Signals and Noise:

Art, Literature and the Avant-garde

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Thesis Abstract

One of the most consistent features of the diverse artistic movements that have flourished throughout the twentieth century has been their willingness to experiment in diverse genres and across alternative art forms. Avant-gardes such as Expressionism, Dada, Surrealism, Futurism, Fluxus and Pop were composed not only of painters but also dramatists, musicians, actors, singers, dancers, sculptors, poets and architects. Their works represent a dramatic process of cross-fertilization between the arts, resulting in an array of hybrid forms that defy conventional categorisation. This thesis investigates implications of this cross-disciplinary impulse and aims by doing so to open out a site in which to reassess both the manner in which the avant-gardes have been theorised and the impact their theorisation has had on contemporary aesthetics.

In the first part of this study, I revisit the work of the most influential theorists of the avant-garde in order to ask what the term "avant-garde" has come to signify. I look at how different theories of the avant-garde and of modernism relate to one another as well as asking what effect these theories have had on attempts to evaluate the legacies of the avant-gardes. The work of Theodor Adorno provides a connective tissue throughout the thesis. In Chapter One, I use it to complicate Peter Bürger's notion of the avant-garde as "anti-art" and to argue that the most pressing challenge that the avant-gardes announce is to think through the cross-disciplinarity that marks their work. In Chapter Two, I trace how painting has come to be considered as the paradigmatic modernist art form and how, as a result, the avant-garde has been read as a secondary, "literary" phenomenon to be grasped through its relation to painting. I argue that this constitutes a systematic devaluation of literature and has resulted in an "art historical" model of the avant-gardes which represses both their real radicality and implications of their work for these kinds of disciplinary structures.

In the second part of this thesis, I explore works which examine and question the aesthetic hierarchies and notions of aesthetic autonomy that the theories of modernism and the avant-garde explored in the first part set up. In Chapter Three, I approach by way of two cross-disciplinary works which employ literature and visual art: Marcel Duchamp's *Green Box* (1934) and Andy Warhol's *a; a novel* (1968). Works such as these, which slip through the gaps between literary and art history, have, I argue, important implications for literary and visual aesthetics but are often overlooked in disciplinary histories. In my final chapter, I return to the theory of the avant-garde as it emerges in the work of Jean-Francois Lyotard. I examine how his work reconfigures Adorno's aesthetics by performing the cross-disciplinary movement that it argues is characteristic of avant-garde art works. Tracing his "post-aesthetic" response to Duchamp and Warhol, I explore how Lyotard articulates a mode of practice that moves beyond the dichotomy of "art" and "anti-art" and opens out a site in which the importance of the twentieth century avant-gardes is made visible.

I conclude by briefly considering the implications of the avant-garde, as I have presented it in this thesis, for contemporary debates on the twenty-first century "digital avant-gardes" and recent writing on aesthetics.

I verify that I composed this thesis which consists of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree or qualification.

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Acknowledgements

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Introduction

"There is something like an explosion in the meaning of certain words," remarked the artist Marcel Duchamp in a 1968 interview, "they have a value greater than their meaning in the dictionary" (Cabanne *Dialogues* 16). One word of which this is certainly true, and a word heavily associated with Duchamp himself, is "avant-garde". The term has a long history that encompasses political, military and aesthetic discourses and has been used to describe cultural developments since at least the early nineteenth century.[1] Yet, in the course of the last few decades, since the year in which Duchamp made his remarks in fact, the expression "avant-garde" seems to have become increasingly freighted with meaning, associated with a specific set of twentieth-century artistic movements and intimately linked with the hopes and disappointments of late modernity. In this thesis, I examine this process, analysing how the avant-garde was theorised in the last decades of the twentieth century and exploring the debates that these theorisations have provoked. My primary aim is to interrogate how the theorisation of the avant-garde has impacted both upon our understanding of specific types of art work and upon aesthetics more broadly.

The development of the term "avant-garde" and the debates over the its usage are to a great extent the result of Peter Bürger's seminal *Theory of the Avant-garde*, which was published in 1974 but is nevertheless very much infused with the disappointment that followed the events of May 1968. Clearly delimiting the concept for the first time,[2] Bürger's text used the term to describe the various radical artistic movements of early twentieth-century Europe. These "historical avant-gardes", he argued, sought to restore a

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[1] It is well known that the term has military origins and that its application to artistic production dates back to at least 1825, when it was used by Henri Saint-Simon. However, as this thesis is an examination of how the term has been used in the late twentieth century and what it has come to mean since the 1970s, I will not rehearse the full history of the term here. For a comprehensive history of the word and its usage before the period I am discussing see Calinescu 95-148. For a discussion of how the term is used in different countries, something this thesis will touch on in Chapter Two, see Bäckström.

[2] This is not to credit Bürger with the first theory of the avant-garde. In fact his work is pre-dated by Rennato Poggioli's *Theory of the Avant-garde,* published in Italian in 1962 and translated into English in 1968. However, Poggioli's work does not delimit a clear field for it does not define the avant-garde in any sense that would distinguish it from modern art more broadly. Bürger's text, as the evidence of subsequent discussion shows, has been considerably more influential.

social function to art, to restructure society through a basis in art. It was, he concludes, a task at which they failed. *Theory of the Avant-Garde* has left a powerful legacy in the form of two central ideas, ideas which seem to have set the parameters for almost all subsequent discussion. The first of these is the description of avant-garde as "anti-art", as operating through a practice of negation. It is this practice, according to Bürger, that distinguishes the avant-garde within the wider category of modern art. The second is the idea that authentically critical art has become impossible under the conditions of late twentieth-century capitalism, as the process of recuperation operates with increasing speed and ruthlessness: according to Bürger's thesis, the avant-garde is "historical" or dead.

Over time, however, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* has also come under scrutiny. Indeed, the book has been roundly criticised. Some have argued, quite rightly, that its scope is limited and its examples are few and very carefully chosen, which is to say that *Theory of the Avant-garde* is in effect a theory of Dada and Surrealism which fails to take account of any of the other movements that it purports to describe.[3] Others have suggested that the central categories of aesthetic autonomy and life praxis remain inadequately theorised.[4] Bürger's blanket dismissal of the 1960s "neo" avant-garde has also been contested as both short-sighted and self-defeating, relying on a model of originality and repetition which by his own account the avant-garde set out to challenge.[5] As a result, there has been a great deal of dispute over Bürger's conclusions, generating what Paul Mann has recently described as an "interminable discourse of termination" (115).[6] *Theory*

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[3] It is for this reason that Richard Murphy, for example, attempts to supplement Bürger's thesis with work on German Expressionism in *Theorizing the Avant-Garde*: *Modernism, Expressionism and the Problem of Postmodernity*. Likewise, Boris Groys' *Total Art of Stalinism* effectively challenges the applicability of Bürger's conclusions in the context of the Russian avant-gardes.

[4] Murphy questions Bürger's theorisation of autonomy (see *Theorizing the Avant-Garde* 31-33), a move which I will discuss in Chapter One of this thesis. Ben Highmore examines his theorisation of "life praxis" in his essay "Awkward Moments: Avant-gardism and the Dialectics of Everyday Life".

[5] See in particular "The Primary Colours for the Second Time" by Benjamin Buchloh and "What's Neo about the Neo-Avant-garde?" by Hal Foster.

[6] Contributions to this debate, which operate within the framework of *Theory of the Avant-garde,* have been made by Suzie Gablik, Octavio Paz, Hans Magnus Enzensberger, Benjamin Buchloh, Richard Murphy, Hal Foster, Dietrich Scheunemann and Andreas Huyssen. These contributions will be referenced at various points in the main body of this thesis.

of the Avant-Garde, in short, has been revealed as flawed and internally contradictory, its conclusions disputed and its assumptions exposed: Bürger's theory of failure appears as a failed theory. As far as the avant-garde goes, Mann concludes "there is, precisely, nothing left to say" (3).[7]

Yet despite these criticisms, Bürger's definition of the avant-garde as "anti-art" has nevertheless been broadly accepted. This is despite the fact that it clearly reduces a complex and heterogeneous set of phenomena to a single conceptual idea, the gesture of negation. It is this state of affairs to which this thesis responds: the central argument and assumptions of *Theory of the Avant-garde* have been largely discredited, the debate over the death of the avant-garde has ground to a halt, yet the theoretical reduction of the avant-garde to "anti-art" has barely been challenged.[8] This is all the more surprising given the recent critical effort that has been expended on examining the related category "modernism", the conceptualisation of which is intricately bound up with the idea of the "avant-garde". Modernism, it is widely recognised, had been reduced and caricatured in discourse in order to provide a relief against which "postmodern" perspectives could be constructed. In the last decade or so, the category has undergone an extensive revaluation during which its complexities and richness have been restored.[9] The term "avant-garde", however, has not been revisited in this manner. The second aim of my research, then, is to argue against the reduction of the category "avant-garde" to mere "anti-art". In this sense, this thesis should also be read as a defence.

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[7] Although, as the page number here indicates, Mann goes on to write a whole book on the subject, the arguments of which I will discuss further in Chapter One.

[8] One exception here is the recent work of Krzysztof Ziareck, who, as his two monographs *The Historicity of Experience* (1999) and *The Force of Art* (2004) show, is in the process of developing an understanding of the avant-garde work as an operation of transformative force or event. Ziareck's writing touches upon some of the arguments that I will be setting out in Chapter Four and, I would suggest, represents the development of a trajectory opened out by Heidegger which can be held in comparison (and sometimes runs parallel) to the Adornian trajectory with which I am concerned. Another important contribution to this Heideggerian strand would be Andrew Benjamin's *Art, Mimesis and the Avant-garde* (1991). Although I will not deal with this line of development directly, I will indicate points at which the two might be productively compared.

[9] This is evidenced by works such as Eysteinsson's *The Concept of Modernism* and Peter Nicholls' *Modernisms*. Indeed, as both these works show, the concept has been sufficiently broadened that there is now a question over whether the avant-gardes should be grasped as part of modernism: Eysteinsson discusses the question at length, see his Chapter Four, 143-178.

Several possible paths open out, of course, so before setting out the approach I have decided upon, it is perhaps worth explaining which of these paths I have chosen not to take. One response to the problems of theorising the avant-garde would be to simply reject outright the attempt to impose a narrow conceptual category on a wide and diverse historical phenomenon, and instead to divert energy to mapping out the field.[10] Rather than concern myself with overarching theoretical frameworks, I might have turned to the excavation and reconstruction of the different aspects of the avant-gardes, bringing to light a forgotten movement, perhaps, or inviting "lost" artists to step out of the shadows. However, it seems to me that as well as adding layers to the sediments of "avant-garde" history an examination of this sedimentation, these accumulated layers, is also in order. It is for this reason that my primary focus is not so much the history of the works and movements of the avant-gardes but rather the history of the idea and theorisation of the "avant-garde". This said, however, the way in which I attempt to recast this debate does involve the examination of works that, for reasons that I will come to shortly, have received very little critical attention indeed: I hope, therefore, that my research does contribute in a modest way to the enrichment of the field and material history of the avant-gardes.

Another course of action would have been to attempt to construct a "better" theory by which to consider the avant-gardes. Such work has been undertaken, indeed attempts to counter Bürger's dismissal of late twentieth century art (i.e. attempts to counter the death sentence he bestows) have often constructed alternative models by which these works and their relation to the earlier works of the historical avant-gardes can be grasped. In this respect, the Lacanian models adopted by the critics associated with the journal *October* have been particularly important.[11] These attempts all impact upon this thesis at points. I

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[10] That such work is well underway is evidenced by many recent studies, for example the archival work on the Central European avant-gardes (see Benson and Forgács) and also on the female avant-gardists who have been all but written out of the history of the avant-gardes despite having played central roles in the movements (see Hemus and Sawleson Gorse).

[11] See Krauss, "Notes on the Index" and Foster "What's Neo about the Neo Avant-Garde?" Other critics have attempted to develop alternative theories of the avant-garde by suggesting that, rather than being driven by self-criticism, the avant-gardes were driven by the development of mass culture and technology. Andreas Huyssen, for example, while largely accepting Bürger's parameters, has tried to widen them by suggesting that what marked the avant-garde as distinct from modernism is its engagement with mass

have decided against such a path, however, for I believe—and will argue—that any single attempt to "correctly" grasp the avant-garde effectively misses the point: the schismatic relationship between the works of the avant-gardes and attempts to theorize, I will suggest, is indicative of a more profound resistance to discourse manifest within avant-garde art.[12] For this reason, I would argue that constructing an alternative theory obscures rather than responds to the problem of *Theory of the Avant-Garde*.

Rather than attempting to define or conceptualise the term "avant-garde", then, I want to use it as a heuristic device by which to open out a certain nexus of ideas, patterns of thought, viewing and reading, to allow the explosion of meaning in the term to make itself felt. In this thesis, I want to ask how the avant-garde has been constructed in the theoretical discourse that has accumulated over the last decades and to what effect. My aim is not to conceptualise the avant-garde "properly", nor to "correct" its history: rather, what I want to discover is what is at stake in the process of theorising the avant-garde and how this process has impacted on how we understand art and the relationships between the arts.

Given that part of my project is to examine how these debates construct and frame particular artworks in certain ways, it seems only logical to focus on the work of those artists who have been central to this project. Two figures in particular stand out in this respect, namely Duchamp and his heir apparent Andy Warhol.[13] In almost every account

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culture. This opens the door to a reconsideration of the "neo" avant-gardes as reacting to a different technological context, which in turn recasts their work as "authentic" responses to the position of art in society. In this regard see also Scheunemann "On Photography and Painting," and David Hopkin's introduction to *Neo-Avant-garde* (1-15). If I do not deal with these alternatives in this thesis it is because they are grounded in precisely the same larger, Marxist framework as Bürger's work and therefore operate more to shift emphasis than to change the terms of the debate.

[12] It is for this reason that I take Ziareck's attempt to think through avant-garde art as operating as event to be the most compelling contribution to recent debates. To reiterate, though, our projects are different: I am effectively examining the background out of which the necessity for his work (and of course his work itself) arises. Indeed, I hope that this thesis helps to illuminate what is at stake in Ziareck's work.

[13] Duchamp is usually seen to have set the stage for the activities of art world throughout the 1950s and 60s, and is positioned as patriarch, fathering a generation of (metaphorical) artistic 'sons': he is "the Daddy of Dada and the Grandpa of Pop", as one critic wrote in 1967 (qtd. A. Jones *Postmodernism* xii) His work has thus played a crucial role in the art historical appraisal of neo-avant-garde artists such as, in the American context, William de Kooning, Jasper Johns, and Claes Oldenberg and in the European context Yves Klein, Gerhard Richter, and Marcel Broodthalers. Indeed, it is this patriarchal structure of Duchamp discourse that has attracted recent criticism: its implications are the main focus of Amelia Jones' monograph *Postmodernism and the En-Gendering of Marcel Duchamp*. While Jones concentrates on re-

under examination in this thesis, Duchamp's readymade is positioned as the paradigmatic avant-garde gesture.[14] Unsurprisingly, then, it is to the readymade that Warhol's silk-screened paintings of banal everyday imagery are often seen to respond: they are, for instance, the key example of the "neo" avant-garde in Bürger's thesis.[15] This was not an original pairing in Bürger's work, however; from the outset, Warhol's art was labelled as "Neo Dada," or as, as one early reviewer put it, "Anti-Art with capital A's" (Glueck 6).[16] Over subsequent decades, his paintings and films have often been contextualized in the framework of Duchamp's work. Warhol's embrace of the automatic, his fascination with technological reproduction and his rejection of the human and emotional—all of which can be understood as Duchampian traits—has made his work appear every bit as challenging as Dada did half a century earlier.[17] Focusing on these artists' work and how it has been positioned thus gives me immediate purchase on the various theoretical approaches in which their work figures, allowing direct and often illuminating comparisons between different critical positions. Importantly, by focusing on these key

reading Duchamp's work in order to destabilise the gendering of this heritage, it was this masculine gendering itself which was the subject of David Hopkin's recent exhibition *Dada's Boys* (Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh 2007), which examined Duchamp's influence on subsequent generations of male artists. My own interest is not in the role that Duchamp's legacies play in the gendering of the avant-garde and art history, important though this is, but more in the role they have taken in structuring and reinforcing the way in which the concept avant-garde has been theorised.

[14] Such is Duchamp's ubiquity in theories of the avant-garde, in fact, that it has itself become a subject of some debate. See Perloff "Dada without Duchamp/ Duchamp without Dada" and Amelia Jones *Postmodernism and the En-gendering of Marcel Duchamp* (passim). However, as David Cunningham's 2006 article "Making an Example of Duchamp: History, Theory, and the Question of the Avant-Garde" argues such a thing as an "example of the avant-garde" may well be a contradiction in terms. Following Adorno, Cunningham argues that the avant-garde must logically be marked by its non-identity and difference. This means that examples cannot be given, for once a work is "exemplary" of a shared trait it must logically be excluded from the avant-garde. Although our focuses are different, the ideas and questions that Cunningham outlines in this essay and others overlap with the questions that this thesis focuses upon: he seeks to grasp the temporality inscribed in the idea of avant-garde, while I am examining its theorisation and cross-disciplinarity. I am nevertheless very much indebted to his work for a deeper grasp of the problematic of the avant-garde.

[15] See Bürger, *Theory* 61. This is also the subject of Benjamin Buchloh's "Andy Warhol's One Dimensional Art". Again, Amelia Jones discusses how this relation has been naturalized in art historical discourse (51-54).

[16] For more on the reception of Pop see Pratt, *The Critical Response to Andy Warhol*. For a scholarly analysis of this reception, see Harrison, *Pop Art and the Origins of Post-Modernism*.

[17] Warhol actually always claimed to know very little about Duchamp and denied any influence. Whether this is actually the case is very difficult to confirm. Certainly, those around Warhol knew about Dada, his friend and flatmate Philip Pearlstein, for example, wrote a thesis on Picabia while living with Warhol; see Buchloh, "Three Conversations" 37-45.

players, I am also attempting to show that even the most theorized or recuperated avant-garde works might be seen to challenge the conceptual categories that are imposed upon them.

In order to contextualise these constructions in the wider philosophical, political and aesthetic discussions that they address, it is necessary to situate the debates on the avant-garde as responding to a particular set of inter-related events and phenomena which mark the period: as I have already intimated, these include the crisis of Marxism that followed the events of May 1968, and the emergence of the idea of "postmodernism".[18] Another, more precise event of special significance in this regard is the publication of Theodor Adorno's late magnum opus *Aesthetic Theory* in 1970. Adorno's work provides a connective tissue throughout the debates under discussion; recognising the engagement with Adorno's aesthetics that these works articulate, I will argue, is a crucial step towards understanding what is at stake in the theorisations of the avant-garde.[19]

In Chapter One of this thesis, therefore, I look at how the avant-garde is set up by Bürger in counter-distinction to Adorno's aesthetics and spend some time examining this relationship. I argue that Bürger's work relies upon a problematic simplification of Adorno's notion of aesthetic autonomy and that, as a result, it fails to take account of the real complexity of the works which it depends upon. However, my reading of Adorno's essay "Art and the Arts", in which the German theorist notes that the attempt to reach beyond the sphere of "art" into society (and thus to give art a social function) is often accompanied by the attempt to mix media and explore relationships among the arts, allows me to recast the conclusions of *Theory of the Avant-Garde* and to locate in Bürger's work the germ of an alternative angle by which to approach to the avant-garde: a consideration of the relationships between the different arts and how they impact on one another. I attempt to develop the importance of this line of approach throughout the thesis, tracing

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[18] For a considered account of the 1970s historical context and its fascination with the artistic movements of the early twentieth century see Huyssen "The Search for Tradition".

[19] Adorno's aesthetics, as I approach them in this thesis, are a broader project than just *Aesthetic Theory* and include the essays that were written during the period that *Aesthetic Theory* was being developed, many of which have been collected in *Notes to Literature* (1991).

how avant-garde works are seen, by all the theorists discussed, to be marked by an impulse towards cross-disciplinarity.

In the Anglo-American context, Bürger's work has been understood less as a response to Adorno than as in dialogue with the ideas of Clement Greenberg to whom I turn in the pivotal chapter of this thesis, Chapter Two, which draws out many of the ideas with which the second half of the thesis will be engaged. In this context, Bürger's distinction between the "historical" and "neo" avant-gardes has been grasped as paralleling a distinction between modernism and postmodernism: Bürger's "historical" avant-garde is presented as a phenomenon contemporary with but opposing Greenberg's modernist avant-garde (for Greenberg the terms are interchangeable) and which prefigures the postmodernist works of the "neo" avant-garde. However, while their terminology is different, it is striking that Greenberg identifies the same distinct patterns and impulses outlined by Bürger and Adorno. Indeed, mapping Greenberg and Bürger's thought onto one another indicates that while the terminology may shift, a pattern can be discerned in twentieth-century art, a pattern in which artworks are seen to either turn inwards to explore their own media (Bürger calls this self-criticism) *or* to reach outwards, to experiment with other art-forms and with non-art (system-immanent criticism). Building on the groundwork established by Chapter One, it is this latter impulse, art's attempt to transgress the boundaries imposed upon it by its medium and to engage with other arts, that this chapter takes as its focus.

For both Bürger and Greenberg, Duchamp and Warhol play key roles. Bürger, concentrating on the 1917 readymade *Fountain*, argues that while Duchamp's work is authentically avant-garde, Warhol's repetition of the same gesture is inauthentic. For Greenberg, both Duchamp and Warhol represent what he sneeringly terms "avant-gard*ism*", a term that is meant to indicate the artists' miscomprehension of the proper aims of art. The proper aim of each art, Greenberg argues, is to refine and distil its medium in an attempt to identify its unique properties and effects. In this light, Duchamp and Warhol stand accused of "medium-scrambling", which Greenberg describes as mixing or confusing the properties and effects of different media. In other words, what Greenberg objects to is their cross-disciplinarity, which he derides as "literary". I examine his use of

this term and the hierarchies that it sets up, and drawing out the way in which the comparison between literature and painting is made in terms of social engagement in Greenberg's work, try to show how this helps to illuminate the "avant-garde" problem of art's function in society.

It is at this juncture that a specific inter-art relationship—the relationship between painting and literature—comes to appear especially significant.[20] For Greenberg, it emerges, these art forms represent opposite poles: literature is associated with conceptuality (with what Adorno calls the rational and unifying pole of experience), with the idea of transparency or the clarity of a signal, while painting is associated with materiality (the diffuse and mimetic pole of aesthetic experience), opacity, or noise. This distinction and apparent antithesis between these two arts becomes a grounding element of Greenberg's thought and, I attempt to show throughout Chapter Two, has had significant impact on subsequent debates. A central question, then, is what it means to call a work (in any medium, including language) "literary". From this perspective, moreover, Duchamp and Warhol become particularly interesting for while both are known primarily for their visual art—paintings, photography, installations and films—they also share an active interest in literature. Both artists produced numerous books and textual works, exploring the conventions of literary writing as well as the conditions of literary production as a part of their broader cross-artistic projects. These experiments, however, have received very little critical attention, although these two artists are among the most exhaustively researched figures of the twentieth century. In an attempt to highlight the avant-garde impulse to cross-disciplinarity, therefore, in both Chapters One and Two I concentrate my readings of Duchamp and Warhol on the points at which their visual art work engages directly with literature or employs "literary" strategies.[21] The disciplinarity against which

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[20] Of course, this particular inter-artistic comparison has a long history. It is thus illuminating to trace which of the arts is privileged at certain moments, for it gives us an insight into the aesthetic values of the time. For more on the relationship between literature and visual arts, see Steiner *The Colours of Rhetoric*.

[21] While the way in which the other arts (particularly music and theatre) appear in relation to these debates would be a fascinating thread to weave into discussion, I regret that it would necessitate a far larger project, one beyond the scope of a single thesis. I do, however, try to indicate points in this thesis at which such comparisons might be fruitful.

their work protests, I am attempting to show, has framed their work in a certain way:[22] approaching from a different angle, as I try to do, reveals new insights into their work and brings previously ignored aspects of the works to the fore.

In the remainder of Chapter Two, I trace how this opposition between painting and literature becomes increasingly ingrained in discussion of modernism and postmodernism. It is in relation to this debate and this aesthetic hierarchy, I go on to suggest, that Thierry de Duve's recent attempt to locate Duchamp's readymades as a form of painting should be understood. Looking at his *Pictorial Nominalism* (1991) and *Kant After Duchamp* (1996), I argue that while the key point of de Duve's work—the idea that the "literary" avant-garde and "painterly" modernism are intimately connected—is of crucial importance, his work is ultimately in danger of re-inscribing the hierarchy that Greenberg constructs, subsuming the work of the avant-gardes as a negative manifestation of painting, and thus reducing them to "anti-art" once again. De Duve's reading of *Fountain* as a nominalist gesture, however, allows a fresh insight into the relationship between art and language, reconsidering the role of aesthetic judgement and naming in art-making.

I conclude this chapter by examining Jay Bernstein's recent response to de Duve, which appears in his volume *Against Voluptuous Bodies: Late Modernism and the Meaning of Painting* (2006). Bernstein's work constitutes a defence of modernism, but one that over-simplifies the role of the avant-garde, positioning it once again as anti-art. In his Adornian narrative in which art is continually in threat of being overwhelmed by the forces of rationalisation, art's only defence, Bernstein argues, in is the materiality of the medium. Painting, Bernstein thus argues, as the most self-consciously material of the arts, is the form which most rigorously defends the "lost authority of nature" (11), the preservation of which he presents as being at stake in modern art. Thus, although he

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[22] One thing that has been striking about post-1968 discussion of the avant-gardes is that it has taken place largely in an art-historical context. Although there has been a resurgence of interest in literary avant-gardes recently, driven particularly by the work of Marjorie Perloff, "avant-garde" is still a term that is used considerably less often in literary studies than "modernism". In this thesis, I aim to show that the questions that the avant-gardes and the theorizations of the avant-garde raise are important across different disciplines. Unlike Jake Kennedy, however, I do not want to construct a "literary" history of the avant-gardes but rather to suggest that it is their cross-disciplinarity that is important about the avant-gardes.

distances himself from Greenberg's arguments, Bernstein echoes Greenberg's conclusions on painting, presenting Adorno's thought as leading to a scenario in which the medium specificity of abstract painting is privileged and considered more rigorous than the "meretricious" (215) medium-scrambling of the avant-gardes. However, I suggest, although he does not necessarily recognise it as such, Bernstein's work also presents a useful alternative framework for thinking about the task of avant-garde art, a framework in which the avant-garde is not reduced to a negative anti-art gesture, but can be thought of in positive terms as a gesture of "integral nominalism". This "avant-garde" gesture has consequences for a considerably broader field than either de Duve or Bernstein acknowledge: how it impacts on the fields of literature and philosophy will be discussed in Chapters Three and Four.

Bernstein's dismissal of the avant-garde exemplifies one direction in which Adorno's aesthetics can be taken. In the second half of the thesis, attempting to counter this judgement and to launch a defence of the avant-garde which counters its reduction to mere anti-art, I attempt to show that other directions have also been taken, directions which reveal the real potential of the cross-disciplinarity of the avant-gardes. In Chapter Three, therefore, I continue my project of drawing out the cross-disciplinary projects of Duchamp and Warhol, using their work to reconsider the relationship between literature and visual arts. Focusing on two works, Duchamp's masterpiece, *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even* (*La Mariée Mise à Nu per ses Célibataires, Même* 1915-1944)[23] and Warhol's seldom discussed *a; a novel* (1968), the key aim here is show that these works are as much in dialogue with literature as they are with painting,[24] and thus to locate literature as a site of equal importance vis-à-vis the stakes of modern art. I also

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[23]Duchamp used a mixture of English and French titles for his works: sometimes there are commonly used translations, as with *Given* and *The Bride Stripped Bare*; sometimes the title works in both languages, as with *Fountain*; sometimes there is only an English title, for example 'readymades,' or only a French title, for example *Tu'm*. When there are two titles, I will cite the French title along with the dates at the first mention of the work and use the English titles within the text. All of the titles and dates of Duchamp's work are taken from the catalogue complied by Schwarz.

[24] Studies of modern literature quite frequently make reference to writers adopting painterly strategies, yet in studies of modern painting the impact of literature is barely mentioned. Indeed, as I shall try to show in Chapter Two, one sometimes gets the impression that, rejecting the function of representation, art turned away from literature in this period. I hope that my reading of Duchamp and Warhol throughout this thesis counters this.

aim to show that in their work these artists recognise and engage with the gesture of integral nominalism itself. In developing this argument I follow the same logic as the Adornian arguments set out in Chapter One, thereby beginning to develop a counter-reading to Bernstein's.

I develop this reading further in Chapter Four, by returning to the 1970s debate and to another theorisation of the avant-garde, in the form of the work of philosopher Jean-François Lyotard. Lyotard's theoretical reformulation of the task and responsibility of avant-garde art has been somewhat overshadowed by his far more widely known work on the postmodern condition, and therefore has not yet been brought to bear on discussion of the legacies of the avant-garde. Yet, as any glance over his body of work shows, Lyotard is consistently and intimately engaged with the art of the historical avant-gardes. In Chapter Four, I trace this engagement looking at his early monograph on Duchamp and related experimental essays, which, I argue, also show evidence of a deep engagement with Warhol's art. I then turn to his later direct reconfiguration of the term "avant-garde" in *The Inhuman*. In both periods, although in different ways, Lyotard's work is centrally engaged with the question of the relationship between the arts and the implications of the avant-garde transgression of the conventions of media. Indeed in his 1970s work, I suggest, Lyotard's is so intimately engaged with this question that he takes on the avant-gardist mantel and performs this mixing of effects and procedures in his writing, attempting to develop an avant-garde theory rather than a theory of the avant-garde.[25] Although he later distances himself from such experiments, I argue that they remain of profound importance for his later work. What Lyotard uses avant-garde strategies to do, I suggest, is to alter the relationship between criticism and its objects: indeed it is this task of transforming critical relations that might be thought of as moving the avant-garde more broadly beyond the idea of negation.

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[25] The work of several of Lyotard's contemporaries has been discussed in this way. For example, Calinescu discusses Deleuze and Foucault in these terms (130) while, as I try to show in Chapter Four, Derrida has been most often identified with the avant-garde legacy. The influence of the historical avant-gardes on Lyotard's work, although equally profound has not yet been fully sketched out. I attempt to address this omission in Chapter Four.

The common thread throughout these two periods is Adorno: Lyotard's work is at once a complex critique of the German philosopher and a development of his aesthetics and it is only through tracing the thread of this engagement, I suggest, that the full implications of Lyotard's reworking of the avant-garde are revealed. Reading his work in this way, allows me to present Lyotard's thought on the task and achievements of the avant-garde as an alternative reading of Adorno, a reading that can be contrasted with Bernstein's pessimistic modernism and which, through its commitment to avant-garde cross-disciplinarity, opens out the German philosopher's thought in ways that have important ramifications for any contemporary account of modernist or avant-gardist aesthetics.

Exploring the avant-garde from the angle of its resistance to disciplinary restraints, I hope to show, opens out not only a space in which to re-read art, literature and theory but also shifts relations that have come to appear fixed into different and surprisingly illuminating constellations. This relatively simple change of perspective shows, I hope, that we still have a great deal to learn from the twentieth century avant-gardes, whose multiplicity and richness I hope this thesis reveals.

Chapter One

"Art" and the Erosion of the Arts

> What the avant-garde does not tolerate about the bourgeoisie is its language.
> – Roland Barthes

"Russia needs a political revolution. America needs an artistic one" (Roché 151), declared *The Blindman*, a little magazine written and published in New York in April 1917. The author of these words, Henri Pierre Roché, could hardly have imagined how prophetic his statement would later seem. Although he would certainly have known that New York's first Exhibition of Independent Artists was soon to open, Roché could not have foreseen that this would later be remembered as one of the most significant events in twentieth-century art history.[26] Nor would he have been able to predict what the catalyst of this artistic revolution would be. For while he may have been aware that his friend and *Blindman* co-editor Marcel Duchamp intended to submit a work to the exhibition, Roché would not have known that this "work" would take the form of the now notorious *Fountain.*[27] (Fig. 1.1)

A urinal, turned over and "signed," *Fountain* is one of the most provocative of Duchamp's works. Certainly it is the most famous of his readymades, a genre that was

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[26] Based on the Parisian *Salon des Indépendants*, the exhibition provided a space outside the gallery system in which aspiring artists of all levels of experience and talent could show their work. There was a hanging committee, responsible for organisation and administration, but no jury: everything submitted would quite simply be shown without exception and, to prevent the individual taste of the committee from impinging on the event, the works would be hung in alphabetical order. For more on the history of the exhibition see Thierry de Duve, "Given the Richard Mutt Case."

[27] It is worth noting here that, at the time, the urinal did not in fact attract a great deal of attention and Duchamp's involvement in what would come to be known as The Richard Mutt Case was concealed: it is retroactively since the 1960s that the significance of this event has really been constructed. This is to say that the "scandal" that surrounds *Fountain* is a product of art history. Indeed, whether the work was actually exhibited at all is open to question. Pierre Cabanne, for example, claims it was exhibited behind a screen (*Duchamp & Co.* 28-33) and "The Richard Mutt Case", a text attributed to Duchamp, suggests it was never shown at all. For an interesting reading of Duchamp's involvement in the events surrounding *Fountain*'s submission see de Duve "Given the Richard Mutt Case." See also Camfield's *Marcel Duchamp: Fountain*, which is the fullest documentation of the history of the work.

defined in 1934 by André Breton as "manufactured objects promoted to the dignity of works of art through the choice of the artist" ("Lighthouse" 88). Breton's definition pivots on the opposition between the unique artwork and the mass-produced object, between conventional ideas regarding artistic media and the radical proposition that the artist's prerogative alone is what generates art. *Fountain* appears as a paradox: it represents an attack on the conventions of art via the deliberate introduction of non-art into an art context and, at the same moment, to operate as the confirmation of art's ability to transcend the opposition, a celebration of artistic freedom. Quite deliberately indeterminate, the gesture hovers between iconoclasm and affirmation.

As a result, *Fountain* has played a central role in debates on the relationship between aesthetic experience and wider social experience throughout the twentieth

century. In Peter Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-garde* (1974), for example, the urinal appears as a paradigmatic example of avant-garde anti-art.[28] For Bürger the central problematic to which the avant-garde responds is the autonomy of art, the separation of art from what he terms "life praxis": it is this autonomy that the avant-garde seeks to challenge through a sequence of strategic negations. The readymade serves as a key piece of evidence in Bürger's argument, illustrating the negation of the categories of work and individual craftsmanship. This positioning comes at the cost of significant reduction, however, as situating *Fountain* as a gesture of negation is to ignore its constitutive ambiguity and complexity. Opening out the aspects of *Fountain* that are suppressed in Bürger's approach, I hope to show in this chapter, enables a different set of concerns and questions to emerge which, in turn, reveal the limitations of the theoretical framework of *Theory of the Avant-garde*. My intention here, however, is not so much to critique Bürger's thesis—the inconsistencies and contradictions of *Theory of the Avant-garde* have already received a good deal of attention—as to locate in his work the germ of an alternative framework, one that I think provides a better means by which to approach both Duchamp and the avant-garde more broadly.[29] In order to develop this, I will go back to Bürger's own key source, namely fellow Frankfurt-School theorist Theodor Adorno. Returning to Adorno, and in particular to the ideas set out in his 1967 essay "Art and the Arts" establishes a crucial connection between the problem of aesthetic autonomy, anti-art and the media of the arts, thus allowing the question of art's relation to non-art to be posed rather differently. Importantly, this generates a site in which the artwork can be approached without being reduced to the articulation of a single idea or intention: it thus provides a means to account for the full force of the ambiguity and instability of gestures such as *Fountain*.

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[28] Duchamp himself disliked the term anti-art and considered himself, if anything, an "an-artist:" "I am against the word 'anti'," he told Arturo Schwarz, "because it's a bit like atheist, as compared to believer. And an atheist is just as much of a religious man as the believer is, and an anti-artist is just as much of an artist as the other artist" (Schwarz 1:33). See also Paz, *Appearance Stripped Bare* 22. Nevertheless Duchamp's contribution to twentieth-century art history is very much framed by this idea.

[29] A good discussion of the problems with Bürger's thesis can be found in the opening chapter of Richard Murphy's *Theorizing the Avant-garde* 1-48. See also the references given in the introduction to this thesis (2n3, 4, 5).

1. Anti-Art and the Death of the Avant-Garde

The primary aim of Bürger's thesis is to create a unifying concept and historical grounding for the divergent artistic movements and practices which emerged in Europe in the first half of the twentieth century. Focusing primarily on Surrealism and Dada, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* stresses the utopian aims of such movements and seeks to make clear the political challenge they attempted to articulate. Bürger's thesis is well known. However, as the most influential articulation of the concept *avant-garde* and thus as the point from which this thesis departs, it will be necessary to rehearse its key arguments. I will therefore sketch out the historical trajectory that Bürger sets up, before elaborating two important distinctions that develop in his work: firstly, between modernism and the practice of the avant-gardes and, secondly, between the historical avant-gardes and the neo-avant-gardes. At this juncture I will indicate how Warhol's work has been positioned in the light of Bürger's argument. I will then return to Bürger's discussion of *Fountain* and try to demonstrate how this specific example in fact operates as a fault-line within his argument.[30]

The central premise of *Theory of the Avant-Garde* is that the emergence of the avant-garde is a logical development in a historical trajectory which sees the "social subsystem" of art become increasingly differentiated and isolated within bourgeois culture. The avant-garde is the result of the historical unfolding of the autonomy of art: for Bürger this means art's being marked out as a sphere independent of other social spheres and operating according to a different set of values. The notion of autonomy, he argues, by positing a realm that appears to stand outside of other social systems— beyond history, economics and politics—encourages the idea that art is an a-historical category and thus suggests that autonomy is inherent to art, a necessary condition for art's appearance. In fact, Bürger argues, this is an illusion, for the autonomy of art is entirely historical and contingent.

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[30] As I indicated within my introduction, Cunningham's essay "Making an Example of Duchamp" also examines Bürger's discussion of *Fountain*. However, while Cunningham approaches it from the angle of the general function of examples in theorising of the avant-garde, I am attempting to use the work to open out some of the questions suppressed by Bürger's framework.

To substantiate this claim Bürger outlines a trajectory in which the function of art is transformed from a sacral role, through a courtly function to its position as effectively functionless in the late nineteenth century. While Bürger is mindful of the fact that these changes do not move at an even pace, his narrative describes an evolution in which art moves from a first phase of collective production by craftsmen and a ritualistic function within social systems which entail collective reception, into a second phase in which the individual artist becomes a significant figure while the function and reception of the art object remains social or collective, in that it is considered a representational object which can be understood by all.[31] Objects such as altarpieces and religious icons might exemplify the first stage, while court portraiture may be taken as an example of the second, a mode which relies on the skill of a single painter to create an image that represents the wealth and status of the subject. The third and final stage of this process is represented by bourgeois art. In bourgeois society, here Bürger follows Adorno, experience is increasingly rationalised into discrete spheres, generating a fractured and alienated form of subjectivity. As a part of this process, art is separated from wider social systems: aesthetic judgements and ideas are grasped as qualitatively different from judgements of pure and practical reason and rational ideas. Art is understood as a means by which to restore the subject to himself: the pleasure given by the beautiful, described by Immanuel Kant as the free-play of the faculties of understanding and imagination, provides a consolation in the face of fragmented experience. In such a system, reception becomes a private affair; emphasis is on aesthetic judgement as subjective and as pertaining to individual taste. The artist is no longer a craftsman but a genius charged with the responsibility of generating an authentic experience in the bourgeois subject. The artist's task, then, is not simply to produce an ornamental object but to express aesthetic Ideas through the work.[32]

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[31] See Bürger 47-49.

[32] The notion of art in bourgeois society, as Bürger presents it, is broadly Kantian. The legitimacy of Bürger's reading of Kant is of course open to question: I have only glossed over these aspects of his argument very briefly for this legitimacy is not what interests me here. I flag up this connection here however because, at several points later in this thesis, I will be returning to how Kantian aesthetic theory has informed the debates on avant-garde art. For a general outline of Kant's aesthetics see Scruton: for a discussion of the stakes of Kant's thought see Bernstein, *Fate* 17-65.

For Bürger the increasing separation of art from society reaches its zenith in late nineteenth-century Aestheticism, with its famous motto of *art for art's sake*. It is in this moment, Bürger argues, that art's detachment from everyday life culminates: "the apartness from the praxis of life that had always constituted the institutional status of art in bourgeois society now becomes the content of works" (27). This shift effectively closes the category "art" off from wider social systems and causes it, in opposition to historical and particular "life praxis," to appear a-historical and universal. Aestheticism celebrates this apparent freedom, formulating aesthetic autonomy as art's ability to throw off the shackles of the everyday, to rise above the banality of the quotidian. Free from society, art is thus figured as a space in which higher values can be embodied and thus as a site which operates as a critique of degraded and mundane "life praxis."

It is at this moment, Bürger argues, that the avant-garde appears: it is a response to the historical unfolding of art's autonomisation.[33] What its emergence signals, Bürger claims, is the realisation that autonomy is not simply the freedom that aestheticism celebrates but also a form of hegemonic containment or silencing. For, in its detachment from society, any critical power that art might have is neutralized: art may protest all it likes, but as long as it remains art, it cannot really have an effect on "life praxis." With the unfolding of aestheticism, Bürger thus argues, "social ineffectuality stands revealed as the essence of art in bourgeois society and thus provokes the self-criticism of art" (27). It is this self-criticism that is the task of the avant-garde which seeks to restore the social effectuality of art, to put it back at the service of society. Recognising and showing that *art for art's sake* amounts to no less than the social and political impotence of art, the avant-gardes seek to reconnect art and "the praxis of life" (49); by doing so, however, they aim not to integrate art into life but instead to transform life from a basis in art. This is the revolutionary political task of the avant-garde as Bürger theorises it: a task driven by the utopian aim of reconciling art and society.

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[33] Given that aesthetic autonomy is initially established with Kant, as Bürger's Kantian model of bourgeois art makes clear, the question arises of why it takes over a century for the avant-garde to emerge. Richard Murphy provides an answer by developing Bürger's thesis to argue that the avant-garde is a response to an "unprecedented and momentous economic and technological revolution in society … [and] the crassness of aestheticism's blank rejection of any need to react to it" (6-7).

However, the task that the artists of the avant-garde set themselves, in Bürger's reading, is one that was always already doomed to failure. For, as Bürger goes on to argue, the aim to reconcile art and life is ultimately contradictory: "the (relative) freedom of art vis-à-vis the praxis of life is at the same time the condition that must be fulfilled if there is to be a critical cognition of reality" (50). In other words, giving up autonomy would mean giving up art's power to challenge; dislocation is the price of critical distance. To collapse art into life or vice versa, then, is ultimately to destroy art. The avant-garde seeks to reconcile art and the people, to transform social conditions: it fails because, in the end, it cannot or will not abandon art. However, this is not to say that there is nothing to be learned from the avant-garde project; their success, Bürger argues, is in making recognizable what he terms the *institution* of art. By *institution* he means to indicate specifically the framework of the historical conditions of production and reception of art, as well as "the ideas about art that prevail at a given time and that determine the reception of works" (22). The avant-garde, by revealing the institutional status of art, reveals that art's status as autonomous within society, its separation from the praxis of life, is fundamentally historical rather than anything essential to or inherent in art itself.

It is Bürger's conceptualisation of the avant-garde as a force that interrogates the institution of art that enables his celebrated distinction between the avant-garde and a wider notion of modern art, a distinction which has since come to be understood articulating the difference between modernism and the avant-garde.[34] Bürger identifies two impulses in modern art, both of which are considered to be self-reflexive responses to the historical trajectory outlined above. The first is defined—in terms borrowed from Marx—as a mode of "system-immanent criticism" (21). It works introspectively with a

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[34] Although his work has been widely interpreted as doing so, Bürger does not make his argument in order to draw a clear distinction between "modernism" and the avant-garde but rather to separate out the avant-garde from other drives in modern art. That Bürger's work has been interpreted as making this distinction—and Jochen Schulte-Sasse's foreword to the English translation of *Theory of the Avant-garde* claims that this distinction is a key legacy of *Theory of the Avant-garde* (xiv-xv)—is highly significant: it reveals the extent to which *Theory of the Avant-garde* has been read as a response to Greenbergian modernism. It is for this reason perhaps that, in Anglo-American criticism, the book has been studied more regularly within the realm of art history rather than literary history. In Chapter Two, I will be outlining Greenberg's formulation of the avant-garde, how it can be seen to dovetail with Bürger's work and how it constructs a notion of modernism which devalues the "literary" avant-gardes.

strong conviction about what art is, accepting the distance between art and "life praxis." A centripetal movement, it does not question aesthetic autonomy but instead, though a formalist reflection on art, interrogates the *media* of art rather than the institution. In contrast, the other impulse that Bürger identifies, and which he terms avant-garde, operates according to the logic of "self-criticism": its movement is centrifugal, looking outwards towards society and interrogating art's relation to non-art (21). Avant-garde art is not concerned with the forms of its media, but rather with the discourses and structures of the social sub-system (institution) of art itself. For Bürger, then, while the mode of system-immanent criticism reinforces the aesthetics of autonomous art and is the heir of aestheticism, the avant-garde turns on and attacks this system seeking to pose questions about what "art" is and how it functions in society. The former affirms the autonomy of art, while the latter reveals this autonomy as a historical contingency.[35]

It is thus that Bürger's work has come to be read as positioning modernism and the avant-garde as different modes of reaction to aesthetic autonomy:[36] modernism re-inscribing the separation between art and non-art, the avant-garde challenging the idea. Yet, as Richard Murphy has argued, the notion of autonomy itself is never fully clarified in Bürger's thesis and remains ambiguous.[37] *Theory of the Avant-garde* takes as given the validity of its opposition between art and non-art, as if what constitutes art and what constitutes "life praxis" were already agreed and their relationship (or lack of relationship) apparent.[38] This failure to consider the complexity of the links between art and society generates, as I will argue in Chapter Two, an overly simplistic opposition

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[35] Bürger is careful to indicate that these tendencies are not unrelated—an important point which will be explored in the following chapter—but *Theory of the Avant-garde* remains focused on their differences.

[36] See for example Murphy's "Introduction" to *Theorizing the Avant-Garde* in which he too claims the distinction between modernism and "avant-garde" is a key aspect of Bürger's work.

[37] In order to clarify the ambiguity that the notion "autonomy" marks in *Theory of the Avant-garde*, Murphy (following Richard Wolin) suggests the category of "de-aestheticised autonomous art" (32). This move is meant to strip art of the inheritance of aesthetic theory and its framework of ideas such as beauty, harmony and truth. While I am sympathetic to the desire to find an approach to art that circumvents the frameworks of conventional aesthetics (and indeed attempt to do so through a discussion of "post-aesthetic philosophy" in Chapter Four), I think Murphy's suggestion—rather than actually challenging the problematic simplification of autonomy in *Theory of the Avant-garde*—simply involves a re-labelling of Bürger's *modernism* as "aestheticised autonomous art" and *avant-garde* as "de-aestheticised autonomous art." I would argue that the real challenge here is to actually reconsider autonomy and how it relates to aesthetics: the final section of this chapter will turn to Adorno to attempt this reconsideration.

[38] See Highmore for a discussion of Bürger's use of "life praxis".

between modernism and avant-garde and in the later sections of this chapter I will use Adorno's thought to begin to break these oppositions down. For the moment, however, I will proceed to outline Bürger's second and more controversial distinction between the "historical" and "neo" avant-gardes.

