted and institutionalized by contemporary culture and so, can never again serve its original political function (he refers here to the strategies of the historic avant-garde). In his words, the avant-garde was 'fait accompli' (1960's). It should be noted that his comments were critical of the growing aesthetic tendency (by artists and writers) to embrace forms of kitsch, camp, rock music, folk traditions, pop art, and popular culture as genuine aesthetical and cultural forms. Enzensberger was demanding a cultural revolution which shared the strategies of the historic avant-garde: anti-elitist, anti-bourgeois, anti-aesthetic, and anti-traditional assertions. See Huyssen (1981:23-40).

[19]See Huyssen's articles (1980:151-164); (1975:77-97); and especially, (1981:23-40).

relationship between their activities and the history that informed their critiques.

On the other hand, the manipulation and redesign of previous historic styles in contemporary aesthetics and fashion — culture — indicates a very different concern for history which includes: (1) a superficial consciousness, achieved by "hot" referencing, of images and gestures from the history of style, fashion and aesthetics; (2) a rejection of the archeology of modernism which has characterized our society (Western) since the Industrial Revolution; and (3) a distinct lack of a vision of the future.

Postmodernism: Aestheticization of Culture

Postmodern is the term typically used to describe cultural forms and tendencies of the late 1970's and early 1980's. The term is used simultaneously to describe aesthetic and cultural manifestations and is used frequently in articles of both mainstream and alternative magazines including, American Vogue, Architectural Digest, Art Forum, New German Critique, Telos, and others. American Vogue has published lifestyle articles and sections which argue that what is modern (as with the title of many of these sections, it does not signify modernism but that which is the most current and up-to-date tendency or style) is postmodern — "post-histoire" — and indicative of a fashionable lifestyle choice.

Postmodern is essentially a catch-all-phrase, a "buzzword", meant to stimulate nods of comprehension from those knowledgeable of the composite of academic and aesthetic currents that have contributed to the social expressions that loosely constitute the cultural landscape of the 1980's. [20] It is meant to describe cultural expressions which defy precise labelling because they are free from the

[20] The mention of academic currents refers to the impact of structuralist and post-structuralist theory (from the French continental tradition, most notably the writings of Jean Francois Lyotard) on American literary and aesthetic theory, criticism, and practice. Huyssen states that, 'On one level, of course, the American appropriation of structural and especially poststructuralist theory from France reflects the extent to which postmodernism itself has been academicized since it won its battle against modernism and New Criticism. It is also tempting to speculate that the shift towards theory actually points to the falling rate of artistic and literary creativity in the 1970s, a proposition which would help to explain the resurgence of historical retrospectives in the museums.' (Huyssen, 1981:34.) This comment will help to clarify a concluding argument of the thesis, drawn, in part from Huyssen's observations — that postmodernism represents a stage of cultural crisis centred around a search for a cultural tradition.

constraints of specific stylistic and aesthetic traditions. At the same time, while decidedly postmodern forms are derived from precise historical traditions (predominately aesthetic ones), they are arranged and re-arranged as reconstructions and composites of these traditions. Assuredly, postmodern forms make distinct reference to historical traditions (most notably the historic avant-garde and other forms of anti-traditions), but they do not carry the impetus of these tradition's historical context and political strategies. Rather, the spirit of postmodernism attempts to reject the historical dialectic between modernism, culture, and art, terminate the trajectory of modernism which has informed our social history, and integrate aesthetics and culture into the institutionalization of popular culture. In short, postmodernism reduces our cultural history to caricatures of cultural expression and eliminates rupture for the sake of a cultural reality that does not embody a true sense of a cultural history. Postmodernism is simply comprised of accessible cultural references and cliches which have more to do with an aestheticism of elite consumerism — aestheticized life-styles.

Seemingly historically conscious, postmodernism is fundamentally a process of de-historicization, a process of manipulation in which the aestheticization of all aspects of life promotes a highly marketable and diversified system of commodity aesthetics:

> Today the velocity with which the fashions of the aestheticized life-world are transformed is a function of revolutionary capitalism, and the perpetuity of change robs the social order of the signs of traditional legitimation. Not long ago, the domestic interior was dominated by inherited objects, laden with family memories; today they have been liquidated or return solely in the weak form of commodified objects. [21]

Originally meant to represent a changed philosophical position with respect to the archeological legacy of modernism (to signify the end of era of modernism and the beginning of a new, innovative, and more relevant tendency in cultural aesthetics), postmodernism does celebrate a changed relationship between art (merging of high and low forms which constitute what is commonly called "vulgar modernism"), technology (as it mediates mass and cultural forms), and popular culture (signifying the institutionalization of previously distinct forms of social and cultural expression into popular culture).

