

# Outmodernisms: industrialization and the forgotten histories of the avant-garde

M. Chapman

*University of Newcastle, Newcastle, Australia*

**ABSTRACT:** Interweaving ideas from Walter Benjamin, Siegfried Giedion and Kenneth Frampton, this paper will look at the historical importance of nineteenth century industrial forms in recording the intangible histories of modernism, glimpsed through surrealism and its subsequent interpretation. While a lot of emphasis has already been placed on the programmatic aspects of industry, this paper will look at the way that the *outmoded* provides an alternative avenue for redeeming the artifacts of nineteenth century construction; not as symbols of economic progress but agents of aesthetic (and psychological) transgression. The collision between the “new” in modernism and the rediscovery of the “old” in the historical avant-garde is a critical aspect of architectural production in the 1920s, framing the relationship of architecture to *work* and establishing it as a model of production that is tied to both craft and industry. Through an analysis of this aspect of architectural production, this paper will reveal the submerged traces of the industrial architecture of the nineteenth century and its silent influence on the aesthetics of the present and future.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Writing in 1929, Walter Benjamin’s post-mortem of the surrealist movement attaches great importance to the discovery and promotion of the “outmoded”, as a forgotten tactic of the historical avant-garde and its most tangible legacy. Occupying a stance in opposition to modernism, the surrealists preferred to revive historical and forgotten modes of architectural production at the same time as they dismantled new ones. This drew into precise focus the issues of the past, the future and the present that were all inherently tied to the historical narrative of the twentieth century. Benjamin’s observation of the “revolutionary nihilism” that the surrealists had witnessed in the *outmoded* coincided with his discovery of Siegfried Giedion’s work and particularly his anthologies of the industrial architecture of the preceding century. Giedion’s study of the essentially superseded industrial forms of the nineteenth century drew attention to the power of technology as well as its inherent ethereality and fragility. Embodying both progress and decay, these relics of the past were rediscovered through surrealism and layered with transformative values that were antithetical to the utopian currents of modernism in architecture.

Drawing from the methodologies of both Benjamin and Karl Marx, Kenneth Frampton argued that a radical transformation took place in regard to industrial production which caused the separation of “labor” from “work” (Frampton, 1969). As the science of engineering splintered from the emerging field of aesthetics, it triggered a fracturing of form and content in architecture where the functional and artistic began to operate in distinctive (and often unrelated) spheres. For both Frampton and Manfredo Tafuri, the unification of these trajectories came to be embodied in modernist rationalism although, as will be demonstrated, it was equally a motivation for the historical avant-garde in their redemption of architecture as a lived social artifact. Where “labor” and “work” structure the argument of Frampton, it is through the reconciliation of art and life that post-war theories of the avant-garde have been most concerned (Bürger, 1984; Calinescu, 1977; Huyssen, 1981; Huyssen 1986; Hopkins, 2005).

This paper will argue that the avant-garde of the 1920s had demonstrated a fascination with the historical (and intangible) language of industrial architecture for polemical reasons and that, as well as predating avant-garde concerns in architecture, this creative redemption of the built environment was a symptom of the collective attack on the autonomous status of art and the emphasis this placed on the tangibility of the work of art. The avant-garde obsession with the outmoded forms of architecture (central to the critical re-reading of surrealism in the 1990s) embraced the forgotten forms of nineteenth century architecture, not only for their “decadence” (in the case of Ernst) but equally as a result of their connections with commerce. As Benjamin

illustrated, the role of architecture in the fetishization of the commodity dovetailed with the surrealist reclamation of the city and, unlike the institutionalized art object, was available to collective reception in the public realm. Giedion's fascination with the forms of nineteenth century architecture not only acknowledged the social transformations but the evolution of technology, which meant that, while indicative of progress, they were superseded at a very rapid rate (Giedion, 1995). It was the inherent "outmoded" dimension, as well as the functional and social values that were attached to it, that made the forgotten architectural spaces of the nineteenth century central to the avant-gardiste negation of tangible history. Attracted to the commercialized, readymade objects of consumerism, the avant-garde used architecture as a contextual frame, whereby the forces of art and life literally intersected.