The avant-garde proceeds, Bürger argues, through the force of negation: it is as an example of this negative protest that Bürger positions *Fountain*. "Duchamp's Ready-Mades are not works of art but manifestations," he writes. "Not from the form-content totality of the individual object Duchamp signs can one infer the meaning, but only from the contrast between mass-produced object on the one hand, and signature and art-exhibit on the other" (52). Bürger's understanding is a variation on Breton's definition of the Readymade. Yet, while Breton had approached the gesture as affirmative, an elevation of the object confirming artistic freedom, Bürger reads it as a gesture of negation: because the urinal is mass-produced it signifies the negation of not only the aura of the unique artwork, but also the craftsmanship and skill conventionally associated with art. In other words, it negates the "work" of art, as well as the emphasis that bourgeois art places on the unique and the individual, in terms of production and reception. As a gesture of negation, *Fountain* is anti-art: it represents the moment of art's fall from grace, revealing once and for all that in the bourgeois institution of art the signature of the artist "means more than the quality of the work" (52). In other words, the artwork is revealed as a form of commodity. This reading of the Duchampian readymade has not only been extremely powerful—mention of *Fountain* today is often shorthand for precisely this set of ideas—but has also provided a key by which the work of other artists has been interpreted.[39] Foremost among those who inherit this mantel is of course Warhol. As I will attempt to show throughout this thesis, however, this interpretation of Duchamp and Warhol as "anti-artists" requires considerable complication.

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[39] This is not to say that Bürger was the first to approach the readymades from this direction. In fact such readings were well established by the time *Theory of the Avant-Garde* was written and underpinned the immediate critical response to much new "Duchampian" art of the 1960s, such as Pop. See Camfield (*Fountain* 88-116), Dezeuze, and Pratt.

It is not as an anti-artist that Bürger positions Warhol, however, but as a "neo" avant-gardist. Protesting against the separation of art and the everyday, and blind to the contradictory nature of their task, the "historical" avant-gardes seek to reinvest art with a critical function by reconnecting it with the praxis of life: what anti-art gestures such as *Fountain* make visible, however, is art's complicity with the structures of power. This is an operation with significant implications for the future of art. For, once the avant-garde reveals art's separation from the realm of the social and political and once it demonstrates (through the failed attempt to sublate the two spheres) that this separation is a pre-requisite of a critical art practice, later attempts to re-connect art and "life praxis" are at best "inauthentic" (53) and, at worst, the very means by which the historical avant-garde is recuperated. As Bürger, making reference to another of Duchamp's readymades, explains:

> once the signed bottle drier has been accepted as an object that deserves a place in a museum, the provocation no longer provokes; it turns into its opposite. If an artist today signs a stove pipe and exhibits it, that artist certainly does not denounce the art market but adapts to it. (52)

The historical period in which truly critical art was possible has come to an end: the authentic avant-garde is dead. In its wake, art cannot challenge but can only knowingly affirm bourgeois society: "the neo-avant-garde institutionalizes the avant-garde as art and thus negates any genuinely avant-gardiste intentions" (58). Just as the avant-gardes reveal the meaning of aestheticism in the wake of its full unfolding, then, so too does Bürger's theorisation position itself as revealing the meaning of the avant-gardes in their full unfolding. *Theory of the Avant-Garde* marks the moment in which the avant-garde task (and its failure) can be revealed *because* it has become historical: the genuine "historical" avant-garde is dead, its death marked by the "neo" avant-garde.

It is no surprise that Warhol is Bürger's key example of the "neo" avant-garde of the 1950s and '60s for this is, of course, precisely the game that Warhol played. Declaring himself to be in "the Business Art Business" (Warhol *Philosophy* 92), the Pop artist made no secret of his desire to adapt to the market. In his work, he emphasizes the commodification of the artwork by not only mechanizing the production of art through

Fig. 1.2 Andy Warhol, *32 Soup Cans* (1961-62).
Irving Blum, New York.

silk-screen printing canvases on the "assembly line" at his studio the "Factory"[40] but also through his choice of subject matter, most notoriously the series of Campbells' soup cans, hung to resemble a super market shelf,[41] which seem to knowingly perform precisely the kind of "inauthentic" repetition against which Bürger protests.[42] (Fig. 1.2) Thus, in *Theory of the Avant-Garde,* it is Pop that marks the recuperation of Duchamp: the soup cans signify the power of the institution of art, the hegemonic containment of Duchamp's radical gesture. For Bürger, therefore, Warhol's work is the very opposite of anti-art:

> What Adorno calls "mimetic adaptation to the hardened and alienated" has
> probably been realized by Warhol: the painting of 100 Campbell soup cans

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[40] For a description of Warhol's production methods see Caroline Jones, *Machine in the Studio* (189-267).

[41] The soup cans, which were actually hand-painted, were shown in a 1962 exhibition in the Ferus Gallery, Los Angeles. For an interesting discussion of this and other exhibitions by Warhol see Stuckey.

[42] There have always been those who disagree with this assessment: in 1962, in a review of the Marilyn paintings, Michael Fried announced that he was moved by the work and concluded that Warhol had a "feeling for what is truly human" ("New York Letter" 2). More recently, Thomas Crow has made a credible argument that the same paintings constitute a significant emotional response to Monroe's death. See Crow "Saturday Disasters: Trace and Reference in Early Warhol." However, I would argue that to attempt to neutralise the threatening disinterest of Warhol's work by suggesting that it has a conventionally humanistic basis is to deny what makes it interesting.

> contains resistance to the commodity society only for the person who wants
> to see it there …. The Neo-avant-garde, which stages for a second time the
> avant-gardiste break with tradition, becomes a manifestation that is void of
> sense and that permits the positing of any meaning whatever. (61)

In other words, Warhol's "yes art" (Bergin 34) is to all intents and purposes indistinguishable from commodity culture and thus entirely affirmative, a vessel for whatever values the market ascribes to it.[43]

The "death" of the avant-garde has in fact come to define the parameters of its discussion, which is framed in terms of originality, authenticity and failure. These are the parameters that guide Octavio Paz when he writes that "the avant-garde is the great breach, and with it the 'tradition against itself' comes to an end" (*Children* 103). The same ideas lie behind the work of Hans Magnus Enzensberger who suggests that "the historic avant-garde perished by its Aporias" (264) and goes on to lament the cowardice of mere "experimentalism" which relinquishes art's duty to articulate a political challenge. Art historian Susie Gablik draws from this pool of ideas when she writes of the bureaucratisation of the art world, arguing that the death of the avant-garde is a result of a bureaucratic late capitalist society whose machinery is pre-programmed to incorporate and thus neutralise any opposition. For Gablik, the neo-avant-garde artist, as a cog in the wheel of late capitalism, cannot resist the temptations of financial security and reward: "the vanguard concept has been traded in for a good marketing strategy" (65). Avant-garde status is forfeited when the artist buys into (and sells out to) the dominant ideology. Despite the differences and subtleties of each of these critics' readings, they operate within the same framework: a framework in which the only

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[43] Again, Bürger is by no means alone in reading Warhol in this way. Pop art is often discussed as having drawn upon the Duchampian rejection of the craft of painting and the banal and transient images of advertising images, newspaper photographs and film stills are frequently considered as responses to the Readymade. Where Duchamp introduces non-art into an art context in order to question conventions and aesthetic values, Warhol appears to take such indifference a stage further, declaring all the trivial objects of everyday life as beautiful. Where Duchamp rejects sensual values in art, Warhol seems to reject them completely: famously declaring that he desired nothing more than to "be a machine" (qtd. in C. Jones *Machine* 189). Buchloh, in "Andy Warhol's One Dimensional Art", argues that Warhol progresses beyond Duchamp's naivety to a fully-developed and fully cynical use of the readymade. Here Warhol is presented as knowingly reducing art to spectacle: however Buchloh, in contrast to Bürger, sees this as an "authentic" response to the artist's historical moment.

authentic avant-garde art was that produced during the early decades of the twentieth century. The very act of recognising this avant-garde pre-supposes its recuperation and thus reads as an obituary.

The circularly of these "death" theories is perhaps best captured by Paul Mann's 1991 monograph *The Theory/Death of the Avant-garde.* The central project of the book is to rethink the moment of the recuperation of the avant-garde work into discourse as a productive event. Mann builds upon the contradictions inherent in Bürger's thesis to argue that it is the death of the avant-garde that is its most vital element: "The obituaries are not merely reports," he writes "but performatives, sites on which death occurs; the diagnosis is the fatality, and, what is more, this is the diagnosis the patient has always sought" (40). For Mann, in other words, the avant-garde works within and is consciously aware of the recuperation process: its death is re-enacted every time it is declared to exist or have existed, for it is the act of describing the avant-garde in theoretical discourse that constitutes its recuperation. Conversely, it is by the very act of this recuperation/death that the avant-garde is theorised into existence. The moment of recuperation then becomes both the "end" and the "source" of the avant-garde.

In this context, rather than reading Warhol's work as a mere repetition of Duchamp's gestures,[44] Mann locates the pop artist as revealing the process of recuperation most explicitly. "What is most significant about Warhol," Mann writes,

> is that he so thoroughly turned the means of recuperation—repetition, mechanization, stereotyping, the effacement of self by persona, theatricalization, flatness, commodification, publicity, a total embrace of the economy, openness to every interpretative ideology—into the very substance of his work, and without a single pretense that he was doing anything else. (138)

Warhol "transparently represents" the culture in which he works, Mann argues. "A pure symptom: that is all he constitutes" (138). This is to say that, for Mann, Warhol's work is not antithetical to "authentic" avant-garde art but, in fact, truly and more completely

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[44] For Mann's reading of Duchamp see *The Theory/Death of the Avant-Garde* 100.

avant-garde. It reveals the "historical" avant-garde as a ruse, a semblance of opposition, which is in fact generated and contained by discourse.

By rewriting recuperation as a generative process, Mann subverts the usual discussion of failure, selling out and cashing in. Instead, the death of the avant-garde is the on-going realisation of its goal: the creation and maintenance of a discourse about the values and practices of the institution that is art. The true aim of the avant-gardes is to work towards "a clearer and clearer reflection of recuperation" (131). Mann's text, then, is the logical extreme of the argument that Burger articulated, unmasking the repetitiveness and circularity of "the same dialectical squabbles between radical and conservative" (139) and exposing "the avant-garde" as the mere "screen" on which these debates are replayed: it reveals Bürger's text itself as a key agent of the recuperation of the avant-garde.

The problem that the avant-garde marks, then, as Mann neatly surmises, is "essentially a critical one" for "to demonstrate the inherence of recuperation in the artwork is also to mark one's own text as yet another agent of the discursive economy" (93). In this framework, he concludes, there are two options: the first and more difficult response is to invent another form of writing, an alternative critical practice. In such a mode, the aim would be

> to write without merely manufacturing another or even better theory for circulation, another history for exchange. To explore recuperation without being entirely caught up in it, or in the illusion that one is entirely free of it. [to invent] a writing that sees itself in the history it describes, that never pretends it is above the recuperative law, that drives recuperation all the way to the surface and turns it against itself. (93)

This alternative critical practice, I will argue throughout this thesis, is precisely what is at stake in the works and discourses of the avant-garde. This is not however the option Mann himself takes.[45] Instead *The Theory/Death of the Avant-garde* ends with a fall into silence: "And what if all this were true?" he writes,

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[45] Having revealed the contradiction of oppositional discourse, Mann seems content to revel in it, writing "as usual", as one reviewer points out, and "simply inserting the odd disclaimer" (Radin 48).

> Suppose everyone knew it, assented to it, what difference would it make? None at all: nothing would come of it but more texts reflecting their emptiness. But we have traveled this path to arrive at this very point, where artists resign from discourse and discourse resigns itself to reproducing its death. A vanishing point. The last chapter of the death of the avant-garde is blank. (145)

Positioning itself as marking the end of discourse's claim to truth, Mann's text announces the end of the narrative of the avant-garde. His work is a vision of the end of a critical distance between art and society: not as the utopian moment of reconciliation but as the moment in which recuperation triumphs. Mann's text performs the process that it describes so efficiently that it presents itself as a complete closure, one that anticipates and pre-empts any response.

2. "Art" and Media

Bürger's arguments have been much discussed and many commentators have disputed his pessimistic conclusions, and in particular his assessment of the art of the 1950s and 60s.[46] Others have argued that, based on Dada and Surrealism, his theory only describes a small section of avant-garde activity and thus fails to grasp even the "historical" avant-gardes properly. Such criticisms are pertinent and do not need to be rehearsed again. My aim here is not to critique Bürger's work, but rather to try to explore what this friction between the actual manifestations of the avant-garde art and attempts to categorise them signifies. I want to do this by locating in *Theory of the Avant-garde* the germ of an alternative idea, planted but not developed, in the form of Bürger's claim that it is with the emergence of the avant-gardes that the "various techniques and procedures [of art] can be recognized as artistic means" (18). Exploring this claim and its implications, I will argue, opens out a space from which to reconsider the problematic of the avant-gardes and the relationship between art and non-art.

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[46] As I mentioned in my introduction, the most significant attempt to break out of the "death theory" parameters took place in the pages of the journal *October* throughout the 1980s and '90s, and will be discussed in some detail in the Chapter Two.

Aestheticism, to reiterate Bürger's framework, marks the moment in which the historical process of art's separation from society fully unfolds: it is the moment in which art becomes autonomous, when the social subsystem "art" appears to cut itself off from broader social spheres. The avant-garde marks this moment by means of its protest thus delimiting the institution of art. When "art" is delimited as an institution rather than by means of a single work it becomes a general category. Likewise, the avant-garde generalises the category of artistic means or media. Rather than working within the subsystem "art" and choosing its means according to a dominant style, the avant-garde "liquidated the possibility of a period style when they raised to a principle the availability of the artistic means of past periods. Not until there is universal availability does the category of artistic means become a general one" (18). What Bürger is suggesting, then, is that the avant-garde marks the separation of the generalised category of "art" from the materials of the arts, from the generalised category of media. While previously there had been the arts—painting, sculpture, music etc.—the avant-garde reveals the contingency of the material form or media of the work, opening the possibility of any material or object (for example a urinal) to be subsumed under the general category "art". This is to say that the progressive autonomisation of art results in the separation of the generalized category "art" from any necessary connection with the materials of the art work.[47]

One consequence of phrasing the idea of autonomy in this way, as the delimitation of a conceptual category, is that it positions the material support of "art," the medium, as non-art. The relation between art and non-art is thus shown to play out not just in terms of social conventions (e.g. what kind of objects are shown or not shown in a gallery), but in the material form of the work itself. In this light, while the

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[47] Boris Groys has pointed out that such a state of affairs has potentially dangerous consequences. In *The Total Art of Stalinism*, Groys argues that when artistic means are revealed as means, "reality itself [becomes] material for artistic construction." Avant-garde artists, therefore: "naturally demand the same absolute right to dispose of this real material as in the use of materials to realize their artistic intent in a painting, sculpture or poem. Since the world is itself regarded as material, the demand underlying the modern conception of art for power over the materials implicitly contains the demand for power over the world" (21). Bürger's avant-garde, in other words, as an attempt to transform life from a basis in art, can easily be taken as a drive towards totalitarianism: life will be transformed but only as the artist/dictator sees fit.

problematic of "system-immanent" art might be understood as an exploration of media in order to establish the grounds of the general category of "art", the problematic of "self-critical" avant-garde art turns upon whether one can use specific materials or techniques to resist that category, asking the very question that Duchamp put to himself in a 1913 note: "Can one make works that are not works of 'art'?" (*Writings* 74) It is against the recuperative power of the *concept* "art" that we might thus understand the avant-garde as protesting, against the power that declares every "work" to be "art" and thus disarms it and exempts it from social function. The avant-garde can thus be understood as employing the material means of artistic production—the medium—to operate against language, against the totalizing power of conceptual abstraction.

Framed in this way, it is no surprise that the avant-garde works seem so resistant to Bürger's attempt to categorise them under a single, univocal concept such as "anti-art." Yet it is this implicit claim about the separation of the category "art" from its materials that legitimates Bürger's approach to the artworks of the avant-gardes.[48] Bürger considers an avant-garde work such as *Fountain* not as something to be considered in its "form-content totality" but rather as the manifestation of conceptual ideas. Indeed, in the preliminary remarks which precede the main text of *Theory of the Avant-garde* Bürger states that his use of examples should not be considered as "historical or sociological interpretations of individual works but as illustrations of a theory" (xlviii). In other words, he knowingly bends the material history of the avant-gardes and their works to fit with his conceptual schema. He reacts to the avant-garde's attempt to evade the categories of "bourgeois art" by imposing an alternative category upon them. It is not surprising, then, to discover incongruities between how Bürger positions *Fountain* and the historical facts of the case. As a fuller consideration of the work will form the final section of this chapter, I will give only one example of this

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[48] It is this idea that also motivates Joseph Kosuth's conceptual art. "It is Marcel Duchamp whom we can credit with giving art [as opposed to the individual arts] its own identity" he writes in "Art after Philosophy" (18). Kosuth's interpretation of Duchamp and his notion of conceptual art has been has been influential: for a brief discussion of how it touches upon the arguments of this thesis see Chapter Two, 117n63.

incongruity at present, namely the importance that Bürger places on the fact that Duchamp *signs* the readymade.

The emphasis on the Duchampian signature dominates Bürger's discussion. As we have seen it is "from the contrast between mass-produced object on the one hand, and signature and art-exhibit on the other" that the readymade generates meaning. It is the procedure of signing, furthermore, that challenges the conventional role of the artist, for "when Duchamp signs mass-produced objects (a urinal, a bottle drier) and sends them to art exhibits," Bürger writes "he negates the category of individual production" (51). Again, it is the signature that indicates the paradox of the readymade which both reveals and negates the categories of the bourgeois institution of art.

> When Duchamp puts his signature on mass-produced, randomly chosen objects and sends them to art exhibits, this provocation of art presupposes a concept of what art is: The fact that he signs the Ready-Mades contains a clear allusion to the category "work." The signature that attests that the work is both individual and unique is here affixed to the mass-produced object. (56)

Curiously, despite this emphasis on Duchamp's strategy of signing objects, at no point does Bürger take into account what is obvious from a mere glance at Stieglitz's famous photograph, reproduced alongside his argument. Bürger never mentions that the "signature" that appears on *Fountain* is not that of the artist Duchamp: in fact, it reads "R. Mutt."[49] Strikingly, then, while the textual element of the readymade is the most significant aspect of Bürger's understanding of *Fountain* it is also the aspect least reflected upon. Like a Freudian slip, "Duchamp's signature" is an indication of what Bürger desires to see in *Fountain* rather than what is actually there. In fact, what

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[49] In this sense Duchamp pre-empts the criticism levelled against him by the artists Gilles Aillard, Eduardo Arroyo and Antonio Recalcati who claim that "if one wants art to cease being an individual matter, it is better to work without signing than to sign without working." ("Vivre et laisser mourir, ou las fin tragique de Marcel Duchamp" Statement for their Joint exhibition at the Galerie Creuze, Paris 1965. qtd. in Seigel 206) This accusation, made by young artists in the 1960s, is evidence of how powerful the reading of the readymade as a mass-produced object "signed by Duchamp" is, despite the fact that in reality the readymades very rarely fit that description.

Bürger's work both relies upon and suppresses is the readymades' involvement with language and writing.[50]

Bürger ignores the materiality of the inscription on the readymade, subsuming its singularity and specificity under his theory: approaching it as the presentation of a unified theoretical concept (anti-art) rather than as an ambiguous object. *Fountain* is simplified and reduced in order that it be incorporated into an overarching theory, just as "works" are disarmed and made impotent by their incorporation into an autonomous realm of "art". *Theory of the Avant-garde* performs the subsumption of the "work" into the conceptual category against which Duchamp (and the avant-garde more broadly) protests: in this light, what it reveals is the tension between the material field of artworks and the structuring concept "art".

That the availability of means as means makes problematic the relationship between individual works and the conceptual field of "art" is something that Bürger himself also recognizes. Indeed, it is his awareness of this issue that leads to the despondent conclusion which ends his monograph.

> The total availability of material and forms characteristic of the post-avant-gardiste art of bourgeois society will have to be investigated both for its inherent possibilities and the difficulties it creates, and this concretely by the analysis of individual works.
> Whether this condition of the availability of all traditions still permits an aesthetic theory at all, in the sense in which aesthetic theory existed from Kant to Adorno, is questionable, because a field must have a structure if it is to be the subject of scholarly or scientific understanding. Where the formal possibilities have become infinite, not only authentic creation but also its scholarly analysis become correspondingly difficult. (94)

Bürger concludes, in other words, that the "total availability" of all forms signals a situation in which "anything goes:" he envisages a situation in which the label "art" can be applied to any object irrespective of any aesthetic values. The avant-garde's opening out of the field in which "art" moves, its rejection of the limitations of conventional

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[50] Duchamp always insisted on the importance of the linguistic inscription of the readymade, indeed the notes and much of Duchamp's practice indicate that it is the process of inscribing the object that creates the readymade (*Writing* 32).

media raises, in other words, raises the spectre of art's demise. For when all means and materials are available, Bürger claims, the field of art is de-structured and there ceases to be a delimited field of study for aesthetic theory: the failure of the avant-garde thus evolves into the death of art more broadly.[51]

Bürger thus ends on what (as he would later admit)[52] is an overly pessimistic note, focussed on the difficulties created by the apparent divorce between the conceptual and material. Unlike Bürger, however, I do not think this de-structuring of the field of art need be seen in the either/or terms of rigid convention versus "total" availability of means: what interests me, is precisely the connection or tension between these poles. For it is in this tension, I think, that the "inherent possibilities" of this situation open out: these possibilities, in fact, are what this thesis is concerned to investigate. The revelation of the avant-gardes, their making visible means *as means* sets a specific challenge, which is to think through the implications of this "availability of material and forms," to explore the difficult relationship between media and the concept "art." If the avant-gardes challenge conventional hierarchies of and distinctions between artistic media, then what is at stake in this challenge? In order to begin the process of sketching out an answer, I want to turn now to Adorno and in particular his 1967 essay "Art and the Arts." Here, as I will try to show, Adorno in fact outlines and develops exactly the insight that I have located in *Theory of the Avant-garde*. In the following section, then, I want to set out firstly how Adorno's thought develops the idea of the avant-garde's use of means *as means* as an attack on the *concept* of "art", secondly how this relates to his own understanding of art, and finally how this alters the framework by which we might grasp aesthetic autonomy. I will then briefly indicate how, for Adorno, this opens up a political potential in art.

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[51] See also in this respect Harold Rosenberg's discussion of the "de-definition of art". For Rosenberg, Warhol is a perfect example of "the post-art artist [who] carries the de-definition of art to the point where nothing is left of art except the fiction of the artist" (12).

[52] See "Postscript" in the second edition translation of *Theory of the Avant-Garde* 95-99.

3. Adorno: Art, Force and the Collective Undercurrent

"Art and the Arts" identifies and sets out to comprehend precisely this notion of the divorce between the idea of "art" and the materials of the arts. Adorno, although he does not use the term avant-garde or modernist in the essay, identifies a trend within contemporary art which he describes as "a process of erosion" (369). The boundaries between the arts have become fluid, he argues, as painting, sculpture, music, architecture and poetry borrow techniques and strategies from one another. Significantly, he dates this trend back to Dada and Surrealism and suggests that it is "almost always accompanied by the attempt by works of art to reach out toward an extra-aesthetic reality" (385). Adorno, in other words, is describing here the same impulse that Bürger terms avant-garde. His emphasis however is quite different: in this essay Adorno approaches the question of art's autonomy through the problem of the relationship between different media (or means), drawing a connection between the exploration of the limits of the individual arts and the exploration of the limits of the conceptual category "art." He thus locates the relationship between the specific art-object and the idea of "art" at the heart of the question of autonomy and so foregrounds precisely that moment, implicit in Bürger's thesis, in which the identities of the individual arts are distinguished from the generalised concept "art."

Like Bürger, Adorno sees the avant-garde's erosion of the arts as a reaction to the aestheticism of bourgeois society, specifically to its culmination in the idea of *art for art's sake*: "whatever tears down the boundary markers" he writes "is motivated by historical forces that sprang into life inside the existing boundaries and then ended up overwhelming them" (370). The metaphors that pervade the essay are telling. Aestheticism is described as "culinary," as something to be consumed and sensually enjoyed; it is a mode in which aspects that are conventionally considered beautiful or pleasing are repeated without variation, "an orgy of soulless repetitions" (371). In other words, bourgeois aestheticism is characterised by a glorification of sensual, bodily

pleasure: it is "retinal," to borrow a Duchampian term.[53] In contrast, the art that Adorno seeks to understand is described not as culinary but as cannibalistic, the arts "eat away at one another" (387) turning their back on the pleasures of the viewer and instead consuming themselves. While aestheticism revels in orgies of sensual pleasure, the incestuous cross-breeding between the "sister" arts is of a more threatening order: "the artistic genres" Adorno writes "appear to revel in a kind of promiscuity which violates some of the taboos of civilisation" (371). The metaphors of cannibalism and incest indicate both that art is confined, cut off from what Bürger calls "life praxis" and what Adorno calls "empirical reality," and that this confinement is unhealthy or somehow dangerous. Like *Theory of the Avant-Garde,* then, Adorno's essay describes the erosion of the arts as a self-destructive impulse, generated by the apparent severance of the connection between art and empirical reality. The avant-garde, Adorno suggests, takes a gleeful pleasure in this destruction of convention, aspiring to be unclassifiable in the terms of any pre-established artistic genre, to do violence to the structures which contain it, and to challenge the discrete, rationally organised genres by which "civilisation" organises (dominates) nature. It attacks bourgeois society not simply by breaking down the barrier between art and "life praxis" but also by breaking down the barriers between the arts. What this avant-garde impulse protests against, then, is not only the processes of rationalisation which demarcate "art" as a sphere separate from "life praxis," but also the extension of these processes into that sphere itself in the form of a system of discrete "arts."

For Adorno, history can be viewed as the progressive domination of nature by the forces of rationalisation and capital. Art, he famously argues, is valuable because it bears witness to what is suppressed in this process. Yet, art—itself a result of this history—is also increasingly encroached upon by these forces of rationalisation, always in danger of being subsumed into rationality. It is this process that Adorno describes when he writes that with *art for art's sake* "the culinary element, sensuous charm, has

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[53]In Duchamp's vocabulary, the idea of the "retinal" indicated everything he disliked about painting, namely its glorification of sensuality at the expense of ideas: he associated it with a kind of bestial pleasure which he sometimes described as an onanistic "shudder" (Cabanne *Dialogues* 43) and dismissed it as "completely non-conceptual" (Cabanne *Dialogues* 77).

split itself off and become an end in itself and the object of rational planning." As a result, he writes,

> art rebels against every sort of dependency upon pre-existing materials that are reflected in the classification of art according to different art forms and that resist shaping by the autonomous artist. For the scattered materials correspond to the diffuse stimuli of the senses. (371)

The classification of the separate arts indicates the rationalisation of art, just as their alignment with the separate senses represents the rationalisation of the human body.[54] The avant-garde transgression of the limits of the individual arts, its refusal of the classification of the arts, can thus be understood as a form of protest against the internal division and fragmentation of the bourgeois subject, against the domination of instrumental reason.[55] Yet, paradoxically, what this refusal depends upon is precisely the processes of rationalisation that it refuses in the form of the generalisation of the concept "art". In the face of their rationalisation into a system of arts, Adorno writes, "the individual arts aspire to their concrete generalization, to an idea of art as such" (373). Refusing the systems that aesthetic theory would impose upon art, individual works attempt to discover "art as such", to isolate and locate not the specificities of the medium but rather what makes a work of any kind into a work of "art."

In "Art and the Arts," then, Adorno describes a field held in tension between two poles. While one is conceptual, a generalised idea of "art" as such, the other is material, the particular object or medium. Art, Adorno goes on to argue, emerges within this field: the work is a product of this tension and its success depends upon how well it is able to mediate the between the two poles. Art "gravitates toward dilettantism as long as it

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[54] This alignment between the individual arts and the senses can be traced back to eighteenth-century German Romanticism and notably to Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, whose work I shall be discussing in the next chapter. It culminates in Clement Greenberg's modernist doctrine of "eyesight alone."

[55] There have of course been numerous attempts to unify the arts under a single banner throughout history, generating concepts such as the "sister arts", *ut pictura poiesis,* and the Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk*. What is new to modern art, Adorno argues in "Art and the Arts", is the refusal to accept such systems: the arts no longer maintain their individual identity under the broader banner but rather challenge one another's identities, attack and consume one another in the irresolvable struggle to identify "art."

remains satisfied with a generalized aesthetics," he claims,[56] but on the other hand, "an art from which the last trace of that ether—the simple fact that someone is an artist—had been expunged simply dries up into philistine handicraft" (376). What this means is that the

> substantial content [of art works] lies in the relation between the *what* and the *how*. They become art by virtue of this substantial content. But this needs the how, their particular language; if it went in search of something larger, beyond the particular form of art itself it would be destroyed. (377)

Adorno's description here of the substantial content of art can be compared to the Kantian notion of the aesthetic idea, which is defined in the *Critique of Judgment* as a "representation of the Imagination which occasions much thought, without, however, any definite thought, *i.e.* any *concept*, being capable of being adequate to it; it consequently cannot be completely compassed and made intelligible by language" (§49, 117-118). In other words, the aesthetic idea is a sense or meaning (the *what*) which cannot be abstracted from our engagement with the work, which arises as a result of sensory, embodied experience (the *how*) and which evades any attempts to grasp it within language. The aesthetic idea is not reducible to the material in which it expressed; it exceeds the material of the art object in the same way that the meaning of language exceeds the graphic and phonic matter in which it is expressed. Neither is it reducible to an abstract idea, however, a generalised concept as such. It cannot be translated into the language of rationality, cannot be fully recuperated by discourse. It is by means of its embodying an aesthetic idea, then, that an object becomes art.

It is at this juncture that a key difference between the understandings of art that underpin the thought of Adorno and of Bürger becomes apparent. For Bürger, as I tried to show, art is a social subsystem or institution, a set of practices, conventions and ideas which govern the reception of the work. In this sense, the *what* of the artwork (*what*

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[56] This is the accusation that is often levelled against *Fountain* and, given the kind of preferences which Adorno's choice of examples indicates, I suspect that he would agree that Duchamp's work is an example of this kind of dilettantism. The argument that I present in Chapter Two will, I hope, demonstrate that this is not the case.

makes it art) is extrinsic to the object. It can be abstracted from our engagement with the work and expressed within conceptual language as the description of practices and conventions. The *how* is simply the means or material of the work. The artwork, then, is a compound of meaning and material and is understood as the combination of these elements. For Adorno in contrast, while the *how* is the material of the artwork and the practice and conventions of art, the *what* of the artwork is not a conceptual idea but an aesthetic idea which is intrinsic to the work: for to reduce the artwork to a set of conceptual "meanings" is to translate it into another language, something "beyond the particular form of art itself," and thus to deny the force of the particularity of the work.[57] This specific relation between the *what* and the *how,* Adorno argues, is what generates the artwork, which is born of the clash between idea and material.

> Art needs something heterogeneous in order to become art. In the absence of that, the process that every work of art is lacks a target and so just freewheels. The clash between the work of art and the world of objects becomes productive, and the work authentic, only where this clash is allowed to happen and to objectify itself by its friction with the thing it devours. (375)

In other words, art is not an object nor is it an institution—a collection of practices, ideas, conventions or materials formed by an artist—but rather a movement or a process. Adorno refers to this in *Aesthetic Theory* as a "binding force" (425). It is a process which brings heterogeneous elements together into a dynamic and always changing relationship which constitutes the truth or authenticity of the work.

This proposition is developed at length in *Aesthetic Theory* where Adorno writes that "however much they seem to be entities, artworks are the crystallizations of the process between spirit and its other" (436). Like a centre of gravity, which magnetically holds an entire field in tension, it is the force of art that creates this "internal

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[57] The indeterminacy and singularity of aesthetic ideas calls for a judgment the criteria of which are intrinsic to the specific work and not pre-determined. It is the freedom implied in this absence of pre-determined criteria that has, for thinkers such as Adorno and Lyotard, made aesthetic experience appear as a site of possible resistance to the domination of nature by a rationalizing capitalism. I will develop this point further in Chapter Four.

crystallisation" (443) in which the work and its truth content are formed.[58] Art then describes a force which holds thought and its other in tension, a drive which brings the incommensurable together without resolving their difference. Art is an aporia out of which the work is generated; the mediation of fact and concept, mind and thing. The task of aesthetics, Adorno argues, is to think this mediation: "this alone, and not the phenomenologist's purportedly originary intuition, leads to art's concrete concept" (446). Art is what we might therefore term a "complex concept" because it is structured not as a unity but as a constellation: it is, in Adorno's terms, "non-identical" with itself. In "Art and the Arts" he explains this as follows:

> No work of art, not even the most subjective, can be completely identical with the subject that constitutes it and its substantial content. Every work possesses materials that are distinct from the subject, procedures that are derived from the materials of art, as well as from human subjectivity. Its truth content is not exhausted by subjectivity but owes its existence to the process of objectification. That process does indeed require the subject as an executor, but points beyond it to that objective Other. This introduces an element of irreducible, qualitative plurality. It is incompatible with every principle of unity, even that of genres of art, by virtue of what they express. (375)

Art, for Adorno, is generated by the friction between art and its other, maintained by holding that difference in tension. Art as the dynamic crystallisation of spirit and substance, necessarily non-self-identical, necessarily heterogeneous is reducible neither to a univocal concept "art" nor to the material of the individual arts. Thus, Adorno concludes, "the constellation of art and the arts dwells within art itself" (383), which is to say that the plurality of the arts and the conflict between their different material conventions and the aesthetic ideas they articulate is necessary for art. To unify the category of "art", to define it as a concept, is to submit it to complete rationalisation: the unification of the arts signals the end of art. It is against this rationalisation, delimitation and unification of the category "art" that the erosion of the arts, the avant-garde's

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[58] In this sense Adorno sees art as a kind of event, an idea that has been applied to thinking about the avant-garde by Lyotard among others (see also Ziareck, *Force*). The overlap between Lyotard and Adorno's thought will be the subject of my fourth chapter.

debauched transgression of the limits of the individual arts, protests: "it is as if the artistic genres, by denying their own firm boundaries, were gnawing away at the concept of art itself" (385).

To try to grasp "art" as a unified concept, to reduce it to a set of ideas, practices or systems, as Bürger does, is, as Adorno writes, to be "blind to the invisible contained in the visible" ("Art" 379). It is, moreover, to fail to grasp that "what is essential to art is that which in it is not the case, that which is incommensurable with the empirical measure of all things" (*Aesthetic* 426). As these words suggest, and as I now want to argue, this dynamic phrasing of art's essential heterogeneity—Adorno's complex concept of art—presents a quite different relationship between art and non-art to that assumed in *Theory of the Avant-Garde* and reveals a notion of aesthetic autonomy at once more complex and more precise than Bürger's.

In the 1957 essay "On Lyric Poetry and Society," Adorno explores the relationship between art and non-art by means of what he terms "the collective undercurrent".[59] Like all art, lyric poetry is generated by means of its attempt to individuate itself from the wider structures of empirical reality: art, as we have seen Adorno argue, is generated through a process of objectification. The basis of the work is not the individual poet, Adorno argues, but rather a common ground of non-art from which it must take form and separate itself in order to be a work of art. It is this precondition of art, this common ground of empirical reality, which forms the collective undercurrent in the work: in other words, society is not what the lyric leaves behind, but rather what it takes shape out of. In the lyric, Adorno writes, "language itself acquires a voice" (43). The heterogeneous composition of art, as Adorno thinks it, contains non-art

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[59] Having outlined this concept in the first half of the essay, Adorno then goes on to demonstrate its presence in two specific lyric works, one by Eduard Mörike and the other by Stefan George. For a discussion of these readings see Ulrich Plass's chapter "*As If*: Stephan George" 89-114. The volume in which this essay appears, *Notes to Literature* was considered by Adorno to be an intrinsic part of the larger project of *Aesthetic Theory* (See Plass 362). This suggests that grasping art by examining the relationship between the arts was one of Adorno's aims in the 1960s, an idea further strengthened by his use of the preposition "to" rather than "on" in this title which suggests a connection—or a promiscuous relation—between the different arts of music and literature. For more on Adorno's cross-disciplinary interests see Cunningham and Mapp's introduction to *Adorno and Literature*. It is for this reason that we might consider him not an aesthete as Bürger suggests, but as a post-aesthetic philosopher. Chapter Four will discuss this difference in detail.

in the form of the collective undercurrent within it. Moreover, Adorno considers this collective undercurrent not only as the matter that constitutes the lyric itself but also the gauge of its power: "participation in this undercurrent" he writes "is an essential part of the substantiality of the individual lyric" ("Lyric" 45). Non-art, then, is the ground and substance of the artwork:[60] the "essential social relation of art," Adorno argues in *Aesthetic Theory*, is not "the immanence of art in society" (as Bürger would have it) but rather, "the immanence of society in the artwork." (304).

For Adorno, art is not the a-historical separate autonomous sphere that aestheticism claims it to be. Rather, art is *essentially* social and historical yet, because of its heterogeneous composition, at no point reducible to history or ideology. Art develops in relation to empirical reality, it achieves a level of autonomy by clashing with it, by objectifying itself, but this autonomy is always precarious and always under threat of disintegration. For, with non-art at its heart, art is always in danger of collapsing back into empirical reality: "admixed with art's own concept" as Adorno puts it in *Aesthetic Theory* "is the ferment of its own abolition" (5). Adorno's artwork is not, as Bürger understands it, "isolated" and "monad-like" (11). It is rather engaged in an ongoing and irresolvable struggle with the empirical reality, to which it is essentially bound but from which it tries to differentiate itself and which, by so doing, it rejects. This is the process which generates art: should this process halt, should the relationship between the work

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[60] Adorno's model of the collective undercurrent and art as a process of objectification bears comparison to the way that art is described by Martin Heidegger in "The Origin of the Work of Art" (1950). Indeed, in "Art and the Arts" Adorno appears aware of the proximity of his model to Heidegger's, taking pains to explain why he substitutes empirical reality (as the ground and substance of the work) where Heidegger positions art (in Heidegger's essay art is the ground and substance of the work). While Heidegger is credited with emphasizing "the linguistic nature of all art" (381) Adorno argues that in making "art" the basis of the artwork, Heidegger shifts the question from one of genesis within time, to one of ontology: rather than grasp art as a historical process, in Heidegger's thought "art" becomes an essence, captured in the individual artwork. Heidegger "rescues the unifying element of art, that which makes it art, but at the price of a situation in which theory reverently falls silent when confronted with the question of what it is" (381). Thus in Heidegger's thought the aesthetic aspect of art "shrinks to what Heidegger once said of Being, namely that it is ultimately nothing more than itself" (382). "Art" becomes something which cannot be explained or understood. In contrast, Adorno's alternative of the collective undercurrent as the basis and substantial content of art is an attempt to counter what he considers a politically dubious mystification of "art" with a historical model, to establish a profound connection between art and society yet at the same time to preserve art's critical distance and prevent its reduction to empirical reality. For more on this relationship see Nikolopoulou, whose work picks up this methodology, re-positioning the collective undercurrent in line with both Heidegger's work and Kant's *sensus communis*.

and empirical reality become reified, then the work no longer operates as art. It is upon this intimate but difficult connection between art and non-art, in fact, as I will now try to show, that the critical capacity or political potential which Adorno assigns to art depends.

The 1962 essay "Commitment" is one of Adorno's most explicit formulations of his understanding of the relationship between art and politics. At several points, it prefigures the arguments of "Art and the Arts" and, in fact, in this earlier essay Adorno also locates the question of art's political engagement quite specifically within the realm of the relationship between the different arts by comparing the visual arts to literature.[61] He begins by outlining what he calls the precarious position of contemporary art, a precariousness resulting from the increasing dissipation of the tension between two previously antithetical poles: these are the same poles described as generating the field of art in "Art and the Arts," one rational and unifying, associated with the conceptual, the other diffuse and mimetic, associated with the aesthetic and material. It is the nature of these antithetical forces, he argues in "Commitment," to operate as a drive towards totality: in a trajectory that we have seen in Bürger's theory, aestheticism moves to sever art's relationship to rationality and empirical reality, making it politically impotent, while committed art in its move to sublate art into life, thereby threatens to reduce art to a mere conceptual message. The precariousness of art's position is caused by the progressive strengthening of the rational and unifying pole—here we have again Adorno's familiar narrative of the domination of all spheres of experience by the forces of homogenisation and rationalisation—and weakening of the diffuse and mimetic pole, which is increasingly overpowered. In other words, as Adorno sees it, the tension by which art is generated is gradually being dissolved.

While Adorno associates the diffuse and mimetic pole of this structure with *art for art's sake*, the opposite pole is not exemplified here by the avant-gardes but rather by

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[61] The later argument about the importance of the erosion of the arts is clearly developing in Adorno's thought at this time, for the rather abrupt comment that the painter "Paul Klee too has a place in any debate about committed and autonomous art; for his work, *écriture par excellence*, had its roots in literature and would not have been what it was without them" seems virtually inexplicable otherwise ("Commitment" 194).

Jean-Paul Sartre's concept of "engaged" literature.[62] Sartre, Adorno writes, accords literature a privileged place over visual art in terms of political commitment because, as Sartre puts it, "the writer deals with meanings" (qtd. in "Commitment" 178). Sartre sees the apparent transparency of language as the key power of literature: the medium is the servant of the idea. Literature is thus better suited to social engagement than the visual arts, his work suggests, because it is a transparent medium which can signal a clear political message. In other words, Adorno argues, Sartre reduces literature to the pole of the rational and unifying. As I shall argue in the following chapter, Sartre is by no means alone in assuming that literature, because its material is language, is more transparent and more amenable to social engagement or political use than the other arts. This is, in fact, a central aspect of numerous accounts of artistic modernism. Adorno counters Sartre by explicitly arguing for the importance of form in literature, thereby refusing the distinction between literature and visual art that Sartre's argument sets up.

> If no word which enters a literary work ever wholly frees itself from its meaning in ordinary speech, so no literary work, not even the traditional novel, leaves these meanings unaltered, as they were outside it. Even an ordinary "was," in a report of something that was not, acquires a new formal quality from the fact that it was not so. The same process occurs in the higher levels of meaning of a work, all the way up to what once used to be called its "Idea." The special picture that Sartre accords literature must also be suspect to anyone who does not unconditionally subsume diverse aesthetic genres under a superior universal concept. The rudiments of external meanings are the irreducibly non-artistic elements in art. Its formal principle lies not in them, but in the dialectic of both moments – which accomplishes the transformation of meanings within it. (178)

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[62] Bürger would distinguish the avant-garde from this kind of thematic "engagement" with society as, were it to be reduced to such a level, the "historical avant-gardes" could not be distinguished from any other forms of "engaged" art. Yet if the avant-garde's social function is, as Bürger suggests, to provide "a free space in which reality and social practice may be theorized and reconceptualized," as Murphy points out, then "the avant-garde would appear to be merely sharing a critical function common to many different forms and movements throughout the history of art" (27). This ambiguity about what constitutes avant-garde engagement is, as Murphy rightly argues, a result of Bürger's under-theorization of autonomy. See Murphy 26-48.

In other words, Adorno argues that in literature, as in any art, the sense of the work depends upon its material embodiment and the new constellations which this embodiment generates. Thus, while for Sartre commitment is found in the meanings or content of language, Adorno is suggesting that it is found in the "formal principle" of art. This claim depends upon a particular notion of form, however, one in which the form of art is not opposed to content or meaning. This notion distinguishes Adorno's theoretical framework from the oppositional structure (in which literature is led by content, visual art by form) which underwrites Sartre's argument. The formal principle according to Adorno is the process in which meanings and materials collide and transform one another in the context of particular works, the crystallisation of art and non-art within the work. Literature is not reducible to conceptual "meanings," then, just as the visual arts are not reducible to mere material.[63]

Sartre, according to Adorno, ignores the tension between the poles, attempts to reduce literature and visual art to oppositions.[64] He ignores the fact that language operates not just as sign but also, in the terms Adorno sets out in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, as image. For, like art, language also moves between two comparable poles: "[as] a system of signs, language is required to resign itself to calculation in order to know nature, and must discard the claim to be like her. As image, it is required to resign itself to mirror-imagery in order to be nature entire, and must discard the claim to know her" (*Dialectic* 17–18). For Adorno, then, literature, like any art, is internally heterogeneous and cannot be unified. Literature partakes in both the mimetic *and* the discursive: it brings them together in a clash that transforms both. Again, then, it is this formal principle, the binding force of art rather than any extractable meaning that constitutes literature's power.

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[63] It is Adorno's notion of form as dynamic (socio-historical *and* aesthetic) which separates him from Greenberg, whose formalism, as I shall try to show in the next chapter, is considerably narrower and more limited.

[64] One of the effects of this move, we may note, is to create a hierarchy in which literature (in Sartre's view) is the privileged art: the next chapter will be concerned to show how such hierarchical squabbles have also marked theorisation of the avant-garde. Dismissing such notions in "Art and the Arts", Adorno draws the arts together not to suggest a hierarchy but to use them to reflect on one another.

Against Sartre, therefore, Adorno argues that "it is not the office of art to spotlight alternatives, but to resist by its form alone the course of the world. … In fact, as soon as committed works of art do instigate decisions at their own level, the decisions themselves become interchangeable" ("Commitment" 180). The form of art, understood as the clash of internal heterogeneity and thus the movement of transformation, is a resistance to the reified structures of thought in which "alternatives" are necessarily framed. The decisions or "messages" of individual artworks are interchangeable, Adorno claims, because they can do nothing to change the structural framework of the society in which they take place. *Art for art's sake* reduces art to a medium for the private reflection of the bourgeois individual; but committed art becomes the mouthpiece of opinion. Both, in other words, reinforce the structures of bourgeois society rather than challenging them, Adorno argues. Sartre reduces literature to the declaration of a subject: "interwoven in the veil of personalization is the idea that human beings are in control and decide, not anonymous machinery" (182). Any personal opinion, any political statement or programme, as Adorno sees it, is contained within this machinery: one decision is interchangeable with another and thus none are truly transformative.[65]

It is a movement beyond the individual and the subjective that Adorno seeks to make in an attempt to challenge the power of these two poles, and in order to reveal what he sees as the totalising power of the social system, a power that, for Adorno, only art can resist.[66] It is for this reason that art must be understood neither as representing a conceptual idea nor as the *opposite* of the social sphere: the former would be to reduce art to the frameworks of rationality; the latter would be to fail to grasp the connection with empirical reality that gives art its power and importance. On the contrary, art participates in what neither commitment nor bourgeois aestheticism is able to take full account of, an "inherently collective objectivity" (181). This collective objectivity—

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[65] At this point the pessimism that marks Adorno's work begins becomes obvious: in Chapter Four I will argue that it is precisely this pessimism that Lyotard rejects in Adorno's thought and that it is as a result of this rejection that he attempts to rethink the task of the avant-garde.

[66] It will be useful to the discussion in Chapter Four, if we take the time now to note that Adorno is critiquing subjectivity here (to some degree at least) because, in that later chapter, I will be examining Lyotard's claim that Adorno does not critique the subject. I will argue then that Lyotard is strategically misreading Adorno.

which results from the double fact of the distance that art must achieve from empirical reality in order to become art and the necessity that art take shape out of empirical reality, must have a material basis, and is therefore irreducible to subjectivity—is the truth of the work generated in the process of its objectification. In other words the art work's force comes from the way it differs from itself, the way in which it refuses reduction to concept or object, to rational unification or diffuse material. This force, because it cannot be expressed otherwise than in the work itself, is necessarily enigmatic, ungraspable, and this, Adorno finally claims, is what the debate on commitment fails to grasp: it cannot account for "what the shock of the unintelligible can communicate" (180). It is in its evasion of intelligibility, in other words, in its resistance to what Adorno terms "the lying positivism of meaning" (191) that art takes on an ethical and political role. Indeed in modernity, Adorno asserts, the work of art takes on the burden of "wordlessly asserting what is barred to politics" (194). The wordlessness of what art asserts, its aesthetic idea which cannot be translated into the language of rational conceptuality, is of course precisely the invisible in the visible that Bürger fails to see: his reduction of art to ideology is not only deaf to the language of art but in fact, in its attempt to strip away the veil of aesthetics and reveal the "real" social conditions of art, helps to silence it.