---

[21]Russell A. Berman, "Modern Art and Desublimation," Telos 62 (Winter 1984/85): 19-22.

The once separate realms of art, architecture, literature, popular art, and popular culture are all sources for a pooling of references which has been described variously as eclectic, layered, confused, cacaphonous, and pluralistic. Two examples of epitomies of postmodern cultural forms are given in American Vogue (January, 1984). These examples at once reflect the theoretical consciousness that is prevalent in contemporary cultural expression and recall the anti-traditional gestures of Marcel Duchamp (Dada artist) and Andy Warhol (pop and entrepeneurial artist):

> When A.T.& T., the very symbol of corporate probity, set out to build an architectural monument and communicate its importance to the world, it ended up erecting a large toy. In the end, the world's most expensive building communicated nothing so much as the fact that the world's largest corporation really does have a sense of humour. (Lemos, 1984:175.)
>
> The most far-out art phenomenon to hit the New York art scene in a long time is 'appropriation', which simply stated is nothing more than photographing famous art and presenting it as your own. (Lemos, 1984:175.)

Having identified traditional forms of modernism as obsolete because they addressed the cultural politics of an earlier epoch (late nineteenth and early twentieth century political, social, and aesthetic relations), postmodernists see themselves in relation to an old and exhausted modernist project — a phase within the larger notion of modernity. It has been argued that modernism achieved success, historically, in challenging the tradition of autonomous art and promoting the aestheticization of everyday life.[22] Berman argues further, that while emphasizing innovation, postmodernism is not motivated by protest but is a form of ornamentalism whose main purpose is to capture and share with the public a sense of cultural identity, albeit in the form of an epidemic of contentless "neo-culture".

Some postmodern forms may still be adversary or critical but, in general, they do not suggest alternatives — do not anticipate a future vision of changed social relations. Perhaps more than anything else, postmodernism represents a somewhat diffuse search for a cultural tradition.[23] Having rejected the spirit of modernism in totality:

---

[22]Berman points out that this success was largely due to the labours of the historic avant-garde which was premised on a protest against a tradition of bourgeois aesthetic assumptions — a tradition which, if it does still exhist, is a very weak adversary. (Berman, 1984:41.)

[23] See Huyssen (1981:23-40); and Berman (1984/85:19-22).

> The historicity of the modernist work disappears in post-modernism which, no longer defining its present against a rejected past, exists in a temporal void in which any notion of historico-philosophical progress, any promise of hope, becomes meaningless. ... With the end of history, the aesthetic category of the new loses its relevance; instead the aesthetic debris of the past (which is no longer a past opposed to the present) reappears as immediately accessible in the historicist eclecticism of post-modernist architectural referentiality. (Berman, 1984/85:44.)

Summary

Perhaps the central premise of Martin's argument is that symbolic systems are cumulative systems of culturally shared knowledge that informs and motivates patterns of symbolic usage and interpretation. Thus, symbolic systems and their significant articulation are fundamental to human social interaction and negotiation — subversive as well as institutionalized symbolic systems act to frame social experience and display a relation to the social world.

Viewed in this way, Martin's "enfants terribles" of the 1960's communicated social needs and criticisms through symbolic forms which were derived from a historical cultural vocabulary and contributed to the content and stylistic form which characterizes more recent symbolic communication practices. Martin recognizes and documents a process whereby symbolic systems give meaning to, and construct, those of the present. Just as the aesthetically radical historic avant-garde contributed to the expressive vocabulary of post-war youth, this same legacy is evident in the contemporary consumption and display of life-styles through popular culture commodities.

Martin fleshes out Turner's theoretical concepts by applying his paradigms to contemporary examples of liminal genres and anti-structural social expression. Turner merely suggests that patterns exist between the symbolic usage prevalent in contemporary aesthetic and subcultural movements and those he observed in historical marginal and cult-oriented groups. Martin's analysis of post-war expressive movements substantiates Turner's suspicions, in that employing Turner's methodological tools she charts similar patterns of socially generative cultural expressions.

Martin gives evidence of a cultural history comprised of symbolic systems of subversive articulation which has altered normative social relations, both in the way these relations are negotiated and the social routinization of a greatly expanded expressive vocabulary. Her sociology of radical culture contributes to an understanding of the role that subversive expressive forms and the historic avant-garde have had on communicative forms in contemporary culture — as this role pertains to the integration of alternative visions and expressive relations into accepted models for social interaction.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION: DESCRIPTIVE TERMS FOR CONTEMPORARY POPULAR CULTURE FORMS AND TENDENCIES

While debates concerning the aesthetic avant-garde in relation to modernism and contemporary culture were considered exhausted a decade ago, it is hoped that this thesis has given evidence that the aesthetic avant-garde has contributed to vital and significant expressive forms in contemporary popular culture.