## 2 OUTMODERNISM AND THE OUTMODED

The writing of Walter Benjamin is an important starting point for reframing architecture within the temporal landscape of Dada and surrealism and especially within the context of Bürger's work. The task of historicizing the relationship between Dada, surrealism and architecture began with Benjamin, although it is sometimes framed as an extension of Marx's broader concept of history. Benjamin was closely linked to the key agents in both Dada and surrealism and an emphasis on architecture foreshadows his writing. He had personal connections with both Bataille (Stoekl, 1985) and Breton and, as well as completing an essay dedicated to surrealism, he returned to the creative strategies of Dada and surrealism on a number of occasions throughout his writing. Significantly, he knew a number of the members of Berlin Dada personally from his time in Berlin and had been later introduced to the circle of surrealism in Paris by Franz Hessel, with whom he had collaborated on a translation of Proust (Brewster, 1969). It is also clear that Benjamin saw the historical concerns of surrealism as linked to his own arcades project, which he fittingly described as "the philosophical realization of surrealism—and hence its *sublation*" (Brewster, 1969).

It is not accidental that Benjamin's most concentrated writing on surrealism—his essay on its demise—was completed as he had discovered the work of Siegfried Giedion (Mertins, 1996). Benjamin drew from Giedion a fascination with "outmoded" constructions and especially those of the nineteenth century that embodied both the emergence of technologies such as iron, as well as their historical supersession (Mertins, 1997; Mertins, 1999). While privileging architecture and, more specifically, the interior, Benjamin was, by the mid 30s, fundamentally concerned with the notions of radicality and the extent to which avant-garde practices could transcend the intellectual and connect with broader popular forces and energies. These themes had also engaged Giedion in the same period (Heynen, 1999a). Benjamin, on a number of occasions, referred to architecture as a passive medium that (as in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction") is consummated by "a collectivity in a state of distraction" (Benjamin, 1969; Cary, 1999). In the essay on surrealism, Benjamin argues that a discursive reading of time not only connects and empowers architecture (reclaiming buildings through retrospection) but can equally engage the kind of "revolutionary nihilism" that modernity found itself fundamentally at odds with. Benjamin argued that "[n]o one before these visionaries and augurs perceived how destitution—not only social, but architectonic, the poverty of interiors, enslaved and enslaving objects—can suddenly be transformed into revolutionary nihilism" (Benjamin, 1978).

Benjamin's writing on surrealism highlights the ambivalence that the surrealists had to the architecture of their time, as well as their ability to engage the architectures of the past within the broader surrealist project, shattering the ticking clock of history and reinventing its objects within new temporal (and intangible) landscapes. What Benjamin also illustrates, however, is that the primary concerns of Dada and surrealism, as well as politicising the machinery of time, conceptualised it as an extension of the body. Recently it has been popular to theorise the activities of both Dada and surrealism as anthropomorphic strategies, seeking to marry the body with the mechanisation of technique and to envisage a crisis in the male body that, historically at least, is a response to the butchery of the First World War (Biro, 2009; Foster, 2004). However in Benjamin's synopsis, there is a shift that can be detected from the *anthropomorphic* to the *temporal*, where time becomes an extension of the body and a presence that it must continually acknowledge and obey. Benjamin's assertion—that "[the surrealists] exchange [...] the play of human features for the face of an alarm clock" (Benjamin, 1978)—is indicative of this shift.

Literally replacing the historical physiognomic characteristics of the face with the fluidity of time, examples such as Raoul Hausmann's 1920 *Self Portrait of the Dadaspoh* further serve to articulate this marrying of the spatial and temporal aspects of the body, where the facial features of the artist are replaced with the controlling mechanisms of the machine (in this case a scale) rendering the work of art intangible through its dislocation in historical and contextual frameworks. Automatism, a key strategy in Bürger's analysis, is the surrealist reification of this, where the body surrenders its autonomy to the controlling forces of speed, operating not only against *reason* but predominantly against *time*.