For Adorno, art is born of society, constituted by it, and at the same time operates to remove itself from empirical reality, to make itself an alternative to that reality and thus to refuse society. "Art's own nature," he writes, "not the impotence of our thoughts about it, forbids us to define it; its innermost principle, that of utopia, rebels against the domination of nature that its definition implies" ("Art" 386). It is this enigmatic character that Adorno sees as vital to art's power. "The nonmeaningful realities that find their way into the domain of art in the course of erosion" he writes in "Art and the Arts", "are potentially salvaged as meaningful by art, at the same moment as they fly in the face of the traditional meaning of art" (385). In other words, by reminding us that there is a potential for meaning in what rationality has deemed meaningless, art bears witness to an alternative to rationality. Thus, as he writes in "Commitment," "as eminently constructed and produced objects, works of art, including

literary ones, point to a practice from which they abstain: the creation of a just [and meaningful] life" (194). It is this potential for transformation in the moment in which art and non-art, the rational and the aesthetic, meet that gives art a political role: for "in the semblance of what is other," as Adorno writes in *Aesthetic Theory,* "its possibility also unfolds" (23).

The possibilities opened out by Adorno's own theory will be the subject of the following chapters which will look at the impact of Adorno's work on more recent discussions of aesthetics and the avant-gardes. What remains to be done here, however, is to show how Adorno's insistence on the importance of the productive conflict between the arts and on the enigmatic character of the artwork can be usefully employed to open out Duchamp's readymades beyond the still highly influential "anti-art" reading. My concern in what follows is not so much to provide a decisive reading of *Fountain*, as to reveals aspects of the work which the anti-art reading suppresses and, by doing so, to locate the readymade in relation to Adorno's thought. I aim to draw out the interest in poetic language which I think motivates the readymade and thereby to sketch out (with a broad brush) the outlines of ideas that I will develop in subsequent chapters.

4. *Fountain* and *Lits et Ratures*

In *Theory of the Avant-Garde, Fountain* signals a set of questions about authorship and institution critique. Bürger's interpretation of the piece relies on the contrast between the authenticity of art and the mass-produced object, and Duchamp's "signature" plays the primary role in establishing the work's meaning. Yet, as I have already noted, this is one of the fault-lines in Bürger's position, for *Fountain* is not signed by Duchamp. The idea that the "signature" functions as a guarantee of authenticity is made problematic by the fact that it belongs to a fictive persona, "R. Mutt." Bürger ignores the particularity of this inscription and fails to take account of the more complex interaction of text and object that the readymade announces and performs. It is this relationship between the linguistic inscription and the object that I want to consider here, for approached from

this angle, I will suggest, what the readymade reveals is an interest in both poetic language and in the recuperative operations of discourse.

In recent discussions of Duchamp's readymades the relation between the object and inscription has in fact been an insistent line of enquiry.[67] Rosalind Krauss, for example, argues that Duchamp's work articulates a "trauma of signification" ("Notes" 206) [68] in which the sign is revealed as emptied of meaning.[69] For Krauss, Duchamp's work plays with and can be understood in relation to the type of sign that Prague School linguist Roman Jakobson terms the "shifter." The shifter is a word such as "this" or "that," "I" or "you," the meaning of which is generated through the context in which it is spoken and received. In a conversation, for example, "I" and "you" will shift according to the person speaking, who will sometimes be "I," sometimes "you." Crucially, the speakers will be able to recognize themselves as either "I" or "you," because of the context of the articulation. The shifter, therefore, is "'filled with signification' only because it is 'empty'" ("Notes" 197). This, Krauss argues, is precisely the position of the readymade. "It is a sign which is inherently 'empty,' its signification a function of only this one instance, guaranteed by the existential presence of just this object" ("Notes" 206). In other words, Duchamp, by placing a urinal where an artwork "should" be, reveals the emptiness of the sign "art" and how it must be guaranteed by an object, and conversely *Fountain* reveals the dependence of the object's significance on its labelling as "art". For Krauss, then, language and object operate to fill one another in: like photographs and their captions in newspapers, she argues, they supplement one another to create meaning and at the same time, because of their interdependence, reveal the absence of meaning conventionally assumed to inhere in the sign.

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[67] The linguistic aspects of the readymades have been explored by many critics outside of the avant-garde and anti-art debates. The connection was established by the poet David Antin in his experimental essay "Duchamp and Language" (1974). It has recently been cemented as an area of interest by Marjorie Perloff, as a theme she treats in many essays (see in particular "The Conceptual Poetics of Marcel Duchamp"), and David Joselit (*Infinite Regress*).

[68] This idea has had important consequences for the theorisations of the avant-garde, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

[69] Joselit finds a similar emptiness revealed in the readymades' play with language; see *Infinite Regress* 72-79.

In her monograph *Postmodernism and the En-gendering of Marcel Duchamp* (1994), Amelia Jones has developed this idea of the readymade as shifter in relation to a discussion of the signature. What shifters indicate, Jones argues, is the manner in which the speaking subject is always already split in two and alienated in language, a splitting which she sees both Duchamp's use of pseudonyms—a practice which he referred to as his "little game between 'I' and 'me'" (Kuh 83)—and the readymades as articulating.

> It is the activation of shifters by Duchamp's textualized objects, the displacement of the active–passive, making–viewing parts of the self, that exposes the multiplicity within the signifying system – the changes in signification that occur according to enunciation. Duchamp's texts and objects undermine the notion of a clearly defined split by acting out the *mutual dependence* of the shifters, even their permeability to one another – the reliance of the "I" on the "me," the masculine on the feminine, the internal on the external, the maker's identity on the interpretation of the spectator and the spectator's identity on what she or he perceives to be that of the maker. (133-134)

For Jones, shifters operate not as empty signs, in other words, but rather as unstable signs, exposing not so much the evacuation of meaning from the sign as the multiplicity of potential meanings within language. The readymades, as textualized objects, deliberately operate to prevent the fixing of meaning and to destabilise identities. "Duchamp's productions undermine interpersonal opposition [you and I] by activating intrapersonal difference," Jones writes, "playing out the split *within* the subject by taking on both shifters at once, compelling the spectator to do the same" (133). In other words, the readymades work to attack precisely that coherent, "rational" subject position—a stable, homogenous and unified identity—that Adorno, as he argues against Sartre's notion of literature, conceives art as protesting against.

Like Krauss, then, Jones perceives Duchamp as working through a kind of trauma of signification. Both understand his work as challenging the notion that meaning can be lodged within the sign: however, where Krauss sees an emptying out of the sign, its being divested of meaning, Jones—more perceptively I think—sees an instability caused by excessive signification, by a doubling of identities and multiple meanings. In

a passage that allows us to take account of the fact that "R. Mutt" is not the Duchampian signature, she writes that the readymade's

> written label is … splintered from continuity with the object. It refuses to serve as the traditional, descriptive "anchor" directing the vehicle towards its "proper" referent. The metaphysical belief that meaning can lodge within the sign (as intended by an original subject still present through her or his enunciative "I") is continually shaken as text and object conflict. (138)

With *Fountain*, in other words, text and object do not supplement one another in order to stabilize meaning, but rather frustrate such a resolution. Such an account resonates with Claude Lévi-Strauss' description of Duchamp's work as a kind of "semantic fission," the disconnection of signifier and signified serving not to annihilate meaning but rather "to create an unexpected fusion between another signifier and another signified" (Charbonnier 79). The readymade can thus be understood as a text/object construction, or to use Duchamp's own description of the object, "a kind of rendezvous" (*Writings* 32) between numerous meanings and materials.

In fact, given this description, it is perhaps not the shifter that is the most fitting linguistic model for Duchamp's work but the pun.[70] As a double structure in which the manifold senses of the word or phrase interfere and destabilise one another, the pun fascinated Duchamp throughout his career. From the *double entendre* captions which accompanied the newspaper cartoons that he drew in the 1910s, through a period of overt experimentation with the form in the 1920s—exemplified, for example, by the punning pseudonyms of the 1923 *Wanted Poster* (Fig 1.3)—to the publication in 1939 of a book of puns under the alias of Rrose Sélavy (*Eros, C'est la Vie*),[71] and on to later works such as the visually punning collage *Genre Allegory (Allégorie de Genre* 1943)

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[70] For a richly allusive discussion of Duchamp's many puns see George Bauer's "Duchamp's Ubiquitous Puns." For further discussion of Duchamp's puns in relation to his readymades see Carol James, "An Original Revolutionary."

[71] Rrose Selvay is Duchamp's most famous alter-ego, "born" around 1920. Rrose, as well as authoring the book of puns, signed/created a number of works and inspired many others. She was captured in a famous 1921 photograph by Man Ray and appears on the readymade perfume bottle "Belle Haleine: Eau de Voilette" (1921). Perhaps the best discussion of the Marcel/Rrose relationship appears in Amelia Jones's *Postmodernism* (passim). See also Schwarz 1:214-215.
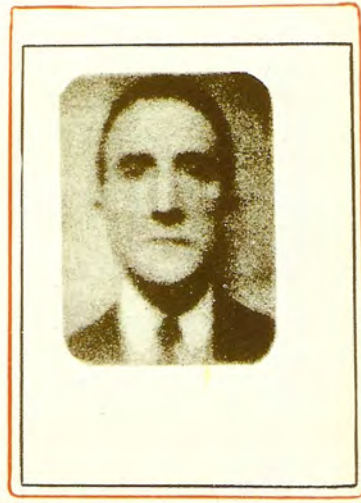
Fig. 1.3 Marcel Duchamp, *Wanted: $2,000 Reward* (1923).
Collection Louise Hellstrom.

Fig. 1.4 Marcel Duchamp, *Genre Allegory* (1943).
Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre National d'Art et de Culture Georges Pompidou, Paris.

(Fig 1.4), Duchamp's work constantly revels in compound meanings, multiple identities, internal heterogeneity and the potential for humour that these generate.

In his 1905 study *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*, Sigmund Freud discusses puns as linguistic condensation, the compression of multiple meanings into a single word. Such jokes, Freud reminds us, depend on a process of setting up a meaning that appears expected or "normal" within dominant structures of thought or behaviour and then allowing another unexpected or "abnormal" alternative to present itself.[72] Puns necessarily emerge though the frameworks of "normal" language and can only operate within a social context. They are relative to the dominant structures of meaning, therefore, yet subversive within these structures, revealing, as Derek Attridge writes, "the process upon which all language rests, the process whereby context constrains but

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[72] See Freud 16-22. As Andrew Stott points outs drag identities such as Rrose Selavy operate according to precisely the same structure—a man appears as a woman but is clearly male—which is, Stott argues, why drag is often humorous and why transvestitism, in contrast, isn't. See Chapter Three of Stott, *Comedy*.

does not wholly constrain the possibilities of meaning" (*Peculiar* 192). In other words, the pun emerges from the social sphere of communicative language and relies upon that framework for its meaning yet also operates against that sphere, revealing other possibilities of meaning repressed within these structures as the second meaning flashes out from within the material of language. Crucially, the ambiguity in the pun is not resolved but remains held in conflict: it cannot be collapsed into one meaning or another but, like the joke, relies upon what Henri Bergson in his own study of humour describes as "the double fact of coincidence and interference" (124).

The title *"Fountain"* appended to the urinal also performs precisely these doublings and sets into play multiple associations. A drinking fountain, an ornamental water feature, a generative source from which plenty springs forth: each of these meanings finds its counter in the object of the urinal, an entirely practical object, a repository for waste fluids rather a source and certainly not something from which to drink. Marjorie Perloff, in a pertinent reading of the object, its title and inscription, sees in this coupling of conflicting ideas a kind of sexual joke or *double entendre*:

> The fountain is a standard Romantic image of natural energy and beauty, a symbol of sexual potency. But here, the urinal's original male function gives way to a rounded female form with a hole at its bottom — perhaps a true fountain after all. Or is this female form the receptacle for the male artist's "fountain"? … Even the signature "R. Mutt," a variation on J. L. Mott, the Philadelphia Iron Works where Duchamp purchased the urinal, becomes the occasion for extensive punning: Duchamp himself cited the "Mutt and Jeff" comic strip, but the name also recalls such German words as *Mutti* ("Mama"), *Mut* ("courage," "nerve"), *Armut* ("poverty"), or even *art mutt* ("art" in French + mongrel dog in American slang = mongrel art). Such sexual punning and double entendre is found everywhere in Duchamp's world of objects. ("Of Objects" 140)

Like the title in other words, the "signature" inscribed on the urinal functions as a verbal pun to double the conflict of meanings in the object/title. Duchamp's interest in language is not in its function as a communicative tool, it seems, his inscription is not intended to identify the object as a work, not to claim ownership, nor to guarantee (however ironically) authenticity. Rather the inscription is a tool to open out and

multiply the potential meanings affixed to the object: as the artist wrote, "instead of describing the object like a title it was meant to carry the mind of the spectator towards other regions more verbal" (*Writings* 141).

As a sexual joke, moreover, *Fountain* might be considered to prefigure *The Bride Stripped Bare* as part of Duchamp's broader concern with eroticism as "a way to try to bring out in the daylight things that are constantly hidden … because of social rules" (Cabanne *Dialogues* 88). For, if we accept Freud's account, obscene jokes or smut operate in the same manner as the "exposure" (or stripping) of the person (or bride) at whom it is directed.

> By the utterance of the obscene words [or presentation of the obscene object] it compels the person who is assailed to imagine the part of the body or the procedure in question and shows her that the assailant is himself imagining it. It cannot be doubted that the desire to see what is sexual exposed is the original motive of smut. (Freud 98)

What is particularly interesting about the sexual joke, then, is that it reminds us that while joking depends upon a shared and understood social context and the unresolved subversion of the dominant structures of meaning within that context, it can also operate to reveal divides or conflicts within this social framework. The sexual joke targets someone and operates upon their discomfort as the social context in which the joke emerges is divided into those who take pleasure in the jest and those who are the butt of the joke. This is of course precisely the operation of *Fountain* and precisely what makes it disturbing: for the viewer cannot be sure whether she/he is the one being exposed or whether they should take pleasure in the joke. Are we to laugh along at the bourgeois pretensions of the art world or does the fact that we are in the position of viewer in that same system mean that we, ultimately, are the target of Duchamp's humour? *Fountain*, as Jones indicated, forces us onto an unstable and uncomfortable ground.

Importantly in the context of this thesis, the idea of the pun also connects the readymades to Duchamp's interest in literature.[73] The sense of the pun arises out of the

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[73] Judovitz's *Unpacking Duchamp* has perhaps the most considered discussion of Duchamp's work in relation to poetic language currently available.

clash of incompatible meanings brought together in the material of the word, the image or sound of the written or spoken word. It operates, through the exploitation of polysemy and of formal similarities between signifiers, to reveal the possibility of multiple meanings within the system of language, refusing to reduce language to its utilitarian communicative usage. It is the pun's refusal to behave, to communicate properly—what Attridge refers to as its "insubordination" (*Peculiar* 192)—that links the form to literature, for, as he writes,

> the independence of meaning from its material representation required by the linguistic system is challenged by *every* use in poetry of sound or appearance to make connections or to establish contrasts—every effect of rhyme, rhythm, visual patterning, alliteration or assonance. (*Peculiar* 192-193)

The pun, in other words, uses the material of language to interfere with its meaning and to highlight the capacity of language to evade conceptual rationality, to be aesthetic. Thus, as Dalia Judovitz remarks, "the radicality of readymades, as both objects and critical gestures, lies in the fact that they embody the effort to rethink visual representation through the mediation of a poetic interpretation of language" (77). In other words, the readymades perform the erosion of the arts which Adorno identifies as central to avant-garde works, cross-pollinating the visual arts with the techniques and strategies of literary language.

In fact, as the subsequent chapters of this thesis will attempt to show, Duchamp had a keen interest in poetry and poetic language—which he described in one interview as "words distorted by their sense" (Cabanne *Dialogues* 90)[74]—often exploring the effects that could be generated by the material form of writing. A case in point here is *Written Wrotten* (*Morceaux Mosis* 1919)[75] (Fig. 1.5), a text which presents extremely

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[74] This sequence of extensive interviews, in which Duchamp talks about his interest in literature in some depth, was first published in France in 1967 under the title *L'Ingénieur du Temps Perdu*, a far better title in that it captures not only the sense of literary influences but also the idea that in these late interviews the artist reworks his career, engineering his impact in much the same way as he had with the *Green Box* and the *Boîtes-en-Valise*.

[75] The French title is itself a pun that plays with the meanings "mouldy pieces" and "selected details" (see Schwarz 2:759).

Parmi nos articles de quincaillerie paresseuse, nous recommandons un robinet qui s'arrête de couler quand on ne l'écoute pas.

Ovaire toute la nuit.

Paroi parée de paresse de paroisse.

Il faut dire :
La crasse du tympan, et non le Sacre du Printemps.

Le système métrite par un temps blennorragieux.

Des bas en soie...la chose aussi

M'amenez-y.

Lits et ratures.

Fig. 1.5 Marcel Duchamp *Written Wrotten* (1919)
One of Four Pages from the *Boîtes-En Valise*, Collection Arturo Schwarz, Milan.

neat writing on musical paper that looks like a school exercise book, from which a whole host of "unacceptable" meanings burst forth: the obviously "practiced" constraints of handwriting reign in references to incest, "intimate hygiene" and casual sexual liaisons. The work thus allows what Sarat Maharaj terms the "calligraphic" and "cacographic" modes of writing to interfere with one another. Maharaj describes the calligraphic as a perfected and controlled writing "of luminous clarity" and the cacographic as a writing of "fecal opacity … clumsy and cack-handed precisely because it is a transcript of bodily drives and pulsions" (84). The exaggerated correctness of the writing in *Written Wrotten,* Marharaj suggests, "a stilted right-hand slope, copybook fashion," demonstrates the calligraphic aspect of writing while the puns demonstrate the cacographic, "quietly [playing] havoc with the copperplate form, composition, and layout, unbuttoning their stiff properness" (84). Like the arts which erode one another's boundaries, the multiple meanings set in motion by the puns seem to violate the confines of the "proper" writing and proper behaviour: the promiscuous coupling of meanings breaks the same taboos as the incestuous coupling of the arts.[76]

Another pertinent example in this regard is the phrase *Lits et Ratures* which appears in *Written Wrotten.*[77] On first reading, this pun clearly mobilises the word "literature" with its attendant associations. However, read as three words, *lits et ratures* or "beds and erasures," it generates a whole set of further associations – sleep, sex, death, disappearance, errors, frustrations. The two nouns impact on one another, as we are asked to imagine a logic in which this connection between "beds" and "erasures" makes sense. This second reading arises from within and interferes with the word "literature." The pun invites us to ascribe it a context that connects these words, to find an overarching framework in which their relation makes sense.[78] Yet, the frameworks of communicative language use and rational thought cannot account for this pun: it refuses to conform to established patterns of meaning. The ambiguity of the pun seems to hint at

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[76] For a discussion of the pun as connected to sexual perversion see Tanner, *Adultery in the Novel* 53, and Attridge, *Peculiar Language* 201.

[77] This pun was created for the cover of issue 7 of Andre Breton's magazine *Litterature* in 1922.

[78] Schwarz, for example, describes it as an attack on literature; see 1:31. To me, however, the connection between sex and death seems to be the dissolution of the self, and, in this respect, I think the connection with literature can be read more easily as a rather conventional nod to aesthetic disinterest.

an alternative order the rules of which remain elusive: it has, we might thus conclude, something of the enigmatic promise that Adorno identifies in the artwork.

Duchamp's play with poetic language did not only manifest itself in the form of readymades. Indeed, in this light, "Apropos of 'Readymades'," a talk that the artist delivered at New York's Museum of Modern Art in 1961, appears significant.[79] In the speech Duchamp pays special attention to the linguistic aspect of the readymades and imagines a whole sequence of categories—the "RECTIFIED READYMADE;" the "IMITIATED RECTIFIED READYMADE:" the "RECIPROCAL READYMADE", a purely imagined category in which one could "USE A REMBRANDT AS AN IRONING BOARD" (142). The fact that the majority of these categories begin with the letter *R* is not coincidental, the alliterative resonances of word play were something that Duchamp often capitalised upon: the double *R-R* of these categories also evokes the double *R-R* of Rrose's name indicating her punning presence in the material of the text. As if to highlight the wordplay within the text, Duchamp switches the alliterative mode at the end, finishing with a punch line: since the tubes of paint used by the artist are manufactured and ready made products, he claims, all the paintings in the world are "READYMADES AIDED" (142). From the repeated *R* that has structured the discussion, Duchamp switches to the unexpected repetition of the final syllable. Playing with the concept of the readymade, highlighting the alliterative and material aspects of language and loading a single term with such an excess of meanings that it begins to reflect the instability of signification: in this text, the concept "readymade" becomes a substitute for the concept "art" and recuperates all manufactured objects under its banner. Duchamp infuses this "non-artistic" text with the kind of word play that more usually characterises literary language: he refuses to keep the genres separate, again plays the calligraphy of discourse against the cacography of rhythm and assonance as the rolling *R*'s of Rrose (Eros) and the stuttering repetition of "readymade-aided," interrupts the "proper" discourse of the artist's address. The bodily and material interferes with the conventional in this address, just as the lewd urinal interferes with the conventions of

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[79] This text was printed (entirely in uppercase) in *Art and Artists* (1.4, London, July 1966). It is reproduced in Duchamp's *Writings*, from which my references are taken.

art. Does this artist's statement give us an insight into the "truth" of his works, or does it constitute a work of art in its own right it, like a readymade which is, in turn, Duchamp tells us, "like a speech delivered on no matter what occasion but *at such and such an hour*" (*Writings* 32).

If we can approach "Apropos of 'Readymades'" as indicating Duchamp's desire to infuse discourse with poetic language, to break down the borders between art and the commentary on it, then we might also approach his other texts in this manner. Indeed, from this angle, the events of 1917 begin to take on a slightly different cast. Recalling that the urinal itself was lost during the process of submission, and may never have been exhibited at all, we might note that *Fountain* actually entered art history by way of discourse: the lost "work" was recorded in a photograph that was published alongside a text, "The Richard Mutt Case", which although unattributed at the time was later reported to have been authored by Duchamp himself.[80] The text was published in the second edition of *The Blind Man,* the little magazine that Duchamp and Roché edited, and is often approached, like the photograph, as a document of fact, evidence of the author's real intentions: "whether Mr. Mutt with his own hands made the fountain or not has no importance", reads the text, "he CHOSE it. … [He] created a new thought for that object" (153). Yet, given Duchamp's willingness to blur the boundaries between art and non-art, we can also understand it as another layer of the work, a means of controlling the reception of *Fountain*, which, as an event reactivated through a later textual intervention, is thus seen to operate with the kind of delays and recursive temporalities that mark Duchamp's catalogue more broadly.[81] The readymade, as it turns out, is like any good joke a "matter of timing" (*Writings* 32).

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[80] Although I am following the usual practice of attributing the "Richard Mutt Case" to Duchamp, in fact there is some confusion about who wrote this. As William Camfield writes, "Beatrice Wood claims she wrote this editorial in *I Shock Myself*, 31. In response to questions posed by Serge Stauffer … Duchamp said 'The Richard Mutt Case' was by the eidtors [sic] of *The Blind Man.* Duchamp identified Louise Varèse as the author in his interview for the Arts Council of Great Britain, June 19, 1966, 27. Alice Goldfarb Marquis thinks Arensberg was probably the principle author" ("Duchamp's Fountain" 174). Certainly*, The Blind Man* was produced, as I noted at the outset of this chapter, by group that included Duchamp and, in conversation with Pierre Cabanne, Duchamp goes as far as to suggest that the entire point of publishing the journal was "above all a matter of justifying the 'Fountain-Urinal'"(Dialogues 56).

[81] Given Stieglitz's involvement as photographer, moreover, this process of documentation can be read as a conscious game with the reception and discourses surrounding art for, as Arlene Olsen's *Art Critics and*

Such a practice of subsequent intervention can be seen to mark Duchamp's career from beginning to end, in fact: the artist played with texts and objects in a strategic attempt to prevent his work from becoming fixed in any particular conceptual category. "If you interrupt your work, I mean after you have done it," the artist declared "then it becomes, it stays a thing in itself" (*Writings* 134).[82] This is a process that I will examine more closely in Chapter Three. For the moment, however, it suffices to say that Duchamp's catalogue may be viewed as elaborating a practice of strategic interruption in which single works appear not as univocal gestures, but rather as constellations of conflicting ideas set in motion in an attempt to forestall the recuperative process.[83]

If this process began early with *Fountain*, Duchamp continued the process of returning to this particular work throughout his career. A late example is the cover that Duchamp designed for Arturo Schwarz's 1964 book *Marcel Duchamp: Readymades, etc. (1913-1964).* (Fig 1.6) The cover is a negative image, a white sketch of the upside-down urinal on a black background. Above the image there are two lines of text: "*Un Robinet Original Revolutionnaire /'Renvoi Miroirique'?"* (An Original Revolutionary

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the *Avant-Garde* shows, the photographer and gallery owner was an expert manipulator of the media as a source of free publicity (16-17). Duchamp may have been attempting to turn Stieglitz's own work and tactics against him for, if Thierry de Duve is correct, the entire Richard Mutt case was Duchamp's attempt to write himself into a history that was dominated by the artists represented by Stieglitz's gallery. In this sense, manipulating the conservative Stieglitz—who thought Duchamp a "charlatan"—into taking the picture seems part of the joke (see "Given the Richard Mutt Case"). For more on the relationship between the Duchamp and Stieglitz circles see Balken's *Debating American Modernism.*

[82] *The Bride Stripped Bare* in particular was "interrupted" several times, left to "breed" dust for many months at one point and at another, famously, it was broken in transit: Duchamp declared himself delighted with the result. In fact, Duchamp's last project *Given: 1° the Waterfall and 2° the Illuminating Gas (Etant Donnés: 1° La Chute d'Eau 2° Le Gaz d'Eclairage,* 1946-1966) can also be considered as a return to the *Glass.* The title of the later work is taken from the notes for the former, which appear in *The Green Box* and refer to important elements of the *Glass* and, presenting the stripped bride, *Given* renders the abstraction of the earlier *Large Glass* all too literal. See Schwarz 2:145 and Cabanne, *Dialogues* 18. For Duchamp's attitude to habit and repetition, see Cabanne, *Dialogues* 48.

[83] This refusal to allow one interpretation to dominate his work is a crucial aspect of Duchamp's wider project. The artist's catalogue is a sequence of complex returns to earlier ideas; figures are re-worked, tropes reappear, entire works are incorporated into others. For more on this aspect of his work, see Buskirk's "Thoroughly Modern Marcel" and Carol James, who argues that the concept of the readymade is consistently worked over and interrupted throughout Duchamp's career. "As time passed," James concludes "all of Duchamp's previous work became 'readymade,' first, in its simple anteriority, and second, in its availability for reuse as artistic material, that is, in a state of having been already changed into art" ("Original" 281). The resistance to this kind of reading and the desire to fix the definition of readymade are evident in what appears, on the printed page, as a rather hostile response to James' argument (*Definitively Unfinished* 304-306).
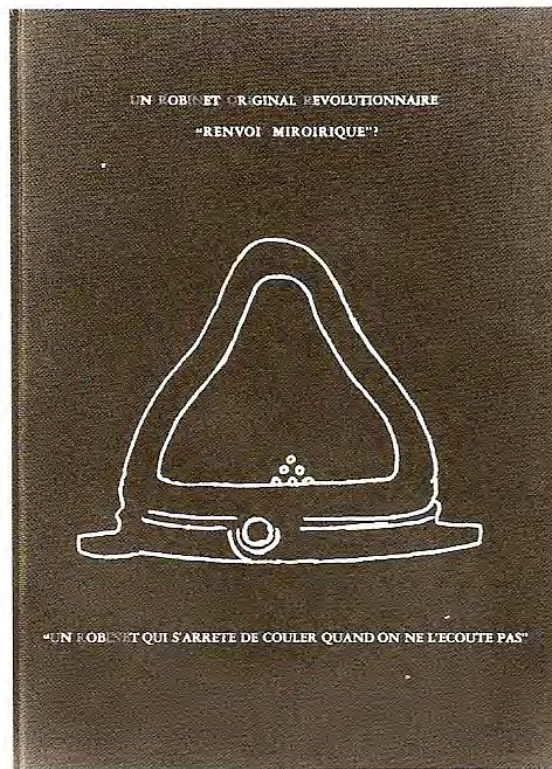
Fig. 1.6 Marcel Duchamp, *Dust jacket for "Marcel Duchamp: Ready-mades, etc. (1913-1964)," by Arturo Schwarz* (1964) Published by Galleria Schwarz Milan.

Faucet/'Mirrorical Return'?) and, below the sketch, "*Un robinet qui s'arrete de couler quand on ne l'ecoute pas*" (A faucet that stops running when no one is listening to it).[84] The object thus visually suggests a process of reflection on the "snapshot effect" (*Writings* 32) of the readymade, inverting the revolutionary original (that is not an original) into a conceptual riddle that suggests that the work directs itself to the ear rather the eye,[85] and only functions when attention is paid to it. The cover was designed for a text about his work: the readymade is thus opening an art historical commentary, the kind of text that Duchamp described as "a faucet of words …which instead of explaining subconscious thoughts, in reality creates the thought by and after the word" (qtd. in Tomkins 394). In other words, *Fountain* is a faucet that opens a flow of

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[84] This work is catalogued by Schwarz 2: 834. For a more lengthy discussion of it see Judovitz 132-133.
[85] As the discussion in the next chapter will show, this suggests that *Fountain* is literary or musical in the terms of Romantic aesthetic theories of the arts.

discourse which retroactively forms it: discourse which Duchamp himself, as we have seen, engages with and shapes. The term "mirrorical return" can be read as indicating this process of interruption and reflection on the works and their interpretation, a questioning of whether the work appears as original and revolutionary only in retrospective as a result of discursive construction.[86] Refracted through this later book cover, then, *Fountain* appears as a game with discourse, suggesting that texts such as "Apropos of 'Readymades'" and "The Richard Mutt Case" are not explanations of Duchamp's work so much as additional media by which to condense progressively more and more meaning into the objects and increasingly destabilizing any single interpretation in the process.[87] The idea of an independent, self-standing work is challenged and thus the mutual dependency of work and label, art and discourse is revealed.

The force of *Fountain,* to conclude, is in the ongoing play of meanings that the work generates: it is for this reason—and not because it is anti-art—that *Fountain* is still provocative today.[88] Duchamp's readymade explores the relations between the arts and between art and non-art on numerous levels. Destabilising dominant structures of meaning and experience, it critiques a univocal interpretation of the work and exposes the constraints of convention, revealing the instability of linguistic meaning and the contingency of labels and definitions. Indeed, Duchamp's work questions the truth value that is assumed to inhere in "non-aesthetic" or "rational" discourses just as it questions "art". In this sense the task of the Duchampian art-pun, and its mirrorical return in *Fountain*, is the very same task which Adorno assigns to art: to resist the drive of

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[86] As I shall try to show in Chapter Three, this term links the urinal to the bachelor section of the *Glass* and the frustrated attempts at communication which the bachelors make.

[87] Duchamp appears to have been very relaxed about interpretation of his work, remarking on several occasions that all interpretations were valid: if a viewer could see something in the work, then it must be there (see Cabanne, *Dialogues* 42, 70). In this he is true to the comments made in his 1957 speech "The Creative Act" in which he asserted that is the spectator and ultimately posterity that decides what enters the art history books (see "The Creative Act" reprinted in *Writings* 138-140).

[88] Fountain has inspired not only positive reactions in the form of artistic *homages* by for example artists as well known as Claes Oldenberg and Sherry Levine but also negative reactions in the form of attacks. Most recently, in the Pompidou Centre, Paris in January 2006, performance artist Pierre Pinocelli attacked the urinal with a hammer. Like the Chinese artists who urinated on Fountain in 2000, Pinocelli's declared that his "attack" was performance art and that Duchamp himself would have approved. On artist's responses to Duchamp's work see Cabanne, *Duchamp & Co.* 162-203. On the Pinocelli attack, see Riding.

rationalisation and unification. The readymade enacts the erosion of the arts and their concomitant reaching out towards an extra aesthetic reality, introducing a concept of poetic language into the realm of the visual arts and, in a text such as "Apropos of 'Readymades'" into the realm of discourse. As Rrose says "whiskers and kicks in all genres."[89]

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[89] This is the title that Duchamp and Cabanne use when discussing the puns (usually referred to as *Wrotten Written*) written by Rrose (*Dialogues* 82). However it is also a variation on text that appears on Rrose's calling card which reads "complete line of whiskers and kicks" (*Writings* 105).

Chapter Two

Modernisms and Media: Painting, Literature and Language

1. The Studio and the Library

Despite its prominent position in art historical accounts of his career, it was not *Fountain* that established Duchamp's name in the United States. In fact, ironically perhaps given his subsequent rejection of the craft, his reputation as iconoclast was secured by means of a painting – the scandalous *Nude Descending a Staircase No. 2 (Nu Descendant Un Escalier No. 2)* which was completed in Paris in early 1912.[90] (Fig 2.1) The painting owes much to the social and artistic contexts of Duchamp's life in Paris; the brown-yellow colour palette of the *Nude*, its decomposition of form and fragmentation of planes all point to the influence of Cubism. Moving among the painters of Puteaux, a group that included the theorists of Cubism Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger, Duchamp was immersed in an intensely intellectual milieu. The exchanges were not limited to debate about painterly techniques and theories but also ranged over contemporary developments in mathematics and physics, notably the possibility of a fourth dimension and the implications of non-Euclidean geometry.[91] Through these discussions, Duchamp claimed in a 1946 interview, the artists attempted to generate new ideas, to break free from the "conventional way of speaking—from our café and studio platitudes" (*Writings* 126).

Despite initial appearances, however, the *Nude* is far from a straightforward adoption of Cubism. It is most immediately differentiated by its depiction of movement, the portrayal of subsequent rather than simultaneous perspectives. Such an interest in the

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[90] This painting, unlike *Fountain*, actually did cause a public outcry in the New York. See Schwarz (1:18-22) for a discussion of the work and its reception.

[91] In terms of Duchamp's interest in science, fruitful research has been conducted by Linda D. Henderson and, particularly in relation to mathematics and the fourth dimension, Craig Adcock.
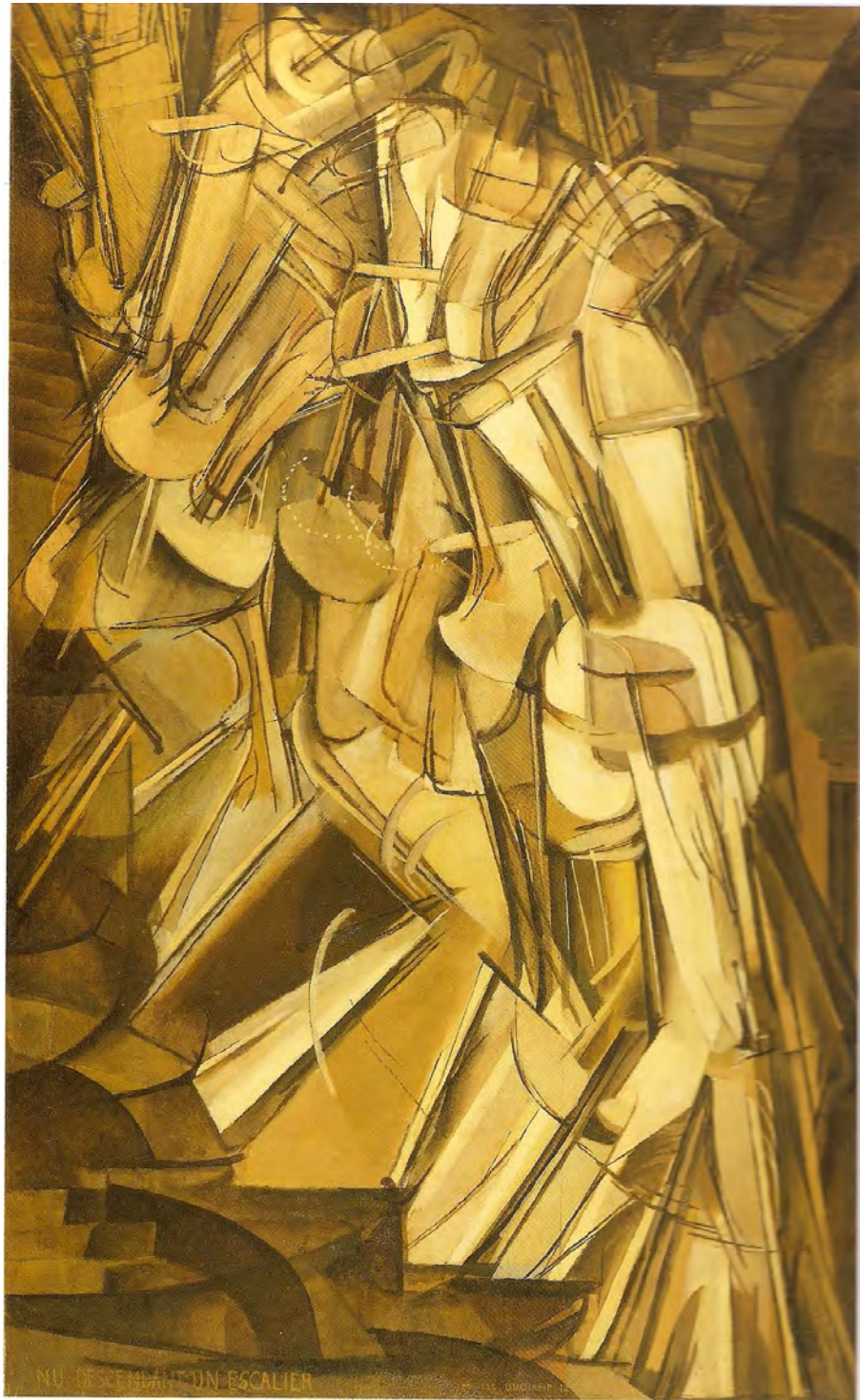
Fig. 2.1 Marcel Duchamp, *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2* (1912).
The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection, Philadelphia Museum of Art.

dynamics of movement is of course associated more readily with the Italian Futurists.[92] Indeed, it may have been this obvious proximity to the ideas of a rival movement that prompted the decision reached by the Cubist hanging committee at the Salon des Indépendants in 1912: in spite of the Salon's governing principle of "no jury, no prizes",[93] the *Nude* was turned away. While this refusal clearly foreshadows the events of 1917, the tone is quite different. Duchamp's *Nude* was not submitted as a joke and its dismissal was unexpected. The hanging committee was composed not only of the Puteaux Cubists but also of Duchamp's two older brothers, a fact that can only have heightened the impact of the rejection. Certainly the event had a profound effect on Duchamp, providing the impetus for his decision to stop painting. Speaking some years later he recalled that "as a reaction against such behaviour coming from artists whom I had believed to be free, I got a job. I became a librarian" (Cabanne *Dialogues* 17). Never again would Duchamp seek validation from the art-world, instead he would attempt to become financially independent by other means, thereby gaining the liberty to pursue his projects without any attendant anxiety regarding their success or failure.

In actual fact, as Duchamp would later explain, the primary reason that the *Nude* was rejected was not its engagement with Futurism or with movement but rather its engagement with literature and language. Firstly, the title was considered inappropriate:[94] to the hanging committee the practical movement that it described represented a mockery of one of painting's most idealised subjects. For centuries the female nude had reclined, bathed, been idealised, depicted as goddess or nymph: her body was considered one of the highest examples of natural beauty. She was, then, an object to be looked at and revered not a subject to be engaged in mundane actions.

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[92] Not only did Duchamp vehemently deny such assertions, calling the Futurists mere "urban Impressionists" (Cabanne *Dialogues* 35), but there is in fact little evidence in the painting of the preoccupation with dynamism and speed which characterises Futurist works. The movement of the *Nude* is slow and deliberate; her descent is as symbolic as it is literal. The relationship between Duchamp's work and other contemporary artistic movements has been well documented in critical literature. For cubism see in particular de Duve *Pictorial Nominalism*, Chapter Two of Henderson *The Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidean Geometry in Modern Art*, and Steefel.

[93] This Parisian salon was clearly the model upon which the New York Independents was based, for more information see Chapter One, 14n1.

[94] Duchamp recalled: "On the day before the opening Gleizes asked my brothers to go and ask me to at least change the title …They thought it was too much of literary title" (Schwarz 1:18).

Duchamp breaks these codes, envisaging a figure that descends the stairs "like a show girl at the Folies Bergère!" (Tomkins 80) The action thus carries a sexual charge that appears to introduce a "base" concern into the realm of the high arts.[95] Of course, it was not only the action of the nude that made the painting subversive; the androgyny and mechanical form of the figure played a part too. It is debateable, though, whether these would have been so shocking had conventional expectations not been set in motion by the title, which Duchamp painted directly onto the canvas.

Not only was the title problematic, however, but the painting itself was deemed too "literary." The accusation can hardly have come as a surprise to Duchamp, given that the painting was in fact a direct response *to* literature. *Nude Descending a Staircase* is a reworking of an earlier sketch, illustrating poet Jules Laforgue's work, *Once More to This Star* (1911) in which the same mechanical figure is portrayed ascending rather than descending the stairs. During the same period, the artist produced two more illustrative sketches for Laforgue's work; *Mediocrity* (1911) and *Eternal Siesta* (1911) which would later reappear in the *Boîtes-en-Valise* (1935-1941).[96] Similarly, *To Have the Apprentice in the Sun* (1914)[97] was also illustrative, although this image was suggested by the lines of Alfred Jarry rather than Laforgue: the work appears in the *1914 Box* and then again in the *Green Box* before finally reappearing in the *Boîtes-en-Valise*. The painting that Duchamp had completed immediately prior to beginning the *Nude* was also inspired by poetry; *Sad Young Man on a Train* (*Jeune Homme Triste dans un Train* 1911-12) began with the working title, taken from Laforgue, *Pauvre Jeune Homme M*. The subsequent change in title by no means represents a rejection of the literariness of the poetic title but rather, quite the opposite, was done because of the strong appeal

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[95] The preoccupation with the nude remains central throughout Duchamp's career. Duchamp, as Dalia Judovitz reminds us, treats the subject "as a symptom of the problems embodied in pictorial representation in general" (8). In this light, Jake Kennedy seems right to understand *Given* as "a declaration about the nude's destiny" (51).

[96] The *Boîtes-en-Valise* are suitcases created by Duchamp which contain miniatures and reproductions of his works. They clearly play into Duchamp's concern with re-presenting earlier works and managing the connections drawn between his works, as well as their interpretations. For more on the *Boîtes-En-Valise* see Schwarz 2:762-765, and Bonke. Duchamp created numerous boxes throughout his career, the first of which was the *1914 Box*. The *Green Box*, which was the second, will be discussed in detail in Chapter Three of this thesis.

[97] The French titles of these illustrative sketches are, respectively, *Encore à Cet Astre, Médiocrité, Sieste Éternalle,* and *Avoir L'Apprenti Dans le Soleil*.

which the assonance between *triste* and *train* held for the artist.[98] The interest in poetic language suggested by the later inscriptions of works such as *Fountain*, then, is made explicitly evident in the works of this earlier period. Likewise, the *Nude*'s inclusion of the title into the work prefigures later works that actively include writing and suggests that the title is to be considered less a label than a part of the painting: here the words themselves, like the notes reproduced for the boxes and the inscriptions on the readymades, are an element of the work.

Laforgue was by no means Duchamp's only literary source. "My ideal library," he later commented "would have contained all Roussel's writings—Brisset, perhaps Lautréamont and Mallarmé. Mallarmé was a great figure" (*Writings* 126). I will explore the impact of some of these writers on Duchamp's work in the next chapter. Here, however, I simply want to note that such remarks suggest that the decision to move from the studio to the library may not have been quite as arbitrary as it might at first have seemed. In fact, Duchamp's own description of his development in these years, as relayed in numerous interviews, is dominated by references to writers.[99] "I felt that as a painter it was much better to be influenced by a writer than by another painter," he claimed, for "this is the direction in which art should turn: to an intellectual expression, rather than to an animal expression. I am sick of the expression 'bête comme un peintre'–stupid as a painter" (*Writings* 126). The relationship between the arts, and in particular between literature and painting, it begins to appear, is of central importance to Duchamp's thought and work.

The complex and dynamic relationship between literature and the visual arts in fact also lies at the very heart of Duchamp's reception in the Anglo-American academy. Indeed, in this context, it has been a primary site upon which the importance of his work has been contested and upon which the notion of the avant-garde has been theorized. In the first sections of this chapter, therefore, I want to spend some time examining how the

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[98] See Cabanne, *Dialogues* 29.
[99] These comments are from a 1946 interview with James Johnson Sweeny, titled "The Great Trouble with Art in this Country" and published in *The Bulletin of the Museums of Modern Art*, Vol. XIII. No.4-5 (1946), reprinted in Duchamp, *Writings* 123-126. Similar sentiments about the importance of literature can be found in at numerous points throughout the extended interviews conducted by Cabanne and published in *Dialogues*.

relationship between the arts has been conceptualised in discussion of the avant-garde. A key figure in this respect is the art critic Clement Greenberg whose influential formalist aesthetics have had a huge impact on how Duchamp's work has been received. Like Bürger, Greenberg draws a direct connection between Duchamp's work and that of Warhol, which is to say that his arguments have also had significant impact on how what Bürger calls the "neo" avant-garde has been interpreted. In fact, Warhol's work proves pivotal here for, as I will try to show, it self-consciously reveals the inadequacies of Greenberg's theoretical framework. Having sketched out Greenberg's position, then, how it develops out of his response to literary ideas yet becomes fundamentally anti-literary, I will briefly discuss the role Warhol has played in more recent attempts to theorize the relationship between the "historical" and "neo" avant-gardes. While these attempts challenge both Bürger's conclusions and Greenbergian formalism, I will argue that they do little to destabilise the opposition between the visual arts and literature that Greenberg's work sets up.

In the second half of this chapter, I will look at two more recent interventions by philosophers Thierry de Duve and Jay Bernstein, both of whom reconsider the apparent opposition between modernism and the avant-garde. Both, I will try to show, argue for different versions of artistic modernism, yet like Greenberg, both situate the medium of painting as the paradigmatic modernist art form. It is a conclusion which suppresses the particular problems raised by literature and one that Duchamp and Warhol, I think, actively resist. In Bernstein's case, I will argue, this conclusion is reached as a direct result of his reading of Adorno's account of socio-historical development. His work thus represents one direction in which the Frankfurt-School theorist's arguments can be developed: it is not the only direction Adorno's thought can be taken, however, as I will try to show in subsequent chapters. This is one reason that I end this chapter with Bernstein. The other reason is that, despite his own conclusions on the avant-garde and painting, I think Bernstein's Adornian account of the stakes of art opens out another, more interesting way of thinking about the task of avant-garde art. I will therefore try to draw out this aspect of his argument with the aim of developing it in the following chapters.

2. "Literature", Painting and Poetry: Greenberg's Avant-Garde

The accusation of "literariness" levelled against Duchamp's *Nude* is in fact less to do with its direct connection to poetry than with the aesthetic principles most famously formulated by the German aesthetician Gotthold Ephraim Lessing. First published in 1766, Lessing's *Laocoon: or, The Limits of Poetry and Painting*[100] attempted to identify and delimit the properties peculiar to each art.[101] While maintaining that the arts share a common objective, inducing aesthetic pleasure, Lessing set out to refute the established Horatian maxim *ut pictura poesis* which suggests that, despite their different media, the arts of painting and literature share the same principles and modes.[102] Lessing countered this idea through an exploration of the relationship between perception and the arts, attempting, as Jonathan Rée explains, "to derive norms of artistic value from the specific nature of different sensory fields" (58). He decreed that each art must strive to recognize and develop those effects and properties which are essential to it and must leave aside those which are not. The visual arts, he thus claimed, address themselves to the eyes and are characterised by a concern with space and with bodies which co-exist in space; painters and sculptors should choose a single pregnant moment rather than concerning themselves with the passage of time. The literary arts, in contrast, address themselves to the ear and are concerned with time and actions which unfold consecutively.[103] While the arts can and do involve themselves with one another, the

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[100] In the German, Lessing's title has an umlaut: it reads *Laokoön*. The translation that I am using however does not use the umlaut, nor does Wellbery's monograph on the text, nor does Greenberg's essay. For this reason I have elected not to use the umlaut in this thesis.

[101] That Lessing was neither the first nor the only thinker to adopt these ideas regarding the relationship between the arts is something that he himself acknowledged in the preface to *Laocoon* (see xiii-xix). For more on the relative position of Lessing to other aestheticians see Wellbery, whose illuminating study traces Lessing's ideas back to the philosophy of Christian Wolff and places it in dialogue with the aesthetics of Baumgarten, Meier & Mendelssohn in order to demonstrate the extent to which *Laocoon* crystallises a whole complex of ideas, current in eighteenth-century Germany, about the relationship between signs and language.