Hans Magnus Enzensberger was, in the late 1950's and early 1960's, prominent amongst those theorists who pronounced the aesthetic avant-garde "fait accompli". He argued that the manifestation of the avant-garde in popular culture forms contradicts the avant-garde's revolutionary history and tradition of experimentation and difference. The avant-garde was considered an inappropriate descriptive metaphor for the cultural events of the 60's, in that (1) the etymological history demonstrates a general reformist political position incompatible with the appropriation and absorption of the avant-garde into popular culture forms; 2) the historic avant-garde, in search of utopian freedom through social non-conformity, ultimately subscribed to internal regulations and manifestos; and (3) as a result, the European historic avant-garde movements never achieved their political goals.

In essence, the historic avant-garde, rife with paradox, contradiction, and impotency, could hardly be considered an effective social metaphor within its historic context, much less in Enzensberger's context of an emerging popular culture. He considered the use of the term regressive in his context of contemporary cultural forms.

In this way, Enzensberger's observations contributed to the line of argument which led to the current use of postmodernism as the popular means to characterize the tendencies evident in cultural expression during the 1980's. At the moment, the social implications for the continued employment of postmodernism for the discussion of cultural forms is being questioned by members of the social

theoretical disciplines. Debates between pro- and anti-postmodernists suggest that there is a danger inherent in postmodernism primarily because of its tendency to reject the history of modernism, and consequently, its history of alternative cultural and minority demands for expression.

As well, these debates suggest that postmodernism, in its accepted and legitimated form, is in fact a continuation of the same cultural legacy that gave shape to the cultural and stylistic forms of the 1960's and 1970's. Ultimately, the conclusion will suggest that postmodernism, in search of a viable cultural history and tradition, is merely a continuation of the trajectory of modernism as most postmodern techniques for innovation and difference were decontextualized but similar to the techniques of the historic avant-garde.

Postmodernism

The literary critic Irving Howe, suggested that the avant-garde be abandoned as a descriptive term for the concerns of literature and theoretical aesthetics of the 1960's. He advocated a shift in the language of criticism in which modernism and avant-gardism be replaced by postmodernism. Postmodernism was considered to most accurately address the sense of social crisis and transition which accompanied the development of a "mass society" after World War II. In suggesting that modernism belonged to the historical context of the old world (pre-World War II), he argued for a terminological recognition of a changed contemporary world in which the growing consumer society was considered responsible for the erosion of traditions and structures of authority. Postmodernism was meant to counteract, with optimism, what Howe viewed as negative forces which were deteriorating the fabric of contemporary society, and give, "...shape to a world increasingly shapeless and an experience increasingly fluid." (Calinescu, citing Howe, 1977:69.)

The epithet "postmodern", was originally coined by Arnold Toynbee in the early 1950's. An historian given to precise periodization of Western civilization, Toynbee regarded what we have traditionally called the modern period (from the last quarter of the nineteenth century to the present), as

the postmodern era — a pessimistic label for an age sharply divorced from classical intellectual traditions, imperatives, and values.

Toynbee considered the postmodern era to be characterized by social unrest, and civil and social wars, born with the development of the modern social sciences which have increasingly challenged the value spheres of classical philosophies and sciences. As a result, the term postmodern was derived from an apocalyptic perspective — a disintegrative age in which the values and existence of Western society are threatened.

Toynbee's negative interpretation of the effects and symptoms of postmodernism affected the ideas of literary critics much more than those of historians. While postmodernism initially conveyed alarm in the context of post-war North America, the term came to impart a sense of optimism in debates amongst literary communities during the late 1960's. Gradually postmodernism became part of the critical vocabulary, made popular by Irving Howe, Leslie Fiedler, Harry Levin, Susan Sontag, and others. For these writers, the term acted to both legitimate the theoretical interests of the tentative "New Criticism" and to release aesthetic concerns from the traditions and prejudices established by modernism and the avant-garde. Used in this way, postmodernism implied an aggressive and positive direction for literary and critical practices. However, postmodernism was used in limited circles, primarily for discussions and debates addressed by specialized and esoteric journals. Postmodernism was used only by those committed to a change of direction for aesthetic and literary theory.

By the late 1970's, postmodern had become the popular descriptive term for expressive cultural forms, including those of aesthetics, architecture, fashion, commodity symbolics, and popular culture. Postmodernism is now used indiscriminately in popular journals, those catering to subcultural audiences, and social theoretical journals.