Dada and surrealism, as well as instigating a new schema of time, dismantled the notion of *work* and the aesthetic categories that were attached to it (Buck Morss, 1992). In his most famous essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Benjamin quotes Breton, who argues "the work of art is valuable only in so far as it is vibrated by the reflexes of the future" (Benjamin, 1969). The issue of time and its impact on the work of art is a central motif in the essay, as Benjamin struggles with the rampant acceleration of aesthetic production and the mechanization of the creative process. However, Benjamin's writing on Dada and surrealism not only highlights the connection between time and production but also the relationship that the avant-garde has to both history and architecture. Surrealism, in particular, occupied a stance in opposition to modernism, preferring to revive historical and forgotten modes of production at the same time as it dismantled new ones. This drew into precise focus the issues of the past, the future and the present that were all inherently tied to the avant-gardiste work (Cunningham, 2005). Benjamin saw the surrealist fascination with outmoded phenomena as a merging of the past with the present, whereby historicized forms of practice assumed a radical potential by being recontextualized in opposition to the temporal and aesthetic conditions of the present. For Bürger, this was the significant redefinition of artistic means that characterized the avant-garde as a break with the historical evolution of aesthetic production. Where authors such as Hal Foster (1993) and Anthony Vidler (1992) dwell on the "outmoded" forms of surrealist activity, Cunningham, for instance, prefers to see surrealism as a period of "conflicting temporalities" that, rather than pertaining to a historical period, are characterised by a particular relationship to the future in which work and its interpretation is undertaken (Cunningham, 2001). Both readings are accurate and represent the anachronistic nature of avant-garde practice and, more importantly, the intangible nature of the works it produced.

As Benjamin argued, surrealism was an avant-garde not of the *new*, but of the *old*, radically repositioning the outmoded objects of everyday life in opposition to technology and the rampant consumer fetishism that had continually absorbed increasing percentages of the visual landscape. For Benjamin, architecture was a critical, and overlooked, aspect of surrealism and had been instrumental in articulating their radicalised relationship to history. Illustrating this in his essay on surrealism, Benjamin argued

"[surrealism] was the first to perceive the revolutionary energies that appear in the 'outmoded'—in the first iron constructions, the first factory buildings, the earliest photos, objects that have begun to be extinct, grand pianos, the dresses of five years ago, fashionable restaurants when the vogue has begun to ebb from them. The relation of these things to revolution—no one can have a more exact concept of it than these authors. No one before these visionaries and augurs perceived how destitution—not only social, but architectonic, the poverty of interiors, enslaved and enslaving objects—can suddenly be transformed into revolutionary nihilism" (Benjamin, 1978).

This outmoded revolutionary potential is a significant theme in the work of Peter Bürger (Bürger, 1984) who demonstrates that Adorno's theory of modern art has an overdependence on the category of the *new*. Historically, as in the case of Greenberg (1971), the *new* was entwined with the concerns of the avant-garde and central to its definition and interpretation. Adorno's own essay on surrealism (Adorno, 1991) had argued that it was "paradoxical for something modern, already under the spell of [...] mass-production, to have any history at all." For Bürger however, the *new* was not a characteristic of modernism but a pre-requisite of all historical epochs and it was of little use in explaining the tactics of the historical avant-garde as they were radically outside of the established traditions against which the new could be evaluated (Bürger, 1984; Poggioli, 1968). The historical avant-garde undertook a systematic negation of the entire institution of art and, as a result, the stylistic concerns of technique were inconsequential in rela-

tionship to this broader catharsis (Bürger, 1981). Equally importantly, the most discursive practices of the avant-garde were not innovative in a technical sense but provocative in an experiential sense. This distinction was a fundamental insight of Bürger's argument and distinguished it from the earlier positions of both Lukacs (Lukacs, 1963) and Marcuse (1968). Dada and surrealism were lived (rather than artistic) phenomena and it was in the ramshackle flea-markets of Paris or the aging Cabaret Voltaire that the experiences of Dada and surrealism were framed and, more importantly, that a discovered architectural context made its way into artistic production.