[102] For more on the history, ancient context and subsequent importance of *ut pictura poesis*, see Markiewicz.

[103] Obviously Lessing's distinction between the arts of space and the arts of time is problematic on numerous levels (see Mitchell, "Space and Time: G. E. Lessing" 96). Several other contemporary scholars have also done fruitful work on *Laocoon*, in particular on the gendering of Lessing's distinction and on the

mutual relation which exists between poetry and painting may be likened to the rational policy of two neighbouring and friendly states, which, while they forbid all unreasonable liberties in the heart of their dominions on the part of each other, yet tacitly permit on their extreme boundaries a sort of mutual indulgence, to compensate on both sides for the little encroachments which occasional circumstances may suddenly oblige the one to make on the territory of the other. (Lessing 178-197)

This characterisation of the arts as neighbouring but distinct spheres has had a substantial impact on subsequent thought: in fact, as Rée points out, the idea of an aesthetic theory of the arts can be traced directly back to Lessing. As I shall try to show shortly, Lessing's account of the difference between literary and visual art underwrites several of the claims upon which prominent theorisations of modernism such as Greenberg's depend. Certainly it seems to have grounded the Cubists' rejection of Duchamp's *Nude* in 1912, for the work depicts an event in time as well as space, narrating a sequence of moments rather than depicting a single, pregnant moment: clearly, like *Sad Young Man* it transgresses the limits that Lessing sets for the medium, adopting the concerns proper to literature as well as those of painting.

For Lessing, discovering the divergent properties of the individual arts was not a means to arguing for their equality. Indeed, in the system of the arts outlined in *Laocoon*, one art is held as intrinsically superior to all others, namely poetry. Lessing's argument revolves around his crucial distinction between natural and arbitrary signs. Natural signs are signs which bear an intrinsic connection to the object that they represent, for example signifiers which look like or sound like that which they are meant to indicate. Natural signs, Lessing argues, are the material of the visual arts. Arbitrary signs, on the other hand, are those that bear no relation to what they represent, neither mimicking the appearance of, nor being produced by, the objects or ideas that they signify. Language is largely a system of arbitrary signs, and thus arbitrary signs are the primary material of poetry. One way of grasping this distinction is to understand it as

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representation of pain; see in particular Gustafson and Richter. The gendering of the arts, interestingly, raises the connection between transgender ambiguity and mixed media: this connection has been raised by Dalia Judovitz and Amelia Jones but is yet to be explored in depth.

prefiguring the difference that Kant describes between aesthetic ideas and rational ideas. For, in the terms of Lessing's argument, natural signs are understood intuitively, and arbitrary signs are grasped conceptually. An immediate consequence of this is that the visual arts immediately appear to be more essentially art-like than literature which, forced to use arbitrary signs, seems to be placed in a peculiarly difficult position. For, if the arbitrary signs of language appeal to conceptual rather than sensory experience, literature must find a way of supplementing this rational aspect of language in order to *become* aesthetic.

While it seems initially, as a result, that in Lessing's system of the arts literature might be at a disadvantage, in fact, as Lessing sees it, just the opposite is the case; the arbitrariness of its signs is not poetry's weakness but rather its strength. As David Wellbery explains, in Lessing's thinking, language

> negates the brute, sensuous presence of things: the con-fused interlocking of qualities in perceived reality is dissolved into series of discrete content units from which selections can be freely made providing optimal intelligibility and purity of representation …[and] the arbitrary relation between individual sign and meaning allows for unlimited semantic scope. Whereas the plastic arts can represent only what is visible and must conform to our ordinary perceptual expectations, poetry can represent 'bloße Wesen der Einbildung' ('mere beings of the imagination,'…) and can project worlds with various ontological levels. Language is the vehicle through which the contents of our experience are *elevated* to the status of freely deployable, ideal entities. (189-190)

The power of poetry, then, as Lessing sees it results from the freedoms inherent in the use of the arbitrary sign, its semantic scope and the access it allows to extra-perceptual ideas. Yet, this alone cannot account for poetry because all language, poetic or not, shares these possibilities. What is unique about poetry, Lessing thus argues, what differentiates it from other modes of language usage, is its power to make its arbitrary signs function as natural signs. It is this ability upon which its conversion into an art form, its appeal to intuitive rather than conceptual cognition, is dependant.

The transformation that poetry effects on arbitrary signs, its means of making them function as natural signs, is achieved through the use of tropes and metaphor and

the poet's ability to mimic the temporality of his subject: "Poetry not only employs individual words," Lessing writes,

> but rather these individual words in a certain sequence. Thus, even if the words are not natural signs, their sequence can still possess the forcefulness of a natural sign. Namely in cases when all the words follow upon one another exactly like the things they express. (qtd. in Wellbery 198)[104]

Here we have the idea in which the thesis of *Laocoon* is grounded: poetry should restrict itself to actions unfolding in time because it is in the consecutive, temporal aspect that words approach the condition of natural signs and can produce aesthetic rather than rational ideas. It is this ability to capitalise on the freedoms of the arbitrary sign, while taking advantage of its capacity to appear as natural, that prompts Lessing to remark that "the dominion of the Poet extends over a wider sphere than that of the Painter … he can command beauties which painting can never attain" (93). Thus, Lessing's aesthetic theory and his famous distinction between the divergent concerns of the arts can be seen not only to position literature as the highest art form but also, in fact, to be motivated by a specific theory of language.

It is with the literary bias of Lessing's thesis in mind that we might now approach Clement Greenberg's formulation of what constitutes avant-garde art. In two early doctrinal essays, "Avant-garde and Kitsch" (1939) and "Towards a Newer Laocoon" (1940), Greenberg lays out the basic definitions that would both underpin his thinking throughout the next decades and form the foundations of his readings of Duchamp and Warhol.[105] The theoretical framework of these twin essays has had a

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[104] This quotation is a translation by Wellbery of a fragmentary note made by Lessing as part of his plan for an intended but never completed expansion of *Laocoon*.

[105] My claim that these basic definitions form the underpinning of Greenberg's thought should be qualified with the observation that his own position as regards these underpinnings shifted considerably across his career. There are, most commentators agree, three major periods in Greenberg's work: the early essays are marked by their author's Marxist position and speak very much to their historical moment. Indeed, in order to be properly understood, Greenberg's insistence on the autonomy of art must be set against the back-drop of German National Socialism and Stalinism in Russia. In the second period, the post-war years, Greenberg's politics moved increasingly to the right, this too is reflected in his writing which—broadly speaking—concentrates largely on individual artists and works rather than socio-political contexts. The essays that characterise the third and last period of Greenberg's career are marked by an active re-engagement with Kant and thus constitute a re-thinking of many of his earlier positions. I

crucial influence on how modernism and the avant-gardes have been theorised in the Anglo-American context; together they constitute a sustained argument for the priority of the visual arts over literature. Greenberg, however, fails to address adequately the problem of the relationship between art and language, instead simply glossing over it by means of an ambiguous use of the term "literature." It is his failure to recognise and respond to this problem, I shall try to show, that leads to the development in his work of a rigid theoretical framework which, ultimately, prevents Greenberg from being able to take account of the development of art in the later twentieth century.

Like *Theory of the Avant-Garde,* Greenberg's "Avant-garde and Kitsch" (1939) argues that the key factor in the historical development of the artistic avant-garde is art's apparent autonomy. Greenberg too sees the progressive autonomisation of art and rationalisation of society as resulting in two contradictory impulses which manifest themselves as, on one hand, an inwardly-focussed, self-referential art and, on the other, a desire to transgress the limits of art and to reach out to an external reality. However, while Bürger, as we have seen, labels the latter "avant-garde", it is the former "system-immanent" movement that Greenberg understands by this term. Indeed, in Greenberg's early writings the avant-garde *is* modernist; he uses the terms interchangeably to describe the impulse of art to consolidate rather than challenge its autonomy.[106] This is to say that he does not understand the artistic avant-gardes as breaking with aestheticism but rather as developing from it. Autonomy, then, is not what Greenberg's avant-garde seeks to renounce but rather what it celebrates: "once the avant-garde had succeeded in 'detaching' itself from society," he writes "it proceeded to turn around and repudiate revolutionary as well as bourgeois politics" (7). Greenberg's avant-garde does not seek

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concentrate on the first period only because it is here that Greenberg lays out explicitly the framework for his conception of modernism and, despite his later shifts of position, it is this early framework that remains his most powerful legacy. For more on Greenberg's oeuvre and its impact on art history see Caroline A. Jones' *Eyesight Alone,* and for a theoretical response to Greenberg's later engagement with Kant see de Duve's *Clement Greenberg between the Lines* and Crowther "Greenberg's Kant and the Problem of Modernist Painting."

[106] This is explicitly stated in Greenberg's famous 1960 essay "Modernist Painting": "The essence of Modernism lies, as I see it, in the use of the characteristic methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline itself – not in order to subvert it, but to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence" (774). Thus what in "Modernist Painting" Greenberg calls "self-criticism" corresponds to what Bürger calls "system immanent criticism."

to reconnect art and life, but to disengage itself from society; it does not declare a political position but, quite the opposite, rejects revolutionary aims, does not oppose the bourgeoisie but remains knowingly connected to it by "an umbilical cord of gold" (11).

Art which "misunderstands" this role and attempts to transgress the limits imposed by autonomy, Greenberg argues, is quite simply bad art.[107] In "Towards a Newer Laocoon" this particular movement beyond the confines of autonomy is linked, as it was in Adorno's thought, to the erosion of the arts: "confused" art, Greenberg suggests, mistakenly concerns itself with effects that are not proper to it, derived from other media. "Artistic dishonesty," he writes, is "the attempt to escape from the problems of the medium of one art by taking refuge in the effects of another" (26). In other words, like Adorno, Greenberg thinks the opposition that Bürger sets up in terms of the distinction between art and life, as equally bound up with the distinctions between the individual arts.

In "Avant-garde and Kitsch," both avant-garde visual art and avant-garde literature are described as born of the desire to create

> something valid solely on its own terms, in the way nature itself is valid, in the way a landscape—not its picture—is aesthetically valid; something *given*, increate, independent of meanings, similars or originals. Content is to be dissolved so completely into form that the work of art or literature cannot be reduced in whole or in part to anything not itself. (8)

Both are thus defined in formalist terms as a process of increasing medium specialization: painting must concern itself with painting, writing with writing. The arts will no longer attempt to communicate a conceptual message that can be abstracted from the work: they will not seek to represent, but rather will attempt to eliminate anything extrinsic to the art-work and thus to present "art" as such. As a self-referential

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[107] To minimize risk of confusion, it is perhaps worth spelling out explicitly this shift in terminology: like both Adorno and Bürger, Greenberg differentiates between two impulses or trends in modern art, one inwards-focussed and self-critical and the other system-critical and outwards-focussed. Bürger terms the latter avant-garde. Greenberg, in contrast, uses the terms modernism *and* avant-garde to describe the former, and "bad art" (or, as I shall explain shortly, "avant-gard*ism*") to describe the latter. Adorno's preference is for the term modernism and, although his choice of example often suggests otherwise, I would argue on the basis of "Art and the Arts" that he recognises both trends within that category.

movement, then, the avant-garde is concerned with exploration of its own media, techniques and processes, striving to be "independent of meanings," independent of "originals." Clarifying this in "Towards a Newer Laocoon," Greenberg argues that what the avant-garde work must avoid is "subject matter as distinguished from content: in the sense that every work of art must have content, but that subject matter is something the artist does or does not have in mind when he is actually at work" (28). What this definition of "subject matter" implies is that the avant-garde artist must avoid expression of intentions or meanings that can be articulated independently of the work. Emphasis is shifted, Greenberg explains, from the "meaning" of the work to "the physical, the sensorial" (32).

The role taken by Greenberg's avant-garde, then, is not to question the identity of art and the individual arts but to perpetually reinscribe it. Developing Lessing's argument, Greenberg suggests that the most advanced art seeks to distil itself within its medium; the avant-garde forms a progressive drive towards aesthetic "purity," its aim is to isolate the essential elements of each art form. Rather than challenging traditional aesthetic conventions, therefore, the avant-garde is the force that preserves them and entrenches them more deeply in their fields and in their separation. Like Lessing, in other words, Greenberg lays emphasis on the differences between the arts. It is from Lessing, moreover, that Greenberg takes his understanding of literature as an art essentially concerned with time: "the question of form in literature" he writes in a 1950 review of T.S. Eliot's work, "boils down to that of a right succession of parts" ("Eliot" 243). When it comes to painting, however, Greenberg's thesis begins to diverge from that set out in *Laocoon*. This is principally because he is not concerned with the kind of representational painting which Lessing describes, for, as the previous quotation from "Avant-garde and Kitsch" demonstrates, in Greenberg's framework, what art must at all costs avoid is extrinsic meaning, being indicative of something else. Art must be "valid solely on its own terms" and not judged upon its capacity for and skill in *re*presentation. Thus a crucial difference emerges in Greenberg's reworking of Lessing's distinction between painting and poetry: although he borrows the structure of Lessing's aesthetic theory, he rejects his theory of semiotics. Indeed, at no point does "Towards a Newer

Laocoon" acknowledge Lessing's distinction between "natural" and "arbitrary" signs. Instead, it advocates an art that avoids the character of the sign completely; art ceases to *signify* and instead is experienced as a material presence.[108] As a result, as I shall try to show shortly, Greenberg struggles to find a way to account for literature in his theory of the arts: ultimately, in his work, "literature" becomes something that "art" must reject. Firstly, however, I want to return to the argument of the first essay and consider kitsch, the term which Greenberg opposes to avant-garde.

The defensive tactics of self-preservation and consolidation that the avant-garde demonstrates are necessary because, Greenberg suggests, art operates in the face of a threat, namely the specific danger posed by kitsch. While avant-garde is defined as a formalist concern with the properties of the medium, kitsch is identified as the art of the masses: "popular, commercial art and literature, with their chromeotypes, magazine covers, illustrations, ads, slick and pulp fiction, comics, Tin Pan Alley music, tap dancing, Hollywood movies, etc., etc." (11) Formulaic and synthetic, presenting not a challenge but a pre-constituted and easily communicable message, kitsch can be passively consumed: "identifications are self-evident immediately and without any effort on the part of the spectator" (16). In other words, while avant-garde art is concerned with form, kitsch is concerned with subject matter: the pre-constituted meaning is what counts here. Kitsch is about signification and transparency.

The ease with which its pre-formulated message can be consumed sets kitsch closely in league with not only capitalism and "the culture industry" but also with totalitarianism in general. With reference to propagandistic Soviet Realism, Greenberg declares that "[flattering] the masses by bringing all culture down to their level" is the means by which such dictatorships preserve their power and ensure that they "stay close to the 'soul' of the people" (20). The viewer of such kitsch, he writes, "recognizes and

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[108] It is on this point that Greenberg might be compared to another of Duchamp's most influential commentators in the Anglo-American Academy, Arthur Danto who, in complete contrast to Greenberg, sees art as operating primarily through its semantic character. If I do not deal with Danto in the main body of his thesis, it is because I think his notion of an "art-world" can be understood as roughly equivalent to Bürger's "institution" of art. The moves taken by de Duve and Bernstein appear to me, in this sense, much more interesting. Moreover, many of the questions that Danto's account of art raises are also raised in the context of my discussion of de Duve. For more on Danto in relation to Duchamp and aesthetics see Robert J. Yanal. See also Bernstein on Danto in *Against Voluptuous Bodies* 223-252.

sees things in the way in which he recognizes and sees things outside of pictures—there is no discontinuity between art and life, no need to accept a convention" (16). In other words, while the viewer of Soviet Realism apparently does not need to reflect upon the artwork in order to understand it, the viewer of avant-garde art must derive its values "at a second remove, as the result of reflection upon the immediate impression left by plastic values" (16). While kitsch subdues the masses, keeps them in place with a constant supply of "new" images—a drip feed of pre-digested information—avant-garde art is that which ruptures their experience, generating a critical distance which provokes them into reflection on the conditions of their existence.

Such ruptures are crucial for Greenberg, for he sees art's power as residing in its function as a space outside, detached, operating to different rules and with different values from society. While avant-garde art maintains a distinction "between those values only to be found in art and the values which can be found elsewhere," (15) kitsch perilously collapses these distinctions. Thus the key danger of kitsch—a mode that operates according to the values of life, not art—is that it threatens to destroy this alternative space, to collapse art and life into one.[109] This is an important point as it grounds Greenberg's belief that the values of art and those of life are *necessarily* different: art, Greenberg suggests, must reject the political values of "life praxis" because the aestheticisation of politics would be too high a price to pay.[110] The materiality of avant-garde art, its sheer opacity is what prevents it from being reduced to the conceptual, reified meanings of kitsch. What is at stake in art's autonomy and the

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[109] It is important here to remember the historical context of Greenberg's comments. For it is right at this point, the point at which Greenberg positions the aesthetic as a means to preserve difference in society in the face of what he perceives as a very real totalitarian threat, that his thought appears to tip over into the essentialism which his detractors focus upon, an essentialism that is driven by the desire to erase alterity within the individual arts. In this sense, Thierry de Duve's argument in "Silences in the Doctrine" (*Clement Greenberg between the Lines* 39-86) is particularly important (although also slightly problematic because forced): De Duve, to put it very bluntly indeed, suggests that for Greenberg the other is in fact represented by the medium itself and thus that his commitment has always been to acknowledging the importance of alterity and difference.

[110] Greenberg thus voices the same fears expressed more famously by Walter Benjamin in the concluding paragraphs of "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." Debates on the relationship between modernism and post-modernism have tended to position Benjamin and Greenberg at opposite poles: Greenberg representing the elitism of high modernism and the rejection of mass culture, Benjamin as representing the post-modernist democratic possibilities of mass culture. As Caroline Jones argues this positioning obscures the common grounding of many of their ideas. See C. Jones *Eyesight* 350-386.

avant-garde's rejection of society, for Greenberg, is the preservation in art of values higher than those which motivate everyday life and politics: the avant-garde operates to prevent art being reduced to propaganda.[111]

These stakes also motivate Greenberg's call for a newer *Laocoon*, for the second essay is an attempt to reinforce the framework set up by "Avant-garde and Kitsch" by providing it with a grounding in aesthetic theory and the history of the arts. "Towards a Newer Laocoon" is also Greenberg's most sustained attempt to work through the problem of the relationship between language and art. It begins by reinforcing and building upon Lessing's position as regards the essential differences between the arts. Echoing the description in *Laocoon* of the arts as neighbouring states, Greenberg suggests that at certain times the relationship between the arts is one of conflict. One art form can become dominant and

> when it happens that a single art is given the dominant role, it becomes the prototype of all art: the others try to shed their proper characters and imitate its effects. The dominant art in turn tries to absorb the functions of the others. A confusion of the arts results, by which the subservient ones are perverted and distorted; they are forced to deny their own nature in an effort to attain the effects of the dominant art. (24)

A dominant art exerts control over its neighbours, subjects them to its laws and avails itself of their resources. Such a position Greenberg argues had been achieved by literature by the middle of the seventeenth century; this, he explains, is why Lessing saw the arts "exclusively in terms of literature" (25). Under these conditions, as subservient, the pictorial arts were relegated to effectively imitating literature, to denying their own identity or medium. When literature is dominant, Greenberg writes, "all emphasis is taken away from the medium and transferred to subject matter" (25). This is a dual claim: firstly, it suggests that literature is essentially characterised by subject matter, and secondly it opposes the past, the period of literature's dominance, to the present movement of the avant-garde which places emphasis directly on the medium. Building

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[111] This dovetails neatly with Adorno's argument that when works of art present positions, art is reduced to the mouthpiece of opinion and loses its power to challenge social structures (see Chapter One 44).

upon his thesis that the avant-garde seeks to seal art off in its autonomy, Greenberg goes on to state that as

> the first and most important item upon its agenda, the avant-garde saw the necessity of an escape from ideas, which were infecting the arts with the ideological struggles of society. Ideas came to mean subject matter in general. ... This meant a new and greater emphasis upon form …[and] was the signal for a revolt against the dominance of literature, which was subject matter at its most oppressive. (28)

While in "Avant-garde and Kitsch," the word "literature" indicated an art form, here it takes on the character of subject matter. Thus the signification of "literature" begins to shift in Greenberg's thought; for if the primary characteristic of literature is subject-matter, then "literature" comes to signify that which the avant-garde must slough off.

When literature became the dominant art, Greenberg claims, the medium was suppressed in all the arts. With the avant-garde the emphasis is shifted from subject matter towards sensuous physical experience, towards the medium. A revolt is staged against the dominance of literature by the other arts, and the key weapon in this battle is the materiality of the artwork: just as the opacity of the avant-garde artwork is opposed to the transparency of kitsch, so the materiality of the media of the other arts is opposed to "literature" for, as Greenberg puts it just a few pages later "'literature's' corrupting influence is only felt when the senses are neglected" (32). In Greenberg's thinking, then, "literariness" refers not to an aesthetic form of language use but to what he sees as language's ability to communicate a meaning, without the "noise" of the medium interfering. It is a subtle shift, but an important one for while in these early essays the terms are still mobile, Greenberg's distinction between "literary" and "advanced" art would become increasingly entrenched in modernist aesthetics.

The major problem that this historical account leaves Greenberg with is the difficulty of explaining poetic language and how it escapes "literature." In "Avant-garde and Kitsch" he acknowledges this, flagging up the apparent disadvantage of the medium of language: "poetry must deal with words" he writes "and words must communicate" (9). Nevertheless, he goes on to say, avant-garde writing adopts a similar tactic to the visual arts in that it involves "the reduction of experience to expression for the sake of

expression, the expression mattering more than what is being expressed" (10). Whether this ambiguous conclusion entails a conception of poetry as an act, or poetry as a material object is unclear: indeed with this formulation Greenberg simply glosses over the problem which Lessing's semiotics sought to explain, the problem of how language, weighed down with its accumulation of meanings, can take on an aesthetic dimension.

Tackling this problem once more in "Towards a Newer Laocoon," Greenberg reveals a second important influence on his aesthetics by turning to the poet who had so impressed Duchamp, Stéphane Mallarmé. In fact, strangely enough given his subsequent positioning of "literature," Greenberg's notion of the arts as seeking "purity" is rooted in his reading of Mallarmé's poetics.[112] For Mallarmé, Greenberg claims, "the poem is to aim at the general consciousness of the reader, not simply his intelligence … to deliver poetry from the subject and to give full play to its true affective power it is necessary to free words from logic" (33). This sense of literary autonomy as an achievement, won by casting off subject matter and the obligations of representation, clearly parallels Greenberg's discussion of painting: like painting, then, poetry, as an art, must avoid "meaning". For Greenberg, following Lessing, the arts are to be considered as formally

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[112] See C. Jones, *Eyesight Alone* 63-64. As Greenberg himself puts it, it was "literary criticism, and my experience with literature, that decided me to be such a quote 'formalist' endquote" (qtd. in Jones 63). Another literary influence was Bertolt Brecht, whose famous *Verfremdungseffekt* may be thought of as impacting on Greenberg's conceptualisation of the task of the avant-garde. However, Brecht's work constitutes a serious challenge to the values that are espoused in "Avant-garde and Kitsch": Brecht's work is materialist, it attempts to provoke a rational rather than an aesthetic judgement. While it redefines and explores its medium, it does not do so through the processes of distillation and purification that Greenberg's avant-garde engages in: instead, as Greenberg acknowledges, Brecht refutes traditional aesthetics by "grafting his poetry upon conventions that lay outside the usual orbit of 'book' literature" (256) Brecht's art turns towards politics as his essay "Shouldn't We Abolish Aesthetics?" shows, and away from aesthetics. Greenberg responds to his work, however, by forcing it into the kind of categories which it attempts to reject: Brecht's "advances" Greenberg claims are enabled by his aesthetic intuition. "In Brecht's case, it is poetry that fires both prose and verse; his instincts and habits as a poet enforce the shape, measure, and incisiveness which belong to almost everything he writes" (265). In other words, while Brecht tries to break with aesthetics, tries to reject intuitive judgement in favour of reason and intellectual engagement, Greenberg argues that his success is due to his aesthetic sensibility, his poetic intuition. In an ironically circular move Greenberg imposes on Brecht precisely the kind of romantic aesthetic notions that he sought to escape, making Brecht into a genius (for Kant, to create work as a genius is not to actively and consciously plan and create works, but rather to allow "nature" to guide the creation of the work: genius "gives the rule just as nature does. Hence the author of a product for which he is indebted to his genius does not himself know how he has come by his Ideas" (§46, 113)). Greenberg ignores the social basis of Brecht's work. As I tried to show in Chapter One, it is the strength of Adorno's aesthetic theory, that, in its radical historicity, it grasps both the aesthetic and the social at the same moment. It is the weakness of Greenberg's thought that he is unable to do so.

different while their aim—the production of purely aesthetic pleasure—is the same. The poet may thus hint at the infinite possibilities of significance, Greenberg suggests, but should never express concrete ideas which can be extracted from the poem.[113] In a formulation that modifies the comments on poetry in "Avant-garde and Kitsch", he claims that the poet writes "not so much to *express*, as to create a thing which will operate upon the reader's consciousness to produce the emotion of poetry. The content of the poem is what it does to the reader, not what it communicates" (33-34). For Greenberg, then, Mallarmé's notion of the drive towards "pure" poetry is understood as a movement towards a kind of sensual, aesthetic form. Poetry shakes off the conceptual and the communicative, words are freed from logic: it becomes sound, affect, rhythm and emotion.[114]

Such a reading seems to echo with a famous phrase from Mallarmé's "theoretical poem" *Crisis in Poetry* (1886) in which the poet describes "pure" poetry as the act of "transposing a fact of nature into its almost complete and vibratory disappearance through the play of the word," a transposition that results, he claims, in the "pure notion" (75).[115] In this context, the "pure notion" appears as a process of dematerialisation, the poem reduced into pure sense entirely independent of reference to any object. Thus, rather than slough off meaning in favour of sensual, aesthetic pleasure, Mallarmé's notion of purity seems to transcend this opposition. This sense of overcoming the opposition, however, is what Greenberg fails to see (or perhaps chooses to ignore). Indeed, reading Mallarmé through Lessing, Greenberg imposes on his work the kind of oppositional structure against which, as I shall argue in the following chapter,[116] Mallarmé's thought might be seen to operate: literature becomes "pure" subject matter, "pure" conceptuality.

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[113] Thus in his review of T.S. Eliot's *Selected Works* Greenberg writes that the "correct insight of all true lovers of art […is] to take delight precisely in that which art suspends beyond the reach of discourse or explicitness" ("Eliot" 241).

[114] "Pure" poetry can of course be read in relation to music more easily than to painting: it is in this inter-art relationship that Mallarmé, like many of his peers, was more interested.

[115] In the original: "*transposer un fait de nature en sa Presque disparition vibratoire selon le jeu de la parole, cependant ; si ce n'est pour qu'en émane, sans la gêne d'un proche ou concret rappel, la notion pure*" (*Oeuvres* 213).

[116] As I shall attempt to show in the next chapter, it is the idea of transcending the opposition between the material and the conceptual that Duchamp takes from Mallarmé.

Greenberg's early essays create a framework in which literature and painting are positioned as governed by different modes and properties but, ultimately, judged by the same criteria. Like the visual arts, literature, or poetry, as Greenberg sees it, must strive to escape the reified meanings of language. Unlike the visual arts however, it is also invested in those meanings. Always a sign, language cannot turn its back on meaning and subject matter. It shares the avant-garde struggle with degraded "reality" but unlike the visual arts it cannot resist by means of its own materiality: from the outset it is contaminated with meaning, its very material—that which Greenberg claims it must emphasise—compromises it. It is under these circumstances that, for Greenberg, painting moves into a position of dominance, becoming the paradigmatic modernist (or avant-garde) art form. Painting as "the chief victim of literature [has] brought the problem into sharpest focus" ("Laocoon" 28), Greenberg claims, and because its medium is easier to isolate, can more easily address itself to "eyesight alone" (Greenberg "Sculpture" 59).[117] It has been able to progress the furthest in identifying and consolidating the characteristics of its medium, and in so doing has attained "a more radical purity" ("Laocoon" 34). If we translate this back into the terms of "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," painting with its more radical purity and its ability to highlight its own medium free from the problems of subject matter, is, by its nature, more resistant to the recuperative powers of conceptual thought. In contrast, poetry, as nothing more than affect, has no such material stronghold. Painting is superior because matter is resistance: painting is avant-garde, poetry is weak, and "literature" is kitsch.[118]

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[117] Greenberg's comments on sculpture are extremely interesting in fact: he argues that in sculpture the "prohibition against one art's entering the domain of another is suspended, thanks to the unique concreteness and literalness of sculpture's medium" (59). In other words, because of its sheer material presence, sculpture is exempt from the rules that govern the other arts.

[118] In this sense Greenberg shares Sartre's assumption (criticised by Adorno in "Commitment") that literature is characterised by transparency. While Sartre sees this as literature's strength, Greenberg of course sees it as its fundamental flaw.

3. Avant-gard*ism* and Medium Scrambling

By setting up an opposition between the conceptual and the intuitive, rational ideas and aesthetic ideas, Greenberg, I have tried to show, suppresses both the literary roots of his own argument and the problem of "poetics," the question of how language becomes an art. This framework, set out in his two early essays, is one that Greenberg would return to again and again throughout his career. Increasingly, he came to view abstract painting as the most advanced art form, writing in 1955 that "painting is the most alive of the avant-garde arts at the present moment" (208). In 1959, he clarified this, distinguishing abstract painting as more properly aesthetic by contrasting it to representational painting which he linked, once again, to literature: "representational painting is like literature, [in] that it tends to involve us in the interested as well as the disinterested by presenting us with the images of things that are inconceivable outside time and action" (78). Representational painting involves its viewer in the "interested," for it is contaminated with non-art, events that take place in time.[119] In contrast abstract painting appears as the manifestation of something a-temporal, valid in its own right and disconnected from immediate social concerns. Abstract painting, in what Greenberg considers to be exemplary avant-garde fashion, rejects empirical reality and thus enables a more profoundly "disinterested" response from the viewer, a more purely aesthetic reaction.

The Kantian terminology of this description foreshadows Greenberg's famous 1960 essay "Modernist Painting," which is perhaps his most precise statement of what

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[119] Although this is clearly Kantian terminology, Greenberg's description suggests the rather un-Kantian idea that the artist can manipulate "interest" or aesthetic value through the choice of subject-matter (or through the choice to exclude it). In this, Greenberg seems to be attempting to make Kant's stipulation that aesthetic judgements take place without pre-determined criteria, into a fixed criterion by which to judge artworks. For Kant it is the pleasure of aesthetic experience which is disinterested (relating only to the experience of immanent presence of the work/object) and upon which the aesthetic judgement is made. However, attempting to draw out values from that experience and thus construct an extrinsic framework in which to understand and objectively judge art, as Greenberg does, ultimately makes his own responses interested (as his judgements are constantly related to a set of criteria which are pre-formulated) As Paul Crowther argues, this "unargued reduction of aesthetic value to artistic quality" ("Greenberg's Kant" 320) is a highly problematic aspect of Greenberg's work. For more on Greenberg's reading of Kant see Crowther. On disinterest in Kant see Zangwill.

he considers the task of modernist or avant-garde art.[120] In the opening paragraphs, Greenberg declares that he identifies Modernism

> with the intensification, almost exacerbation, of [the] self-critical tendency that began with the philosopher Kant. Because he was the first to criticize the means itself of criticism, I conceive of Kant as the first real Modernist. … Kant used logic to establish the limits of logic, and while he withdrew much from its old jurisdiction, logic was left in all the more secure possession of what remained to it. (774)

In other words, Kant marks the distinction between logic and aesthetics. His work is thus the site which opens out the possibility of modern autonomous art.[121] For Greenberg, as I have tried to show, art must not only accept but entrench this division by means of identifying its own "unique and proper area of competence" (775). In a description which recalls the argument of "Towards a Newer Laocoon," Greenberg writes that for each art this competence

> coincided with all that was unique to the nature of its medium. The task of self-criticism became to eliminate from the effects of each art any and every effect that might conceivably be borrowed from or by the medium of any other art. Thereby each art would be rendered "pure", and in its "purity" find the guarantee of its standards of quality as well as of its independence. 'Purity' meant self-definition, and the enterprise of self-criticism in the arts became one of self-definition with a vengeance. (775)

The drive of "self-definition with a vengeance" is the drive of modernism, of what Greenberg earlier termed avant-garde art. Yet, it is important to recall once again the other impulse of twentieth-century art, the impulse which moves against definition, which gnaws away at the concept "art" and attacks the rational division of experience

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[120] Greenberg slowly gave up the term avant-garde in favour of modernism. "It is with 'Modernist Painting,'" as de Duve explains, "that Greenberg began consistently to employ the term 'modernism' for the same thing he previously designated by the term 'avant-garde.' With one crucial difference […]: where avant-garde is a general term that doesn't distinguish between the arts, there is only modernism in painting or in sculpture (or in music, in poetry, etc.), but not in art in general" ("Silences in the Doctrine" 80). The reason that Greenberg gives up the term avant-garde, it thus appears, is because it is too heavily associated (in his own mind at least) with interdisciplinary activity.

[121] The idea that it is the separation of aesthetics from rational logic that opens out the possibility of modern art is shared by Adorno. However, while Adorno recognises in art's "self-criticism" its rationalisation, Greenberg does not seem to.

into separate spheres, just as it attacks the rationalising division of "art" into "the arts": I want to return at this juncture, therefore, to Duchamp, in order to see how his work challenges the aesthetic theories which ground Greenberg's thought.

Duchamp rejected the "retinal" aspect of brute materiality, instead attempting to put art "at the service of the mind" (*Writings* 125).[122] A key step in this regard was his attempt to escape the prejudices of taste, which, he claimed, not only "gives a sensuous feeling …[but also] presupposes a domineering onlooker who dictates what he likes and dislikes, and translates it into beautiful and ugly" (Tomkins 368-369). Taking a primarily sensuous pleasure in the work, Duchamp thus suggests, does not necessarily immunise a viewer from "interest." Nowhere is this expressed more visibly than in his 1911 painting *Dulcinea*, a work which mobilizes literature in order to, as the artist put it, "'detheorize' Cubism in order to give it a freer interpretation" (*Dialogues* 28) and which openly mocks the idea of aesthetic "disinterest." (Fig 2.2) Like the *Nude*, *Dulcinea* shows a figure—this time clearly a woman—repeated on the canvas five times in a sequential fashion, suggesting a movement in which she walks into and proceeds through the pictorial space of the canvas. Just as the *Nude* does, this painting depicts the unfolding temporality that both Lessing and Greenberg see as proper to literature. In the first three positions, the figure's clothing is evident: she appears to have an overcoat on initially which, somewhere between the third and fourth positions, disappears to reveal the form of a naked torso with the suggestion of a bustle or large skirt. In the fourth and fifth position her breasts and legs are exposed (with typical Duchampian humour, her hat remains in place throughout). Here the stripping, which would later be explored in more theoretical fashion in *The Bride Stripped Bare* (1915–1923), operates on a simpler, voyeuristic level. As Lawrence Steefel has pointed out, in his early and still seminal monograph on Duchamp, the figure is surrounded by a "welter of nude limbs, torsos and

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[122] Duchamp, although he used this formulation and frequently disparaged purely sensuous art, claimed to dislike the word "intellect" which he claimed was "too dry a word, too inexpressive" (*Writings* 137). In French, he uses "*esprit*" referring not only to intellect but also, as Tomkins writes, "spirit, soul, vital principle, understanding, wit, fancy, humour, temper and character, all of which figured in Duchamp's thinking. When he said that painting could not be understood by the intellect, he was using the word in its specific and limited sense: the intellect *alone*" (369). Thus when Duchamp talks about art and the intellect, he does not mean any thing as restrictive as "logic" or "rationality."

Fig. 2.2 Marcel Duchamp, *Dulcinea* (1911).
The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection, Philadelphia Museum of Art.

breasts" (87) which can be made out in the fragmented planes and brush strokes which constitute the background of the painting. In what appears to be a tongue-in-cheek comment upon analytic Cubism, a practice of painterly abstraction which famously tore the subject of the painting into a mass of interjecting angles and planes, the stripped female body is exposed to our view and dismembered in what seems like an aggressive act, the figure ravaged by the viewers gaze.[123]

As with the *Nude,* moreover, the title of this painting is of no small consequence. It provides another instance of literary influence and locates the painting into another narrative for Dulcinea is, after all, a character in Cervantes' *Don Quixote.* Like the central character of the novel, Don Quixote himself, Dulcinea del Toboso is a fantasy dreamed up by the "real" figure of Alonso Quijano, who imagines himself as the knight and the peasant Sancho Panza as his squire. Dulcinea is a part of this imaginary scenario: an identity projected upon the peasant Aldonza Lorenzo, she is an idealized princess in whose name Quixote undertakes his quest. As befits a chivalrous nobleman, Quixote describes her in the language of courtly poetry:

> she is my queen and lady, and her beauty supernatural, for in it one finds the reality of all the impossible and chimerical aspects which poets attribute to their ladies; her tresses are gold, her forehead Elysian fields, her eyebrows the arches of heaven, her eyes suns, her cheeks roses, her lips coral, her teeth pearls, her neck alabaster, her bosom marble, her hands ivory, her skin white as snow, and the parts that modesty hides from human eyes are such, or so I believe and understand, that the most discerning consideration can only praise them but not compare them. (1:13 91)

Such over the top ekphrastic description serves to remind the reader of the meta-fictional operations of Cervantes' work, a novel profoundly concerned with rhetoric and writing whose hero is inspired by chivalric romances. Quixote's literary language also serves to highlight the contrast between his vision and the more mundane figure of Aldonza Lorenzo, who, Panza tells us, is in fact loud, coarse and even "something of a trollop"

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[123] In this it also prefigures—although with a lesser degree of violence—Duchamp's last major work *Given.* As Kennedy observes, power and violence are key themes in Duchamp's work which are as yet barely explored in the critical literature (see Kennedy 51). Jean-Michel Rabaté has recently developed a related argument, suggesting that Duchamp is "as Sadean as he is Mallarméan" (*Given* 75).

(1:25 200). As he does elsewhere in the novel, here Cervantes employs to comic effect the mismatch between the generalised ideal which Quixote imagines and the specific reality this ideal is projected upon. Dulcinea can thus be taken to represent the complexity of the relationship between reality and imagination, between how things are and how we perceive them to be, between objects and the meanings that we invest in them.

In a key moment in the novel, the complex nexus of reality and imagination that Dulcinea represents is aligned with the processes at work in artistic creation. Rebutting Panza's attempts to convince him that Aldonza/Dulcinea is in fact a peasant rather than a princess, Quixote admits that he is conscious of the gap between the reality of his situation and his imaginary world. Yet, he declares,

> because of my love for Dulcinea del Toboso, she [Aldonza Lorenzo] is worth as much as the highest princess on earth. … I imagine that everything I say is true, no more and no less, and I depict her in my imagination as I wish her to be in beauty and distinction, and Helen cannot approach her, Lucretia cannot match her, nor can any of the famous women of past ages, Greek, barbarian or Latin. (1:25 201)

In this unique moment, the only point in the novel in which the apparent mad-man reveals awareness of his "real" position, it is strikingly as an artist that Quixote positions himself. It is not as someone subject to crippling delusions that he appears, but rather as someone caught up in the processes of artistic creation, who actively and knowingly creates pictures, depicts his subject in his mind in poetic terms. Quixote actively attempts to create an image which will function to motivate and explain his own narrative: muse and artwork, Dulcinea is an inspirational vision imposed upon the reality represented by Aldonza Lorenzo which—as far as Quixote is concerned at least— transforms the peasant into the princess.

Just as Quixote bases his fantasy upon a "real" woman, Duchamp's *Dulcinea* too was inspired by a real person: "'Dulcinea' is a woman I met on the Avenue de Neuilly," recalled the artist "whom I saw from time to time going to lunch, but to whom I never spoke…I didn't even know her name" (Cabanne *Dialogues* 33). Like Cervantes'

princess, Duchamp's figure bears little relation to the real woman who inspires the image. While Cervantes' hero is motivated by the noble sentiments of chivalry, however, Duchamp's projection is explicitly sexualised. Indeed, the rude assault of *Dulcinea* may be taken as an assault on the idealised, aestheticised vision of art presented by Quixote. This is not an innocent attempt to idealise or romanticise the subject: instead what we are presented with is the knowing product of an entirely self-conscious desire. That the title refers to the painting rather than the figure, moreover, suggests that Duchamp is marking the canvas itself out as a site of projection; just as *Don Quixote* can be read as fiction about fictions, then, so too can Duchamp's *Dulcinea* be read as a painting about painting. The painting is identified as an object that bears an unstable relation to the interpretations attached to it: mocking the idea of "disinterest" by suggesting that the basis of the gaze lies in desire, it implies that what the viewer projects upon the material body of the work bears no necessary relation to the reality of the paint and canvas.

Duchamp's painting can thus be read as suggesting that social context and the immediate desires and interests of the viewer inevitably impact on how a work is received. *Dulcinea* mocks not only the "higher" aesthetic values of Cervantes' romantic knight and the pretensions of the Cubists but, also, the tenets of aesthetic theory which Greenberg would later locate as central to the claims of abstraction. In this work, through allowing literature to trouble painting, Duchamp opens out some of the same issues that he would later explore with *Fountain*, raising not only the question of interpretative "interest" but also the question of how language and naming operate to create "art."

It is, of course, on account of such tactics that Greenberg dismisses Duchamp. His response is set out most explicitly in the 1971 essay "Counter Avant-Garde" where Duchamp is accused of "medium scrambling" and "avant-gard*ism,*" that is striking an avant-garde pose while misunderstanding the aims of art as well as the expectations of the historical moment.[124] Duchamp's iconoclastic gestures, Greenberg complains, are

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[124] Despite revising his position on various aspects of art and philosophy throughout his career, the distinction between avant-garde and kitsch, as "Counter Avant-Garde" makes clear, remained an

attempts to unsettle expectations rather than live up to them. The "unique historical interest" of Duchamp, he writes, is that in this fug of miscomprehension he decided "to wreak his frustration on artistic expectations in general. As well as by scrambling literary and cultural with visual contexts he tried to disconcert expectation by dodging back and forth between pictorial and sculptural ones" (131-132). It is quite precisely the erosion of the arts, in other words, strategies that interrogate the relationships and overlaps between the arts rather than keeping them within a set of rigid boundaries that are declared to be emphatically pronounced and problematic within Duchamp's work.

The inability to take account of work that breaches boundaries and crosses media is, of course, one of the reasons that Greenberg's thought fell out of fashion as the twentieth century progressed. Increasingly such cross media experimentation was seen to articulate an alternative practice which countered the dominance of aesthetic modernism (an idea which Bürger's text clearly helped to ground) and it gradually became clear that mass culture in all its "literariness" was both here to stay and in need of more thorough consideration. In this context Greenberg's formalism, and indeed formalist aesthetics more generally, began to appear as elitist, conservative and largely irrelevant to a contemporary situation in which the "cultural dominant" was no longer modernist but post-modern.[125] As Greenberg's star waned, Duchamp's shone more brightly: his art was seen to herald this new age, a precursor for the developments that were now gaining momentum.[126] It is upon this stage that Warhol made his appearance.

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important touchstone in Greenberg's work and one to which he would return to frequently. Indeed, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" reappeared in 1961, as the opening essay to the collection *Art and Culture,* with no revisions. Greenberg did stop using the word "purity" in the 1960s, however, clearly aware of the politically dubious inferences it carried. Later he tried to excuse his earlier vocabulary by claiming that he had always used the word in scare quotes: "I don't believe there is such a thing as purity in art, or pure art. That was a useful illusion for the avant-garde, for many years, but I don't believe there is such a thing. Now, when I wrote 'Towards a Newer Laocoon,' it was too new to put the quotes around the words 'pure' and 'purity'" (*Clement Greenberg Between the Lines* 146).

[125] For a discussion of the relationship between art history and aesthetics, including considerations as to why aesthetics came for a period to be regarded as out of date, see Elkins, *Art History Versus Aesthetics.*

[126] See for example the influential anthology *Art after Modernism: Rethinking Representation* in which both Craig Owens and Douglas Crimp stage a Duchampian postmodernism as the antithesis of Greenbergian modernism. For more on this oppositional framework between Greenbergian modernism and Duchampian postmodernism see A. Jones, *Postmodernism* 55-62.

4. Dada to Pop and Back Again: Avant-garde and Trauma

It was from those most influenced by Greenberg's modernist aesthetics that some of the most powerful critiques of his work emerged. Yet, and this is what I now want to argue, these critiques did little to challenge his problematic hierarchy of the arts. For example, two of Greenberg's most influential heirs, Michael Fried and Rosalind Krauss, have simultaneously distanced themselves from Greenberg's thought and built upon his distinction between painting and literature. Within this context, I hope to show, Warhol's work proves particularly interesting. Having outlined these responses to Greenberg, I will return briefly to the question of the theorisation of the avant-garde. For it is from Krauss' work that an important line of enquiry begins to develop in that regard. This discussion necessarily moves away from the direct inter-art comparison, which I will examine again in Chapter Three, but it enables the question of the relationship between art and language to be recast as the question of the relationship between art and discourse. This move returns us to the question of the apparent priority of painting, which the final sections of this chapter examine.

In "How Modernism Works" (1982), Fried argues against what he perceives as Greenberg's essentialism, his belief that each art has a unique nature proper to it alone, the values of which are distinct from the values of non-art.[127] In an attempt to distinguish his own position, Fried declares that, while he concedes that the task of art is self-criticism and that this task takes place within the confines of the individual art forms, he

> expressly denies the existence of a distinct *realm* of the pictorial—of a body of suprahistorical, non-context-specific, in that sense "formalist," concerns that define the proper aims and limits of the art of painting—maintaining on the contrary that modernist painting, in its constantly renewed effort to discover what it must be, is forever driven "outside"

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[127] This article is a response to an article by T.J. Clark on "Clement Greenberg's Theory of Art" published in the same issue of *Critical Inquiry*. Together the two articles form one of the most important and influential debates on Greenberg's legacy which revolves around the key accusation that Greenberg's aesthetics are essentialist. More recently, in "Silences in the Doctrine" (which is a response to the Clarke/Fried debate), de Duve has argued that, despite all his talk of purity and the distillation of the arts, accusations of essentialism sit uncomfortably with Greenberg's resolute historicism, evident throughout "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" (see *Clement Greenberg between the Lines* 39-86).

itself, compelled to place in jeopardy its very identity by engaging with what it is not. (226)

Art, for Fried, is not governed by distinct and higher values; it is, as it was for Adorno, constituted through its relation to empirical reality. Painting does not progressively reveal its essential features through a process of reduction but reveals the conventions which appear necessary for painting at any particular historical moment. This is to say that the material properties and conventions of a medium are in fact arbitrary, contingent upon historical circumstances, rather than necessary. This model, Fried thus claims, "leaves wide open (in principle though not in actuality) the question of what … those conventions will turn out to be" (227). Yet, at the same time, Fried remains true to the distinction drawn in his influential 1967 essay "Art and Objecthood" between avant-garde art which seeks "an ideal of self-sufficiency" and "presentness", or, as Fried puts it, an "instant revelation", and avant-gardist work which "is essentially *theatrical,* depending for its effects of 'presence' on the staging, the conspicuous manipulation, of its relation to an audience" ("Modernism" 229).[128] Significantly, what distinguishes Fried's "theatrical" art most clearly from avant-garde art is that it attempts to move beyond the specific object and into the realm of ideas, or as he puts it in the early essay, "seeks to declare and occupy a position—one which can be formulated in words" ("Art and Objecthood" 838). In other words, theatrical art employs non-aesthetic, conceptual ideas (ideas which can be formulated in words, subject matter) which compromise the integrity of the work. Fried reiterates, then, the idea that language is alien to art, which is characterized by its material opacity. Quality, Fried thus maintains can only be found in the individual arts, in our encounter with the materiality of the art object: "what lies *between* the arts" he claims "is theatre" ("Modernism" 228).