The prefix "post" reflects cultural and expressive dimensions of contemporary society, in that modernism and its expressive tendencies has been relegated to an earlier stage in industrial society. Postmodernism suggests that an archeological movement had taken place between the cultural and

philosophical position of a pre-war modernism to a distinctly changed position and direction for post-war — postmodern society. Modern is no longer used to describe the cultural acitivities of our age. Instead, modernism is used in a purely literal sense to suggest the most contemporaneous of stylistics or trends. Avant-garde, once a common idiom for innovation in aesthetics and fashion, is rarely used other than as general descriptive label for retail and service outlets (in which an atmosphere for youth and oppositional groups is suggested). It has been suggested that the new modernism is "post" because it represents a tendency (culturally, aesthetically, and architecturally) to accept and appreciate the social and economic conditions of contemporary Western society for what it is — a blatantly commercial culture: "...robust, pluralistic, flashy, trashy, ..., where extravagence and kitsch hold as much promise as any search for abstract truths." (Lemos, 1984:250.)

The Debate

Given the apparent cultural predilection for the term postmodernism, a renewed cultural and academic interest in the activities of the historic avant-garde during the late 1970's initiated serious debates between advocates of postmodernism or modernism as representative of the salient features of contemporary culture. Essentially a controversy about the historical legacy of the twentieth century and corresponding implications for contemporary social relations, these debates promote great speculation about (1) the viability and vested interests implicit within the use of each term; (2) the position of each "camp" in relation to history — the conscious decontextualization of history by postmodernists and the teleological continuation of history as a modernist project; and (3) the effect of the perspectives of either position on the changing shape of social relations in society.

These debates emerged with the international gallery displays, retrospectives,and collections of the historic avant-garde movements which became popular in the late 1970's. These exhibits were the cultural events of the decade, as were media events and television mini-series such as "The Shock of the New" (Robert Hughes' eight-part television series on avant-garde art which was also published in book

form under the same title). A public interest in immediate social history and the achievements of modernism became evident with the increased interest in museum presentations of cultural artifacts from historical periods of Western civilization (most of which were, coincidentally, discovered in the twentieth century).

Numerous academic conferences were held concerning the historic avant-garde as a manifestation of modernism in contemporary culture. Studies on the avant-garde were published, inviting the comments of social, critical, aesthetic, and cultural theorists, alike. [1]

The social theoretical contributors to the debate tend to argue against postmodernism while at the same time, they concede that the political and aesthetic emancipation demanded by the historic avant-garde proved, historically, to fail. However, the arguments conclude that the historic avant-garde, primarily because of its contributions to alternative forms of social and cultural relations cannot be ignored or theoretically suppressed. Two critical points which arise from the arguments of the debate are pertinent to the argument at hand: (1) in condemning modernism and the historical avant-garde, alternative and subcultural movements dependent on expressions of difference and opposition are also condemned; and (2) postmodernism and what it has come to mean for contemporary culture does not radically depart from traditions of modernism.

Despite its claims for innovation, novelty, and change, advocates of postmodernism tend to represent two traditional cultural positions. On the one hand, those called the "old conservatives" are considered anti-modernists because of their projected interest in reaffirming rationalism, instrumentalism, and the principles of enlightenment in the sphere of cultural relations. On the other hand, the "new conservatives" argue for the re-establishment of aesthetics and culture into the "high cultural" forms that the historic avant-garde so vehemently opposed. In different ways, these conservative positions express a critical attitude towards history. Both perspectives blame cultural traditions which gave rise to rupture,

---

[1]Perhaps the most provocative and accessible publication of the concerns addressed in these debates can be found in the journal, New German Critique 22 (Winter 1981): pp. 1-40. Jurgen Habermas contributed an essay called 'Modernity versus Postmodernity', (pp. 1-13) to which Peter Burger, Anthony Giddens, and Andreas Huyssen responded.

dissonance, and change because of their effect on cognitive interpretations and normative social orientations. Consequently, alternative traditions established in our cultural history of modernism are considered as the source of crises in contemporary social and economic relations. Following this logic, the progress made in the past few decades for the social recognition of rights, identities, and relations of minority groups are discredited. Postmodernism, as much as it claims to be a discontinued history, advocates an unblemished theory of historical continuity. Similarly, the historic avant-garde would be sublimated. With it would go the achievements of the historic avant-garde, including its protest against the autonomy of art and its committment to the integration of art and life, as well as its contributions to aesthetic and stylistic forms which have become central to contemporary aesthetic, cultural, and social experience.

Postmodernism does not, of its own, serve political and economic instrumental interests. Rather, because of its relation to history, postmodernism lends itself to conservative interests intent on re-establishing the values of a pre-modernist society — values which do not tolerate rupture or dissonance — which would include the principles of authority, tradition, and discipline.