While the sublation of art and life is a perennial theme throughout Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, the role of experience, as a by-product of life, has been more widely explored in its aftermath, and especially in relationship to Dada and surrealism. Schulte-Sasse focuses on this aspect of avant-gardism in his analysis of *Theory of the Avant-Garde* and Bürger, in his more recent writing, has established a concrete connection between the avant-garde and the pursuit of experience (Bürger, 1986; Bürger, 1990). The implied spatiality that is a preoccupation of the historical avant-garde is central to the resurrection of surrealism in the closing decades of the twentieth century and in particular in relationship to the circle of scholars gathered around the journal *October* (Krauss, 1994; Krauss et al, 1985). In particular, Hal Foster has drawn attention to the *outmoded* as a spatial model through which to reposition surrealist practice. Foster's *Compulsive Beauty* (1993) sets out to position an alternative starting point for evaluating surrealist activity, which stresses the centrality of death and decay rather than the romanticisation of love, as the primary explanation for a number of surrealist practices and fetishes. For Foster, this tends to shift the discussion of surrealism towards some of the historically marginalized practices such as, for instance, the perversions of Hans Bellmer. The critical aspect of Foster's work is the emphasis that it places on architecture, which, through Benjamin's concept of the *outmoded*, assumes a critical role in avant-garde practice not through production but through its rediscovery as a fragment of the values of the nineteenth century. In this sense, architecture provides a direct opposition to the "category of the new" by its reappropriation as a historical, and antiquated archaeological practice. With an emphasis on this conceptualization of surrealist practice and its origins, the remainder of this paper will demonstrate how the architecture of the nineteenth century was both truncated and problematised as a rediscovered fragment of the outmoded spaces of the bourgeoisie and a relic of their intangible history.

### 3 DIALECTICS OF ARCHITECTURE AND INDUSTRY

In the theorisation of Peter Bürger, the failure to recognize the historical nature of *autonomy* as a category (rather than a condition) of artistic production has meant that the separation between the work of art and the praxis of life is interpreted as "the (erroneous) idea that the work of art is totally independent of society" (Bürger, 1984). In the context of intangible history, this has shifted the focus of art history onto the tangible (and institutionalized) works of art, rather than the intangible and often varied processes that are instrumental to its production (Haskins, 1989; Potts, 2004). The key aspect of Bürger's theorisation of autonomy is that it emerges from a transformation in the feudal conditions of production that saw a separation of the intellectual and material qualities of art, primarily through the evolution of a court where artists were supported. As a result, one of the conditions of autonomy is that it evolves in contrast to handicrafts and, in essence, in unison with a revaluation of aesthetics. As a result, what is implied is that the history of art parallels its emergence as a tangible autonomous object, at the expense of a more detailed understanding of its intangible origins and the importance of tradition in sustaining this. Bürger's point of departure for revisiting issues of autonomy is that the predominantly German scholarship (Hinz, 1972) that he analyses tends to limit the autonomy of art to the formation of an art economy, while neglecting the historical forces that have driven this. However Bürger's emphasis on the historical evolution of autonomy invites an investigation of architecture, where the relationship between social forces and artistic production is entirely different.

The nature of autonomy in art is clearly different to the requirements or history of autonomy in architecture (Hill, 2003; Ackan, 2002). Where it was an assumption (almost a prerequisite) for the work of art in the nineteenth century, it was always highly contested in the realm of architecture. As a number of critics have noted (Fischer Taylor, 2001; Wood, 2002), architecture can never be assimilated entirely with the autonomy of art given that it is fundamentally *collec-*

*tive* in both its production and reception and inherently *functional* across all of its historical epochs. Modernity, in general, saw architecture aligned more closely with the social aspirations of society to an unprecedented extent, as the central figures were anxious to dispel questions of aesthetics and beauty in favor of functionalism, utility and structure. Despite this, architectural production in the modernist period generally arrived at the “work” from a utopianism that revered the lack of autonomy that architecture embodied and was in flagrant contradiction to the status of the work of art. The avant-garde exposes the illusion of autonomy in the visual arts and, consequently, architectural space (as the *opposite* of the autonomy of the art object) becomes a strategy of the avant-garde in this polemical negation.