It is easy to locate Warhol's work in this framework, of course, for his brand of Pop is almost excessively theatrical. The artist was highly aware of how his art impacted on viewers and, like Duchamp, strategically manipulated its reception. Having learned his techniques in the advertising industry, perhaps the most self-consciously calculating

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[128] Fried seems to be suggesting here, as Greenberg does, that the work can provoke interest or disinterest by its subject-matter, or lack thereof (see 84n30).

mode of image-making, Warhol chose much of his imagery from that field.[129] His work stages his own absorption in commodity culture and mass media. It invites viewers to share the artist's apparently passive consumption, to allow themselves to be manipulated, and to revel in the ease of being fed "pre-digested" information which is often directly transposed from the familiar contexts of newspapers and films.[130] Such strategies have been hailed as democratic and liberating by those who see Pop as critical of art world elitism: Trevor Fairbrother, for example, describes Warhol's achievement as his move to "banish the mysteries of artistic creation from his 'Factory', where making a painting had roughly the same number of steps as a cake mix, and selling one involved 'Small, medium, or large? And how many?'" (95-96). Such an equation of art and consumerism has led others, among whose number we of course find Greenberg and Bürger, to renounce Warhol's work as an affirmative celebration of meaningless kitsch.

It was not only the iconic images of mass consumerism that fascinated Warhol but also the specific manner in which the mass media plays upon its readers/viewers, encouraging them to identify with certain figures and to develop a voyeuristic emotional investment in certain events. The "Death and Disaster" series, created in the 1960s, famously features images of "stars" such as Marilyn Monroe and Jackie Kennedy whose personal tragedies have become public spectacle, alongside images of riots, car crashes and suicides. One of the most potent works of the series is undoubtedly the series of electric chair paintings. An image such as that used for the 1963 painting *Blue Electric Chair* (Fig. 2.3) is highly "literary" or "theatrical" in that its force appears to depend entirely on subject matter; the significance of the events that take place in this room, the cultural meanings attached to this object. The photograph was chosen by Warhol in the midst of debates about the death penalty, produced in the same year that the state of New

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[129] Interestingly, while he was working in commercial illustration, Warhol's work was characterised by a recognisable personal style and elaborate sketches: the precise opposite is true of his later art. Indeed, it seems that while he worked as a freelance illustrator Warhol played up his "artistry" and while he worked as an artist he played up his commercialism. For a detailed discussion of the relationship between the two phases of Warhol's career see Buchloh, "One."

[130] Such an invitation is pushed to breaking point in Warhol's films, which have become almost as well-known as his paintings: works like *Empire* (1964), a practically unwatchable 8 hour film comprising of a single fixed shot of the Empire State Building. This invitation can, and has been, read as a quasi-Brechtian gesture that serves to defamiliarize "normal" late twentieth-century cultural experience and thus to reveal to the viewer its absurdity. See Crone and, to a lesser extent, Buchloh's "One."
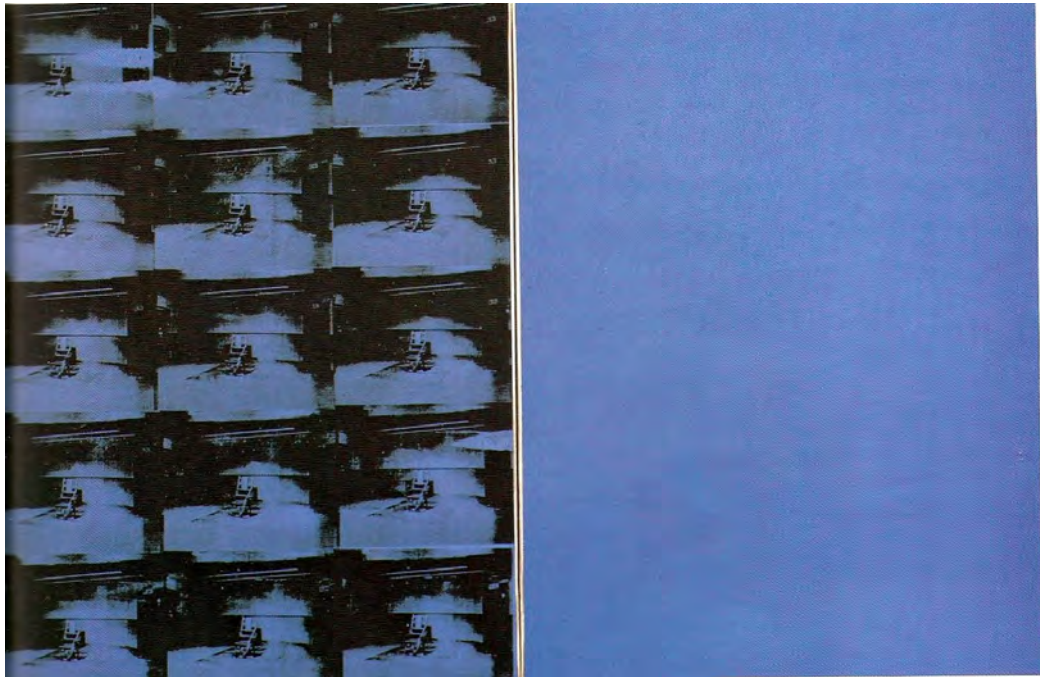
Fig. 2.3 Andy Warhol *Blue Electric Chair* (1963)
Gian Enzo Sperone, New York

York outlawed the use of the chair.[131] The image itself was re-produced from a newspaper article about the execution of "communist spies" Ethel and Julius Rosenberg, referencing a painful episode in recent American history. Thus the universality and timelessness of the subject of death collides with a sequence of current issues, specific to the historical and cultural context.

The photograph is striking in its composition; the vertical and horizontal lines of the image are echoed in those of the chair itself and produce a grid-like effect. Almost an abstract work, the painting nevertheless raises the issue of the participation of society in the death of the condemned: as judge and jury during the trial, as spectators during the execution itself. Through its sparseness and clean lines, the image is barely emotive: it suggests detachment. Yet the emptiness of the chair appears as a void at the centre of the picture, a space of absence into which the viewer is invited to project themselves. In this sense, the painting functions as a *memento mori*: the chair is empty because death awaits

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[131] For more on the historical context of this work see Dworkin, "Whereof One Cannot Speak" 58-59.

Fig. 2.4 Andy Warhol *Orange Disaster (Electric Chair)* (1963)
The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.

us. Destabilising the viewer's position, the work encourages an oscillation between looking on and projecting in. Like the sign on the wall (which reads "Silence") the picture rebuffs the viewer but, at the same time interpolates him/her directly. It demands a "disinterested" response and disallows it.

Yet, while Warhol's art is certainly "literary" what makes works such as the chair series particularly interesting is that they also draw upon the strategies of the painterly abstraction which critics such as Greenberg and Fried consider to be the marker of "advanced" art. Indeed, it is highly significantly that, although he experimented with many media, Warhol never abandoned painting: for the vast majority of his career, he located his challenge to aesthetic modernism from *inside* the medium of painting. Foremost among the formal devices that Warhol adopted, as *Blue Electric Chair* and *Orange Disaster* (1963) (Fig. 2.4) demonstrate, are the grid and the monochrome. In her 1979 essay "Grids," Krauss maintains that the grid is the paradigmatic modernist structure because of its "hostility to literature, to narrative, to discourse" (9). As a structure that maps the conventions of painting (the rectilinear shape of the canvas) back on to painting itself, the grid walls "the visual arts into a realm of exclusive visuality and [defends] them against the intrusions of speech" (9). Likewise, the monochrome, or "blank" as the artist called it, as the reduction of painting to the single cell of the grid and to the bare fact of paint on canvas, performs the same process of negating empirical reality.[132] Yet in Warhol's work these devices perform slightly differently. As Fairbrother puts it, in a discussion of *Blue Electric Chair*, they allow the artist "to articulate the antagonism of life and death, the idea of death as the nothingness of a blank afterimage, and the perception of that bare figment of color as escape from a society that commits electrocution" (104). In other words, Warhol plays with the "literary" connotations of his image and how those interact with the formal devices of modernist painting: Warhol parodies the refusal of meaning embodied by the grids of abstract painting, by presenting images excessively imbued with connotation and emotional investment;[133] the "blank" finds its paradoxical equivalent in a word, the word

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[132] As always, Warhol himself eschewed such theoretical explanations, claiming that the blank "just makes them bigger and mainly makes them cost more" (qtd. in Buchloh "One" 19).

[133] Warhol was certainly aware of the formalist interpretation of the grid structure, claiming that he chose the structure precisely of its capacity to silence narrative: "I don't want it to be essentially the same – I want it to be *exactly* the same. Because the more you look at the same exact thing, the more the meaning goes away, and the better and emptier you feel" (*POPism* 50). Rather than opposing modernist abstract painting, then, Warhol mimics it just as he mimics the products of the "culture industry."

"silence." The artist thus builds a narrative around the devices of the monochrome and grid, imbuing them with the "meanings" they apparently protest against.

Krauss, as her work on the grid shows, is another example of a critic who leaves Greenberg's literary/visual distinction in place while distancing herself from his aesthetic theory more broadly.[134] In "A View of Modernism" (1972), an essay which pre-dates the formalist argument of "Grids", she rejects Greenberg's position on the basis of its essentialism and its insistence on a set of unchanging conventions. In opposition, she adopts a "post-modernist" stance to argue that the repression of narrative as it is figured in the rhetoric of modernism masks the fact that such modernism itself depends on the ceaseless invocation of a larger narrative "the entire history of painting since Manet" (979). This larger historical grand narrative, Krauss complains, perceives itself as an objective history when it is in fact a single "interested" perspective and one which operates to repress alternative histories and different perspectives. In the light of this realisation, the task that Krauss' work prompts is the articulation of these alternative art historical narratives: it is this project that underlies much of the work published in *October*, the journal which Krauss founded in 1976. It is at this juncture, furthermore, that Bürger's thesis, as a revaluation of the work that Greenberg dismissed, started to make an impact on the modernist/post-modernist discussion as the *October* writers began to examine his alternative art historical narrative.

It has not been Krauss, however, but rather her fellow *October* theorists Benjamin Buchloh and Hal Foster who have engaged most deeply with *Theory of the Avant-garde,* both attempting to work through the contradictions of Bürger's work in order to counter-act his negative assessment of the "neo" avant-garde art of the post-war period. Yet Buchloh and Foster did take their cue from Krauss, developing the idea of

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[134] On the level of her approach to individual works, Krauss does not challenge Greenberg's formalism in any great depth. It is on the broader level of art history that she argues. That she does not challenge the literary/visual distinction is particularly surprising, however, given Krauss' willingness to open her critical practice to the ideas and consequences of post-structuralism. While some of her work seems quite radical in comparison to Greenberg (for example her writing on Duchamp which, as we saw in the last chapter, uses structuralist linguistics to engage with the work) at other times, such as in "Grids", she echoes him very closely. That this push and pull has remained a constant in Krauss' work over the last 30 years or so is demonstrated by her recent comments in *Voyage on the North Sea* in which she disparages "inter-media" work as affirming the structures of global capitalism, see 120n67.

the "trauma of signification" ("Notes" 206) that, as we saw in Chapter One, Krauss locates in Duchamp's work, into a model by which to grasp the relationship between avant-garde art and history. It is in Foster's 1994 article "What's Neo about the Neo-Avant-Garde?" that this model is most fully worked out.[135] The author eschews the Marxist approach of considering the avant-gardes in the framework of resistance and affirmation, pointing out that this framework depends upon the very notion of authenticity that the avant-garde movements themselves so frequently challenge. The task, he argues, is to develop a model which takes account of the relationship between works of different periods without positing a moment of originality and subsequent repetition. In other words, Foster tries to establish a temporal model that counters the historical narratives set up by Bürger and Greenberg.

In an argument which draws upon post-structuralist literary theory, Foster proceeds by invoking the difference between "authors" and "originators of discourse" outlined in Michel Foucault's essay "What is an Author?" This distinction rests upon the idea that an "author" takes a position within discourse, while an "originator of discourse" enables numerous positions. The former makes a statement, while the latter generates a discursive framework in which different statements can be made and alternative positions produced. The examples that Foucault gives are Marx and Freud. The aim of the reader returning to the texts of such thinkers, as Foster writes, is not only to

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[135] In this article Foster draws not only upon the work of Krauss but also of Buchloh. Although there are differences among these theorists, there are also shared assumptions between their enormously influential writings, the most important of which is their attempt to rethink the avant-garde in a manner that does not privilege originality. See Krauss "The Originality of the Avant-garde" and Buchloh "The Primary Colors for the Second Time: A Paradigm Repetition of the Neo-Avant-Garde." I have chosen not to deal with Buchloh in the main body of this thesis as his work is in fact heavily invested in the same structures as Bürger's. Locating his own work in relation to Habermas, Buchloh argues that the work of the neo-avant-garde is "spectacular" art and a "semblance of radicality" (See "Introduction", *Neo-Avantgarde*): that it acknowledges itself as such, is what makes it avant-garde according to Buchloh. This hardly alters Bürger's reading at all and, therefore, Buchloh's conclusion is every bit as pessimistic as that of *Theory of the Avant-garde:* "the very same strategies that had developed within modernism's project of enlightenment," he writes, "now serve the transformation of the bourgeois public sphere into the public sphere of the corporate state, with its appropriate forms of distribution (total commodification) and cultural experience (the spectacle)" (*Neo-Avantgarde* 52). For more on Buchloh see Jones, *Postmodernism* 60 and, on the *October* group more broadly, 56-59.

restore the radical integrity of the discourse but to challenge its status in the present, the received ideas that deform its structure and restrict its efficacy … to clarify the contingent strategy of the readings, which is to *re*connect with a lost practice in order to *dis*connect from a present way of working felt to be outmoded, misguided, or otherwise oppressive. (7)

In other words, the ideas of the "originator of discourse" are open to radical reinvention, reinterpretation and recontextualisation.

Foster goes on to propose that the post-war repetitions of "the readymades of Duchampian Dada" (8) should be considered as this type of radical return. This is not to say that these works constitute a "return to origin" but rather to make the point that "origins" are retroactively constructed. This recursive action brings with it a specific temporality: "*rather than break with the fundamental practices and discourses of modernity, the signal practices and discourses of postmodernity advance in a* nachträglich *relation to them*" (31).[136] In other words, the activities of the neo-avant-garde are the return of the repressed within the historical avant-garde, a return that generates the historical avant-garde. This is to say that

> the neo-avant-garde acts on the historical avant-garde as much as it is acted on by it; that it is less *neo* than *nachträglich;* that the avant-garde project in general develops in deferred action. Once repressed in part, the avant-garde did return, and it continues to return, but always *from the future:* such is its paradoxical temporality. (31)

It is impossible for the full significance of something to be understood in the historical moment in which it occurs, Foster is suggesting: yet the work circumscribes a set of possible responses, possible ideas. This is to say that the later manifestations of an avant-garde gesture like the readymade are not necessarily simple copies, but rather might be conceived of as making radical returns to Duchamp's work in order to bring out what is repressed within it. They thus, in turn, generate and inscribe "the Duchampian Readymade" into art history. The avant-garde work, Foster writes "is never historically effective or fully significant in its initial moments. It cannot be because it is

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[136] As several of the quotations in the remaining sections of this chapter are characterised by the kind of emphasis that Foster uses here, I will take this opportunity to state that unless otherwise indicated all quotations in this thesis reproduce the emphasis of the original texts.

traumatic: a hole in the symbolic order of its time that is not prepared for it, that cannot receive it, at least not immediately, at least not without structural change" (30). In other words, in a move that recalls Duchamp's fascination with "mirrorical returns," the avant-garde work receives its meaning retroactively through the way that future artists engage with it.[137] Foster, borrowing his words from an essay on writing by Jacques Derrida, thus concludes that it is "'the very idea of a *first time* which becomes enigmatic' … 'It is thus the delay which is in the beginning.' So it is for the avant-garde as well" (31-32).[138]

The initial failure of signification, and the retroactive construction that this failure entails, allows Foster to question the precise effect of historical avant-garde production. He claims, contra Bürger, that it was not the institution of art that was attacked by the avant-garde but rather "the conventions of the traditional mediums" (20). While institution and convention are intrinsic to one another, he argues, they cannot simply be reduced to one another and, by differentiating between the two, the emphasis of the stages of avant-garde production become clearer: "the first focuses on the conventional, the second concentrates on the institutional" (19). This distinction allows the possibility that the relationship between the neo and historical avant-gardes is not merely one by which the former institutionalizes the latter, but one in which the historical avant-garde attack on convention is for the first time *comprehended* by the neo-avant-garde which develops this critique beyond the bounds of art towards its institutions. If this is to come close to suggesting that the neo-avant-garde is a project of closure, in which the aims of the avant-garde are fully articulated and finally grasped, it is also to suggest that the neo-avant-garde in turn will be the subject of later reconfiguration or analysis. The project Foster stresses is to "'comprehend,' not 'complete': the project of the avant-garde is no more concluded in its neo moment than it is enacted in its historical moment. In art, too, creative analysis is *interminable.*"(16)

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[137] In fact, it is Duchamp (of course) that is the (not so repressed) retroactively constructed "origin" of Foster's own model in this essay: "The language of suspended delays, the trope of missed encounters, the concern with *infra-mince* causalities, the obsession with repetition, resistance, and reception, is everywhere in his work, which is, like trauma, like the avant-garde, definitively unfinished but always already inscribed" (31).

[138] Foster is quoting from "Freud and the Scene of Writing" (1966).

The avant-garde, accordingly, is not condemned to the death that the Marxist framework envisages: it can continue indefinitely, releasing the repressed within the art that precedes it, rewriting its origins.

I will return to Foster's argument in Chapter Four for, in a number of respects, it touches upon the ideas inscribed in Lyotard's work. Here I simply want to note two things. The first is that, as Foster shows, the central problem of the avant-garde is a problem of temporality: the failure that Bürger describes depends upon a particular conceptual framework, a sense of history as linear, as constituting moments of originality and subsequent repetitions. This linearity, moreover, is an idea that the term avant-garde—inscribing the notion of before and after—itself appears to rely upon: there can be no "avant-garde" without a narrative of progress of some description. Foster's psychoanalytic model is an attempt to produce an alternative vision of the temporal dynamics of the avant-garde, in which the "neo" avant-gardes re-write the work of their predecessors, a vision in which attempts to respect the avant-gardes' challenge to conventional aesthetic categories such as originality. Yet, and this is my second point, in positioning the avant-garde as a mode of working through a trauma of signification Foster seems at risk of simply inverting the problem of the original versus the copy. While the historical avant-garde is no longer conceived of as an origin "whose aesthetic transformations are fully significant and historically effective in the first instance" ("What's Neo?" 11), in his analysis it appears to becomes a negative or repressed origin. The avant-garde, as a result, is in danger of appearing as little more than a compulsive return to the scene of a "trauma" that can never be grasped. Progress, if it can be called that, is a process of comprehension of the past rather than the development of possibilities in the present. Most problematically, in conceiving of the avant-garde as a working through of problems generated by earlier artworks, Foster might be seen to reduce avant-garde art to an engagement with art history alone rather than with the contemporary context into which it emerges, thereby erasing the question of art's relationship to society which is so central to the idea of the avant-garde.[139] Foster's

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[139] As Foster's subsequent work makes clear, what he considers to be repressed—and what he considers as returning in late twentieth-century art—is the Lacanian Real. Nowhere is this more forcefully argued, in

narrative is, I would therefore argue, almost as problematic as those that it seeks to counter.[140] Leaving these issues aside for the moment, however, I want to return now to the question of the relationship between painting and language.

5. Painting, Theory and Pictorial Nominalism

In a 1987 essay entitled "*Ut Pictura Theoria*: Abstract Painting and Language" W.J.T. Mitchell echoes Krauss' denunciation of modernism, arguing that "the true face of the 'will to silence' in abstract art is not the 'grid' of its compositional forms, but the imposition of a social mandate: you, who are not qualified to speak about this painting, keep your mouths shut" (226). Modern art, Mitchell argues, has come to be an increasingly specialist and elitist pursuit, a discipline in which contradictions are repressed in order to maintain the appearance of art as autonomous and removed from the concerns of everyday life. In order to grasp art, Mitchell argues, it is no longer sufficient to simply view it, but rather one must speak the language of aesthetics.[141]

> [The] wall erected against language and literature by the grid of abstraction only kept out a certain kind of verbal contamination, but it absolutely depended, at the same time, on the collaboration of painting with another kind of discourse, what we may call for lack of a better term, the discourse of theory. (220)

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fact, than in his 1996 essay "Death in America" which argues that Warhol's work develops out of "an experience of shock or trauma, an encounter where one misses the real, where one is too early or too late […] but where one is somehow marked by this very missed encounter." (36) Thus Warhol's repetitions of single images are read as a working through of this missed encounter, a bearing witness to the "traumatic real" that representation papers over. Foster claims that "the repetitions not only *re*produce traumatic effects" he claims "they *produce* them as well", that they are both "a warding away of traumatic significance *and* an opening out to it, a defending against traumatic affect *and* a producing of it" (42).

[140] Foster's "trauma theory" has received numerous critiques: see Seltzer, and for critiques of trauma theory more broadly see Kansteiner and Ball. While this reading sits comfortably with the Death and Disaster sequence, it is harder to see how it would explain works such as the more knowingly funny Pop paintings like, for example, *Cow Wallpaper* or the *Do It Yourself* series (1962), of which there are many. That said, Foster is by no means the only critic to ignore Warhol's humour in favour of a focus on his more disturbing work. For more on Foster's trauma theory in relation to late twentieth-century art see his *The Return of the Real.*

[141] Of course Mitchell is not the first to say this, as he acknowledges citing Harold Rosenberg's *The De-Definition of Art* (1972), as well as Tom Wolfe's *The Painted Word* (1976). He does not cite however the rather surprising fact that Michael Fried, against whom Mitchell positions himself, also pre-empts him. See Fried, "How Modernism Works" 228n16.

In other words, abstract painting does not address itself to eyesight alone; it addresses itself to aesthetic theory. As painting becomes increasingly self-conscious and abstract, Mitchell suggests, it does not lose its relation to language altogether but rather comes to rely upon a comparatively esoteric language.[142] For Mitchell, theory is a "curious hybrid of mainly prose discourse compounded from aesthetics and other branches of philosophy … characterized, generally, by a refusal of disciplinary identity … [it is] a synthetic discourse that ranges over several specialized idioms" (220-221). An abstract form of language, theory is to be distinguished from the singular, figurative use of language in literature as well as from the common, reified language of convention. What *ut pictura theoria* seems to announce, then, is that as figurative art is matched by literature, abstract art is matched by abstract language.

This seductively straightforward formulation—which Mitchell does not explore in any depth—in fact announces an extremely complex relationship. For, clearly, abstract paintings do not represent theories in the way that traditional figurative painting represents "literary" meanings. Rather Mitchell's formulation articulates a paradoxical situation: it suggests that the analytic discourse of abstract painting—one of specialisation—is somehow matched with the synthetic discourse of theory—one of conceptual generalisation. In other words, he connects the problem of abstract painting to precisely the problem which lies, as I argued in Chapter One, at the heart of Bürger's avant-garde: the paradoxical relationship between the specific work or form and the generic concept. Rather than acknowledge the difficulty of this relationship, however, Mitchell's brilliantly simple phrase glosses over it.

In his monograph *Kant after Duchamp* (1996) Thierry de Duve not only examines this paradoxical bond, positioning it as the central problem of modern art in fact, but also locates it as the key concern of Duchamp's work and *Fountain* in particular. His project is an attempt to refocus Greenberg's famous arguments in order to

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[142] This can be read as a variation on the argument of Paul Mann, which was discussed in Chapter One of this thesis (see 26-28).

counter the critic's negative assessment of Duchamp's work.[143] In a passage that clearly echoes both Greenberg's "Modernist Painting" and his privileging of painting over literature, de Duve states that it is a fact of modernity that all the arts have sought to discover their own specificity.

> Modern literature and poetry have sought to isolate and define "the literary" and "the poetic"; modern music has gone after pure "musicality"; modern theatre, even, has come to think of itself as the enactment of sheer "theatricality." But it was in painting that this self-referential (better called reflexive) striving for purity became both the exclusive object of aesthetic theory and the all-encompassing subject matter of practice. In other words, it was in painting and nowhere else (not even in sculpture, which merely took it over from painting), that the idea of abstract art came into being.
> … Since then, we have spoken of abstract art, in the singular, as though abstraction as an aesthetic principle had uncovered an essence that was not peculiar to painting but was present in all the arts. Better still, we seem to imply that the various arts, in the plural, are reducible to a single essence called art in general, art at large, as though this essence were not specific but generic. (151-152)

In this way, de Duve connects the two impulses of modern art that both Bürger and Greenberg oppose in order to argue that the search for the unique identity of each specific medium ended with their opening out into a field of abstraction that was removed from the object completely. The drive towards specificity opens out into generality, as painterly abstraction aims to locate the meaning of the generalised term "art." Here, we are returned to the moment described by Adorno in "Art and the Arts". De Duve echoes the German theorist's argument when he thus goes on to claim that the "profound paradox at the root of the impulse towards abstraction" is that "in the depth of the matter lies a language" (183). Yet while this revelation seems to echo Mitchell's formulation, de Duve in fact is suggesting something quite different: what he sees at the root of modernism is not language as theory, but rather language in the form of the name.

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[143] As I have indicated previously, part of de Duve's project is to counter the perception that Greenberg is essentialist and thus to an extent to rehabilitate his thought (92n38).

In this respect, *Kant after Duchamp* reworks the thesis of de Duve's 1984 monograph on Duchamp, *Pictorial Nominalism.*[144] The title phrase, which according to de Duve describes the key strategy of Duchamp's practice, is taken directly from the artist's notes and interpreted by de Duve as describing art-making conceived as an act of naming or baptism. In the forward to the earlier book, John Rajchman provides a succinct definition:

> Nominalism is the doctrine that only individual or disparate things exist and that our classifications of them are only contingent and changeable inventions. Pictorial nominalism is the view that the "ideas" that allow us at a time and place to classify things pictorial are open to problematizing events and are not fixed by an essential nature. (xxii)[145]

Pictorial nominalism suggests, then, firstly that we judge one thing to be art not because of something inherent in the object but rather through measuring the object against a set of criteria or ideas that are extrinsic to the work; secondly, it suggests that such criteria are not fixed—not essential—but rather a matter of convention; and finally, it suggests that such conventions are open to destabilisation and change. The values of art, in other words, are not distinct from those of other spheres, as Greenberg believed, and are in fact open to renegotiation.

The particular significance of the readymade for de Duve is that it reveals nominalism to be at the very heart of modernist art practice. In other words, it reverses the gesture of abstract painting, which positions "art" as a quality that arises from specific works. The readymade turns this around by beginning with "art" and submerging it in an object, in the case of the readymade "the generic seems to precede the specific" (*Kant* 153). While painting sought to be "painting and nothing but painting," the readymade in contrast appears as purism of a different kind: "'art' and

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[144] De Duve's first book is concerned with the impact of Duchamp's mysterious trip to Munich, which too place between June 18th and October 10th 1912. The Munich period is often conceived of as pivotal, as the point at which his "unsuccessful" career as painter was laid to rest and from which Duchamp emerged as fully fledged (an-) artist. The most significant product of his time in Munich is Duchamp's painting *Bride* (1912), upon which the first chapters of de Duve's study are focused. See also de Duve's "Resonance of Duchamp's Visit to Munich", Kuenzli and Naumann 41-63.

[145] In this sense, pictorial nominalism operates in the way that Bürger claims Duchamp's work operates, to reveal the "institution" of art as historical and contingent rather than necessary.

nothing but 'art'" (*Kant* 153). In short, de Duve is describing the same situation outlined by Adorno in "Art and the Arts," drawing a distinction between specific works and media which become art, and a generalised aesthetics which is submerged into non-art objects. He does not consider the latter as dilettantism, however, but as revealing the disconnection between the idea of "art" and individual media/art forms.

There are two important consequences to de Duve's argument. Firstly, as I have indicated, it connects the definitions of avant-garde outlined by Bürger and by Greenberg, which are revealed not as oppositional but as dialectically related, different moments of the same movement.[146] Like abstraction, therefore, the readymade gesture is the direct result of painting's "demise as craft and its instant rebirth as an idea" (*Kant* 149). To reiterate for both clarity and emphasis, Greenbergian modernism and the radical avant-garde of Bürger's theory are impulses driven by the same dynamic, a dynamic that springs from the tension between the individual arts and the idea of "art." Secondly, and crucially, de Duve's argument privileges painting, locating *Fountain* as a response to developments in that medium: the readymade is made possible by painting's turn to abstraction. Abstract painting becomes a pure medium and "art" is generalised from its basis in the specific medium, as a result the readymade appears as the articulation of this generalised art which can make use of any/all means available to it as means. Without grasping its relation to abstract painting, its being *"not painting"*, de Duve thus argues, what is at stake in the readymade cannot be understood.

By mistaking the specificity of the medium for the central question of modern art, de Duve argues, formalists such as Greenberg have been blinded to the importance of Duchamp's gesture. Greenberg's thought was based on a conviction that the values of art and life were distinct, thus his approach to art was bound to the idea of identifying those values, necessarily to be found only in the individual arts. Greenberg's formalist doctrine, as a result, fails to take account of both "modernist" and "avant-garde"

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[146] As I indicated in Chapter One, *Theory of the Avant-garde* also acknowledges the relation between these moments, although it is not explained. Bürger, we are led to assume, sees this dialectical relationship as unfolding within historical time, the turn inwards of aestheticism preceding the turn outwards of the avant-garde. De Duve also maps this dialectic as a historical development. I prefer however to follow Adorno's position in which the dialectic is internal to the work, meaning both moments, the generic and the specific, are held within the work itself at the same time rather than superseding one another temporally.

impulses, which de Duve refers to as the "specific" and the "general" modes of art. De Duve, attempting to address this imbalance, argues that the conventions of art are open to renegotiation, that they are infiltrated by different values at different historical moments. Thus he claims that the question of the medium of art is of secondary importance, what is really at stake in modernism is the name "art."[147] This is precisely what the readymades articulate and thus, de Duve claims, "Duchamp is a modernist in a generalized sense that Greenberg was not able to recognise; he is not an avant-gardiste but avant-garde" ("Silences" 86).

Yet, and as I hope my discussion in the previous chapter made clear, such a separation between "art" and individual arts/artworks places art in a precarious position. For, initially at least, de Duve's thesis seems to suggest that "art" is something that exists independently of the artwork: the division between the specific material and the general concept, in other words, threatens to collapse into the idea that the term "art" can be applied to anything and thus that the properties of the object in itself are of no importance. He seems to go too far towards the generic, to open himself to the charge of glorifying the "dilettantism" which Adorno associates with a generalized aesthetics. The doctrine of pictorial nominalism, in other words, comes dangerously close to dissolving into the idea that art is *only* a conceptual category.

De Duve is of course careful to guard against such an interpretation. It is to prevent this reading that he insists on the idea of art as a proper name. "One should guard carefully against any confusion," he writes "between the idea of *art as a proper name* and the concept of 'art-as-a-proper-name'":

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[147] Henry Staten takes issue with de Duve's treatment of the question of the medium as well as his rehearsal of Greenbergian modernism in *Kant after Duchamp*. Staten, quite rightly I think, argues that, while De Duve "pays lip service" to the question, he effectively "sublates the materiality of the medium into the idea of convention" (79). Conversely, we might add, de Duve's argument in *Clement Greenberg Between the Lines*, which suggests that the medium must be understood as fundamentally "other," again absolves the medium of its materiality, by turning it into the absolute opposite of convention, the unknowable. This is to say that rather than thinking through the relationship between the particular and the generic, de Duve concentrates on the generic. While I shall follow de Duve's practice for a short while in order to outline the logic of his argument, I shall argue shortly that this leaves him with a problem as regards the readymade for it undercuts the necessity of the relation between Duchamp's gesture and the medium of painting.

> The latter operates on the level of theory. It expresses the conceptual knowledge acquired through the theorem that defines the word "art" by the …concept of the proper name or rigid designator. But the idea of art as proper name, on the contrary, operates at the level of practice, that is of judgement, of the aesthetic usage of the word "art." The *concept* is either true or false, the *idea* is either just or unjust. (*Kant* 74)

At the very core of pictorial nominalism, then, aesthetic judgement plays a pivotal role.[148] While to use "art" as a concept is to match the work against a set of pre-determined criteria, to use it as a name is to make a judgement without such criteria and thus to respond to the work in its singularity. De Duve's baptismal rite is not performed with the emphasis on the term art, but rather on the judgement: "*this* is art" (in which art is subject to change with each judgement) rather than "this is *art*" (in which a pre-conceived concept "art" determines the judgement).[149] Art cannot exist, de Duve stresses, as a concept removed from the actual work of art, but is rather a performative judgement that turns a specific object into an artwork.

It is in the light of this practice that de Duve re-conceptualises the avant-garde in his 1996 essay "Silences in the Doctrine" as a pact between artists and viewers. The avant-garde must break with artistic convention but only on the basis of an understanding that the break occurs in order to enable new conventions to be founded. In other words, for de Duve, the relationship of the avant-garde to tradition is not one of negation as it is for Bürger. Nor, however, is it one of continuation, as it is in

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[148] By aesthetic judgement, I mean a judgement that is not governed by extrinsic or pre-determined criteria but is made according to intrinsic criteria which emerge from the experience of engaging with the work/object itself. In the *Critique of Judgement* Kant describes this kind of judgement as "disinterested" or free, indicating that the judgement is properly aesthetic when it is not based upon my relation to the object being represented or any such criteria extrinsic to the event of the experience. The judgement cannot therefore be measured against logic, cannot be "true" or "false". The emphasis, as de Duve suggests, moves from the question of whether the judgement is correct to whether it is right or just. This aspect of aesthetic judgement is developed by Lyotard in order to describe the ethical/political task of the avant-garde, as I shall try to show in Chapter Four.

[149] In fact, de Duve argues that to be precise we should conceive of art *as having been* a proper name: the event of baptism is an aesthetic judgement and so, operating outside rationalised time-space, by the time it enters the discourse of art history it is necessarily past. This temporal model is clearly comparable to the "future anterior" model used by Lyotard to describe the post-modern which is likewise predicted on the idea of aesthetic judgement (see "Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?"). De Duve's notion of the idea of art as a proper name, moreover, bears some likeness to, and might profitably be considered in relation to, Lyotard's work on the idea of the "tensor" in *Libidinal Economy* (see *Libidinal* 42-93).

Greenberg's formulation. Rather, as it is in Foster's model, the avant-garde work is an address to the history of art: the medium representing not only the conventions as they currently stand but as they have been developed in the past. "*In modernism*" de Duve writes, "*art has value for the artists of the future and is addressed to the artists of the past*" ("Silences" 84). In other words, art addresses tradition and it is in its reconfiguration of tradition that is meaningful for artists of the future who will address it in turn. In contrast, and here de Duve borrows Greenberg's vocabulary, "*avant-gardism is precisely the reverse: to say that art stands for the artist of the past but addresses the artists of the future*" ("Silences" 85). Avant-gardism, in other words, is art that seeks to erase past art, to stand in place of it rather than to address it; it claims to abolish the old order in the name of the new. It is at this juncture that the connection between the readymade and painting becomes vital to de Duve's argument: *Fountain* must be positioned as a painting/not painting, for in order to claim Duchamp as avant-garde de Duve must show that rather than an outright rejection of convention, his work is primarily a response to an identifiable artistic convention.

The historical significance of Duchamp's work, de Duve tells us, is that it reveals the practice of nominalism at the very heart of modern art: *Fountain* performs the performative judgement by which the pact around the name "art" is re-configured. In other words, by suspending his own aesthetic judgement Duchamp produces a work that is *about* aesthetic judgement. The specificity of painting and the generality of the readymade must be understood in relation to one another. While the "regulative idea" of abstraction "was the specifically pictorial; [Duchamp's gesture] was *about* the specifically pictorial. Theirs was geared to establish their craft's name, *Malerei;* his was a philosophy *about* that name" (*Kant* 165). At stake in the readymade, de Duve thus claims, is the name of painting; Duchamp demands that the "the proper name of art—or of *arrhe*—be given to a practice that no longer *was* painting, but that was *apropos* of painting. … the readymade is art about painting even before it is art about art" (*Kant* 166). De Duve goes on to demonstrate, by means of an elaborate and lengthy argument connecting Duchamp to painting, that this is more than a negative dependency, and that the readymade can be seen to actively engage with the stakes of painting. Like

Dulcinea—a work that, as I have suggested, can be read as commenting on the canvas as a site of projection—what the readymade reveals, as de Duve sees it, is the instability of the name in relation to the object, an instability that applies to the name "painting" as much as it applies to the name "art." *Fountain* is not a rejection of painting, de Duve argues, but—surprisingly enough—precisely the opposite, a continuation of the stakes of painting under conditions in which painting has become impossible. For this reason, it should be considered a sort of "abnormal" painting.[150]

It is through breaking the pact of "painting" that the readymade opens out the question of "art at large", de Duve argues. It is thus only through its relation to painting, as a consequence, that the readymade can be understood. Yet at the same time, de Duve is keen that the emphasis be shifted away from the idea of the medium and onto the process of naming: it was Greenberg's fixation on the medium of painting, his argument implies, that prevented him from seeing the workings of modernist art as inclusive of gestures such as the readymade, a gesture which proves that the medium is in fact a secondary concern. This indicates, however, a point of tension in de Duve's own work. For while it may well be the case that the question of "purity" or specificity recedes after Duchamp, what de Duve's own argument suggests is that the material conventions of the art object that play a crucial role in the breaking and reforming of the pact "art." For if the readymade can only be understood as "art" by means of its status in relation to painting, this is because it is only in relation to conventions (of which media are the physical embodiments according to de Duve) that the pact can be agreed. De Duve's attempt to deny the importance of the materials of art seems doubly strange when we consider the role he ascribes to aesthetic judgement. It is on the basis of aesthetic judgement, he argues, that the baptism of "art" is performed but such judgement necessarily requires an engagement with an object. Without the materiality of the medium there is nothing to prevent "art at large" from becoming a concept rather than a name. It is his reluctance to acknowledge the importance that the medium plays in his

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[150] For the connections between Duchamp's *Fountain* and painting, see *Kant after Duchamp* 147-196, and *Pictorial Nominalism*.

own argument that leads to the ambiguity between the idea of art and the concept of art, an ambiguity which de Duve finds himself repeatedly attempting to clarify.

Refusing to address the problem of the medium, de Duve fails to explain why it is painting in particular to which the readymade responds, rather than say literature or sculpture, art forms with which it can also be seen to be in dialogue. De Duve thus imports the status ascribed to painting in Greenberg's work without examining it. At no point does he speculate on what this particular status might mean for art and the arts more broadly. As a result, when he declares that what is at stake in the readymade is the *name* art (which seems in his argument regarding *Fountain* to be equivalent to the name painting), we are left to guess precisely what is at stake in that name. Clarifying this is the task which philosopher Jay Bernstein sets himself. In an essay that argues that the readymade inherits "*the stakes of art*, not its name but what is at stake in that name" (*Against* 205), Bernstein, as I shall now attempt to show, puts the importance of the medium right back at the centre of the debate.

6. Fugitive Experience and the Conventions of Art

In *Against Voluptuous Bodies: Late Modernism and the Meaning of Painting* (2006), Bernstein credits Duchamp with drawing attention to the contingency of the physical conventions of the media of the arts. He builds upon de Duve's reading, situating *Fountain* as a nominalist gesture and, reiterating the claim that it must be understood in relation to painting, argues that in fact what makes the readymade significant is its failure to distinguish between two types of nominalism: sceptical and integral. The former emphasises the gesture as pivoting upon the idea that any object may be art, the latter emphasises the idea that nominalism is a process of purposively turning an object into art. The failure to distinguish between these different modes, Bernstein suggests, turns *Fountain* into a gesture whose meaning is permanently irresolvable: *Fountain* is, he writes, "a truly indeterminate case" (214). Duchamp's insight, Bernstein goes on to argue, was not about the practice of nominalism but rather about the practice of painting. What he grasped was, in Bernstein's dense but precise formulation, that "painting is the

wholly conventional and in principle exhaustible reduction and preservation of the claim of sensuous particularity to the two-dimensional world of the stretched canvas to which pigment is applied" (214). In order to set out exactly what this insight entails, it will be necessary to rehearse some of the arguments by which Bernstein reaches these terms, arguments which take us back to the stakes of art as outlined by Adorno. Before returning to Bernstein's reading of Duchamp, then, I will outline what "the claim of sensuous particularity" is, why painting in particular is implicated in this claim, why it necessarily "reduces" and "preserves" this claim, and what it means to say that painting is "exhaustible."

Against Voluptuous Bodies is in large measure a defence of Adorno's Aesthetic Theory. For Adorno, as Bernstein reminds us, "the arts owe their very existence to a historical calamity, the diremption of the symbol into sign and image or concept and intuition" (206). Art is generated, as I tried to show in Chapter One, by the tension in which, over the course of history, "substance [increasingly] finds itself stretched out between two poles: the one unifies and is rational, the other is diffuse and mimetic" (Adorno "Art" 383). For Adorno, it is within the tension between these two poles that art objectifies itself; the autonomy of art is therefore, as Bernstein writes, "a consequence and so an expression of the fragmentation and reification of modern life" (3). In this Adornian model, the possibility of art as such is opened out, just as it was for Greenberg, at the moment in which the forces of rationalisation divide concept from intuition, rational ideas from aesthetic ideas.

This same argument grounds Bernstein's earlier monograph The Fate of Art (1992) which also argued that autonomous art is born of the rationalisation of society and social practices, a process which has increasingly meant that the embodied, sensuous experience of the individual—intuition and the practice of intuiting, aesthetic experience—is disregarded and repressed in the name of conceptual, rational experience. In the wake of Kantian thought, Bernstein argues, and in particular in the wake of the categorical imperative, intuition and sensual experience are held to be neither valid foundations for knowledge nor grounds for action, instead rationality and logic, and the kind of knowledge that they generate, are privileged. As a result, Bernstein writes, "the

experience of art *as aesthetical* is the experience of art as having lost or been deprived of its power to speak the truth" (*Fate* 4).

The consequence of this process of rationalisation is that knowledge comes to be understood as independent of sensory perception and embodiment. Thus what is cast out with art in the process of its becoming autonomous is the capacity of sensory, embodied experience to be meaningful. "What hibernates, what lives on in an afterlife in the modern arts," Bernstein argues in *Against Voluptuous Bodies*,

> is our sensory *experience* of the world, and of the world as composed of
> objects, things, whose integral character is apprehensible only through
> sensory encounter, where sensory encounter is not the simple filling out
> of an antecedent structure but formative. (3)

For Bernstein, as for Adorno, modernist art bears witness to the repression in modernity of an alternative experience to the dominant practices of rationalisation and to the potential of that alternative experience to be cognitively significant, to be formative. Art does not express something that can be otherwise expressed, it cannot be mapped on to another antecedent structure but rather the meaning of art is in our experience of it, our encounter forms the work and the meaning of the work is the form of our encounter, its binding eloquence.[151] What is at stake in art, then, is the possibility of non-instrumental, non-rationalised cognition; what Bernstein calls "emphatic experience" which he describes as *"our now delegitimated capacity for significant sensory encounter"* (7). This entails that there is, as Bernstein writes, a

> potentiality for objects unidentified by standard, reified concepts to mean
> something other than their empirical meaning. They reveal this meaning
> otherwise by standing in relation to one another in works in ways that are
> both compelling and not capable of being captured by conceptual or causal

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[151] Bernstein's account of modernism is, as we might expect given that it is derived from Adorno's thought, a formalist one. Equally however, the influence of Adorno means that this formalism is quite specific and—importantly—unlike the rather less complex and more prevalent sense of formalist aesthetics that was discussed earlier in this chapter. While the latter understands form as in opposition to content, the organisation or structure of the work and thus something that is present in the absence of a spectator, for Bernstein/Adorno form is a dynamic process that takes place when we encounter the work, a process in which the elements of the work are held together in a coherence that does not unify, the "binding force" of *Aesthetic Theory*.

means … Adorno will go so far as to say that artworks "move toward the idea of a language of things…through the organisation of their disparate elements." (198)

The claim of art, then, is the claim of sensuous particularity addressing us in its own language. What is at stake in art is our capacity to read and interpret this language, to acknowledge the existence of a sense other than the reified concepts of instrumental reason and thus to create the possibility of an alternative to instrumental reason: "in the semblance of what is other," to recall again Adorno's phrase, "its possibility also unfolds" (*Aesthetic* 23).

It is only through the practices of art, Bernstein goes on to argue, that non-rationalised, non-instrumental emphatic experience is *rationally* accessible. Emphatic experience is rationally accessible in art because art is a product of the system of rationalisation against which it protests. It is the space within this system in which sensory experience hibernates; art's becoming the repository of this experience, however, is a consequence of sensory experience *having already been rationalised*. This is why art is the consequence and expression of instrumental logic, even though such logic is what it rebels against: art opposes, as Adorno puts it, "not rationality, but rationality's rigid opposition to the particular" (*Aesthetic* 128). Being a result of what it protests against, Bernstein argues, art is *a priori* late:

> since the claim of modernism emerges as what has been disclaimed, repudiated, and delegitimated generally, then lateness is inscribed in modernism's emergence. From the outset, the works of modernism are fugitives; or better, what they provide is fugitive experience. (8)

Modern art is thus not a repository of sensuous embodied experience but its ghost. In the terms of *Aesthetic Theory* it is semblance, an after-image or a reminder. The claim of art—its claim for the potential of sensory, embodied experience to be emphatic or significant—is, Bernstein argues, already a claim defeated: media are "*stand-ins* for the *lost* authority of nature" (my emphasis 11). Art is not an advance warning of the force of rationalisation but rather a consequence of its already having delegitimated the claims to "truth" of sensory experience.

In *Against Voluptuous Bodies* this "lateness" is figured in the sense of a temporal delay but also in the sense of an "a priori deadness" (212). It is for this reason that painting can only act as a preservation of the necessarily reduced claim of sensuous particularity, which can appear only as an effigy. Art, Bernstein writes,

> does not save or redeem or enliven its material conditions of possibility or what those conditions refer to; that is exactly what art cannot do, what it remains impotent before. Rather, at best, art preserves and transmits its material in its destitute state. … Autonomous art enlivens its materials the way embalming fluid enlivens a corpse. (210-211)

This lateness or deadness belongs to the very material and substance of modern art. It is, Bernstein claims, the aporia at the core of the modernist work, for "painting (or sculpture, or music, et. al) secures its appearing fullness upon its existential emptiness: it is without actual content, its claim to fullness made possible by its being without empirical significance, its being semblance" (9). Art can become significant for society, in other words, only as something disconnected from empirical reality but, as such, this significance is limited: the claim of art—what Bernstein calls its *material motive*—is made only on the condition that it cannot be satisfied. For art, this failure, which returns us to the paradox of autonomy that Bürger's argument turns upon, is "the only form of success now available" (10).

It is painting, for Bernstein, which best articulates the material motive of art: the art form is, he claims, at "the crux of the claim of modernism" (11). For painting, Bernstein argues, is the medium most able to transmit its material in its destitute state. Painting "can rid itself of representation and remain painting: the paint-stuff can stand in for objects by being one of them; the forming of the paint-stuff into intensive patterns does for it what representation did for the objects represented" (211). In other words, abstract painting can subside into its own materiality and become nothing other than paint on canvas, without ceasing to be art. It thus openly stages the conflict between art and empirical reality by being representative of "art" and highlighting at the same time its status as material, as an object. Painting is the art, Bernstein thus suggests, which

most clearly announces the stakes of art in modernity, not because it is the most "pure" art, but because it is the art which most risks its own collapse.

As this description of painting indicates, Bernstein's notion of modernist art is one in which art is continually under threat of dissolution into empirical reality. As for Adorno, then, for Bernstein art achieves a precarious autonomy through the force of dissonance: its autonomy is precarious because non-art, in the form of the medium itself, is held within art. The anti-art impulse, in other words, is at the very core of modernist art. It inheres, in Bernstein's account, in the materiality of the medium. Bernstein thus provides the grounding for de Duve's prioritising of painting but at the same time counters his claim that the importance of the medium recedes in modern art. As Bernstein puts this,

> in art the medium is not a neutral vehicle for the expression of an otherwise immaterial meaning, but rather the very condition for sense-making. *The specificity of (modern) art-meanings is that their mediums are not regarded as contingent with respect to the meanings communicated.* (74)

As the opposition between a generalised aesthetics and specific media is broken down, the medium is revealed not as a secondary but as a primary consideration: there can be no generalised "'art' and nothing but 'art'."[152] It is this very insight, I will suggest in the following chapter, that Duchamp in fact develops.