Martin, without using the term postmodernism, makes similar observations about conservative tendencies which have become evident in contemporary cultural forms. Within political, economic, and cultural activities is an evident attempt to frame and contain the utopian vision of permanent anti-structure and liminality advocated by radical movements during the past three decades. As has been argued, neither structural nor anti-structural social modalities can be pursued to their extremes. The cultivation of anti-structural gestures representing a total way of life ultimately reinforces its logical paradox — the human need for order and structure as a means to make sense of, and frame, social experience. Postmodernism serves to legitimate an interest and search for older, and assumedly, more socially stable traditions.

Since the early 1980's, powerful arguments have been voiced for the recognition of structure, form, and tradition, particularly within institutions in which expressive and instrumental norms co-exist.

Liminal moments have been reframed in their more traditional context of ritual, art, and popular culture. The culture which was once considered the culture of expressive disorder has become domesticated in that it plays a role as social entertainment — representative of life–style stylistics and stances achieved by purchasing appropriate commodities rather than a serious, negotiated, and pursued social experience. Articulations and activities which were considered liminal and anti–structural in the 1950's and 60's because they threatened traditional social sensibilities are now common idioms of our popular culture vocabulary and consumed on a daily basis. In our institutionalized forms of popular culture, the avant–garde has been absorbed — embraced by an interest in the collusion of high and low culture. Postmodernism, not merely a pastiche of traditions of modernism and the historic avant–garde, is a contemporary extension of sensibilities and events which comprise a folk history of cultural expression. This folk history is the resource for the mannered and referential construction of contemporary cultural production.

Clearly, our contemporary culture is one in which stylistic negotiation displays and articulates an interface with historical traditions and contemporary social experience. Cultural forms derived from a process of bricolage demonstrate a conscious denial of a historical sensibility (as in some genres of popular music of the late 1970's). More often, stylistic bricolage exhibits a well–informed knowledge of the historical styles and precedents which inform and contribute to a stylistic composite. Popular culture marketing strategies, the media, the arts, television, film, etc., have become entranced with a documentation of the history of styles, particularly as the history reveals the original use of stylistic symbols which contribute to a stylistic vocabulary. In this way, all radical stylistic negotiations are recontextualized and routinized within a popular history of the twentieth century. This very process of framing helps to institutionalize and market cultural forms which previously spoke of difference and opposition as popular culture images.

Postmodernism: A Search for Tradition

The interest displayed in the historic avant-garde during the late 1970's can be more readily understood as an interest of postmodernism in establishing a cultural identity. The historic avant-garde was revived in the 1960's also, for similar reasons, by those advocating postmodernism during its tentative years as a descriptive term for cultural tendencies. During the 1960's the historic avant-garde provided aesthetic and radical cultural movements with gestures and images which characterized the expressive dimensions of radical cultural forms. At this time, postmodernism, modernism, and avant-gardism were commonly employed by different cultural groups to reflect certain challenges and effects on cultural traditions. Huyssen points out that a confusion in the way these terms were used and what they were meant to imply, contributed to a misunderstanding of (1) the distinctly different relationships between the historic avant-garde and mass culture in the European context of the early twentieth century and in the context of post-war America , and (2) the cultural use of postmodernism as a means to challenge entrenched values of modernism which often inaccurately challenged avant-gardism because modernism and avant-gardism were used as interchangeable terms. By examining the way in which these terms were used in an American context, it will become evident that postmodernism did not challenge the avant-garde tradition. Rather, it employed some avant-garde techniques to challenge certain aspects of modernism.

In Europe, "high art" had become an established tradition in bourgeios culture before the turn of the twentieth century. As Enzensberger argued (from his European perspective), the major goal of the historic avant-garde was to undermine the reified relations between the powerful institutions of art, education, and social structure. The European avant-garde, because it was culturally and politically destroyed early in the Second World War, did not have an effect on North American culture until it was revived in the 1960's. Prior to this time, high art traditions were not recognized in North America. The struggle for an aesthetic legitimacy in North America prior to the 1950's could not provide the conditions to justify the cultural struggles and politics of the European avant-garde.

The European historic avant-garde only made sense in North America during the 1950's and 60's. In appropriating the concerns and interests of the historic avant-garde, North American culture was provided with a sense of novelty and criticism, "at a time when high art had become institutionalized in the burgeoning museum, concert and paperback culture of the 1950's, when modernism itself had entered the mainstream via the culture industry, and later, during the Kennedy years, when high culture began to take on functions of political representation (Robert Frost and Pablo Casals at the White House)." (Huyssen, 1981:31.) The historic avant-garde was considered by American critics as an oppositional tool for a a critique of modernism. The historic avant-garde became a revitalizing subcurrent which was not only used by pop artists to oppose the institutionalization of Abstract Expression, the historic avant-garde became instrumental in counter-cultural and subcultural movements. For a North American audience, the tradition that informed pop art and continued to include conceptual and experimental forms of music as well as more recent forms of performance art, represented an exciting and innovative tradition. In the North American context of the 1960's, the characteristics of spontaneity, immediacy, anti-structure, and a sense of the future were not considered as a regressive repetition of a historical tradition. These same characteristics were understood as a celebration of another era — postmodernism.