Consider, for instance, the historical framework sketched by Kenneth Frampton in regard to architectural history that, like Bürger’s, responds to key moments when attitudes towards architectural production changed (Frampton, 1973). Frampton’s argument is that “[t]he transformations that overtook the basic means of production between 1750 and 1850 not only radically modified the [built] landscape [...] but also wrought fundamental alterations in the basic system of distribution and consumption” (Frampton, 1973). For Frampton, it is the separation between architecture and engineering which is critical, linked, as he argues, to the dialectical relationship between “labor” and “work”. Drawing from the writing of Hannah Arendt (Frampton, 1969), Frampton argues that “labor” is essentially an extension of “life itself” while work corresponds to the “unnaturalness of human existence.” For Frampton, this separation, which saw the science of engineering splinter from the emerging field of aesthetics, also triggered a fracturing of form and content in architecture where the functional and artistic began to operate in distinctive (and often unrelated) spheres. Frampton argues that this rupture between function and form “was to subtly undermine the object of architecture throughout the nineteenth century and to tentatively resolve itself in the early twentieth as a mode of building to be predicated on the precepts of an economically determined functionalism” (Frampton, 1973).

Frampton’s dialectical method is similar to the approach of Bürger, which uses the production of art to demonstrate major social and economic transformations that were restructuring capitalist society (Frampton, 1978). In Frampton’s argument, architecture went through two significant transformations that—equivalent to the passage from courtly art to bourgeois aestheticism—saw the artistic status of architecture shifting as its economic independence diminished. In the first instance, architecture was separated from the functional and experiential domains through the arbitrary expression of form and, in the second instance, it was conditioned by the controlling forces of an accelerating bourgeois economy which limited the expression of architecture to the narrowing requirements of market forces. Throughout, architecture assumed a role in dialectical opposition to nature, functioning as a collective, but highly politicised, instrument of social reform.

This dialectic, which ran through the historical project of Tafuri in a similar time period (Tafuri, 1976), saw a separation between the artistic concerns of building and their rational resolution. The inherently functional and economic status of the architectural object, bounded by forces which inherently shaped its form, meant that formalistic explorations (such as those of Boullée), while embracing the natural, were ultimately doomed to remain speculative utopian experiments, unable to be realized as concrete architectural forms under the social or economic conditions of firstly, the Enlightenment, and ultimately, modernism. Just as engineering and architecture were gravitating towards autonomous social fields in the Enlightenment (Vidler, 1986), there was an explosion of capitalism in nineteenth century bourgeois society which saw architecture commercialized to an unprecedented extent and instrumental in the formation of a “building typology dedicated to serve the processes of consumption” (Frampton, 1973). At the same time as the autonomy of art had achieved its independence from social forces—authoritatively poised at the nexus of a hungry bourgeois market—architecture was involved in facilitating commerce through the design of markets, exhibition halls and the department store (Benjamin, 2003), coinciding, in Frampton’s argument, with the simultaneous appearance of wholesale kitsch. In fact, as both Frampton and Tafuri conclude, architecture, rather than approximating the independence of the visual arts in this timeframe, was enslaved by bourgeois capitalism due to its inherently obedient submission to both economic and rationalizing forces. This is an inevitable condition of architecture that, as already demonstrated, is necessarily collective in both its production and function.

In this context, Max Ernst's work has been critical to the theorization of the outmoded and the claims that are made to intangible history. One aspect of Ernst's work that is of particular significance for both architecture and a theory of the avant-garde is its dependence on the industrial forms of the nineteenth century and their merging, through collage, with the bourgeois interiors of the same period. Ernst's *La Femme 100 têtes* drew from imagery cropped from nineteenth century journals and illustrated books, transforming these scenes into a surreal collision between figure and context that embodied the dialectical position of Frampton and Bürger (Ernst, 1948). In these works, the architecture retains its spatial characteristics but is radically reprogrammed, inheriting an array of bizarre events and becoming a stage for the projection of a self-indulgent avant-garde dreamscape. Architecture, through this process, is discovered (and reproduced) as an *objet trouvé*, stolen from the outmoded interiors of the nineteenth century bourgeoisie and re-inhabited by industrial machinery. That Ernst drew, in his collages, from Diderot's work is already established (Spies, 1988; Karmel, 2005). Having a lasting impact on visual imagery, Diderot had created a method of documenting objects (or tools) and their spatial environment, revolutionizing the practices of spatial representation and the traditions that accompanied it. As Werner Spies has demonstrated, the majority of the material that Ernst drew from in the formation of his collages was "solely functional, in origin and experience" (Spies, 1993). For Giedion (who knew Ernst personally) the collages were firmly embedded in the nineteenth century and served to reinvigorate the structures of bourgeois society through critique and disorientation. Giedion writes, in regard to Ernst,