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[152] Art, according to this definition and playing for these stakes, is—just as Duchamp demanded that it should be—"at the service of the mind" (*Writings* 125). It is important however to distinguish between an understanding of art as cognition and the idea of "conceptual" art; for while the latter also seeks to place emphasis on the cognitive potential of art, it is against such work that Bernstein locates his argument.

Conceptual art—which is precisely the kind of "literary," "avant-gardist" art that Greenberg so detested—in fact responds directly to Duchamp's demand that art become "intellectual:" indeed, Joseph Kosuth, eschewing the "retinal titillation" of sensory experience declared that "all art (after Duchamp) is conceptual (in nature) because art only exists conceptually" ("Art After Philosophy" 18). Kosuth's contemporary Sol le Witt explains: "When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means that all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair. The idea becomes a machine that makes the art" (846). In other words, the artwork does not develop in conjunction with its materiality or medium: the "idea" of the work exists fully formed prior to its embodiment. In conceptual art, then, the sensual experience of an encounter with the art object is considered unimportant: the primary concern is the "message" or concept that the work communicates. This means that conceptual art in fact represses the capacity of our material encounter with the work to provide orientational significance. The medium is unimportant in conceptual art, for the cognitive potential of embodied, sensual experience is denied. Of course, conceptual art is governed by the contradiction between its aim, to present fully formed

According to Bernstein, what Duchamp's *Fountain* reveals is that painting is conventional. With *Fountain,* by offering a "minimum of conventionality to signal 'art': the urinal's being turned 90 degrees onto its back and placed on a black pedestal" (215), the artist shows that the conventions in which the material motive of art is articulated are arbitrary.[153] Reiterating de Duve's argument, Bernstein claims this as a sign that painting is exhausted, that it has gone as far as it can in presenting the destitution of its material by reducing itself to the monochrome. The next step, as Duve argues, would be to renounce convention entirely, to be not-painting. Duchamp's nominalism is thus, Bernstein claims, "another name for modernism's idea of progress through negativity" (213). Indeed, it is by negating painting, by being emphatically *not painting*, that the readymade reveals art's material motive and thus the importance of the medium. Still, because Duchamp lays emphasis not on the material motive of art but rather on the arbitrariness of convention, Bernstein argues, *Fountain* appears to suggest that any object can be "art:" this is to grasp the work as a gesture of sceptical nominalism. "The wrong thought that anything can be art through nominal insistence or attitude, however, sequesters the better one," Bernstein writes, which, to quote Adorno, is that "art is a second world 'composed out of elements that have been transposed out of the empirical world …[art is an] order just like the habitual order but changed in the slightest degree'" (215). In other words, *Fountain* can also be understood as integral nominalism, a generative gesture that transforms what is at first an arbitrary object into art. Art, Bernstein thus argues, is not a label that can be given to any object as if the difference between art and empirical reality depend upon a simple decision. Rather, following the Adornian argument that I attempted to sketch out in Chapter One, empirical reality becomes art through a process of objectification. The lesson that the readymade provides in this light, Bernstein claims, is "that the 'slightest degree' is an arbitrary convention

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"extrinsic" ideas, and its reality which in fact demonstrates the impossibility of this practice. Kosuth's reading of Duchamp, moreover, is highly problematic (see 86n33).

[153] Bernstein's argument is slightly complicated by historical fact here, as, given the history set out in Chapter One of this thesis (see 59n56), it seems most probable that photographer Alfred Stieglitz made these changes rather than Duchamp. Nevertheless, Bernstein's basic point that these "alterations" are necessary for us to see it as art is still plausible.

that recapitulates the historical calamity that makes art necessary" (215).[154] The readymade makes as its subject the actual process of dividing art from non-art, the aesthetic from the rational: the gesture of integral nominalism is the performance of this "historical calamity." As such, it recognises that while the conventions of the medium are arbitrary, art cannot exist without a sensuous foundation: the gesture of integral nominalism is that gesture by which the conventions of the medium are created.[155]

It is not enough, Bernstein suggests, to show that art requires a medium nor to show that the conventions of media are contingent. Indeed, he concludes that

> By equating the claims of artistic modernism with the claims of modernist painting, the securing of flatness and the delimitation of flatness, Greenberg issued a red herring that disoriented artists and critics alike. And by failing to distinguish with the readymade between integral and sceptical nominalism, Duchamp unintentionally suppressed the stakes and motives of modernism, generating a red herring of his own. Greenberg's essentialism and Duchamp's sceptical nominalism are the precise antithetical ideas of modernism, the logical extremes, which need to be avoided if the logic and paradox of modernism are to be understood. (212)

The essentialism which motivates Greenberg's avant-garde and the negative gesture of the readymade, Bernstein thus argues, belong to the opposing poles between which the tension that art requires for its objectification is generated: neither is a sufficient response to the stakes of modern art. The real challenge in the face of the exhaustion of painting, Bernstein goes on to argue, is not to unmask the medium as a set of conventions but rather to produce a *new* medium that will take up its mantel: "the *inaugurating convention must be generative; that is, it must be capable of supplying conditions and limits that enable an alternative material logic to appear*" (215). In the face of the total reification of painting, the task of the artist is to generate a set of conventions or medium with a comparably binding eloquence, to find alternative ways

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[154] It is precisely this Adornian "messianic conception" (45) of art that de Duve is opposed to, as he states in "Silences in the Doctrine". His description of the difference between art and life as symbolic and the values of art and life as flowing through one another is his attempt to counter the idea.
[155] Although he does not make the distinction, then, it is clearly as operating in the mode of integral rather than sceptical nominalism that de Duve understands Duchamp's "pictorial nominalism."

of inscribing the language of things.[156] It should be no surprise, then, that Bernstein finishes by judging *Fountain* as at best "meretricious" (215) with regard to the challenge that art faces.[157] Like Greenberg, Bernstein thus concludes, Duchamp fails to grasp that at stake in modern art is the possibility of an alternative language to that of reified conceptual rationality: it is this conclusion that, returning to the question of literature, Chapter Three will set out to dispute. I will argue that Duchamp's engagement with literature is precisely an attempt to invent an alternative mode of inscription with which to counter the "café and studio platitudes" that he found so restrictive. His work thus opens out a site by which to re-evaluate one of Warhol's least discussed but most interesting projects, the novel *a; a novel*.

Bernstein's case for modern art as a search for alternative forms to those of rational, conceptual language is persuasive. However, his Adornian narrative of history as the progressive domination of "nature" seems to foreclose on the possibility of art's success in this endeavour. In Chapter Four, I will argue that it is this narrative that leads to the idea of painting as apparently closer to lost "nature" than the other arts. Unlike Bernstein, I will attempt to show, Lyotard questions the grounds upon which "nature" is

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[156] Krauss comes to a similar conclusion in her short 2000 book on Marcel Broodthalers, entitled *"A Voyage on the North Sea": Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition.* While the proximity between her conclusion and Bernstein's is obvious, Krauss's essay is considerably more problematic as she makes the unargued assertion that "inter-media" experimentation and the "dissolving of categories" articulates art's complicity with the homogenizing drive of capital. At no point does she entertain the possibility that this refusal of disciplinary identity might be an attempt to counter the forces of rationalisation and specialisation upon which capitalism depends.

[157] It is important to note that, in the quotation cited above, Bernstein performs a little sleight of hand: Duchamp's readymade, which Bernstein had earlier interpreted as failing to distinguish between integral and sceptical nominalism, is unambiguously labelled as sceptical. The indeterminacy of the gesture is collapsed into anti-art once more. Given this assessment of Duchamp, there is some irony in that fact that Bernstein turns immediately to the work of Joseph Cornell and Louise Bourgeois, asking whether "for the purposes of *producing* a new medium … a box with a glass front or a cell of wire mesh" (*Against* 215) might do, for both Cornell and Bourgeois are of course heavily influenced by Duchamp, whose own master work *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even,* is nothing more than a "box with a glass front,"[157] the "cell" or, as he puts it "transparent cage" (see *Writings* 30) in which his bride and bachelors were separated and imprisoned. Bernstein—apparently unwittingly—suggests that Cornell's work reveals Duchamp's readymade as a dead end, when in fact Cornell himself was highly influenced and inspired by precisely this idea. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s Cornell even helped Duchamp create his boxes, following his precise instructions and undertaking the exacting and time-consuming labour of creating editions of *The Green Box* and the *Boîte-en-Valise.* Cornell consciously and directly explores the problematic that Duchamp set up: in this sense the readymade is not meretricious but highly generative, leading directly to the works that Bernstein values more highly. For more on the relationship between Duchamp and Cornell, see P. Koch.

given such authority and what that assumption entails. While Bernstein's work represents Adorno's aesthetics pushed in the direction of mournfulness and pessimism (a direction in which they were admittedly already well underway) and once again reduces the avant-garde to a purely negative anti-art gesture, Lyotard's work, I will try to show, opens out an alternative reading of Adorno that opens out possibilities for thinking about the cross-disciplinarity of avant-garde works and about the task of the avant-garde more broadly.

Chapter Three

The Matter of Words: Literature and the Book

Duchamp's early illustrative sketches and paintings such as *Nude Descending a Staircase*, *Sad Young Man* and *Dulcinea,* all demonstrate ways in which the artist actively brings literature into dialogue with the visual arts. Warhol's work, as I suggested in the previous chapter, echoes this media-scrambling and, at the same time, knowingly parodies the apparent "silence" of abstract painting. The literary experiments of both artists, however, remain under-examined.[158] My aim in this chapter, therefore, is to take account of the impact of literature on the work of Duchamp and Warhol. Doing so, I hope to show, not only opens out a fresh perspective on their art but also demonstrates that the work of both artists can be grasped as challenging reified language and literary forms, and attempting to find alternative conventions by which to inscribe sensory experience. Both artists, in other words, were attempting to create new and generative conventions for art through an exploration of how literature and the visual arts impact on one another.

Like Duchamp, Warhol evidently felt a strong and constant pull towards writers from the very beginning of his career. As he reflects in his 1980 memoir *POPism*,

> In the fifties, in my pre-Pop days, I wanted to illustrate [Truman Capote's] short stories so badly I used to pester him with phone calls all the time. ... It's hard to say now what made me want to connect my drawings with those short stories … I could almost picture Truman tilting his head and arranging his words around the pages, making them go together in a magical way. (193)

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[158] Even Reva Wolf's otherwise ground-breaking study of Warhol's involvement with the New York poetry scene in the 1960s barely touches upon the pop artist's own experimental texts. As Wolf shows, Warhol emerged into a social context dominated by abstract expressionist painters, whose close relationship to New York School poets such as Frank O'Hara is well-documented (see for example, Perloff's *Frank O'Hara: Poet among Painters*). The Pop artist wanted both to be involved in the scene and at the same time to differentiate himself and his circle from it: the dynamics of his involvement, which Wolf focuses on, are thus significant.

In these "pre-Pop" years Warhol had been primarily employed as an illustrator in the advertising trade: he was also writing and illustrating numerous picture books of his own.[159] A business interest in the commercial prospects of this type of activity, then, might go some way to explaining his desire to work with Capote. The image of the writer conjured up here, however, not only betrays Warhol's admiration but also suggests that one reason for his attraction was a feeling of identification.[160] Capote appears more as artist than writer, the process of writing imagined as a gift of vision. In imagining the writer at work, in fact, the artist seems to imply a kind of kinship between their working methods: Warhol imagines a direct and physical relationship between author and page, akin to that between painter and canvas, the writer engaged in a process of arrangement and composition rather than invention.[161]

This kinship with writers was something that Warhol would continue to seek throughout the following decades, surrounding himself with writers at all stages of his career,[162] and working with his literary protégés to produce numerous books:[163] "the Pop idea, after all, was that anybody could do anything so we were all trying to do it all. Nobody wanted to stay in one category; we all wanted to branch out into every creative thing we could" (*POPism* 134).[164] The most ambitious book project that Warhol set

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[159] Private prints include *Holy Cats by Andy Warhol's Mother* (early 50s)*, 25 Cats Name* [Sic] *Sam and One Blue Pussy* (1954) and numerous others. Privately published works include *Wild Strawberries* (1959) and *Amy Vanderbilt's Complete Cookbook* (1961). For information on these little known works and other rarely discussed Warhol projects see O'Connor and Liu, *Unseen Warhol*.

[160] In the end, Warhol seems to have established the close working relationship that he aspired to have with Capote with the poet Gerard Malanga. While Malanga helped Warhol to produce his paintings, the artist provided illustrations for the poet's collection of poetry, *Chic Death* (1971), and frequently designed "sets" or visual back-drops for his readings.

[161] Warhol also discusses Capote's compositional skills in artistic terms in *THE Philosophy of Andy Warhol*. What he really admired about Capote, he claims, was that he "filled up space with words so well." (148)

[162] In the 1960s, Warhol's circle consisted of young poets such as Malanga and Billy Name (Linich), while in the 1970s and 80s he worked particularly closely with the novelist Pat Hackett.

[163] The most notable of which are as follows: the magazine in a box, *Aspen* (1965), the play *Pork* (1971), the pop up book *The Andy Warhol Index Book* (1967), the books, *a; a novel* (1968), *THE Philosophy of Andy Warhol* (1975), *Andy Warhol's Exposures* (1979), *POPism* (1980), *Andy Warhol Diaries* (1982), the picture book *America* (1985), and *Interview* magazine which began in 1969 and continues to be published today. As the dates indicate, then, Warhol was almost continuously producing work in text and book formats as well as painting, photography, film and video throughout his career.

[164] Warhol wasn't the only person to try out the Pop principles in literature. In 1968 Ronald Gross published a collection of what he called "Pop Poems." They consisted of titled texts, which had been sections of longer texts from various "non-literary" sources; primarily advertising, of course, with one

himself was his 1968 experimental tape-recorded work *a; a novel*. The plans began in 1965: "I wanted to do a 'bad book,'" he later claimed, "just the way I'd done 'bad movies' and 'bad art'" (*POPism* 287). In order to produce the text Warhol adopted precisely the same strategy that he used in painting and turned, as usual, to technology: *a,* which purports to document a day in the life of Ondine (one of Warhol's associates at the Factory), consists not of measured and artful prose, but rather of unaltered transcripts of tape-recordings. Twenty four tapes were made, each side apparently recording a period of thirty minutes. The artist claimed that no editing was done: the tapes were transcribed by some local high school girls; they typed what they heard (or thought they heard) with all their own personal idiosyncrasies. When the transcripts were given to Warhol he was reportedly so pleased with the result that he arranged for them to be typeset almost exactly as they stood.[165] The result is a text that has neither chapters nor story, that switches unpredictably from left justified to centred to right justified text, from a conventional page layout to a newspaper-like double column, from attributing comments to various speakers to running one monologue into another.

When *a* was finally published, it was almost unanimously savaged:[166] the few critical responses that the work has since provoked have read it through the lens of Warhol's paintings and films, and as a mere curiosity. Slipping through the gaps between the disciplines of art and literary history, *a*, like Warhol's other texts, has been almost completely overlooked. Examining Warhol's interest in literature, however,

consisting of a section of the police report on the assassination of J.F. Kennedy. As the subject matter indicates, they are entirely derivative of Warhol. However they benefit neither from his humour, nor from his ability to accurately predict what non-art material will work as "pop" and what will not.

[165] This report is slightly misleading for in fact some parts were changed quite a bit as we shall see in later sections of this chapter. It is difficult to know, however, what was done by Warhol and what was done by his assistants. Poet Billy Name appears to have had responsibility for typesetting the book and chose the titles that appear as headers to each page, so he may well have made some of the other changes too. For more on the production of *a; a novel* see Bockris, "glossary."

[166] Reviews described it variously as "tedious," "vulgar," "absurdly vapid and unreadable", even "pornography" (qtd. in Kara 270). If one reason for such outbursts was the content of the novel (the protagonists are involved in drug-taking, homosexuality and prostitution), another was the challenge that *a* posed to conventional ideas about literature. Since its publication, the novel has received little critical attention. Even Wolf, who discusses Warhol's engagement with literature at length, has little to say about it. She dedicates only four pages to the work, placing it alongside Jack Kerouac's *Visions of Cody* which she suggests is its model. It is the connection rather than the book itself which interests her (see 141-145). By far the best and most lengthy response to *a; a novel* is the 2005 article "Whereof One Cannot Speak" by Craig Dworkin.

provides a means to set his work in dialogue with Duchamp's in a manner that moves beyond questions of influence, originality and repetition.[167]

The relationship between the arts also underpins the central conceit of Duchamp's masterpiece *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even,* namely the work's status as "unfinished."[168] In 1949, Duchamp wrote to his friend the artist Jean Suquet that the *Large Glass*

> is not meant to be looked at (with "aesthetic" eyes). It should be accompanied by a "literary" text, as amorphous as possible, which never took shape. And the two elements, glass for the eyes, text for the ears and understanding, should complement each another, and above all prevent one or the other from taking on an aesthetico-plastic or literary form. (*Correspondence* 283-284)

These remarks describe a kind of inversion of the Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk,* as Duchamp envisages bringing together different arts not to create a unified work but rather to prevent such an outcome: the combination of the visual and the literary is not a resolution of their differences but is conceived as a means to prevent the work from cohering. The letter also suggests that these plans never came to fruition. Indeed, curiously enough, it appears that at exactly the moment that Duchamp abandoned painting in order to devote his time to experimenting on the *Glass,* he also abruptly stopped referencing literature and illustrating literary works.[169] As his ideas for the *Glass* took shape, this seems to indicate, Duchamp's interest in literature as such began to wane.

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[167] To connect the two via their interest in literature is not to say that Warhol was aware of and mimicking Duchamp's preoccupation with literary language in the same manner that he may have mimicked the readymade: Warhol is unlikely to have been aware of Duchamp's interest in language, in fact, as little attention had been paid to this aspect of the latter's work before the 1970s. What the idea of cross-disciplinarity seems to offer then is less a sign of influence than a shared concern, arrived at independently.

[168] Duchamp began work on *The Bride Stripped Bare* in 1915, after four years of developing ideas, and stopped working on it in 1923 at which point he declared the work unfinished. See Cabanne *Dialogues* 18 and Duchamp *Writing* 127. For sustained readings of the *Large Glass* see Golding and Steefel.

[169] The 1942 installation *The Green Ray* is an exception here, adopting the title of a novel by Jules Verne and depicting the natural phenomenon around which the story is constructed. For more on this work see Molderling "Objects of Modern Scepticism."

In fact, however, an "amorphous" textual accompaniment to the *Glass* was produced. Duchamp considered numerous formats: one idea, as Juan Antonio Ramírez writes, "was 'to produce a round book, with no beginning and no end,' with a spine made up of 'rings around which the pages gyrate'" (74). Another was to construct something akin to a commercial catalogue, a set of instruction manuals or an advertising pamphlet.[170] The idea of a "poem" as accompaniment to the *Glass* also seems to have been considered, although the artist's notes suggest that such a text must "not express in the manner of a poem" (qtd. in Ramírez 270). The shape that the text finally took (it was produced some 11 years after Duchamp had ceased to work on the *Glass*) was that of a loose-leaf collection of working notes and sketches, contained in a green case. These objects were reproductions of the working notes and sketches that Duchamp had made between 1911 and 1915. Although Duchamp inscribed the work with the same title as the *Glass* itself*, The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even,* it would be as *The Green Box* that the work would subsequently be known.[171]

Despite the implication of their shared title—which deliberately situates both objects as *The Bride Stripped Bare*[172]—there has been a tendency in critical discussions to assume that *The Green Box* is a secondary object, little more than an explication of the *Large Glass*.[173] This is an approach, it should be noted, that Duchamp himself seems to have encouraged, referring to *The Green Box* as the "manuscript" for the *Glass*

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[170] See Perloff, *21st Century* 79.

[171] There were two editions of the *Green Box*, a normal edition which was unlimited in number and a deluxe edition of just 20. These were compiled to order by the artist over the course of the decades that followed. Both versions contained photographically reproduced copies of the 93 working notes for the project, collected between 1911, when the ideas for the project began to surface, and 1915 when Duchamp began to implement them. The boxes of the deluxe edition were distinguished by the fact that each contained one original. All description of the *Green Box* in this thesis is based on the one that Duchamp produced for George Hugnet, which is currently held in the archives at the Dean Gallery, National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh. It is number 13 of 20 in a limited edition, dating to the first year of production, 1934.

[172] I use *The Bride Stripped Bare*, when I mean to indicate the work as a composite of the two pieces. I will therefore refer to the *Large Glass* and the *Green Box* when I discuss one of the other of these pieces.

[173] Of the two major monographs on the *Glass*, Steefel's work is interested precisely in the iconographic and stylistic development of the work and so not in the *Box*, while Golding does little more than read the notes as explanatory texts despite acknowledging that "they fail, and indeed were not intended to explain the *Large Glass* rationally" (12). Linda Henderson sees his notes operating as "a guide book" (74) to the glass and compares them to the notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci which were published in France at the turn of the century. Judovitz also connects Duchamp's *Green Box* to Leonardo's notebooks (79-81).

(*Correspondence* 214). It has also been prevalent from the outset thanks to Andre Breton's 1934 essay "Lighthouse of the Bride," an immediate response to the appearance of the box. Although there have been some attempts to counter this tendency to approach the work as a visual work supplemented by documents, the attitude is still powerful.[174] Ramírez, for example, goes as far as to assert that the *Green Box* should not be confused with the "literary" text planned but never executed: the box, he claims instead, provides "primordial material for interpreting the significance of *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even*" (74). Clearly, Ramírez sees the box not as a part of the work but rather, despite its appearance after the *Glass*, as an artefact that is somehow prior to the "main" work: that this is the case is confirmed when he speaks of the notes as "the artist's raw material" (75). *The Green Box* is thus positioned as an object which clarifies rather than contributes to the project of the *Glass*.

Ramírez is not alone in adopting this stance; in fact it is standard practice to refer to the content of the notes as evidence with which to corroborate interpretations of Duchamp's work and to present readings of the notes as a demonstration of having uncovered the artist's intentions.[175] While the *Box* does indeed shed light on the hermetic symbols and mechanics of the *Glass*, to approach the relationship in this one-sided way is nevertheless to ignore several important facts. Firstly, there is the fact that the meaning or content of Duchamp's writings is far from clear: not only are the textual fragments full of symbols and drawings, with parts scored out or scribbled over, but even those parts in which fully formed sentences can be found are, as we shall see shortly, extremely ambiguous. In other words, to suggest that the notes are explanatory is to turn a blind eye to the fact it is in no way easier to comprehend them than the *Glass*

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[174] See Bloch, "Green Box."

[175] The assumption that the *Green Box* is a set of notes about the *Glass* rather than a work in itself also grounds the attempts by George Heard Hamilton and Richard Hamilton to typo-translate the work, rendering the hand-written notes into print. The complex typographical rendering of the *Green Box* implies that the notes are primarily communicative, and thus translatable into another form and indeed another language. These translations position the *Green Box* not as an enigmatic work of art, the meaning of which is bound up with its material form, but rather as a set of "meanings" and ideas that can be extricated from their presentation. However, the diagram of the *Large Glass* produced in this process— despite significantly reducing the work, of course—may be a useful tool for those less familiar with the piece, as the complexity of the Glass is notorious: I have therefore attached it as an appendix to this thesis.

itself.[176] Secondly, this desire to find intention and explanation in the notes ignores the warning articulated in the work which, as I will try to show shortly, is, like *a; a novel* in fact, an elaborate meditation on failures of communication and the impossibility of perfect understanding.[177] Situating the notes as "raw material," moreover, provides no means to take account of the considerable work that Duchamp put into creating the boxes: for it is hardly the case, as Ramírez claims, that Duchamp "simply selected 93 old working notes published facsimile copies of them and put them into a box, unnumbered and unbound" (74). In reality the production of the *Green Box* was an arduous affair; it was a laboured procedure, done by hand and which took an enormous amount of planning and meticulous execution over the course of several years.[178] Working some twenty years after the original notes had been made, Duchamp sourced the exact papers, tore them into fragments of exactly the same measurements, and copied the drawings and scribbles precisely.[179] Such levels of dedication suggest that the *Green Box* must be considered no less significant than the *Glass* itself.

The box, moreover, appears not to replace the idea of the literary text, as Ramírez suggests, but rather to emerge from it; in the artist's letters, interviews and statements the two ideas fuse together. In October 1934, for example, Duchamp wrote to one exhibition organiser that he would send a book but that "this book is more like a box containing photographs and reproductions of handwritten notes and photos of paintings"

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[176] Although Cabanne acknowledges this, he does so only to immediately reassert the primacy of the notes and their status as artist's intention: "many of the phrases that are found in the *box*" he writes "are enigmatic, because they are an attempt to capture [Duchamp's] thought processes on paper as they happened" (*Duchamp & Co.* 94).

[177] If I acknowledge the problem of translation here, it is not to pick holes in Hamilton's translation of the *Green Box* specifically. It rather to introduce the idea that in any attempt at translation, be it from one language to another or one genre to another or one media to another, the text or idea or image changes. Translation is a necessary task but one doomed to at least a degree of failure from the outset. Sentiments about the unreliability of language are rife in Duchamp's remarks and correspondence. See also Tomkins 31.

[178] For discussion and description of the process of making the *Green Box* see Perloff, *21st Century* 79-81, and Cabanne, *Dialogues* 77-79.

[179] Jonathan Bass Rieck suggests that Duchamp in fact made tiny alterations in each copy (see Rieck 281). He cites an electronic article that I have been unable to access by Rhonda Roland Shearer and Stephen Jay Gould ("The Green Box Stripped Bare: Marcel Duchamp's 1934 'Facsimilies' Yield Surprises" *Toutfait* 1.1 (1991)). Such a practice would be entirely in keeping with the fact that in making his reproduction by hand, Duchamp seems to have been attempting to give the works the aura of "authenticity" that *Fountain* challenges.

Fig. 3.1 Marcel Duchamp *Green Box* (exterior) (1934)
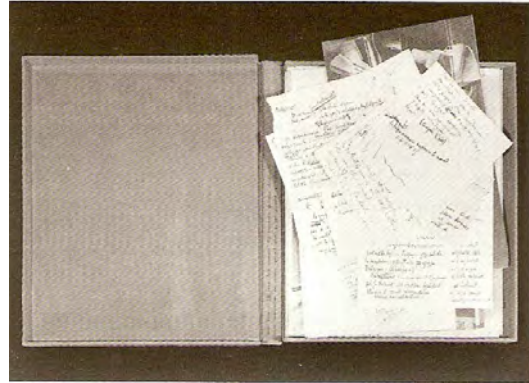
Fig. 3.2 Marcel Duchamp *Green Box* (interior) (1934)

(*Correspondence* 191). In 1959, Duchamp told an interviewer that "the description of the visual part is the literary part. That is why I say welding; the welding of the two sources is very important" (Hamilton "Radio" 77). In the late 1960s, finally, he echoes his earlier comments to Suquet, telling Cabanne that when looking at the *Glass* "one must consult the book, and see the two together. The conjunction of the two things entirely removes the retinal aspect that I don't like" (*Dialogues* 43). It is on the level of the work itself, however, that the connection between the *Green Box* and the form of the book is played out most strikingly: for the final product bears the marks of the work's "literary" inception, appearing as a kind of inverted tome which opens to reveal the title and publication details imprinted down the interior spine. (Fig. 3.1 & Fig. 3.2) The artist's description of the box as "manuscript" (rather than sketch, blueprint, or diagram) and its apparent "publication" (by "*Editions Rrose Selavy, Paris*") foregrounds the object's textuality and its relations to the process of bookmaking and, as it turns out, these relations pervade not only the *Box* but also the *Glass*. *The Bride Stripped Bare*, as Sarat Maharaj notes, carries us "to the scene of writing and its mechanized modes." In the *Glass*

> script/print references abound: a moving inscription scrolls the screen; there are encoding and decoding contraptions, ciphers and molds, an

alphabet box of letters, … [it] not only reflects on Gutenberg techniques, but with its collotypes, facsimiles, prints, photographs, reproductions and serial runs, is itself a product of them. (61)

In other words, if the readymade is a kind of abnormal painting, then the *Green Box*, and perhaps even *The Bride Stripped Bare* as a whole, is a kind of abnormal book.[180] While Duchamp may abandon both illustration and the idea of the poem as an accompaniment to the *Glass*, it is not because his interest in literature and its relation to the visual arts wanes: indeed, as he would later tell Cabanne, it was during this period in which the *Glass* was developed that he considered himself to have finally become a "literary man" (*Duchamp & Co.* 76).

It is Duchamp's abnormal book that this chapter will begin by examining, before moving on to a discussion of Warhol's *a*. What I want to argue is that in these book projects both Duchamp and Warhol clearly demonstrate their awareness of the stakes of art: they reveal the material motive of art as it operates in literature. Each artist, I will try to show, in different ways articulates a fantasy of perfect "unmediated" communication at the same time as making its impossibility apparent. They thus articulate the constraints put upon expression by the material conventions of media, and at the same moment, the necessity of such mediation, thereby revealing a productive conflict between freedom and constraint at the heart of these works. In this sense, they articulate precisely the dynamic that, as I tried to show in Chapter One, Adorno locates within the form of the artwork. In the final section of this chapter, I will examine how each work tests and attempts to transform the conventions of writing.

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[180] Given the number of print references, the paradox of the work is that the notes are handwritten: "as they speak against the hand-mark's aura, the potent spell of script, signature and manual trace closes in" (Maharaj 61). This, along with the term "manuscript," indicates that the *Box*'s status as text is part of the complex of questions about authenticity and reproduction that the *Glass* raises. For more on this see Judovitz, *Unpacking Duchamp* 121-158.
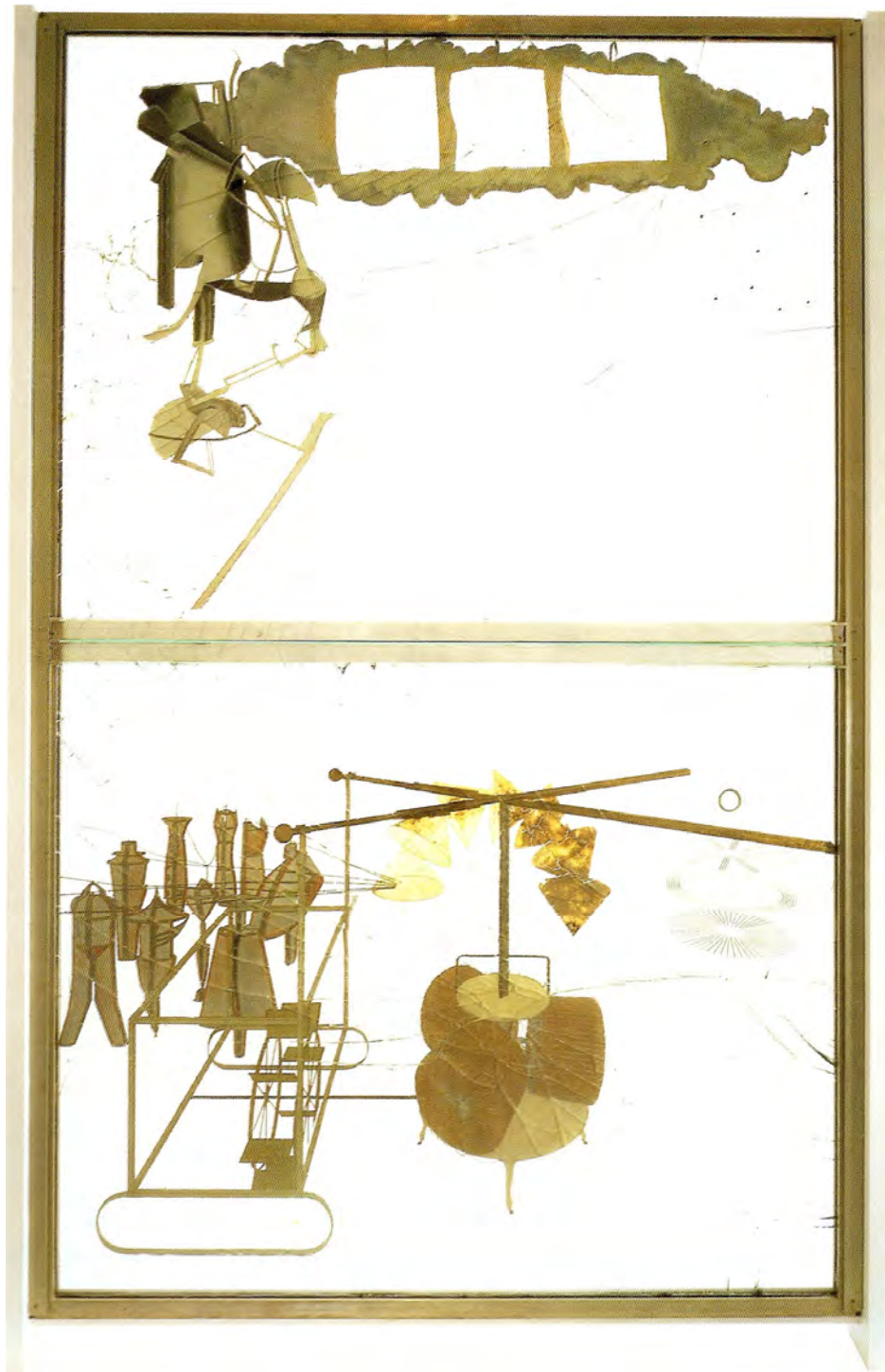
Fig. 3.3 Marcel Duchamp *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* (1915-1923) (*Large Glass*) Katherine Drier bequest, Philadelphia Museum of Art.

1. "Illumanistic Scribism": Duchamp, Mallarmé and the Book

*The Bride Stripped B*are takes the dual form, as I have indicated, of the *Large Glass* and the *Green Box*. The *Large Glass* (Fig. 3.3) is a vertical construction, split into two panes. These spaces are separated by "the bride's clothes" which consist of three, barely visible horizontal panes of glass. Each space depicts a sequence of images of machines: in the bottom pane, the space of the bachelors or "malic molds," these machines are mechanistic and industrial, like the machines that we might encounter in everyday life. This space is governed by the conventional laws of classical perspective and, as the molds are also referred to as "the cemetery of uniforms or liveries," the bachelors are identified by various professions (cuirassier, busboy, etc.). In short, the bachelor space is governed by convention and represents a "realistic" space in which the figures have recognisable roles that correspond to social positions beyond the imaginative space of the work. In direct contrast, the top pane, where the Bride is depicted, is envisaged as representing an imaginary four dimensional space. It is dominated by the "natural" forms of the opaque "Milky Way" and an insect-like machine, the Bride-motor. What links the machines in these different spaces, however, is their malfunctioning: although the notes describe their workings in some detail, the mechanisms that the *Glass* depicts in each pane are imagined as intrinsically faulty.

Despite their separation and differences, both of the areas which compose the *Glass* are imagined as spaces regulated by language: it is language which drives the operations of the machines in the *Glass*. The commands of the Bride in the four-dimensional upper section resonate down to the nine bachelors (or molds) in the three dimensional space below and inspire their movement: their rhythmic operations in turn are synchronized by the verbal litanies chanted by the Glider as it moves back and forth.[181] The bachelors, whose emissions power the lower section of the *Glass* (while the

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[181] Thus in *The Bride Stripped Bare* the visual arts, literature and music (in the form of the songs of the work) are brought together, just as in *Musical Erratum* (1913), a song about visual images and titled with a "literary" concept (an erratum is the publisher's correction of mistakes in a printed work). Both suggest a connection between the poetic, the visual and the musical, which does not resolve these different arts into

Fig. 3.4 Marcel Duchamp *Three Standard Stops* (1913-1914)

Bride's "love gasoline" keeps her motor running in the top section), are "castings" generated by "the illuminating gas" (*Writings* 51). This is to say that the illuminating gas, one of the "givens" with which Duchamp's work is constantly pre-occupied, appears here as the material by which the bachelors are generated. Provoked to respond to the Bride's commands, the bachelors belch out the illuminating gas from their "heads": this is then processed and rationalised through the pataphysical "logic" devices of the "capillary tubes." These are formed by reproductions of an earlier experiment, the *3 Standard Stops* (*3 Stoppages Étalon* 1913-14) (Fig. 3.4): Duchamp took a meter-length piece of string, held it precisely one meter above ground, dropped it and fixed the

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a harmonious unity (a "musical erratum" suggests that music is used to correct a text or the words to correct the music) Again, then, as in the letter to Suquet, while the notion of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* is brought into play it is only, as always, to 'slightly distend" the concept. On the aural aspects of Duchamp's work, see Carol James' "Duchamp's Silent Noise/Music for the Deaf"; Adcock "Marcel Duchamp's Gap Music"; Landy, "Duchamp, Dada Composer."

resulting shape. This operation to "can" chance was done three times in order to create a distorted measure, a meter/not meter.[182] As a result of its movement through these tubes, and its further processing in the "sieves" or "parasols" which arc over the grinder, the illuminating gas is provoked into various states and ultimately reduced to a lonely "splash." In the end, then, the bachelors are unable to make themselves heard; their attempt at communication (having gone quite literally through the "mill") is fruitless: "they will never be able to pass beyond the Mask = They would have been as if enveloped, alongside their regrets, by a mirror reflecting back to them their own complexity to the point of their being hallucinated rather onanistically" (*Writings* 51). The illuminating gas, the notes thus suggest, is a substance at once explosive, generative, enlightening and deadening. It serves to produce subjective identity and social positioning and at the same time, increasingly rationalised and reified, it is unable to actually facilitate, even prevents, real communication. The illuminating gas, in short, is a kind of abnormal language.

In two intriguing notes in the *Green Box*, Duchamp appears to plan to attach texts directly to the bachelor part of the glass. On the drainage slopes (the parasols or sieves) where the gas/language goes through the process of becoming abstracted and regulated, a photograph of *To Have the Apprentice in the Sun* was to be placed. This illustration of Laforgue's poetry would act as a "commentary" or an "improvement of the [illuminating] gas to the slopes" (*Writings* 51). On the chocolate grinder, there was to be a "*commercial formula, trade mark, commercial slogan inscribed like an advertisement on a bit of glossy and colored paper (have it made by a printer)*" (*Writings* 68). While poetry is invoked in order to comment on or improve the reification of the language/gas, the onanistic movement of the chocolate grinder is matched by a use of language that is the opposite of poetic, the language of pure capital, associated with the technologies of reproduction: the language of advertising reflects the bachelors

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[182] For Duchamp "the number three [was] important […] one is unity, two is double, duality, and three is the rest. When you've come to the word three," he claimed, "you have three million." (Cabanne, *Dialogues* 47)

back at themselves.[183] The bachelor section of the *Glass*, then, as it emerges in conjunction with the *Green Box*, represents a complex and ambiguous statement about the power and failures of language and about how communicative language and poetic language engage with and impact upon one another.

Untouched by the illuminating gas, the realm of the Bride is nevertheless equally concerned with language and in particular with its inscription. While the bachelors are empty castings formed by the gas/language, the bride herself is "blank desire" (*Writings* 39). The commands that she issues pass through the three "draft pistons," scrolling out as *"the top inscription"* within the flesh-coloured "Milky Way" and filling the upper section of the *Glass*. Like the standard stops, these forms were obtained through recording the way in which a regular form, here a rectangle, is made irregular by natural forces: the artist hung squares of netting material in a window and photographed the shapes they made as wind blew through them. Another example of "canned chance", what the draft pistons constitute is a form of printing.

Top inscription

> obtained with the draft pistons. (indicate the way to "prepare" these
> pistons.). Then "place" them for a certain time. (2 to 3 months) and let
> them leave their imprint as 3 *nets* through which pass the commands of the
> pendu femelle (commands having their alphabet and terms governed by the
> orientation of the 3 nets [a sort of triple "cipher" through which the milky
> way supports and guides the said commands]
> Next remove them so that nothing remains but their firm imprint i.e. the
> *form* permitting all combinations of letters sent across this said triple form,
> commands, orders, authorizations, etc. which must join the shots and the
> splash. (*Writings* 36)

Like the mechanics of the lower section, then, the draft pistons encode the bride's instructions. They create an "alphabet and terms" through a sequence of prints and imprints. Just as they are recordings of nature in the form of wind, so they record and

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[183] Thus the mechanics of the bachelor realm may be understood as foreshadowing Warhol's soup cans, which use the imagery of advertising to short-circuit meaning. For more on Duchamp's work in relation to the processes of consumerism and capitalism see Joselit *Infinite Regress*.

encode the desire of the bride within the "organic" matter of the Milky Way. Fixed in this language, these commands are intended to join the emissions of the bachelors.

This process of the inscription of "blank desire" is also called "Blossoming" and like the "splash," represents a sexual climax. It is the pleasure of the bride—"the sum total of her splendid vibrations" (*Writings* 42)—and the "happy goal" towards which the erotic machinery of the *Glass* works. Again, the Blossoming appears as a form of writing:

> *[Blossoming] ABC..*
> To make an inscription of it
> (title,).
> Moving inscription. i.e. in which the group of alphabetic units. should no
> longer have a strict order from left to right.-each *alphabetic unit* will be
> present only *once* in the group ABC. and will be displaced from A to C and
> back again.—Since, from A towards C, the inscription should, according to
> the need for equilibrium of the plate D, displace a [stabilizer] (a ball or
> anything) On this plate D. At A. there will be [a sort of *letter box*]
> (alphabet) which will go towards B and C. (to develop and study)
> Representation of this inscription: Photographic method
> Determine the alphabetic units. (their number, form, significance..).
> represent sculpturally this inscription *in movement*. and take a snap shot.
> <div align="right">(Writings 38)</div>

The blossoming of the bride is a moving inscription, complete with its own unique alphabet and grammar. It mimics the circulation of information in society, letters being "posted," photographs being taken. The Bride's language, however, is untranslatable; as Duchamp notes of the top inscription, "this alphabet very probably is only suitable for the description of this picture" (*Writings* 32). Yet, this is "the most important part" of the *Glass* (*Writings* 42). Indeed, the notes suggest that the work itself, *The Bride Stripped Bare,* is in fact the result of the blossoming:

> graphically, there is no question of symbolising by a grandiose painting this
> happy goal—the bride's desire; only more clearly, in all this blossoming,
> the painting will be an inventory of the elements of this blossoming,
> elements of the sexual life imagined by her the bride-desiring. In this
> blossoming, The bride reveals herself nude in 2 appearances: the first, that
> of the stripping by the bachelors. the second appearance that voluntary-

imaginative one of the bride. On the coupling of these 2 appearances of pure virginity—on their collision, depends the whole blossoming, the upper part and the crown of the picture. (*Writings* 42)

The work is an "inventory" of the sexual life of the bride, a means to cataloguing the elements of her blossoming. It is a projection that is generated at the moment in which the bride's own imaginative vision collides with that of the bachelors: the two imaginations clash in order to produce the blossoming, in order to produce the inscription. If, on one hand, then, *The Bride Stripped Bare* appears as a warning of the unreliability of language, on the other, it is also the dream of an erotic epiphany embodied in a unique and untranslatable writing. At the heart of the work is a vision of a moment of perfect clarity, a kind of orgasmic coupling of imaginations by which the bride and bachelors can communicate.[184]

The fantasy of *The Bride Stripped Bare* is a kind of perfect match between the written language of the bride and the spoken language of the bachelors, a moment in which the commands encoded in the blossoming meet with the processed splash. Yet, as we have seen, the bachelors' emissions do not reach the bride. As malfunctioning machines, the bachelors remain celibate and the Bride remains the apotheosis of "pure virginity": their desired union is a virginal coupling, a paradoxical impossibility, as they remain separated from one another by "the bride's clothes," isolated at the very moment of their coupling in the *Glass*. It is in this mode of frustrated coupling/non coupling, a connection between unconnected things, that, I will argue shortly, we might also understand the relationship between the visual *Large Glass* and the literary *Green Box*. At this juncture, however, I want to turn to one of the literary sources for the *Glass,* Mallarmé.

Mallarmé's poetics, as I indicated in the last chapter, were a source of inspiration for both Duchamp and Greenberg.[185] For Greenberg the key notion that Mallarmé

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[184] On the relation of the Glass to the work of Joyce and the Joycean epiphany, see Maharaj 70.
[185] This is discussed briefly by Rabaté who identifies Duchamp's *Given* as a visual literalisation of the second verse of Mallarmé's poem "The Tomb of Charles Baudelaire" (See Rabaté, *Given* 71).

provides is that of purity, a state to be obtained through processes of negation.[186] In painting, Greenberg tells us, purity means that the sensuous plastic values appeal to eyesight alone, pure painting is the negation of subject matter. In terms of poetry, the aim is "to deliver poetry from the subject and to give full play to its true affective power" and, we may recall, the content is what the poem "does to the reader, not what it communicates" ("Laocoon" 33-34). As Greenberg rightly suggests, for Mallarmé poetry is not pure sensuous materiality—"the sound of words is a part of their meaning, not the vessel of it" (33)—but rather the "pure notion" (Mallarmé *Selected* 75). "I say: a flower!" Mallarmé proclaims "and there arises musically, as the very idea and delicate, the one absent from every bouquet" (76).[187] Pure poetry is not the sensuous physicality of the word—the sound or graphic appearance—but rather the power of words to invoke ideal forms. In other words, pure poetry is a poetry which transcends the difference between the particular object and the general concept to articulate a "pure notion," pure sense independent of materiality: like the epiphany of the *Large Glass*, Mallarmé's pure poetry is not "mediated" at all but rather appears as sense itself.

What Mallarmé presents us with is the idea of pure poetry as fully autonomous, language as freed from ordinary reference, no longer a sign of something else but sense itself. This is a similar point to that made more recently by literary critic Paul de Man who writes that the phenomenal understandings of "literariness" of the kind proposed by Lessing are naïve.[188] Literariness is not a property of the material of the medium he suggests, in fact

> the convergence of sound and meaning … [is] a mere *effect* which language
> can perfectly well achieve, but which bears no substantial relationship, by
> analogy or by ontologically grounded imitation, to anything beyond that

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[186] For an interesting discussion of the political ramifications of this negativity in the cold war context, see Caroline Jones *Eyesight Alone* 83.

[187] In the original : ("*Je dis : une fleur! Et, hors de l'oubli où ma voix relègue aucun contour, en tant que quelque chose d'autre que les calices sus, musicalement se lève, idée même et suave, l'absente de tous bouquets*" (*Oeuvres* 213).

[188]The major concern of the article "The Resistance to Theory" is why post-structuralist literary theory has been received with such skepticism and why it should be considered important. Although I will not be drawing upon de Man again, this problem will be explored in some detail in the following chapter in the context of Lyotard's work.

particular effect. … [The] relationship between word and thing is not phenomenal but conventional. (10)

In other words, there is a difference between the phenomenal experience of language—here sound but equally its graphic appearance—and the experience of it as sense: these two are not necessarily, but contingently, connected. Like paint on canvas they are a matter of convention. Literariness, de Man goes onto argue, is a result of the potential autonomy of language, the capacity of language to not refer (a capacity born of the recognition that its reference is purely conventional rather than something inherent in the word). In this sense literary language does not "mean" but *is*: the literariness of a text comes from its "freedom from referential restraint" (10). Importantly, this makes literature a space in which "negative knowledge about the reliability of linguistic utterance is made available" (10). The lesson of literary language, then, according to de Man, is precisely the lesson that *The Bride Stripped Bare* meditates upon: the unreliability of language, its opacity and its ambiguity.

An immediate consequence of thinking about the poetic in this way is that it has to be distinguished from aesthetics. Indeed, de Man argues, literary language, as language that demonstrates that there is no necessary connection between sense and phenomenal experience, "involves the voiding, rather than the affirmation, of aesthetic categories" (10). The literary or poetic is, as he envisions it, a kind of negation or opposite of the aesthetic, language cleansed of the illusion of a direct or necessary connection with matter. Yet this results in a paradox, for, as de Man acknowledges, it is at the moment in which language becomes literary, freed of reference, that the materiality of the word itself becomes the focus of attention. "The ensuing foregrounding of material, phenomenal aspects of the signifier" de Man writes, "creates a strong illusion of aesthetic seduction at the very moment when the actual aesthetic function has been, at the very least, suspended" (10). In other words, at the same time as language approaches "literature", as it achieves a freedom or autonomy from referentiality, it appears as material and phenomenal, as aesthetic.