The avant-garde strategy to integrate the artificially separated realms of high and low culture made commercial and theoretical sense in the context of the growing North American culture industries. The endorsement of technology by the historic avant-garde in the early twentieth century was completely compatible with the technological growth of mass-mediated culture in post-war America. But, the avant-garde did not succeed in effecting change in the social relations of postmodern culture. Rather, the culture industry, replete with historical traditions of a de-politicized and de-contextualized avant-garde tranformed contemporary cultural relations.

Thus postmodernism did not represent, either in the 1960's or the late 1970's, a break from traditions of modernism. Postmodern experiments with de- and re-contextualized texts, modes of visual representation, and history, were drawn from similar activities in the modernist and avant-garde traditions. In recalling the historic avant-garde as comprising part of its historical tradition,

postmodernism contributes to its own regression and demise: "the postmodern search for cultural tradition and continuity, which underlies all the radical rhetoric of rupture, discontinuity, and epistemological breaks, has turned to that tradition which fundamentally and on principle despised and denied all traditions." (Huyssen, 1981:32.)

Summary

Regardless of the terminology by which contemporary cultural forms are described, the historic avant-garde — its inventions and imaginations — are inherent in the manifestations of official Western culture. The historic avant-garde is ineffectual for radically altering social relationships, both because of the capacity of the cultural industries to co-opt the avant-garde and use it to affirm commodity relations and because of the nature of the historic avant-garde itself. The tendencies of the historic avant-garde to embrace the values of growth and progress reveal the complex liasons between late industrialized capitalism and the historic avant-garde.

The recognition of the dialectic between the avant-garde and mass-mediated culture argues that the cultural employment of the historic avant-garde no longer carries the vestiges of criticism and the utopian dream for transforming social experience. In contemporary culture, the avant-garde represents an obsolete and exploited historical movement. The shock techniques of the historic avant-garde no longer shock but reaffirm our cultural perceptions rather than change perception. The historic avant-garde has been absorbed and pre-empted by mass-mediated culture, contributing to an affirmative aestheticization of technology and commodities.

Perhaps the most important argument within the debates between postmodernism and modernism reminds us that because of the historical consciousness of postmodernism it won't be as easy to forget the original impetus and objectives of the historic avant-garde. In remembering this important historical movement, the attempts at de-centering universalized and normative values which have recently taken place with the organization of minority groups might preserve the sense of difference which was central to

the historical avant–garde and the alternative movements which it effected during the twentieth century. Although the 1980's act as the re–aggregation of a liminal moment that has been enacted since the advent of the historic avant–garde early in the twentieth century, the historic avant–garde must be remembered for its effect on the vastly expanded arena of expressive cultural forms. The historic avant–garde, integral to social processes of the twentieth century, points to a theory of culture in which dissonance and rupture are recognized as contributing to the shaping of a cultural history.

CHAPTER VII

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abrahams, Roger D.. "Rituals in Culture." In Folklore Reprint Series, Vol. 5: Folklore Publications Group, no. 1, Folk-lore Students' Association. Indiana University: University Press, 1977.

Barthes Roland. Elements of Semiology. London: Jonathan Cape, 1967.

_____ Mythologies. London: Jonathan Cape, 1972.

Bell, Daniel. The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism. New York; Basic Books, 1976.

Benamou, Michel. "Prescence and Play." In Performance: in postmodern culture, pp3-7. Edited by Michel Benamou and Charles Caramello. Vol. 1: Theories of Contemporary Culture. Center for twentieth century studies, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Madison, Wisconsin: Coda Press Inc., 1977.

Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in The Age of Mechanical Reproduction." In Mass Communication and Society, pp. 384-408. Edited by J. Curran, M. Gurevitch, and J. Woollacott. London: Edward Arnold (Publishers) Ltd., 1979.

Berger, Peter L. and Luckmann, Thomas.The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in The Sociology of Knowledge. New York: Doubleday & Co., 1966; Anchor Books, 1967.

Berman, Russell A.. "Modern Art and Desublimation." Telos 62 (Winter 1984/1985): 19-22.

Brake, Mike. The Sociology of Youth Culture and Youth Subcultures. London: Routledge & Keegan Paul Ltd., 1980.