"[d]rops of the nineteenth century still seemed to flow in his veins. [...] Here irrational images unmask the devaluation of symbols at work. Following one another without regard to external logic, the picture cycles are not to be read for their naturalistic meaning. What matters is their psychic comment. They are collages, fragments culled and pasted from the long forgotten woodcut books of the last century. Max Ernst raised them to the status of 'objects.' The scissors cut them asunder and the artist's fantasy, taking up the elements, combines them anew" (Giedion, 1969).

Giedion's passage implies a rediscovery of architecture through the act of collage, which tears it from its historical roots and repositions it within a distorted *contemporary*. There is a connection to be made between the emphasis that Ernst places on the nineteenth century interior and the dialectic that Bürger sets up between the avant-garde and the bourgeois aesthetic practices of the previous century. A number of scholars connect Ernst's obsession with the nineteenth century interior to the recurring psychoanalytical forces that underpin his work. For Adorno, these works were "the attempt to uncover childhood experiences by blasting them out" (Adorno, 1991). In the context of Bürger, the collages proposed a dialectic between modernism and the avant-garde, marrying experience with context and recovering, in Benjamin's terms, the "revolutionary nihilism" of the nineteenth century.

As has already been shown, the outmoded (and its dependence on architecture) is a key aspect of Hal Foster's writing on surrealism, drawn from the proliferation of outmoded interiors and the radical potential they offer in subverting the traditions of art (Foster, 1993). Foster takes this one step further to imply that the nineteenth century interiors that feature prominently in Max Ernst's work were also the scenes of childhood for many of the surrealists—"representations residual in surrealist childhoods"—as well as the bourgeois backdrop to Freud's writing on sexual discovery. Implying the importance of intangible history in the analysis of historical artifacts, Foster sees a clear confluence between the discovery of psychoanalysis and the architectural context where this occurred, most explicitly, in the ornamental interiors of the nineteenth century home.

This emphasis on the interior was a preoccupation of the Frankfurt school (Adorno, 1969) and especially in the 1930s. The confluence of ideas relating to withdrawing, solitude, isolation and contemplation (heavily romanticised in Nietzsche's writing) were connected in Adorno's dissertation to a nostalgia for the nineteenth century interior as a response to an internalised intellectual spirituality, glimpsed through Kierkegaard (Adorno, 1989). Similarly, in Benjamin's work of the same period, the interior is characterised by its opposition to work and production (Benjamin, 2003); a characteristic of modernism at the same time as it is a reaction against it. Again the nineteenth century interior assumes the qualities of otherness, allowing respite from the banality of work and where the family, in all of its psychoanalytical dysfunction, replaces the collective as the unit of social interaction. Juxtaposed with the architecture and equipment of

industrialisation, the twin trajectories of tangible (art) and intangible (lived) experience intersect in the compiled narratives of Ernst, blurring the public and private realms and juxtaposing the nineteenth century interior with its modernist antithesis.

#### 4 TIME AND TANGIBILITY

More than any other concept, it is an understanding of the avant-garde as a specific manipulation of time that is central to its role as an agent of intangible histories, emerging in opposition to the hegemony of modernism and its institutions. In the preface to a reprint of his *Manifesto of Surrealism* (Breton, 1972), Breton evaluates the concept of time and its pressing urgency to surrealist activities by conceding that “indeed [it must] be admitted, we’re in bad, we’re in terrible, shape when it comes to time” (Breton, 1972). This trepidation towards time was symptomatic of the opposition that a number of the key agents of surrealism felt towards progress generally and modernism specifically and is fittingly embodied in the preface to their original manifesto. Written retrospectively in 1929, Breton was writing in the same year as Benjamin’s nostalgic reappraisal of the legacy of the avant-garde in “Surrealism: the last snapshot of the European Intelligentsia” (Benjamin, 1978). Among other things, the essay praised surrealism for proselytizing the “outmoded” forms of architecture, arguing for this realization as one of the movement’s primary legacies. Benjamin, like Breton deliberately evokes the pressures of time that the early avant-gardes operated under and the incredible urgency with which they went about their business (Kern, 1983). He also positions the activities of surrealism as historical, chained, as it were, to a particular timeframe of which the avant-garde movements were both conscious of and antagonistic towards. The writing of Dada maverick Richard Huelsenbeck, nine years prior, reflects Benjamin’s attitudes, where he argues that “[t]he best and most extraordinary artists will be those who every hour snatch the tatters of their bodies out of the frenzied cataract of life, who, with bleeding hands and hearts, hold fast to the intelligence of their time” (Huelsenbeck, 1952).