Greenberg judges poetry on aesthetic rather than poetic terms, an approach legitimated, as I suggested in the last chapter, by his reading of *Laocoon*. In that text,

Lessing argued that painting and poetry shared a common goal: each attempted to capture nature in representation. The skilled poet is able to capitalise on the sophisticated conceptual meanings of words and at the same time to make language appear as a "natural" sign by mimicking natural sounds, rhythm and pacing. Poetry thus overcomes the arbitrariness of its signs by appealing to sensory experience: the poet attempts to render language sensually evocative of the phenomenon that it represents. For Lessing, in other words, the telos of the visual arts and the literary arts are one and the same: like visual aesthetics, literariness is held to operate through and be judged upon its sensuous, perceptual values. The plastic values of painting are understood as comparative to the phonic and rhythmic values of poetry. Lessing, in other words, sets up a notion of poetics *as* aesthetics.[189] Unlike Lessing, Greenberg does not view painting as a "natural" sign. However, as he sees it, the task of art has changed; its goal is no longer to represent either nature or concepts but rather to present art itself in the form of the medium. While he refuses the semiological distinction that Lessing sets up, Greenberg maintains the basic premise that the arts are motivated by the same goals and measured by the same criteria.[190] Eliding poetics with aesthetics, Greenberg views literature as compromised by the fact that it cannot remove itself from representation (pure poetry is a fantasy, after all) and, viewing the relationship between the arts through the prism of *Laocoon*, deems painting to be the superior art.

Yet, as I suggested in the last chapter, it is possible to interpret Mallarmé's ideas differently. Indeed, his work makes available an important insight, namely that poetry *like all the arts* is dependent upon the clash between materiality and sense. Art is not defined solely by its material support but nor can it exist without it: there is a linguistic moment in even the most abstract painting, as there is a material moment in even the

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[189] Wellbery describes the "central core" of Lessing's aesthetics as follows: "The aesthetic is a general form of representation, sensate intuition, which is realised in different semiotic media. Phrased in another way, the different types of sign are used aesthetically when they yield the sensate intuition or illusionary presentation that characterises the aesthetic in general" (200).

[190] The way that Greenberg reduces art (most famously painting) to its material support in fact, as I hope my discussion of Bernstein showed, is one of the most problematic aspects of his work.

most autonomous language.[191] The transcendence that Mallarmé's dream of pure poetry seeks is impossible: strikingly, this realisation lies at the heart of Mallarmé's work, as his writing on the Book demonstrates. "One does not write luminously on a dark field;" Mallarmé admits, "the alphabet of stars alone, is thus indicated, sketched out or interrupted; man pursues black on white" (*Selected* 77). In practice, in other words, poetry takes place in the materiality of ink on the page: poetry is born of the dissonance between poetry and the non-poetry of the material word. It is this insight, I think, that Duchamp takes.

In "The Book: A Spiritual Instrument" Mallarmé describes his vision of the ideal physical form of literature. Mallarmé's Book (the word is always capitalised in Mallarmé's writing in order to distinguish it from the banal, commonplace object) is neither merely the product of a writer, nor simply the material means for distributing ideas but rather the space in which "all earthly existence must ultimately be contained" (80). It is "a hymn, all harmony and joy, an immaculate grouping of universal relationships come together for some miraculous and glittering occasion" (80), or, as Paul Valéry describes it, "a *mental instrument* designed to express the things of the intellect and the abstract imagination" (312). All of these descriptions might equally apply to *The Bride Stripped Bare*, a work which, as I have tried to show, might itself be considered an experiment with the book form.

Mallarmé's Book is the physical form in which the ideal forms of poetry may be adequately expressed: it is an experiment with the aesthetic experience of engaging with the book, the page, the word, aimed at developing the physical form of literature into "the divine and intricate organism required by literature" ("Book" 83). It is thus, as Johanna Drucker puts it, an attempt at a synthesis "between a philosophical vision of the book as an expansive instrument of the spirit and the capacity of its physical form to reflect and embody thought in new visual arrangements" (36). The Book, in other words,

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[191] We are returned, in fact, to the very point that Adorno made in "Commitment". However, this is not to say that the consequences of Adorno and de Man's positions are the same. I draw this comparison without wishing to conflate their thought. I simply want to suggest that on this single point their thinking is comparable. I have brought de Man's work into the discussion because in this essay he articulates the precise idea in which I am interested in here, I will not attend to his work more broadly in this thesis because it is removed from the debates on avant-gardism which are my main focus.

represents the physical embodiment of pure poetry, the aesthetic form of the poetic, a creation as arising from the materiality of language, text and print itself. It is

> the total expansion of the letter, [and] must find its mobility in the letter; and in its spaciousness must establish some nameless system of relationships which will embrace and strengthen fiction. … [We] will misunderstand the true meaning of this book and the miracle inherent in its structure, if we do not knowingly imagine that a given motif has been properly placed at a certain height on the page, according to its own or to the book's distribution of light. ("Book" 82)

Mallarmé's work thus insists upon recognition of the meaning of form and the material embodiment of sense. It is a work in which typography, layout, binding and even the foldings of the pages develop significance and are experienced as meaningful.

It is, of course, with the posthumously published *Un Coup de Dés* (1896) that Mallarmé came closest to creating a work that might be thought of in these terms. The poem experiments with the properties of the form; its sense manifests itself in the relationship between the page and the words. Valéry describes his reaction to first being shown the work as follows:

> It seemed to me that I was looking at the form and pattern of a thought, placed for the first time in finite space. Here space itself truly spoke, dreamed, and gave birth to temporal forms. Expectancy, doubt, concentration all were *visible things*. With my own eye I could see silences that had assumed bodily shapes. (309)

As Valéry's words make plain, *Un Coup de Dés* is a work that combines the concerns of poetry with those of the visual arts. It spatialises the temporal form of literature, creating "a sort of material intuition … [which] should make us anticipate what is about to be presented to the intelligence" (Valéry 312). Mallarmé does not collapse aesthetics and poetics into one as Greenberg does, then, but rather attempts to hold them in an illuminating tension in the form of the book. *Un Coup de Dés* illustrates the key lesson of Mallarmé's thought: literariness and aesthetics are neither opposed nor separable, they are rather constituted in and through one another. In the process of becoming autonomous, the work of literature is always in the process of becoming aesthetic, yet it

is in this process that it becomes aesthetic and takes on significance that overflows the meanings of reference: it is a dynamic conflict between sense and matter which creates the force of the work. As Lyotard writes,

> [what] the *Coup de dés* says is that language does not abolish its other, that the work itself participates in the sensible, that the choice is not between choosing the written word or renouncing it … that language and its other are inseparable. (qtd. in Carroll *Paraesthetics* 35)[192]

The real lesson of Mallarmé's work, then, is that to counter the language of the bourgeoisie—to move beyond "café and studio platitudes"—it is sufficient neither to retreat into the materiality of the medium like abstract painting, nor to attempt to ignore the medium in a quest to find "art" or "poetry." Rather what is required is an acknowledgement of the role that the material properties and conventions of language play in generating meaning: there is a literary moment in painting as there is an aesthetic moment in literature.[193]

It is precisely this lesson that Duchamp's work takes up, as he investigates language, how it is presented, how it operates, how it changes and—as I will try to show shortly—the possibilities its material forms open out. It is as a consequence of this lesson that he insists that poetic words are not "essential concept[s] which [do not] exist at all in reality" but rather "words distorted by their sense" (Cabanne *Dialogues* 90). In Duchamp's work, as in Mallarmé's, the poetic is brought into contact with the aesthetic, not in order that their differences be resolved but in order that they challenge one another and trouble one another: this difference is mobilised, as I tried to show in

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[192] This quotation is taken from *Discours Figure* (1971) and translated by Carroll.

[193] While Mallarmé's work envisages the virtual ideal form of poetry and the harmonious integration of the aesthetic and the poetic in the material form of the Book, at the same time he recognises that poetry is, like the other arts, the result of and compensation for the failure of language and the fragmentation of experience: purity is impossible and even undesirable. As Eric Gans explains Mallarmé recognised in the *Gesamtkunstwerk* "the dangerous illusion that the imaginary reality [art] designates is contiguous with, and therefore accessible to, the world of the spectator" (17). Recognizing "pure" transparency as a potentially threatening chimera, therefore, Mallarmé sought to "*opacify* [poetic form] by dissolving its clearly perceptible contours into a maze of half-finished gestures and allusive associations. The forgetting of form becomes impossible because naive illusion is never allowed to arise in the first place" (Gans 17). In other words, according to Gans' reading, just as *The Bride Stripped Bare* does, Mallarmé's work foregrounds its materiality and opacity in order to prevent the kind of illusion that the *Gesamtkunstwerk* entails.

Chapter One in the case of *Fountain*, in order to keep works unfinished, incomplete, dynamic. This, indeed, is how we can best grasp *The Bride Stripped Bare*, I think, as a coupling/non-coupling of the aesthetic and the literary. Just as the *Green Box* cannot explain the *Glass*, the *Glass* is not the visual translation of the "ideas" encoded in language in the notes. Rather the notes project the picture, as the picture projects the inventory (or "catalogue" or "description") of its components in the *Box*: the work itself is produced through this fantastic collision. Its spatial forms moreover are bound up with its temporal forms: the notes apparently precede the *Glass,* being written as ideas took shape, but the *Glass* in turn precedes the appearance of the notes, which appear as an after-thought to the work. In this way, meaning, in the form of subject matter or intention, cannot be pinned down and fixed: the work remains definitively unfinished: the "illuminatistic Scribism" (*Writings* 78)[194] of the *Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* is a "delay", which is "poetic, in the most Mallarméan sense" (Cabanne *Dialogues* 40).[195]

2. The Mechanical Scribe: Automatism, Realism and *a; a novel*

In contrast to the elaborate machinations of the *Bride Stripped Bare, a; a novel* appears as a more simply conceived work. It was created by recording and presenting the events, conversations and sounds of Warhol's immediate environment. Warhol's approach to literature, this suggests, begins from the idea that literature can be defined purely in terms of its material form or *what* it is.[196] His assumption leads to a sequence of

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[194] We might note that, contra to what Bernstein calls for, Duchamp does not produce a *new* medium, but reconfigures an old one, an observation the importance of which will become clear in the next chapter. This aspect of Duchamp's work (its return to pre-modernist ideas and concerns) is paid particular attention by Judovitz who draws a series of fascinating connections between his work and that of Leonardo da Vinci and Giuseppe Archimboldo (see 75-87).

[195] The delay is also a pun, it is worth noting, as the pun is delay. As Cabanne notes "the expression "retard en verre" is a homophone of several others, notably "retard d'envers" [delayed reversal], "retard envers" [delay in relation to/delay towards]." (*Duchamp & Co.* 76) As a pun, unstable and shifting, it prevents a single fixed meaning from emerging and ties the untranslatable ambiguity of the phrase to the opaque matter of the word.

[196] Warhol thus begins from what literary theorist Gerard Genette, in his 1999 essay "From Text to Work", terms the idea of literature as "constitutional" rather than "conditional" literature. The former, Genette suggests, is attended by the question of what literature is, the latter by the question of when literature is. I

"logical" equations: a novel is a book; a book is printed text on bound pages; a printed text on bound pages, therefore, is a novel. Warhol creates a novel by creating an artefact in the material form of a novel and baptising it *a; a novel*.[197] Combining a nominalist gesture with the presentation of a work that superficially conforms to the material requirements of literature, the work appears to suggest that what differentiates literature and non-literature is simply formal presentation.

It is no surprise, then, that what *a* represents in the context of Warhol's broader catalogue is simply the transferral of tried and tested techniques from painting and film into a new medium. For all of Warhol's work, across different media, was produced through processes that were as mechanized as possible. Throughout his career Warhol experimented with many forms of technology and technological reproduction from the rubber stamp through silkscreen printing and photography to the video camera.[198] The refusal to edit was also a key strategy in his film-making: the artist simply turned on the camera and left it running,[199] collating material collected into almost unbearably long and repetitive movies.[200] *a; a novel,* then, is created through precisely the same techniques as Warhol's paintings and films, presenting the unedited transcriptions spliced together like the reels of his films or the canvases of his serial works and, in so doing, attempting to capture in the physical form of the book the temporal form of the day. Just as with the electric chair paintings, then, with *a; a novel* Warhol pivots between mimicking and mocking formalist aesthetics. For, on one hand, it asserts that

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hope to show in this chapter that these questions, as Warhol's work meditates upon them, are not as discrete as Genette's essay suggests.

[197] Reading *a* as a gesture of sceptical nominalism of course dovetails neatly with the "anti-art" interpretation of Warhol's other work, an interpretation which has been dominant from the outset and remains so today. On the predominance of this reading see Foster "Death in America" and Walker.

[198] For a discussion of the techniques Warhol used see Crone. His most radical "mechanization" was of course the technique of producing paintings by silkscreen printing, little more than a kind of stenciling process, which Warhol adopted in the 1960s. The majority of his paintings were subsequently produced in this way. He even claimed on a number of occasions that his paintings were actually produced by his assistants. Although he later retracted this saying "I really do all the paintings. We were just being funny." See Buchloh, "One" 45.

[199] Jane Holzer recalls "Andy would just turn on the camera and walk away. And he'd tell you 'Don't blink.' That was his only direction" (*Unseen Warhol* 47). For more on Warhol's films see O'Pray.

[200] Probably the most famous example of such technique is *Empire* (1964), an eight-hour unmoving single shot of the Empire State Building. The 1963 films *Kiss* and *Sleep*, however, also experiment with repeated footage and serial structure. See O'Pray and S. Koch for more on Warhol's films.

the arts are a set of purely formal devices but, on the other, it implies that all media are alike, that the same strategies and techniques can be used to create art in any form thus directly contradicting the principles of formalist aesthetics associated with Greenberg.

Warhol's novel, like *The Bride Stripped Bare*, is on one level a fantasy of perfect immediacy. The aim of absenting himself from the process of production, the artist often claimed, was in fact to capture reality without mediation. "I never liked the idea of picking out certain scenes and pieces of time and putting them together," he claimed "because then it ends up being different from what really happened – it's just not like life" (*POPism* 110). Just as Warhol aimed to capture "life" on film, so too he aimed to capture "life" on tape: *a* was conceived and marketed as presenting a day in the life of the Factory. It is in this manner that the most vocal champion of Warhol's writing, his biographer Victor Bockris, understands the work. His reading of *a*, presented in the short essay "Andy Warhol the Writer," builds on the relation between Warhol's book and his visual art by drawing an analogy between the tape-recorder and the camera and suggesting that the novel can be best understood as a snapshot or "voice portrait" of Ondine and the Factory. He explains that "the most accurate and revealing image of the subject via the topics he or she chooses to discuss, as well as the grammar, syntax and vocabulary used" can be obtained by faithfully transcribing recordings as they sound: "if a tape is transcribed very accurately, with each "uhm", "err" and "but" included, what is redacted is a *voice portrait*." (17) Conceived of as presenting a direct *image* of the subject, the voice portrait is grasped by Bockris as a means to presenting first-hand, bypassing the need for second-hand description: in this sense, like the visual portrait which traditionally is held to capture not just a photographic likeness of its subject but something of their character or presence, the technique seems to offer an enhanced immediacy. The more automatic the inscription process, Bockris further suggests, the more immediate the presence within the text.[201] The material of the work itself, in other

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[201] Bockris' reading, like all readings of *a; a novel* that I have come across in fact, completely ignores the role of the typists, a pool composed of local high school girls and one or two female members of the artist's set. Indeed, in Bockris' reading of the novel as voice portrait, the typists are reduced to mere recording technologies. This gendered omission, in which the male Warhol and Ondine are hailed as the producers of the work while the female typists are forgotten, is entirely keeping with the masculine logic

words, is not what is important here; it is the reflection of the Factory that it seems to provide on which Bockris focuses. Indeed, in this account the work is judged not as literature or art but rather according to its documentary value. For Bockris, the book represents a kind of ultimate readymade, transparently mirroring events by capturing speech in writing. It is a kind of snapshot of the Factory scene, a rendezvous between artist/scene and reader with as little mediation as possible.

The problem with Bockris's reading is immediately apparent to anyone who has even glanced at the book. Due to its lack of editing, the text preserves traces of its production processes and the various stages of remediation it went through. (See Fig. 3.5) Veering across the pages, and following neither convention nor logic, this is a text in which words and sounds break down into letters and marks as the typists try to capture the sound of the tapes: the repetitions, stutters and ruptures of the first sentences establish the tone which remains until the book's close some 400 pages later. Faced with such text, readers do not find themselves transported to the world of the Factory but instead confronted with an opaque and material page that seems to offer up little in the way of sense. What *a; a novel* does *not* do, then, is present an image of the speakers, nor does it evoke a sense of having been at the Factory: in fact, as one reviewer complained, "most of the time, you can't tell who is talking to whom about what; … and at least a third of the sentences simply make no sense whatsoever" (Carroll "Warhol?" 45).

In his brief discussion of the work Wayne Koestenbaum makes precisely this point. He reiterates the idea of *a; a novel* as portrait—this time an indirect self-portrait by Warhol—and, like Bockris, he too suggests spoken language is more authentic than written language. In contrast however, he understands the transcription process not as preserving the sense of the event or the image of the speaker but as destroying this immediacy. *a*, he argues, "[highlights] how the act of conversion, from one galaxy to another, disembodies and alienates the material—embalms it, expunging the soul," continuing a few lines later to suggest that "the novel communicates the tragic gap … between a living act and its transcription on the dead page" (117). For Koestenbaum, in

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of the Factory. For more on Warhol's work in relation to gender and sexuality see Caroline Jones, *Machine* and Doyle and Flately, *Pop Out: Queer Warhol.*

laugh *slightly*.) (*Pause*.) This is that girl's, I got that

D—Where?

O—Petticoat, Brooklyn. She's not getting it back. (*Laughs*.)

D—What girl?

O—It's hers.

D—Oh.

O—I'm not going to part with it. (*Mumble mumble*.) Oh ooh, my callas, oh ho.

R—Your calls. He's worried about his callas; it can't even sing.

O—My callas is hurting me.

D—You can sit here and all htroughout the whole day.

O—I know I can't help it and I repeat it and but, Walter would say if he were referring to his foot, dip is swelling. (*Singing*) You can help me hold my dress, mmmmmmmm, you can help restore my dress, mmmmmmmm

D—Ha ha.

O—You can push me in the dress, mmmmmmmmmm, but remember it's my mess. I'm going from here to that bause that's really the Italian word for mess. That really is the Italian word for

mess because I think it is. The musical stuck?

R—(*singing*) Stuck in the name of love.

O—Stuck in the nam eof God. (*Laughs*.) That could be one of Christ's songs.

R—Stop in the name of love.

O—What is that, is that that same thing over and over, that haunting melody? I don't know.

R—Stop in the name of, haunting me. (*In a high voice*) Haunting melody? Haunting melody?

D—Ha ha ha ha

R—(*in same high pitched voice*) Haunting melody, come to the, how about (*singing*) come to the casbar and dance neath the rasbar doodoo

O—Dance neath the rabar? and give you the rest . . .

D—What was that? (*Pause*.)

O—What embago. Ribumba RIBUMBA. I want to ribumba you. Ri who you want.

R—Boom boom boom boom boom boom I wa wa wa

O—Li di cuma nu na na (*singing*)

R—Boomboomboomboooomboooomboom.   O—Remember when everybody saw Carlton Carpenter in the museum?   D—Ohhh.   O—The day we were goingto the museum of of   —DOhh.   R—(*in a high voice*) Blah blah blah blah blah blah blah said the monkey to the chimp.

     O—(*in a whisper*) Let's go go, that all guy.   R—Blahblahblah said the chimpy to the monk.   D—You haven't had a scene today. O—Huh?   D—You haven't had a flight.   O—With who?   R— (*in a very high pitched voice*) All night long they'd chatter away, all day long they were happy and gay.   D—With anybody.   O—Well it's boiling toward an invisible   D—Uh hu hu hu hu.   O—No, why should it? This is one of the most peaceful, hellish-like days I've ever seen.

     D—Oh really?   O—I'm in perfect torment, my throat's gone.

M—Let's go.   R—Yes, we need air.   D—Oh.   O—Just leave . . .

     D—The whore house is all the way down avenue A.   O—The

Fig. 3.5 Andy Warhol *a; a novel* (1968)
New York: Grove Press, 1968.

fact, the book mimics Warhol's paintings, which he reads as a critique of mass media and celebrity culture. Like the images of the Coca Cola bottles and the car crashes, the novel evokes the deadening effects of a modern existence increasingly dominated by capitalism and techno-scientific rationality. *a; a novel* is not a successful "voice portrait" but an example of the deadening effect of reification.

On one level, Bockris and Koestenbaum represent two opposed responses to Warhol's book. For Bockris the novel is a success, important evidence of the Factory scene; for Kostenbaum it is a failure which demonstrates the power and the threat of technological reproduction and mediation. On another level, their responses operate from the same assumption, as both critics approach the work as a form of documentary, aiming to capture unmediated reality and thus, in a manner that recalls the treatment of Duchamp's notes, understand it in terms of recording rather than art-making. Neither commentator makes anything of the fact that Warhol titled the work *a; a novel*, thereby placing it in relation not to documentary but to literature.

It was in terms of Surrealist automatism in fact that the novel was conceived of among the Factory crowd: at the time of its production, *a* was held to be a case of "automatic talking."[202] Automatic writing is practiced by setting pen to paper while keeping the conscious mind "switched off". For the Surrealists, its aim was to free the writer from the habitual conventions of language and logic.[203] Such conventions were considered by Surrealists such as André Breton to be "rusting barriers to life" which suppressed "the reality of the human condition" (Breton "Automatic" 12), a reality which automatism could reveal. The practice, Breton claimed, provided a means of allowing what was repressed by those structures to emerge. It was "a true photography of thought" (qtd. in Clinton 12), the practitioners themselves becoming, like Warhol's tape-recorder, "modest recording instruments" (qtd. in Clinton 13). The automatic text, then, was held to be an articulation of the subconscious which, once externalized, could

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[202] This is how Warhol's assistant Billy Name continues to understand the work. See Bockris, "a" 453.

[203] For more on the history of automatic writing see Clinton. This technique was also frequently used by psychologists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (see Barkworth, and Downey and Anderson), among whose number was the young Gertrude Stein who would later use automatism in her own writing (see Hoffman; Stafford).

be read and analyzed by the conscious subject. In this manner, the attempt to detach the conscious mind from the writing body was aimed not to dissociate the personality of the producer from the work, but rather, as Breton claimed, "to unify that personality" ("Automatic" 25). In other words, by allowing the subconscious to express itself unedited through the body and present itself to the conscious mind, a unity of the subject was established.

In fact, the idea of automatism as a means to liberate oneself from convention had already made a significant impact in the artistic circles of New York in terms of the visual arts: it was one of the key painterly techniques of Abstract Expressionism which was perhaps the most dominant force in the contemporary American art scene of the time and the backdrop against which Warhol's art is often read.[204] Heavily influenced by Jungian psychology, Jackson Pollock, the group's leading light, had begun in the late 1940s to lay canvases horizontally on the ground, sloshing and dripping paint over them with "automatic movements."[205] Approaching the canvas as a field to move within rather than an object to be created, Pollock felt he could detach mind from body to the extent that he could claim "when I am in the painting, I'm not aware of what I'm doing. It's only after a sort of 'get acquainted' period that I see what I have been about" (Spring 54-57). Action painting was a cathartic process, a release from consciousness and intention. Crucially, for Pollock as for the Surrealists, this detachment aimed not to dissociate the personality of the producer from the work, but rather, to allow access to the subconscious, essential "deep self" which resided within. The practice, by reducing the body to the level of machine, attempted to provide a connection to what is most essential in the human: "my concern" as Pollock put it, "is with the rhythm of nature" (Spring 57).[206]

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[204] See in particular Buchloh "One" and Krauss "Carnal Knowledge" which discusses Warhol's work of the 1970's as a specific response to Pollock. Krauss writes that Pollock's work and its "supposed invention of a kind of drawing that, in enclosing nothing but 'eyesight itself,' leaves the viewers body behind as a kind of discarded skin" (112) is countered with the use of the body in Warhol's Oxidation series, in which the canvases were urinated upon.

[205] For a detailed look at Pollock's automatism and its relationship to Surrealism see Rubin.

[206] Pollock's own hand written notes, dating from about 1950 clearly demonstrate that Pollock's concern is with humanism rather than technology, see Karmel 24.

Surrealist automatism, then, positions the conventions of literary genres and writing more broadly as impositions that frustrate real significance: automatism is a strategic denial of subjective or authorial autonomy in an attempt to achieve a freedom from these constraints, a greater autonomy. In this sense, the Surrealists approach the practices and conventions of writing or painting as something external, imposed on the "reality" of the subject: without these conventions a more profound meaning might be discovered. However, as is well known, while in theory Surrealist automatism evades the conventions of language in practice it was a different story: as Breton himself admitted, not controlling the text during the writing practice was extremely difficult.[207] "Switching off" the mind, the "unconscious" automatic writer did not slip out of writerly convention but rather slipped *into* the habits and conventions of writing: such conventions, the practice demonstrated, were internalized to the degree that evading them was all but impossible. In other words, what the results of the Surrealist experiments showed was that the conventions of writing and grammar were not externally imposed upon the subject, but that the subject generated itself through those conventions: the "rusting barriers" are necessary and intrinsically bound up with subjectivity. This is to say that in the practice of automatic writing, what speaks is not the pre-linguistic subconscious of the individual author, but rather language itself.

It is this practical lesson that Warhol draws upon. *a; a novel* is clearly not a work which seeks to unify the personality: there is no pretence here that the aim is to present Ondine's subconscious thoughts for reflection. Indeed, what the work seems to question is the extent to which the individuals involved are independent speaking subjects, or whether they appear as such because they allow themselves to be used by language. This idea of subjectivity and meaning as created by mediation in fact motivated Warhol's attitude to subjectivity more broadly.[208] Certainly he applied it to the people that surrounded him:

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[207] Indeed, in "The Automatic Message" his essay on the technique, Breton describes how as the Surrealist writers began to get competitive as regards whose automatic writing was better and began to produce increasingly more nuanced and poetic "automatic" texts, the idea that the mode was driven by the subconscious or the body alone seemed increasingly implausible.

[208] For many years, the artist referred to his ever present tape-recorder as his "wife": "So in the later 50s I started an affair with my television which has continued to the present, when I play around in my bedroom

"Good performers," I think, are all-inclusive recorders, because they can mimic emotions as well as speech and looks and atmosphere …Good performers can somehow record complete experiences and people and situations and then pull out these recordings when they need them. (*Philosophy* 82)

The Warholian subject presented here is not simply the master of language or its slave, but rather a figure which allows itself to be used like a recording machine, allows language to speak through it in order to harness it for its needs. As Lynne Tillman writes in her reflections on *a,*

Ondine, the protagonist, sometimes fought against the chains of the tape recorder, a new master, asking Warhol many times to stop it. But Ondine continued to let himself be recorded, as did all the others who questioned Drella's demands in making this novel-book. … They used and were used, perhaps, in every possible sense. (39-40)

Unlike Surrealist automatism, then, *a* is not an attempt to bypass the conventions of writing and mediation: more radically, Warhol's work questions whether there is anything "behind" these conventions. It figures mediation as a means to generate subjectivity. Thus, while on one level, *a; a novel* appears as another example of Warhol's borrowing established techniques for the purposes of subverting them—just as he did with the grid and the monochrome—his concern with automatism and his persistent blurring of the lines between the human and the machine is more than a mere mockery of artists like Pollock. In fact, his work operates to challenge the key assumption of Surrealist automatism, the priority of the subject to expression.

Certainly what the novel reveals is that unified presence, whether in the form of the unification of the subject that the Surrealism sought, or in the form of the pure unmediated "notion" of Mallarmé's poetics, or in the form of the perfect communicative coupling of Bride and Bachelors, is an impossibility. Like the bachelor section of the *Glass*, what the novel illustrates above all is, as Craig Dworkin writes, "the degree to

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with as many as four at a time. But I didn't get married until 1964 when I got my first tape recorder. My wife. My tape recorder and I have been married for ten years now" (*Philosophy* 26).

which medial networks frustrate the very communication they permit, and to which noise is the very precondition of any message" ("Whereof" 49). Take for example the following section of text:

> T-Yeah, yeah, it's true.
> The schlitzmongers really get the
> right to bet. It's true.
> Now the next one after that.　　　　M- I think the penny piggers do pretty well.
> T- Well yeah, they do but y'know
> like they've mixed, they're mixed
> they're mixed to the point of
> . . . They're not quite as these
> People are the ones that get the
> most …　　　　M- Schlitzmonger
> Schlitz is is spit and shit.
> O- Penny pigger, schlitzmonger ….
> T – And what can you get, and also,
> Ondine do you realize what it is?
> O- Even better, penny pigge r
> T – Spit, shit, and split.　　　　M- Penny pigger

(*a* 128)

The first point to note here is the repetition of the nonsense words and sounds: the "s" and the "it" sounds provokes one sequence of repetitions schiltz, spit, shit, split; the "i" echoes through the words penny and pigger, themselves alliterative; the explosive force of the hard consonants "t" and "p." Such language content is not governed by semantic codes, but rather by the process of vocalizing sounds, moving the mouth, its emergence owing more to the enjoyment of making such noises than an attempt at communication. The automatic bodily movements of speech then are highlighted. That these words, if they can be considered referential at all, have a vaguely sexualised character and call to mind bodily process or perhaps obscene insults, is not insignificant: such semantics highlight suppression of the "noise" of the bodily and the libidinal in conventional "rational" language. The pulsions of the speaking body are articulated in the sequences of words, their rhythms and repetitions, which get in the way of logic and effective communication. This language, although freed from reference, is constrained by the

bodily drives and impulses of the speaking body. The tension between these and the requirements of conventional language and writing—a tension which recalls the distinction between the cacographic and the calligraphic that, as I suggested in Chapter One, Duchamp's puns articulate—is in fact, as I shall argue shortly, the driving force of *a; a novel*.

A second important feature of this extract is the page layout. The dialogue spoken by M (Moxanne)[209] appears in smaller type on the right hand side of the page, in contrast to the larger type of the majority conversation on the left side. This layout forces the reader to consider the materiality of the text and how that imposes on our interpretation. Firstly, what does this layout signify with respect to the speaker: should it indicate volume or distance for example? It would then be a choice made by the typist. On further reflection, however, we recall the fact that typewriters only have one size of print. The difference between these two parts of the conversation could not, therefore, be the work of the typist. This indicates that a reasonable amount of editing was in fact done: is this a composite of two pages, pasted together? Or has the type been resized in the type-setting process? If so, why?[210] Does it indicate not volume or distance perhaps but status? The novel, despite the apparent claim to record the day transparently, is revealed as a heavily mediated object: the sudden and inexplicable appearance of an image of Mercury (Fig. 3.6), the messenger of the gods and thus a symbol of communication and mediation, confirms this, for how does an image appear in a tape-recorded and type-written book?[211]

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[209] Moxanne is the nickname of Genevieve Charbon, a French actress who had befriended Edie Sedgewick, also known as "Lady in Waiting" (Bockris, "a" 455). For more on the individual figures that appear in the novel, see Bockris, "a; a glossary".

[210] There is in fact plenty of evidence that the text of *a* is not quite as untouched as Warhol would have us believe: indeed there are clues that the recordings were, to some degree, directed. One example here is the final tape of Ondine's 'Soliloquy' (which is of course a nod to another one-day novel, namely Joyce's *Ulysses*) in which Ondine remarks that this is "supposedly" a "long m-o-n-o-logue about whatever it is that I talk about" and claims, in clichéd director-speak, to be "makin g love t o th e tape record er" (445). There are also reports that Warhol altered comments that he disliked and changed the cast's real names to their nicknames. See Dworkin and Bockris "a; a glossary".

[211] As Dworkin argues, the book abounds with the theme of media too: from the telephone call which opens the book to the ongoing discussion about video-recording. Dworkin also suggests numerous thematic links between the picture and the text: it "prefigures those signs (both advertising and zodiacal) that will fascinate Ondine's companions several hours later, and will be recalled by one of the legendary episodes of Mare (possibly Arione de Winter), whose 'mercury bit' was both irresistibly fascinating and
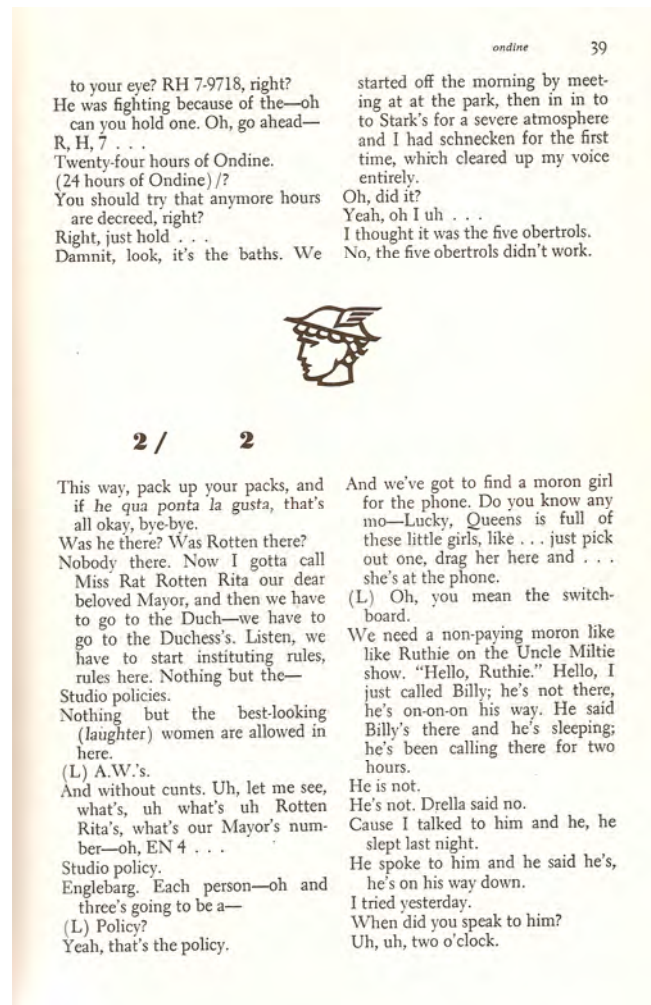
Fig. 3.6 Andy Warhol *a; a novel* (1968)
New York: Grove Press, 1968.

a; a novel ruptures the codes of reading, insisting on the material presence of the text. It shows that the physicality of the medium (be that the body of the performer or the body of the text) asserts itself in the process of making meaning and reminds us that, in the words of N. Katherine Hayles, "even when the interface is rendered as transparent as possible, this very immediacy is itself an act of meaning-making that positions the reader [and text] in a specific material relationship" (*Writing Machines* 107). The implication of this, as Lynne Tillman puts it, is that the work makes visible "realism as a

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potentially lethal." (49) Mercury was also the god of *speed*" (49) and given the amount of amphetamine that fuels the action of this novel, entirely appropriate as its figurehead.

form of writing, a type of fiction, a genre, not an unmediated, exact replica of life, not a mirror image" (40). *a* raises questions about the relationship between fiction (or "art") and reality, suggesting the division between them might not be quite as clear cut as it might sometimes appear. The work can thus be grasped as an exploration of autonomy, the autonomy of both the subject and language, playing with a tension between "I speak", the freedom of the author to create meaning and the idea that meaning is prior to expression, and "it speaks" the idea that language itself rather than the subject shapes expression and thought. *a* can in fact be understood, therefore, as a consideration not just of what constitutes literature, what literature is, but under what conditions language becomes literary, *when* it is. It raises, then, the same temporal problem as Duchamp's *Bride Stripped Bare*.

3. Calligraful Writing: Nonsense and the Generative Potential of Word Play

Both Duchamp's Mallarméan exploration of the book and Warhol's automatist experiment can be read as expressing the exhaustion of conventional writing, the frustrations of reified language which makes true communication impossible. Yet both works also acknowledge that it is not possible to cast off the material conventions of mediation: that all art, literature included, takes form through the process of its objectification. In other words, each work can be seen to recognize that the conventions of media are necessary but contingent. The lesson that they both articulate is that, in the face of this realisation, the task is not to refuse or destroy convention but to transform it.

In Duchamp's case, an important source for his experiments in this regard was Raymond Roussel. It was Roussel's *Impressions of Africa* (1910) that the artist repeatedly claimed as the inspiration for *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even.*[212] The fantastic story, originally a novel, was turned into a play which Duchamp

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[212] See the artist's letter to Robert Lebel, where, recalling his excitement and that of his friends Apollinaire and Picabia, he calls *Impressions of Africa* "a revelation" (*Correspondence* 283). The editors of the collected letters date the performance to June 1912. In her discussion of the staging of the play Abba Cherniack-Tzuriel suggests it would have been May that Duchamp attended. For a different account of the Rousselian influence, see Seigel. By means of Roussel, Seigel suggests, Duchamp entered a "private and symbolic world," which was to be "the last stage and most developed stage of the separation and

saw performed in 1912.[213] It describes the activities of The Incomparables Club, a strange association formed by a group of Europeans shipwrecked in Africa. On the occasion of the coronation of the local Emperor, the club members undertake to distinguish themselves through sensational and entirely original performances such as training an earthworm to play a zither, being electrocuted by lightening and building a statue light enough to be balanced upon inflated calf lungs. While this might suggest a drama of "bizarre attractions," the 1912 audience was in fact presented with "two long acts of nearly unintelligible and detailed exposition" (Cherniack-Tzuriel 123). The reaction was less than positive: it was, in Roussel's words, "a veritable hue and cry. They described me as a madman, barracked the actors, pelted the stage with coins, and sent protesting letters to the manager" (qtd. in Cherniack-Tzuriel 123). Duchamp, however, experienced the piece as a revelation: the artist was delighted by the spectacle on stage and revelled in its "madness of the unexpected" (Cabanne *Dialogues* 33). Afterwards he sought out Roussel's novel and, he told Cabanne, began to associate the text with the visual experience (Cabanne *Dialogues* 34).

Impressions of Africa, like all of Roussel's writing, was generated through language games and word play. His unprecedented "method," outlined in the posthumously published *How I Wrote Certain of My Books* (1935), consisted of generating random sentences and phrases by homonymic word play and then using these linguistic constructions as the foundations upon which to build his narrative. Roussel would create phrases that were identical except for a single letter or word and embed them in the text itself. One favoured technique, for example, was to place one such sentence at the beginning of the text and one at the end, the challenge thus being how to get from one to other via the narrative. Another was to play with the phonetics of popular expressions and song refrains in order to create new phrases with different associations: words and phrases were broken apart and reformed in surprising

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detachment that had long been a theme in his work and a condition fostered through it." (74-75) His work is thus situated neatly in the entirely conservative category of individual genius, the artist apparently wrapped "in the freedom of his isolation, where the self that is purified of the residues of ordinary life achieves a radical wholeness." (233).

[213] For a detailed history and description of the production Duchamp would have seen see Cherniack-Tzuriel.

combinations to produce puns and double entendres and so on. In other words, as in Mallarmé's Book, although in a completely different fashion, in Roussel's texts the materiality of the signifier as much as its sense was at play: the graphic and phonic aspects of the word were manipulated in order to generate new contexts for their later reappearance in a process of textual recycling. As Bruce Morissette writes, Roussel insisted on "the purely linguistic status of his fictional inventions": despite the exotic titles, nothing in Roussel's works "came from outside reality; everything came from inside the text, from the words, their relationships, their interplay" (256). Indeed, for Roussel the seamless incorporation into his text of the words, phrases and sentences generated through this method was the only criterion for success, his only real aim in writing.

Roussel's word play explores the generative capacity of the material of literature; words, phrases, sentences. It is an attempt to allow language to generate itself, its own material and rules, with only minimal interference from the author. In this sense, it operates in a manner apparently free from the limitations of convention, independent of the formal conventions of drama and fiction. Yet, paradoxically, it achieves this freedom only through the creation of alternative and often mysterious constraints of Roussel's own devising. For each of his works stems from a system unique to the text, planted or hidden within it. In other words, using his method, Roussel created texts that were to function as self-contained spaces operating according to their own set of codes.[214] We are obliged to read such works, as the poet John Ashbery writes, "with the understanding that we are not being told at all; that behind their polished surface an encrypted secret probably exists" (16). This, in fact, is precisely what is thematized in *Impressions of Africa*: the strange feats, objects and performances are each governed by their own peculiar intrinsic logic and what makes them "incomparable" is that the extrinsic,

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[214] Michel Holoquist in fact reads this as the defining characteristic of literary nonsense, which, he writes "is 'a collection of words of events which in their arrangement do not fit into some recognized system' but which constitute a new system of their own" (104). This is a rather reductive caricature, however, which ignores the diversity of the genre as well as completely dislocating the texts from their historical contexts. For another viewpoint on nonsense in relation to modernist literature, see Wendy Steiner 91-145. Interestingly, Steiner also points out that the disjunction between image and language is frequently capitalised upon by nonsense, which is very often illustrated.

overarching logic in which they are held is not apparent, the means of comparison are denied the reader. In this manner, Roussel's texts operate in the same manner as the Duchampian pun discussed in Chapter One, *Lits et Ratures*, simultaneously impelling the search for an overarching logic or structure in which the composition makes some kind of sense, but at the same time denying the reader precisely that.[215] Another example of this type of hidden system can be found in one of the *Green Box* notes, which reads "buy a dictionary and cross out the words to be crossed out. Sign: revised and corrected" (*Writings* 77).[216] But what are "the words to be crossed out"? Corrected according to what system? Such word play, as a result, seems at once a promise of the generative potential of language to create new meanings and, at the same time, evokes the threat of meaninglessness.

In his 1994 book *Philosophy of Nonsense,* literary theorist Jean-Jacques Lecercle examines how Victorian nonsense literature intuitively prefigured some of the most important debates in twentieth-century philosophy and claims that this particular double-bind is in fact characteristic of the genre. In a discussion of Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, he suggests that what is at the very core of such nonsense works is

> a theory of the relationship between meaning and saying, the general moral of which … is that meaning logically and chronologically, precedes, or ought to precede, saying. And at the same time [such works] deeply subvert this conception, impelling readers to work out another for themselves. (124)

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[215] It is unclear whether the artist had heard of Roussel's system before 1935 but, judging by texts such as *Written Wrotten* and the puns of the 1920s, Duchamp, as David Joselit says, "certainly seemed either to know of or intuit it" ("Monte Carlo" 18).

[216] In this context, the 1916 readymade *With Hidden Noise* appears apposite: the work contains a ball of yarn in which Duchamp had Walter Arensberg implant an object (the identity of which is unknown to the artist and to art history). The piece is also inscribed with bilingual acrostics that make little sense in either language, despite inviting the viewer to "uncode" them. The work's French title is *A Bruit Secret:* is the perceptible but meaningless noise a "brute" or sensory "secret" to the artist who wanted to put art back at the service of the intellect? The two texts cannot be viewed at the same time and the secret sense of the work—apparently held somewhere between the inscriptions—is, like the identity of the sound-making object, impossible to discover. For detailed readings of *With Hidden Noise* see Perloff, "Conceptual Poetics" 102-103 and Joselit, *Infinite Regress* 79-84.

In other words, as Lecercle positions it, Carroll's nonsense prefigures precisely the way that Roussel and Duchamp's texts operate. It asks us to believe that there is necessarily an intentional meaning implanted in language, that we are the masters of language as Humpty Dumpty would put it, but at the same moment it opens out towards the possibility that language generates its own meaning, that language might be the master of us. In this way, Carroll's texts can be seen to engage with the same problem as Warhol's automatist experiment, which, as the extract examined above demonstrates and as many of its critics have complained, itself veers towards nonsense. Such work is governed by the same paradox or textual double-bind:

> It is both free and constrained. It tells the reader to abide, and not to abide, by the rules of language. …[this is the paradox of] I speak language, in other words I am the master of the instrument which allows me to communicate with others, and yet it is language that speaks: I am constrained by the language I inhabit to such an extent that I am inhabited, or possessed by it. (Lecercle 25)

This dichotomy of freedom and constraint, the tension between "I speak" and "it speaks", drives Warhol's novel as well as Duchamp's punning word play, and even the thematics of the *Glass*. The bachelors, as the castings made by the illuminating gas, are perfect examples of figures inhabited and generated by language. The illuminating gas moves through them and in their space it is controlled, reigned in and rationalised. In the bachelor realm, language speaks but is brought under control by social subjects in a manner that deadens it. In the upper section of the *Glass*, the Bride herself is the source of language, as her commands are scripted into a unique alphabet capable of precisely expressing the Blossoming. Yet if the Bride is the mistress of her language, this is not to say that she can communicate her desire, for her unique "pure" language, we might recall, is probably "only suitable for the description of this picture" (*Writings* 32). The "it speaks" of the bride's desire, finding its perfect expression in the writing of the draft pistons, is ultimately as useless as the rationalised babble of the bachelors. What writing (by which I include the writing of art, as the inscription of a language of things) depends

upon, the *Glass* suggests, is the shaping of convention, the dialectical movement between freedom and constraint.

It is through this movement, in fact, that Duchamp attempts to transform the conventions of writing, to find an alternative inscription, as one of the *Green Box* notes demonstrates:

> Take a Larousse dict. and copy all the so called "abstract" words i.e. those which have no concrete reference. Compose a schematic sign designating each of these words. (this sign can be composed with the standard stops)
>   These signs must be thought of as the letters of the new alphabet.
>
> (*Writings* 31)

Here, Duchamp envisages changing the material form of words which have no material referent, abstract words independent of objects, in order to generate different letters by which to create a new alphabet, to generate a whole new language. This will be governed by "a sort of grammar, no longer requiring a pedagogical sentence construction" which renders the language "inexpressible by the *concrete* alphabetic forms of languages living now and to come" (*Writings* 32). He envisages, in other words, a writing that arises out of established languages but expresses an alternative sense, capable of expressing something other than any sense imaginable in the structures of experience as they currently exist.

That these ideas began to develop at the time Duchamp was learning English and supporting himself in New York by teaching French is perhaps not coincidental.[217] The difficulties of translating between one language and another, the different expressions that each language enables and the various restrictions that they place upon expression were very much on his mind, as the following note shows.

> *Dictionary*
> -of a language in which each word would be translated into French (or other) by several words, when necessary by a whole sentence.

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[217] In a recent reading of Duchamp's textual works, T. J. Demos has read the instability of meaning in Duchamp's work in relation to his status as émigré and his repudiation of nationalist ideas during the world wars ("The Language of Expatriation"). The use of foreign words obviously adds to this argument which Demos has developed at length in his recent monograph *The Exiles of Marcel Duchamp* (2007).

-of a language which one could translate *in its elements* into known
languages but which would not reciprocally express the translation of
French words (or other), or of French or other sentences.
-Make this dictionary by means of cards.
-find how to classify these cards (alphabetical order, but which alphabet)

<div align="right">(*Writings* 77)</div>

The dictionary, of course, on one level seems to represent language as a complete and containable system: it is a guidebook and inventory for the speaker, suggesting that language is a tool that can be mastered. However, what the bilingual dictionary reveals, as Duchamp realised and as this note tells us, is the fissures between such systems: the incomparability of words across language, the arbitrariness of the sign. The bilingual dictionary seeks to impose the same order on different systems and, in so doing, it reveals the extent to which expression is limited by language: things that can be expressed in one language remain inconceivable in another. A new form of inscription, a new language, then opens out new possibilities of expression.

It is at this juncture that we might return, with the notion of translation in mind, to *a; a novel.* For perhaps the central lesson of Warhol's work is that meaning is a constant process of negotiation. Strikingly this process is enacted on the pages of *a,* as the speakers misunderstand, correct and challenge one another.