Brown, Ray B., (ed.). Popular Culture and the Expanding Consciousness . New York: John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 1973.

Burgelin, Oliver. "Structural Analysis of Mass Communication." In The Sociology of Mass Communications: Selected Readings, pp.313-327. Edited by Denis McQuail. Harmondsworth (England): Penguin Books, 1972.

Burger, Peter. "The Significance of the Avant-garde for Contemporary Aesthetics: A Reply to Jurgen Habermas." New German Critique 32 (Winter, 1981): 19-22.

Butler, Christopher. After the Wake: An Essay on the Contemporary Avant-garde. New York: Oxford University Press, 1980.

Calinescu, Matei. Faces of Modernity: Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1977.

Carey, James. "Mass Communication Research and Cultural Studies: An American View." In Mass Communication and Society, pp. 409-425. Edited by J. Curran, M. Gurevitch, and J.Woollacott. London: Edward Arnold (Publishers) Ltd., 1979.

Carey James, and Kreiling Albert L.. "Popular Culture and uses and Gratifications: Notes Toward an Accomodation." In The Uses of Mass Communications: Current Perspectives on Gratifications Research, pp.225-248. Edited by Jay Blumler and Elihu Katz. Beverley Hills: Sage Publications Inc., 1974.

Chaney, David. Fictions and Ceremonies: Representations of Popular Experience. London: Edward Arnold (Publishers) Ltd., 1979.

Clarke, John. "Style." In Resistance Through Rituals: Youth subcultures in post-war Britain, pp.175-191. Edited by Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson. London: Hutchinson & Co. (Publishers) Ltd., 1976.

Cohen, Stanley. Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers. London: McGibbon and Kee Ltd., 1972.

Cohen, Stanley (ed.). Images of Deviance. Harmondsworth (England): Penguin Books, 1971.

Coutts-Smith, Kenneth. "Thesis on The Failure of Communication in The Plastic Arts." Praxis 3 (1976): 77-97.

Davison, Peter; Meyersohn, Rolf, and Shils, Edward (eds.). Literary Taste, Culture, and Mass Communication. Vol. 13: The Cultural Debate: Part I. Cambridge (England): Chadwick-Healey Ltd., 1980.

_____ Literary Taste, Culture, and Mass Communication. Vol. 14: The Cultural Debate: Part II. Cambridge (England): Chadwick-Healey Ltd., 1980.

DeGeorge, Richard and Ferdinande (eds.). The Structuralists: From Marx to Levi-Strauss. New York: Anchor Books; Doubleday Company, Inc., 1972.

Gans, Herbert J.. "The Politics of Culture in America: A Sociological Analysis." In The Sociology of Mass Communications: Selected Readings, pp.372-387. Edited by Denis McQuail. New York: Penguin Books, 1972.

_____ "Popular Culture in America: Social Problem in a Mass Society or Social Asset in a Pluralist Society." In Literary Taste, Culture, and Mass Communication. Vol.1: Culture and Mass Culture, pp. 233-304. Edited by Peter Davidson, Rolf Meyersohn, and Edward Shils. Cambridge (England): Chadwyck-Healey Ltd., 1978.

Geertz, Clifford. The Interpretation of Cultures. New York: Basic Books, 1973.

Gidal, Peter. Andy Warhol: Films and Paintings. New York: Dutton & Co., Inc., 1971.

Giddens, Anthony. "Modernism and Postmodernism." New German Critique 22 (Winter 1981): 13-18.

Goldberg, Roselee. Performance: Live Art From 1909 to the Present. London: Thames & Hudson, 1979.

Goldman, Albert. Freakshow. New York: Altheneum, 1971.

Greenberg, Clement. "Avant-Garde and Kitsch." In Modern Culture and The Arts, pp. 147-163. New York: McGraw-Hill Inc., 1967.

Habermas, Jurgen. "Modernity Versus Postmodernity*." New German Critique 22 (Winter 1981): 1-12.

Hall, Stuart. "Culture, The Media, and the Ideological Effect." In Mass Communication and Society, pp. 315-348. Edited by J. Curran, M. Gurevitch, and J. Woollacott. London: Edward Arnold (Publishers) Ltd., 1974.

Hall, Stuart and Jefferson, Tony (eds.). Resistance Through Rituals: Youth subcultures in post-war Britain. London: Hutchinson & Co. (Publishers) Ltd., 1976.

Hassan, Ihab H. Paracriticisms: Seven Speculations of the Times. Urbana: University of Illinois, 1975.

_____ The Right Promethian Fire: Imagination, Science, and Cultural Change. Urbana: University of Illinois, 1980.

Hauser, Arnold. The Sociology of Art. Translated by Kenneth J. Northcott. London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1982.