The manifesto, blurring the praxis of life with the passage of time in a way that is reminiscent of both Benjamin and Bürger, serves to illustrate that the concerns of Dada and surrealism were radically historical, at least in the sense in which they saw themselves. Radical activity has always had a strong affiliation with time: the revolutionaries in Paris in 1789 saw, as one of their first steps, the introduction of a new calendar (Damisch, 2002) and one of the most symbolic forms of violent protest by the insurgents of the July Revolution was to shoot out the clocks in the clock towers (Benjamin, 1978). As Benjamin observed, these symbols, rather than recording time, are “moments of a historical consciousness” and their desecration is a violation of the continuum of history. It is also important to acknowledge, in this context, that the avant-garde, as a historical phenomenon, was traditionally associated with revolutionary battle and has only subsequently been tied to artistic production. As a *Parisian* (rather than French) term, Poggioli demonstrates how the idea of an avant-garde emerged in the context of the 1848 revolution in Paris and implied a “[subordination...] to the ideals of a radicalism which was not cultural but political” (Poggioli, 1968). The avant-garde retained this political affiliation as its primary meaning for several decades up until the turn of the century and, while being tentatively applied to the visual arts in the second half of the nineteenth century, it still retained the expectation of radicalism and the politicisation of art practice (Poggioli, 1967).

The relationship between time and revolution is not lost in the writing of Benjamin. Discussing the Dada and surrealist fascination with the “outmoded” he describes the “revolutionary nihilism” which activates history in a highly politicised manner. Similarly, for Bürger, the historical avant-garde acts in a “revolutionary” way in that it “destroys the traditional concept of the organic work of art and replaces it by another” (Bürger, 1984) thus enacting an aesthetic and historical revolution of values. In Habermas’s essay entitled “Modernity versus Postmodernity” he argues that Benjamin uses “the spirit of surrealism” to construct a post-historicist position, which conceptualises “the present as a moment of revelation; a time in which splinters of a messianic presence are enmeshed” (Habermas, 1981). For Habermas, the activities of Dada and surrealism (where the avant-garde movements reached their climax) were reflective of a “changed consciousness of time” which characterizes what he refers to as “aesthetic modernity”. Reading

the “anticipation of an unknown future” by the avant-garde as “the exaltation of the present,” (Habermas, 1981), Habermas argues that

“[t]his time consciousness expresses itself through metaphors of the vanguard and the avant-garde. The avant-garde understands itself as invading unknown territory, exposing itself to the dangers of sudden, shocking encounters, conquering an as yet unknown future. The avant-garde must find a direction in a landscape into which no-one seems to have yet ventured” (Habermas, 1981).

While accepting Habermas’s proposition of a “time consciousness” that runs through avant-garde activities, the emphasis that Habermas places on “modernity” as a vital strategy of the avant-garde needs to be more carefully articulated (Passerin d’Entrèves et al, 1997). As demonstrated, recent authors (Huyssen, 1981; Heynen, 1999; Harvey, 1990) have tended to isolate the avant-garde from the broader history of modernism, in order to diagnose more scientifically the specific trajectories. One of the major aspects that distinguishes modernity generally, from the avant-garde specifically is that the “time consciousness” of modernism, drawn from the present and a utopian projection of the future, is inherently contradictory to the “time consciousness” of the avant-garde, which, in Dada and surrealism at least, was often regressive in nature and dystopic in outlook (Nagele, 1980).