Hebdidge, Dick. Subculture: The Meaning of Style. New York: Methuen & Co., 1979.

Hoberman, J.. "Vulgar Modernism." Artforum, February 1982, pp. 71-76.

Huyssen, Andreas. "The Search for Tradition: Avant-Garde and Postmodernism in the 1970's*." New German Critique 22 (Winter 1981): 23-40.

_____ "The Cultural Politics of Pop: Reception and Critique of U.S. Pop Art in the Federal Republic of Germany*." New German Critique 4 (Winter 1975): 77-97.

_____ "The Hidden Dialectic: The Avant-Garde — Technology — Mass Culture." In The Myths of Information: Technology and Post-Industrial Culture, pp. 151-164. Vol. 2: Theories of Contemporary Culture. Center for twentieth century studies, University of Milwaukee-Wisconsin. Madison. Wisconsin: Coda Press, 1980.

MacAloon, John J. (ed). "Cultural Performances, Cultural Theory." Introduction to Rite, Drama, Festival, and Spectacle: Rehearsals Toward a Theory of Cultural Performance, pp. 1-14. Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1984.

Jay, Martin. "Aesthetic Theory and The Critique of Mass Culture." In The Dialectical Imagination: A History of The Frankfurt School and The Institute for Social Research, 1923-1950, pp. 173-218. Edited by Martin Jay. London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1976.

Kando, Thomas M.. Leisure and Popular Culture in Transition . Saint Louis: C.V. Mosby Co., 1975.

Kaplan, Abraham. "The Aesthetics of the Popular Arts." In Modern Culture and The Arts, pp. 48-62. Edited by James Hall and Barry Ulanov. New York: McGraw-Hill Inc., 1967.

Lane, Michael (ed.). Introduction to Structuralism. New York: Basic Books, 1970.

Lemos, Peter. "With a Culture Like This, Who Needs Art?" Vogue, January 1984, pp. 175 and 250.

Levi-Strauss, Claude. The Savage Mind. Edited by Julian Pitt-Rivers and Ernest Gellner. Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1966.

Lippard, Lucy (ed.). Introduction to Dada's on Art, pp. 1-12. Eaglewood Cliffs (New Jersey): Prentice-Hall Inc., 1971.

Lowenthal, Leo. Literature, Popular Culture, and Society. Eaglewood Cliffs (New Jersey): Prentice-Hall, 1961.

Mailer, Norman. The Faith in Graffitti. Jon Naar (Photographer) and Mervyn Kurlansley (Designer and Art Director). New York: Praeger Publishers Inc., 1974.

Martin, Bernice. A Sociology of Contemporary Cultural Change. Oxford (England): Basil Blackwell Publisher, 1981.

Melley, George. Revolt into Style: The Pop Arts in Britain . London: The Penguin Press, 1970.

Meyerhoff, Barbara. "Rites of Passage: Process and Paradox." In Celebration: Studies in Festivity and Ritual, pp. 109-139. Edited by Victor Turner. Washington (D.C.): Smithsonian Institute Press, 1982.

O'Brien, Glenn. "Bop Art." Artforum, February 1982, pp. 43-50.

Poggioli, Renato. The Theory of the Avant-Garde. Cambridge (Massachusetts): The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1968.

Shattuck, Roger. The Banquet Years: The Origins of the Avant-Garde in France . 1885 to World War I. New York: Vintage Books; Random House Inc., 1968.

Shugarman, David P. (ed.). "Wrong Turn: Youth and Social Change." In Thinking About Change, pp. 123-146.. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974.

Sischy, Ingrid and Celant, Germano (eds.). "Editorial." Artforum, February 1982, pp. 34-35.

Turner, Victor. Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society. London: Cornell University Press, 1974.

_____ The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure. Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co., 1969.

_____ "Frame, Flow, and Reflection: Ritual and Drama in Public Liminality." In Performance: in postmodern culture, pp. 35-55. Edited by Michel Benamou and Charles Carmello. Vol. 1: Theories in Contemporary Culture. Center for twentieth century studies, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Madison (Wisconsin): Coda Press, 1977.

Vasquez, Adolfo Sanchez. Art and Society . Essays in Marxist Aesthetics. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973.

Van Gennep, Arnold. The Rites of Passage. Translated by Monika B. Vizedom and Gabreille L. Caffee. London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1960.

Williams, Raymond. Culture. Glasgow: Fontana Paperbacks, 1981.

Williamson, Judith. Decoding Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising. London: Marion Boyars, 1978.

Wintour, Anna. "Design: The New Image." Vogue, January 1984, pp. 177–183.

Wollin, Richard. "Modernism VS. Postmodernism." Telos 62 (Winter 1984/1985): 9–29.