## 5 CONCLUSION: INTANGIBLE HISTORIES OF THE AVANT-GARDE

That a theory of avant-garde practice is inseparable from a concrete understanding of time is evidenced in a number of the posthumous critiques of Dada and surrealism, which struggle to reconcile the creative practices with the political turbulence that foreshadows them (Adorno, 1991; Vaneigem, 1999). To position a role for the avant-garde in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is not a trivial task and one that, for many scholars, is purely historical in its scope. The objectives and strategies of avant-garde practice, bound up with the political utopianism and social naïveté of the interwar period, are generally an embodiment of the tangible histories that have dominated the twentieth century and the personal or submerged narratives that have instructed this are often heavily obscured. The second half of the twentieth century saw rapid expansion of the consumerist systems that the avant-garde sought to dismantle (Huyssen, 1980), meaning that the apparent need or even possibility of an avant-garde is now exceedingly narrow, at least in the context that it has been defined thus far. It is also easy to empathize with the pessimism with which both Tafuri and Bürger approached the study of the avant-garde: as an exercise in depoliticized representation, rather than a tangible alteration to the structure of society or its institutions. However, this is to neglect the changing context within which both the avant-garde and its scholarship are now forced to operate as well as the role that intangible histories can play in resurrecting it.

Rather than being reduced to *mere* representation, the avant-garde should be considered, in the current media-saturated social context, as vital in that it is only through representation that any tangible change to this social reality can be conceived or imagined. Representation has become so central to contemporary life that Bürger’s predicted sublation of art and life has reached a point where the two are effectively indecipherable, not only in the institutions of art, but the praxis of life in general. The encroachment of the social context has served to evacuate the disciplinary boundaries of the fine arts generally, and architecture specifically, meaning that art and architecture are experienced predominantly *through* representation and as a virtual extension of everyday life. What is absent in this sublation is an understanding or recognition of the politics of representation, its ancestry and, more importantly, the ability it has as a *transgressive* medium capable of disrupting the forces of production that homogenise it.

Where, in the 1920s, innovations in representation were contained largely within the domain of art, by the 1960s, these innovations had well and truly subverted these disciplinary categorisations. Developments in visual exploration had a role in the formulation of advertising, the marketing of music, the conceptualisation of fashion and the technological repackaging of information and communications. Architecture no longer resides in a narrow field of formal strategies and programmatic innovation but in a vast and accelerating field of media strategies that condition not only its production and inhabitation but its conceptualisation and dissemination. The boundaries between architecture and its context have never been more blurred and it sits equally comfortably in the hybrid field of visual culture or cultural theory as it does within the

pages of *Vanity Fair* or as the backdrop to a Hollywood blockbuster. While untraditional platforms from which revolutionary strategies are projected, these expanded popular forms are a reflection of the changing contexts of architecture and the contrary expectations of an avant-garde, where the traditional tactics of shock are no longer sufficient or, indeed, shocking. The inability of the historical avant-garde to radically penetrate this aspect of popular culture was a major criticism of Bürger, sentencing art practice to a future bound by the institutional categorization that the avant-garde had discovered and exploited. Walter Benjamin had argued that the avant-gardes remained primarily as intellectual movements concerned with a hermetic and isolated language that alienated rather than empowered the proletariat (Benjamin, 1978b). For Benjamin, the radical avant-gardes merely paved the way for a more inclusive wave of social change to occur but, in their current form, had been marginalized by their exclusivity in the face of the popular.

In regard to the history of architecture, the legacy of both Benjamin and Bürger provides the opportunity to broaden the study of architecture by tracing its radical roots to the intangible histories of avant-gardism and in opposition to the autonomous claims of modernism. Dispelling a number of the historical preconceptions regarding modernism in the process, this enables a study of architecture on the basis of discovery, rather than production, and with respect to the “old” (or outmoded) rather than the new. In this way the practices discussed can be viewed as a continual reinvention of architecture in new and unconventional contexts. Rather than transforming the mode of production, these tactics negate production entirely, shifting the creative emphasis to discovery and reception and establishing architecture as a recurring trope in the dialectical opposition between art and life. In this way, the technological trajectory of modernism is subverted as the work of architecture is torn and ruptured and then ultimately scattered amongst the intangible histories of the historical avant-garde and its legacy.

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