O – What's this?
R – It's the first line, right here.
It's called Not So Funny, the poem.
O – Oh Not—, your writing is strange.
R – I knew I had
O – You're writing is calligraful.
Calligraful? Is that a word? Yeah.
R – Calligraphic.
O – Calligraphic, but no no, calligraful
is, must be a
R – Something like colorful.
O – No c- (pause). A poem by
Cristine Rosetti hm hm hm hm.   (241)

In this discussion, two words, calligraphy and colourful, are confused by the speaker who questions his own language usage. His interlocutor, Rotten Rita,[218] supplies a correction which is rebutted in favour of the multiple implications of the mistake: for "calligraphful", because it recalls colourful, is apparently preferable in this context. The repeated sounds here set the conversation in motion, and prompt Ondine to attribute the poem to Cristine Rosetti (rather than Christina Rossetti), although Rotten is the author. The conversation leads on the next page, as so many in the novel do, to Maria Callas, whose records Ondine plays throughout the recordings.[219] Indeed, Callas' name performs a similar operation on page 265 of the novel (Fig. 3.5, p. 25):

> O – I'm not going to part with it.
> (*Mumble mumble.*) Oh Ooh,
> my callas, oh ho.
> R – Your calls. He's worried about
> his callas; it can't even sing.
> O – My callas is hurting me.   (265)

In both instances, the conversation is pushed along through chains of associations, the materiality of the words driving the subjects rather than, as logic would dictate, the other way around.[220] As Dworkin explains, "[regardless] of their registers or denotations, words evoke other words. And in *a* in particular, the proximity of individual words along the metonymic axis is in fact one of the strongest structuring elements of the otherwise unstructured text." (51)[221] In other words, without the imposition of grammar, language is shown, in Warhol's novel, to find a means of structuring itself.

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[218] "Rotten Rita" was the nickname for another member of the Factory crowd Kenneth Rapp, also known as the Mayor (Bockris, "a" 455)

[219] Dworkin examines the implications of the Callas' music in the context of the novel and the Factory seen more broadly throughout his essay.

[220] Indeed, the title of the work might well be read in this way as not only a nominalist gesture but also the result of a stutter or hesitation, *a; a novel*.

[221] This tension between "I speak" and "it speaks" was something that evidently impacted on Warhol more broadly, and of which he was very much aware. In his book of philosophy, he claimed that

> "sometimes in the middle of a sentence I feel like a foreigner trying to talk it because I have word spasms where the parts of some words begin to sound peculiar to me and in the middle of saying the word I'll think, 'Oh, this can't be right—this sounds very peculiar, […] and so in the middle of words that are over one syllable, I sometimes get confused and try to graft other words on top of them. Sometimes this makes good journalism and

The materiality of language thus generates what Derek Attridge, in a discussion of literary nonsense, has termed "contextual circles" (202). Attridge describes these circles as generated by one of the key discoveries of literary nonsense, the portmanteau. In the introduction to *The Hunting of the Snark*, Lewis Carroll describes how the portmanteau operates:

> take the two words "fuming" and "furious." Make up your mind that you will say both words, but leave it unsettled which you will say first. Now open your mouth and speak. If your thoughts incline ever so little towards "fuming" you will say "fuming-furious"; if they turn, by even a hair's breadth, towards "furious," you will say "furious-fuming"; but if you have that rarest of gifts, a perfectly balanced mind, you will say "frumious." (7)

The portmanteau word is a collision between "I speak" and "it speaks." As in Duchamp's "canned chance", the components of the operation are selected by the speaker but the product is created through passively allowing these components to be altered by their impact on one another. The portmanteau thus operates as a "contextual circle" in which the plurality of meanings that the different parts of the word mobilise rebound off one another: "plurality of meaning in one item increases the available meanings of other items, which in turn increases the possibilities of meaning in the original item" (Attridge 202). Meanings ricochet off one another, echoing through each other and layering more and more meaning on top of one another. "The longer and denser the text, the more often the circle will revolve, and the greater will be the proliferation of meanings" (202).[222] This is precisely the operation of *a; a novel* as

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when they quote me it looks good in print, and other times it's very embarrassing. (*Philosophy* 147-148)[221]

What is described here is of course precisely the anxiety over mastery that literary nonsense plays upon. Warhol's writing, which survives in only a few examples of correspondence, shows similar "patching." Indeed, he was almost certainly dyslexic, a fact which sheds light on both why his books were always created with the help of writers and why he was not interested in editing *a*. Indeed, in this sense of all his works *a* as Dworkin writes "most directly reveals Warhol's own personal signature." (57)

[222] In *Peculiar Language*, Derek Attridge contrasts the portmanteau with the pun. He argues that while the pun evokes the potential of language to generate meaning, the capacity of language to speak independently of the intention of the author, it does so only in order to undercut this potential; for what the pun really articulates is the author's mastery of language, their ability to bend it to their will, to make it mean more than one thing but to remain in control of meaning. In contrast, Attridge suggests, the "portmanteau has the effect of a *failed* pun—the patterns of language have been shown to be partially appropriate but with a

meanings and "misunderstandings" multiply over the course of the pages and sections in a process the generative potential of which Warhol recognised as moving beyond the boundaries of the novel:

> Something that I look for in an associate is a certain amount of misunderstanding of what I'm trying to do. Not a fundamental misunderstanding; just minor misunderstandings here and there. … If people never misunderstand you and they do everything exactly the way you tell them to, they're just transmitters of your ideas, and you get bored with that. But when you work with people who misunderstand you, instead of getting *transmissions* you get *transmutations*, and that's much more interesting in the long run. (*Philosophy* 99)

a is an experiment in tracking such transmutations, which can be seen to occur not only between different people and media in the course of the novel's production, but also on the page, in the course of the conversation.

If *a; a novel* can be said to let language speak, then the same can be said of the two textual experiments that Duchamp conducted in 1915 and 1916, at the point when work on the *Glass* had just begun. These seem, in fact, to be Duchamp's attempts at generating nonsense of his own. Both *The* (or, to give the work the full title under which it first appeared *THE, Eye Test, Not "Nude Descending a Staircase"*) (Fig 3.7) and *Rendezvous of Sunday, February 6, 1916.* (*Rendez-vous du Dimanche 6 Février 1916* 1916) *(*Fig 3.8)[223] were systematically composed to be grammatically correct yet to make no logical sense. *The* is a short text, the main body of which is in English: there is a brief instruction in French below that reads "*remplacer chaque * par le mot: the*" ("replace every * by the word: the") *Rendezvous* consists of four postcards upon which Duchamp has typed French text, again taking every care to make no sense at all. For David Joselit, these works attempt to create a completely abstract language, but in effect

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residue of difference where the pun found only happy similarity" (201-202). In other words, the portmanteau refuses to confirm the mastery of language in the manner that the pun does—it does not insist upon meaning being prior to saying—and instead allows language to speak, to proliferate on its own and to create meaning in contextual circles.

[223] See Schwarz, Vol. 2 642. The former work was written as Duchamp began to learn English and was first published in the October 1916 issue of *The Rogue*. See Schwarz Vol. 2 638. The latter was a present to Arensberg.
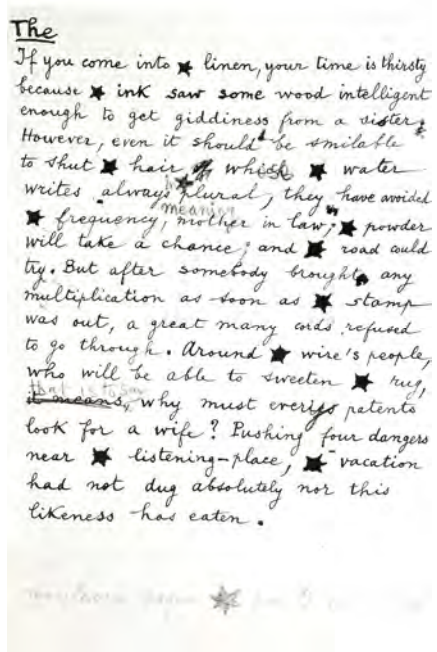
Fig. 3.7 Marcel Duchamp *The* (1915)
The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection,
Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Fig. 3.8 Marcel Duchamp *Rendezvous of Sunday 6th of February 1916* (*Rendez-vous du Dimanche 6 Févier 1916*) (1916)
The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection,
Philadelphia Museum of Art.

reduce their material to gibberish: "words are drained of their significance, falling back into a sensuous medium of sound" (77). Even leaving aside the problem of turning Duchamp into a sensualist, which goes against the artist's often repeated and always emphatic insistence that the sensual was precisely what his work operated against,[224] Joselit's conclusion seems shaky. For, as Marjorie Perloff points out in a discussion of *Rendezvous*, the work does "not prompt oral recitation, and hence the appeal of sound; on the contrary, Duchamp has made it difficult to decipher the visual text, with its odd word division at line ends" ("Conceptual" 97).[225] The words may fall into a kind of

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[224]His distain for the olfactory masturbation and retinal shudder of the painter is well-known and sound did not fare any better in his opinion: what he termed "the cat gut" effect of music was dismissed outright "I'm not anti-music. But I don't get on with the 'cat gut' side of it. You see, music is gut against gut: the intestines respond to the cat gut of the violin" (Hahn 67).

[225] For Perloff, Duchamp's work prefigures "the radical *difference* at the core of the most interesting artworks and poetries since the 1960s" (117). Indeed, she concludes,

materiality, in other words, but they are closer to graphic rather than phonic matter: indeed they recall the grids of painterly abstraction. Curiously, however, despite the artist's proclamation that *Rendezvous 1916* is without meaning, Perloff finds in the text what appear to be several references to numerous other works by Duchamp. "The language of *Rendezvous 1916*" she thus argues is "as allusive as [T.S.] Eliot's language but the allusions are all internal; they point, along a number of metonymic paths, to Duchamp's own visual/verbal universe" (98). Making a similar move in *Appearance Stripped Bare,* Octavio Paz has taken the phrase "water writes always in * plural" which appears in *The* as the spur for an exploration of the relationship between feminine and masculine in the *Large Glass*, making the "meaningless" phrase resound with gendered implications that in their turn bear on numerous other works.[226] These texts represent an

> Duchamp understood what the function of poetry would be in the "age of reproduction" and its seeming loss of aura. From the smallest linguistic difference (*p ? b*), to the key deviation from a given meter or rhyme, to the synonymity that is never complete and the homynymity that produces puns, poetic language is the language that focuses on *delay* – a delay ordinary discourse is bent on erasing. (119)

While I agree that it is the "delay" of Duchamp's work (which I have argued develops from his understanding of Mallarmé's poetics) that is the key which enables him to escape from the reified "café and studio platitudes" that he so detested, I would hesitate to call this, as she does, a "conceptual aesthetic" (101). Indeed, I think to do so is to come dangerously close to doing precisely what, as I tried to show in Chapter Two, de Duve was so careful to guard against, namely turning nominalism into conceptualism. Perloff's concern here is not with the theoretical intricacies however, her primary concern is as ever with building a historical narrative that legitimates more recent experimental poetics by establishing their roots in the work of the historical avant-gardes.

[226] See "Water Writes Always in * Plural" in *Marcel Duchamp: Appearance Stripped Bare* 91-178. In Duchamp's case the key work as regards the idea of the contextual circle, of course, and one that appears entirely self-conscious of the operations of the portmanteau, would of course be the last of Duchamp's boxes, the *Boîte-En-Valise*. According to the artist, the *Boîte En Valise* is "ready-made talk of what goes on in the *Glass*" (qtd. in Judovitz 71), indicating that the various positions of the works comment upon *The Bride Stripped Bare*. The *Boîte* positions one readymade next to each part of the photographic reproduction of the *Glass*. Next to the top section, is the sealed ampoule *Paris Air* (1919): this work, a comically literal attempt to use art as a means to capture nature, is also a punning play with the idea of the musical air. Music as "pure form" is presented here not as something to hear, but rather as "nothing to see," for the ampoule is empty. Music might therefore be understood as a parallel to the Bride's voice, the inscription of which occurs in the blank spaces of the draft pistons set out in the "natural" space of the Blossoming in the Milky Way. The clothes of the bride are accompanied by *Travellers Folding Item* (1916) which is the cover of a typewriter, hung to look like a skirt: the bride's clothes, which separate the two realms and which prevent the communication in the *Glass*, are thus somehow associated with writing and the reproductive technologies of print. Next to the Bachelor's section hangs *Fountain*, a work that, as I tried to show in Chapter One, can be understood as gaming with discourses, as playing different types of language off against different contexts. The *Boîte* then positions the readymades as another layer of commentary on the *Glass* and in so doing, infuses them retrospectively with meaning. For more on this constellation see Judowitz 71–73.

attempt to reduce language to its bare material but what they demonstrate is that through this material, with authorial intention erased, meaning proliferates from language itself: it speaks and we are driven to make sense of it. As Lecercle reminds us, "writing outside sense proves to be surprisingly difficult, for meaning puts up a fight" (115).

Duchamp, I have tried to show in this chapter, abandons conventional painting and conventional literature, in order to experiment with the possibilities afforded by language, attempts to find new linguistic conventions from within the old. Likewise, his *Bride Stripped Bare* represents an attempt to transform the book into a form that defies the recuperative power of conceptual categorisation. His abnormal book attempts to use the visual arts to open out language and its modes of presentation, as he uses language to open out visual art: poetics and aesthetics "mirrorically return" into one another. Warhol, through reducing the novel to its medium, shows that the art-form is more than simply a material form. *a*, in its apparent "freedom" from convention in reality operates to reveal the impossibility of working without conventions: by not editing, what appears as a gesture of sceptical nominalism or "anti-literature", operates to reveal the process and importance of *integral* nominalism. Warhol's stuttering "nonsense" novel shows that the sensory, aesthetic experience of engaging with the medium is at the heart of meaning. Moreover, by passively allowing language to speak, what he reveals is that language itself is always already in the process of transformation: the negotiation of meaning is an ongoing process. As if to confirm this point, these works both reformulate the question of what art is through the question of when art is, inscribing a temporal problem by examining how meaning is "delayed" in the materiality of language. The reiterative contextual circles that they thus inscribe—which the next and final chapter of this thesis will trace into the theory of the avant-garde—echo the mirrorical returns and re-workings of both artists' broader catalogues. Their individual works take on new meaning by reworking ideas and elements of previous works, projecting forwards as well as back, in a mode of recycling that lifts the destitute material of everyday life, as the apparently coincidental last line of *a; a novel* suggests, "Out of the garbage and into The Book" (451).

Chapter Four

The Figuration of a Possible: Rewriting the Critical Relation

> How, if one writes, is it possible not to say yes to the sea of language?
> – Lyotard

In 1974 Jean-François Lyotard published his second monograph, the vitriolic tract *Libidinal Economy*. "It was my evil book," he later remarked, "the book of evilness that everyone writing and thinking is tempted to do" (*Peregrinations* 13). Deliberately provocative, *Libidinal Economy* represents an important moment in Lyotard's thought: it is one of a number of experimental texts which mark the philosopher's disengagement from the direct political activism that had informed his previous work, and his re-engagement with the political as it emerges through art and aesthetics.[227] These texts constitute an assault on critical theory, indicating Lyotard's recognition of the complicity of criticism in the structures of power and the role of discourse as an agent of recuperation. They also mark his attempt to reconfigure that role, to invent a mode of practice that is able to take account of the movement of recuperation while acknowledging its own position within the very system that it seeks to interrogate. These texts, then, are a response to the same theoretical problem which, as I tried to show in Chapter One, underwrites the activities of the avant-gardes.[228]

Lyotard does not simply take up the theoretical problem of the avant-gardes, however, he also responds directly to their works; the flowers of his "evil" period are a succession of essays exploring the works of diverse artists and writers, among whose ranks we find both Duchamp and Warhol. Indeed, Duchamp is one of the key figures of this "evil" period: between 1974 and 1977, Lyotard produced no less than five critical

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[227] For Lyotard's own account of his involvement with direct activism in *Socialisme ou Barbarie* and his subsequent rejection of Marxism, see *Peregrinations* and the 1972 interview "On Theory". Lyotard's engagement with art and aesthetics in fact slightly precedes the break with Marxism, emerging in 1971's *Discours Figure.* However this work was still felt by its author to be too negative and too reliant on the Marxist model (see Carroll, *Paraesthetics* 23-30).

[228] This problem is most clearly stated by Paul Mann, as I indicated in Chapter One (26-28).

essays on the an-artist, collected in *Duchamp's TRANS/formers* (1977). Duchamp's work not only impacted on Lyotard's thought, but also on his writing: Lyotard, as I will try to show shortly, responds to Duchamp by borrowing the artist's own tactics, experimenting with form, genre and convention. A similar relationship, although less immediately obvious, can be traced between Lyotard and Warhol, whose work, I will argue in the later sections of this chapter, also had a significant impact upon Lyotard's thought. In the 1973 essay "Painting as a Libidinal Set-Up (Genre: Improvised Speech)" the philosopher identifies within Warholian Pop "a critique of representation, but one that is inverted, and that does not signify that representation is a commodity, but rather that the commodity is always representation, always fetishism" (327). It is as precisely this kind of inverted critique, I hope to show, that Lyotard's early work can be understood. This is to say that the philosopher's "evil" writing attempts to subvert the recuperative function of criticism by knowingly adopting strategies made available by avant-garde art, by inverting the relationship between criticism and its objects in order to question and challenge its function and role.

As his remarks on *Libidinal Economy* indicate, Lyotard would later distance himself from the writing produced during this period. This change of position can be understood, as Lawrence Schehr writes, as paralleling

> a more general shift over time: moving from the waywardness or drift of earlier work to a perception that such a drift may itself have been wilful or evil; a move from a relativism buoyed by Marx toward a concept of judgement and justice sustained by Kant and Augustine. (66)

It is for his later Kantian work that Lyotard is probably best known; his most famous contributions to philosophy are his writings on postmodernism and the idea of the differend. It is from the perspective of this later position, moreover, that Lyotard set about reworking the concept and task of the avant-garde, one of the central projects of the 1988 essay collection *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*. However, clear though this shift may be, it would be a mistake to underestimate the importance of the earlier experimental texts. The philosopher himself may have retrospectively come to regard some aspects of his own writing as excessive, but that by no means indicates his

rejection of what it articulates.[229] Indeed, what I want to argue here is that an understanding of what is at stake in this constellation of early ideas and texts, and in particular in their excesses, is crucial to any attempt to grasp Lyotard's later work on the avant-garde. Indeed, without a sense of what is at stake in his early writing, Lyotard's avant-garde might seem indistinguishable from the aesthetic modernism against which, I will argue, he is in fact positioning himself.[230] It is thus only in the light of his earlier work that Lyotard's understanding of the avant-garde reveals its full potential.

In this chapter, then, I will trace the connections between Lyotard's "evil" writing, directly influenced by the work of the avant-gardes, and his later, more conventionally philosophical work on aesthetics and the avant-garde. Perhaps the single most important thread of connection between these two periods, as far as this thesis is concerned, is Lyotard's critical engagement with Adorno. It is an engagement that motivates Lyotard's critique of Marxism and provides a vital impetus for the arguments put forth in *The Inhuman*. Lyotard's interrogation of Adorno's thought thus provides a space in which to locate both his early response to the works of the avant-garde and his later re-conceptualisation of the task and responsibilities of the avant-garde, and to explore how these aspects of his work are linked. Having taken a fuller account of the character of Lyotard's writing in *Duchamp's TRANS/formers*, therefore, I will proceed to examine Lyotard's critique of Marxism through a reading of the experimental essay "Adorno as the Devil" (1974). As I will try to show, while he appears to challenge Adorno, Lyotard's real target is not the German philosopher himself but rather the crude distillation of Adorno's ideas into a formulaic and reductive theoretical framework: in fact, Lyotard's work owes a profound debt to Adorno's writing and in particular to his *Aesthetic Theory*. I will sketch out how Lyotard responds to what he sees as the strengths and weaknesses of Adorno's thought, and how his readings of Duchamp and

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[229] Lyotard recalls the reception of *Libidinal Economy*, reporting that "its rare readers disliked the book, which passed for a piece of shameless immodesty and provocation" (*Peregrinations* 14). Yet, despite his apparent rejection of the work, as Geoffrey Bennington reports, Lyotard views it as one of his most important (see Bennington 2). For more on the book's reception see Lyotard, *Peregrinations* 13-14, Carroll, *Paraesthetics* 44, and Schehr 69.

[230] It is possible, as Diarmuid Costello has shown, to read Lyotard as espousing a variation of Greenbergian modernism. However, I will argue in this chapter that the evidence is against such an interpretation.

Warhol impact on this response, before turning to his formulation of role of the avant-garde in *The Inhuman*. I will then address the question of how Lyotard's thought impacts on the debates on avant-garde and modernist art that have been sketched out in previous chapters and how his work, as a response to Adorno, provides an important alternative model to both the dominant theorisations of the avant-garde and to the Adornian aesthetic modernism defended by Jay Bernstein.

1. Paraesthetics and Post-aesthetics

Given the standing of Lyotard's work on postmodernism and given the prominent role that Duchamp has played in theorisations of this concept, one might be forgiven for assuming that *Duchamp's TRANS/formers* is a well-known work. Quite the opposite is the case: it is one of Lyotard's least discussed works and has received only the briefest of mentions in the vast amounts of work devoted to Duchamp.[231] One reason for this absence of engagement may well be the sheer opacity of the writing: it is more or less impossible to reduce the book to a coherent interpretation of Duchamp's art. Instead of explaining the artist's work, in fact, Lyotard adopts the kind of strategies associated with the "theatrical" art under discussion, staging conflicting ideas and consciously attempting to manipulate the reading experience.[232] The five essays do not make up a univocal reading but rather together produce the effect of a debate in which different voices confirm, challenge and transform the various arguments under discussion. They thus make problematic the very notion of a single "correct" response by interjecting difference into the very structure of the text. The book's introduction makes this strategy explicit as it stages a conversation between several (often antagonistic) speakers, some

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[231] A sustained discussion of *Duchamp's TRANS/formers* (the only one I have found) appears in A. Jones, *Postmodernism* (195–200). What Jones takes from the book is Lyotard's denunciation of systems of thought which seek to repress difference (sexual difference primarily) and the reading of the relationship between *The Large Glass* and *Given*, set out in Lyotard's final chapter "Hinges".

[232] I use the term "theatrical" here for two reasons. Firstly, it recalls the formalist assessment of cross-disciplinary art discussed in Chapter Two (see 92-94); "theatrical" is the term adopted by Fried to describe what Greenberg termed "literary". Secondly, the metaphor of the theatre points forward to some of the figures and tactics that will emerge later in this chapter; the idea of representation as a mode of "staging" is important here, as I shall try to show shortly.

of whom adopt arguments that Lyotard makes in other books, others of whom attack these positions. Lyotard thus prevents his work being collapsed into a single argument and, using these voices in a manner that recalls Duchamp's use of pseudonyms, avoids constructing a coherent "authorial" position.

These techniques, which generate a writing poised somewhere between art and interpretation, are what Lyotard calls *paraesthetic* strategies.[233] That his philosophy is thereby part of a broader current has been shown by David Carroll, who uses the term to analyse the work not only of Lyotard but also of his contemporaries Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault. Paraesthetics, Carroll writes, is "something like an aesthetics turned against itself or pushed beyond or beside itself, a faulty, irregular, disordered, improper aesthetics—one not content to remain within the area defined by the aesthetic" (xiv). Such writing, infiltrated by this improper aesthetic, is no longer "purely" philosophical but takes on the mode of literary or poetic language: it is absolved of the necessity to transparently refer and instead questions the relationship between signifier and signified, representation and "reality".

It has been Derrida rather than Lyotard who has generated the most discussion in these terms. In her essay "Poststructuralism and the 'Paraliterary'" (1980), for example, Rosalind Krauss recalls the philosopher giving a lecture that made use of exactly such devices. In a performance that clearly recalls the plural voices of *Duchamp's TRANS/formers,* Derrida delivered his speech in two voices, one his usual voice, the other high and feminine. This second voice functioned, Krauss writes, "to open and theatricalize the space of [his] writing, alerting us to the dramatic interplay of levels and styles and speakers that had formerly been the prerogative of literature but not of critical or philosophical discourse" (37). Krauss describes such work not as paraesthetic, but "paraliterary." Gregory Ulmer, too, has explored this aspect of Derrida's work, arguing that the philosopher adopts collage and montage strategies from the visual arts.[234] While Ulmer employs different terminology, designating the practice "post-criticism," both he and Krauss agree that what such work signifies is a change in the relationship between

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[233] See Lyotard, "Philosophy and Painting in the Age of their Experimentation" 191.
[234] See Ulmer, "The Object of Post-Criticism".

criticism and its objects, a change in what we might call the critical relation. Refusing the division between criticism and art, the post-critic or paraesthetic philosopher no longer comments on art and literature from an external position but inhabits them in order to dramatize the significance of the critical work.

As I have suggested, like Derrida, Lyotard adopts tactics from artistic practice in order to explore and transform the critical relation. As Sadie Plant has recently argued, there is evidence to suggest that the activities of the Situationist International, an avant-garde group led by filmmaker and polemicist Guy Debord, were a key source of inspiration for Lyotard.[235] In his Situationist manifesto *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967) Debord rails against the reification of social relations and the homogenous time-space of a society governed by exchange value: "the world we see," he writes, "is the world of the commodity" (21).[236] As Plant quite rightly suggests, such arguments resonate with Lyotard's thought, the goal of which is often stated as "making visible" that which is repressed by such social structures. Lyotard, moreover, quite explicitly draws upon the Situationist practices of *dérive* and *détournement*. *Dérive*, "drifting", describes an aimless movement in which spaces are occupied and used in manners other than those for which they were designed, a form of passive resistance to how space is controlled and demarcated by the spectacle.[237] *Détournement*, "derailment", designates the practice of using language and objects in manners for which they were not designed: rather than seeking an outside position from which to attack the spectacle, it suggests, a

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[235] Debord was, like Lyotard, a member of *Socialisme ou Barbarie* and also an active participant in the occupation of the Sorbonne in 1968. This occupation was accomplished as a result of the activities of *Le Mouvement du 22 Mars* with whom Lyotard was involved at the University of Nanterre. The direct political activism of the Situationist International has tended to make the movement seem quite distinct to other more artistically oriented avant-gardes. However, whether the SI appears as an artistic or political movement depends very much on the selection of texts examined/presented: Ken Knabb, for example, in his *Situationist International Anthology*, chooses texts with a strong political emphasis that obscure the cultural activities of the artists involved. Sadie Plant takes a similar approach, regarding the Situationist as theorists more than artists. A recent attempt to redress this balance can be found in a special issue of *October* (Vol. 79) dedicated to Situationism which includes a good synopsis of the different approaches to the SI in the form of Thomas F. McDonough's "Rereading Debord, Rereading the Situationists".

[236] The spectacle, in Debord's text, is itself the time/space generated by the reified relations of bourgeois society.

[237] While texts such as *Drifting from Marx and Freud* (1973) and "Adrift" (1972) self-consciously announce their allegiance to this practice, Lyotard's description in *Peregrinations* (1988) of thinking as a process of wandering through clouds also owes a less obvious debt to *dérive*.

better goal is to set its own products against it. "Détournement reradicalises previous critical conclusions," Debord writes, "plagiarism is necessary…it sticks close to an author's phrasing, exploits his expressions … [but it is] the opposite of quotation, of appealing to a theoretical authority" (113-114). As we shall see shortly, this could easily be a description of aspects of Lyotard's work and it is therefore easy to see why Plant feels able to declare that

> the breadth of situationist theory and its magpie tactics of appropriation and détournement find their expression in the deconstructive eclecticism of poststructuralist writing, which similarly has no scruples about taking ideas, examples, and forms of expression from anywhere. (112)[238]

Just as Krauss and Ulmer draw out Derrida's use of artistic and literary strategies, so too Plant suggests that Lyotard's philosophy no longer simply comments on art but mimics it, appropriates its tactics. While Derrida is concerned with the play of signification across these different techniques and strategies however, Lyotard, in contrast, as I will try to show, draws upon the different arts in order to open out the non-linguistic within language, in an attempt to respond to the question which he formulates as how to write without saying "yes to the sea of language" (Lyotard "Return" 145).

While some critics have seen in such practice a kind of liberation from the constraints of theoretical reason, paraesthetic philosophy has not met with unanimous approval.[239] Indeed, it is precisely such tactics that Lyotard's translator Ian Hamilton Grant refers to when he reports that *Libidinal Economy* has been described as "naïve anti-philosophical expressionism, an aestheticizing trend hung over from a renewed

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[238] This is not entirely accurate for, contrary to what Plant suggests, Lyotard is highly selective in his choice of strategies and forms of expression. While the Situationist practice of *détournement* can be seen as an influence, for example, Lyotard is careful to distance himself from the idea that *détournement*, as Debord claims, operates to "[delete] a false idea, [and replace] it with the right one" (*Spectacle* 113). For a comparison of the paraesthetics of Derrida and Lyotard, see Carroll *Paraesthetics*.

[239] The apparent invasion of the aesthetic into the realm of theory generated a great deal of debate during the early 1980s. See Shattuck, Donoghue, Bruss, de Man, and Cain. Krauss and Ulmer see paraesthetics as sign of a certain degree of freedom. Plant, in contrast, recognises in Lyotard's practice the rejection of the distinction maintained by the SI between the real and the spectacle and, completely ignoring his later work, argues that, losing "any sense of purpose or meaning," he eventually drifted into a postmodernity which escaped the dilemma of how we can have truth in the face of mediation "at the price of a political despondency and celebration of meaninglessness" (Plant 109). As we shall see, this is simply not the case.

interest in Nietzsche in the late 1960s" (*Libidinal* xix). This accusation is also levelled by Diarmuid Costello, who argues that Lyotard's work repeats Greenberg's mistakes by presuming aesthetic values to be higher than those of the rational spheres of everyday life or philosophical discourse. Terry Eagleton has gone further, dismissing Lyotard's work as "amoral" and accusing him of aestheticizing politics through his articulation of a misguided and dogmatic "intuitionism" (397).[240] Approaching from a different angle, Paul Crowther claims Lyotard is a "sceptical" post-structuralist who regards any attempt to demarcate boundaries between disciplines as an attempt at domination and who, in Crowther's view, "drastically overemphasizes both the fluidity of modes of knowledge and experience, and their status as social 'constructs'" (*Critical Aesthetics* ix). Finally, the most famous critique of Lyotard's early work can be found in the writings of Jürgen Habermas who claims that paraesthetic work denies aesthetic autonomy and, by levelling the distinction between philosophy and literature, "[jumbles] the constellations in which the rhetorical elements of language assume *entirely different* roles" (209).[241] Literature and philosophy may bear a family resemblance, Habermas argues, but their modes are completely distinct and "the false assimilation of one enterprise to the other robs both of their substance" (210). While these charges will be dealt with individually as this chapter progresses, at this juncture it suffices to note that although they differ in their subtleties, all of these criticisms share a reliance on a particular mode of thinking: each accusation positions the aesthetic as other to reason, art and literature as other to philosophy. From this perspective, the danger posed by paraesthetic writing is that it threatens to reduce philosophy to a "mere" art, to annul its claim to reason and to truth by positioning it as rhetoric.

If the paraesthetic work does pose a threat to philosophy, the claims of Lyotard's 1978 essay "Theory as Art: A Pragmatic Point of View" might seem particularly worrisome. In this short text, Lyotard argues that critical theory should in fact be

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[240] Eagleton's main target here is not so much *Libidinal Economy* as *The Postmodern Condition* (1979). However, the earlier work is perhaps even more vulnerable to this accusation than that text.

[241] This essay is directed at Derrida rather than Lyotard. However, as is well known, Habermas targeted not just Derrida but French post-Nietzschean philosophy more generally provoking a debate with Lyotard. See in particular Lyotard's "Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?" For more on this debate see Steuerman.

considered not as commentary on the arts, but rather as one of the arts: theory is, he writes, "a particular case of those *genres* we usually term literary" (71).[242] This claim opens out the discursive space in which Lyotard works. To grasp what is at stake here, however, it must be approached not as a call for the aestheticisation of philosophy but rather as operating within the context of what Bernstein has termed "post-aesthetic" thought.

In *The Fate of Art,* Bernstein develops the idea of "post-aesthetic" philosophy as a counter to "aesthetics". Aesthetics, he argues, understands art as separated from other spheres of experience, figuring it as autonomous and thus "cut off and separated from truth, as silenced, as dirempted from all that would give it significance" (4). In a society that privileges rational, conceptual ("scientific") cognition, art is seen to be "autonomous from (rationalized) truth and morality" (4). As a result, as "subjective" and "aesthetic" rather than "objective" and "scientific," art comes to be perceived as not just separate from "reason" and "truth" but as their very opposite. It is within this framework that the objections to Lyotard's paraesthetic practice are positioned.[243] In such a structure, Bernstein goes on to argue, a double bind emerges which opens out an aporia at the heart of aesthetics:

> If art is taken as lying outside truth and reason then if art speaks in its own voice it does not speak truthfully or rationally; while if one defends art from within the confines of the language of truth-only cognition, one belies the claim that art is more truthful than truth-only cognition. (2)

Either art is not truthful/rational or, if it can be comprehended in these terms, it is less truthful, less rational than the philosophy which acts as its interpreter. In both cases art

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[242] This idea is not new, as Lyotard hastens to add, philosophy has always dealt in rhetoric: from Platonic dialogue through to Descartes, philosophy generates its space within the discursive terrain by simultaneously distinguishing itself from and borrowing rhetorical strategies from literature.

[243] It is also immediately clear, I hope, that the theories of art set out by Bürger and Greenberg must be considered as within this "aesthetic" framework (which also grounds the narratives of the "death" of art). For Bürger, it is against this silencing that the avant-garde protests: attempting to restore art's significance, the avant-garde seek to reconnect art and wider social systems. For Greenberg, this separation and silencing is in fact the key to art's importance: released from the burden of significance, art preserves the highest values which are incompatible with those that motivate the spheres of politics and morality. See Chapters One and Two.

loses its direct relation to truth and becomes "mere" art: its critical potential is effectively silenced. Here, then, we are returned to the contradiction of aesthetic autonomy that lies at the heart of the theories of the avant-garde explored in Chapter One.

"Post-aesthetic" philosophy, Bernstein suggests, is that thinking which responds to this problem, to the silencing at the centre of aesthetics, and recognises the double-bind or contradiction of art's autonomy. If art is a critique of (but also a product of and by no means opposite to) the rationalised, conceptual, "scientific" cognition which modernity privileges, then post-aesthetic theory attempts to maximise and highlight this critical potential. It accepts that art relies on some degree of autonomy (thus it is not institutional critique) but denies that art is severed from truth, from politics, from morality. Instead of bemoaning or celebrating aesthetic alienation, such work attempts to understand art in "non-aesthetic terms because the very idea of aesthetics is based upon a series of exclusions which themselves assume a conception of truth in terms of its isolation from normative and 'aesthetic' values" (3-4). In other words, post-aesthetic philosophy attempts to approach art from a direction other than that set up by the conventional framework of "aesthetics".[244] It is the work of Adorno above all others, for Bernstein, which exemplifies post-aesthetic philosophy,[245] and it is in relation to this aspect of Adorno's project that Lyotard's proposal to consider theory as an art can be situated. His work can thus be understood as operating against the oppositions by means of which, as we have just seen, it has been critiqued.

Lyotard's paraesthetic writing is an attempt to alter the critical relation set up by "aesthetics", a relation in which philosophy or theory acts as art's interpreter. It is important, therefore, that this aspect of his writing is not dismissed as stylistics or as indicative of a lack of rigour. It is, rather, an attempt to invent a practice in which an

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[244] It is this refusal of the opposition between the aesthetic and the rational or conceptual that enables Lyotard to respond to a wide variety artists and artworks. Lyotard not only writes about the "modernist" abstract paintings of Barnett Newman, but also about "post-modernist" figures such as Duchamp, Warhol and Kosuth. Indeed, it is highly significant, I think, that Lyotard's thought takes account of impulses that in "aesthetic" frameworks appear, as we have seen, to be antithetical.

[245] Adorno's formulation of aesthetic autonomy, as I attempted to show in Chapter One, operates to break down the opposition between art and non-art. In this sense Adorno can be seen to challenge the framework of "aesthetics".

alternative relation between art and criticism can emerge. Instead of attempting to grasp art under a conceptual formula (or set of formulae), Lyotard's aim, as *Duchamp's TRANS/formers* declares*,* is "to try not to understand and to show that you haven't understood … [to accept] nonsense as the most precious treasure" (12). The paraesthetic "nonsense" of Lyotard's work is not secondary to its conceptual meaning, then, but is the attempt to inscribe what rational discourse suppresses or forgets. As such, it is a crucial part of his critique of Adorno and Marxist theory to which I now turn.

2. The Magical Square

If one was looking for confirmation of Adorno's influence on Lyotard's "evil" work, then the title "Adorno as the Devil" seems to offer it. Before examining this influence, however, it is worth taking some time to outline the form that this 1974 essay takes. For, written while *Duchamp's TRANS/formers* was taking shape and clearly influenced by this work, "Adorno as the Devil" is particularly remarkable for the manner in which its structure and composition self-consciously operate to reinforce its argument. Full of disjunctions and random contiguities, it is one of Lyotard's most experimental and least "logical" works.[246] Around half way though the essay, the following declaration appears:

> I have determined six ideas (dialectics, criticism, indifference, position, theology and expression, affirmation) under which I have distributed all my reflexions in the form of items. A first drawing has assigned to each of these items the face of a dice. A second drawing (another throw of the dice) has permitted me to establish the diachronic series of the ideas' appearance. Next a drawing (little papers carrying the numbers 1 to 20) has determined which item, number 5 or number 14, for example, belonging to which idea (for example, indifference) would occupy place n in the series. Several dimensions are left undetermined: the duration of each item, the duration of the blanks-silences which separate them, the chromatism (one would have been able to conceive of several writing types), etc. *The artist has become the mere executor of his own intentions*, plus: intensities which do not belong to him. "We are getting rid of ownership," "our poetry is the realization that we possess nothing:" Cage. The artist no longer composes, he lets his deployment's desire go its way. That is affirmation. The quotes

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[246] James Williams also discusses this essay in *Lyotard and the Political* (64-65).

from Adorno are noted in italics, those of other writers are between quotation marks. The designation of this item is: affirmation 13. (131-132)

The text, this passage reveals, is the product of Duchampian "canned chance" (filtered through the I Ching practices of John Cage, whose own artistic debt to Duchamp is well documented)[247] combined with a Warholian passive affirmation. Lyotard includes Adorno's words as if they were his own, inhabiting the phrases, setting them in a new context in order to give them a new thought (just as Duchamp did with the urinal). These reflections are assembled in random order according to the throws of the dice: there is an indirect reference to Mallarmé here, amplified by the direct reference to poetry. Indeed, like Mallarmé's *Un Coup de Dés*, this essay draws the different arts together: we should note that the language draws upon the terminology of the visual arts (the repetition of "drawing", the idea of chromatics and blank space) and music (duration, silences, the mention of the composer Cage) in order to describe the process of writing. Openly transferring the experiments of different arts into the realm of philosophy, Lyotard uses them to problematize and to disrupt the linear logic of established reasoning.

The final paragraph of the essay, perhaps the strangest, provides an insight into what Lyotard is attempting. It centres on the description of what he calls (borrowing a phrase from the novelist Thomas Mann) "the magical square" (137). The description of this figure—which is not mentioned at all in the previous paragraphs—is built up through a sequence of examples: the magical square is to be found in the work of Albrecht Dürer, inventor of the classical perspectival grid, as well as in the music of Arnold Schönberg, in which the differences between harmony and melody are suppressed. The magical square, Lyotard writes, "is the end of the narrative, the emergence of the structure. The neutralization of intensive differences. A narrative will still be possible but only as one realization among others of a structure, the performance of a competence" (137). Synthesising difference, making vertical identical to horizontal, the magical square is like a chessboard, permitting certain moves and disallowing others

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[247] The I Ching is an ancient Chinese system of divining order in chance events, such as the throwing of dice. For the relationship between Duchamp and Cage see "John Cage on Marcel Duchamp" by Moira Roth and William Roth, Perloff's "Avant-Garde or Endgame" (*Radical Artifice* 1-29), and Roth and Katz.

Fig. 4.1 Richard Baquié. *Untitled: Reconstruction of Marcel Duchamp's Given: 1. The Waterfall, 2. The Illuminating Gas* (1991). This shows how the installation, normally only visible through the peepholes of the door (which is set into a wall) is constructed. The Collection of the Museé d'Art Contemporain de Lyon.

according to a set of rules. In *Given*, as *Duchamp's TRANS/formers* reminds us, Duchamp, an accomplished chess player himself, covers the floor-space behind the door with black and white squared linoleum.[248] (Fig 4.1) For the viewer this space is, Lyotard explains, "entirely invisible, as the squaring must be that serves to set up the perspective in Alberti and others" (176). Hidden from sight, it is the ground of the installation, the condition upon which the apparition itself can appear: invisible, it is that upon which visibility is predicated. The emergence of the magical square—which, as it turns out, is

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[248] Duchamp was an internationally recognised chess master and author, along with Vitaly Halberstadt, of a book on endgames entitled *Opposition and Sister Squares are Reconciled*, which was published in 1932. "Even the chess champions don't read the book", he told Cabanne, "since the problem it poses really only comes up once in a lifetime" (*Dialogues* 77-78). For more on the relationship between Duchamp's chess playing and his art see Damisch.

not magical at all—is the materialization of the conditions of visibility, the revealing of the laws that govern what takes place within their frame. The square is the site in which the manner that narratives and works are "put into perspective" is exposed, the site in which they are revealed as the reproduction of laws.[249] Crucially, what is also made manifest in the emergence of the magical square is that while such a structure generates certain narratives, or certain visibilities, it disallows others: "putting into perspective" is also means of concealing or preventing possible alternatives from becoming visible. Narratives are possible—language games, like games of chess—but the idea of *the* narrative, the one "true" representation, is invalidated.[250]

The key task that Duchamp set himself as an artist, Lyotard argues in *Duchamp's TRANS/formers*, was to "detect everywhere in 'realities' the putting into perspective that forms them, a putting into perspective that is both necessary and contingent" (198). The task was, in other words, to reveal the magical square. This is another way of saying that Duchamp's work is engaged in a process of revealing conventions as such. In this sense, Lyotard's work prefigures the more recent arguments of de Duve and Bernstein, for the gesture of "putting into perspective" is the very same gesture as that of integral nominalism, the gesture that Duchamp reveals as at the heart of art-making. In "Adorno as the Devil" Lyotard takes on this avant-gardist mantle and, critiquing philosophy as a form of representation, locates the same problematic at the heart of philosophy: it is the necessary but contingent "putting into perspective" of his own work that he reveals in "affirmation 13," the paragraph quoted above. Strikingly, his essay is organised in a manner that echoes *a; a novel*; both texts organise their narrative spatially, in a random

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[249] Clearly the magical square can be thought of in very similar terms to the grid of abstraction which, as I suggested in Chapter Two, can also be conceived of as the end of the narrative and which, as the re-presentation of the frame or canvas itself, can be understood as the emergence or becoming visible of the structure of painting. Lyotard's argument here might then also be taken to be inspired by the reductive procedures of abstraction. Indeed, in this essay Lyotard might be seen as reflecting on key ideas of both abstraction (in the form of the grid) and "theatrical" art (in the form of Duchamp) and, in so doing, refusing their apparent opposition. This ability to take account of both impulses is one way in which his work differs from modernist aesthetics and one way in which it can be seen as performing in a Warholian manner, for, as I tried to show throughout Chapters Two and Three, Pop should be understood as setting abstraction into a dialogue with "literary" art rather than rejecting it.

[250] Thus, just as Warhol inverts modernist abstraction, so too does Lyotard reconfigure its silence: this grid is not the end of narrative full stop but the end of *the* narrative, and so it is a site in which other narratives are made possible.

series of blocks, rather then temporally (with a beginning, middle and end) and thus break down Lessing's distinction between narrative time and visual space. While Warhol transfers the model of the visual arts onto literature, Lyotard develops the idea of the square as figure that applies to the different arts of music, painting and writing. His essay reveals the affinity between narrative and perspective and in so doing it reveals the possibility of multiple narratives, like multiple perspectives.

What Lyotard's essay adopts, then, is the avant-garde strategy of breaking down aesthetic theories of the arts, of medium scrambling, allowing the effects and concerns of different media to impact upon one another. It is "the refutation of the *distinguo* introduced by Lessing's *Laocoon,"* he writes, that has "been the central concern of avant-garde research since, say, Delauney or Malevitch" ("Newman" 81). This refutation is the central concern of the avant-garde because it is by means of this process that the avant-garde reveals "realities" as constructions.

The avant-gardist critique of representation is precisely what Lyotard sees as missing in Adorno's thought. The task he sets himself in "Adorno as the Devil" is to transfer this critique to philosophy, to reveal Adorno's thought, by contaminating philosophy with art, as one way of "putting into perspective" and thereby to challenge its claim to truth. Yet while Lyotard thus appears to be arguing *against* Adorno in this essay, it is important to realise that he is also developing ideas that he sees as emerging in the Frankfurt-School thinker's work. In fact, Lyotard turns Adorno's own thought against the narratives associated with his work. Adorno's work itself, he suggests in this essay, makes visible the contingency of the "reality" that it articulates. It is the site in which the magical square that grounds the Marxist narrative emerges. It is thus Adorno that shows Lyotard the necessary contingency at the heart of philosophy and that leads him to see "Adornian Marxism" as not *the* theoretical position but one position among many possible positions in a given framework.

For Lyotard the key structure upon which the Marxist narrative is founded, and thus the structure which it cannot properly take account of, is the critical relation. It is this relationship which grounds the belief in the opposition between art and life, self and other, subject and object, critic and work/text. Under such a model, Lyotard argues, both

the category of the subject and that of representation remain uncriticized. It is at this juncture that a grasp of Lyotard's paraesthetic practice of staging different positions becomes particularly important. Indeed, it is vital here to grasp the split between Adorno's thought and the way that Lyotard is staging it for, as I hope the previous chapters have shown, this is clearly not the framework that grounds texts such as *Aesthetic Theory*, "Art and the Arts," and "Commitment." What Lyotard associates with the name Adorno in this essay is in fact a much cruder Marxism than that made available in the German philosopher's writing. Yet while Lyotard stages and attacks a certain version of the critical relation under the name "Adorno" this is not to say that this version can be separated from a "true" or "correct" Adorno. This is necessarily so because what Lyotard's argument operates against is the claim of any single reading or narrative to be *the* truth. To aim to separate out a "true" reading of Adorno's work would be to submit to the criteria of the framework that Lyotard seeks to challenge. In what follows, then, it is important to bear in mind this blurring of different versions of Adorno: Lyotard's practice of responding to some aspects of Adorno's thought in its sophistication and over-simplifying and deliberately "misreading" other aspects is entirely strategic.[251]

For Adorno under capitalism the human subject is "riven" or "alienated", dominated by the inhuman system of techno-scientific rationality. Yet, Lyotard tells us, Adorno holds onto the idea of reconciliation, albeit in the negative:

> *the reconciliation of the subject and object has been perverted into a satanic parody, into a liquidation of the subject in the objective order.* Totality is missing = there is no god to reconcile = all reconciliation can only be represented in its impossibility, parodied = it is a satanic work. You [Adorno] wasted your time replacing God with the devil, the prefix super— with the old sub—terranean mole, you remain in the same theological deployment. (132-133)

Adorno's apparent refusal to affirm existence in its rivenness, his belief that

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[251] What Lyotard does with Adorno in "Adorno as the Devil" is thus comparable to what he does more explicitly with Marx in *Libidinal Economy*. In that text, Marx is famously staged variously as "Marx," "old man Marx," and "little girl Marx." See Chapter Three, "The Desire Named Marx" 94-155.

reconciliation is desirable (even if impossible) forces him to preserve the idea of the unified subject. For Lyotard this leads, as the passage above indicates, to something akin to a negative theology.

> The dissipation of subjectivity in and by capitalism; Adorno like Marx, sees there a defeat; he will only be able to surmount this pessimism by making of this defeat a negative moment in a dialectics of emancipation and of the conquest of creativity. But this dialectics is no less theological than the nihilism of the loss of the creative subject; it is its therapeutic resolution in the framework of a religion, here the religion of history. (127)

Dialectics institutes a progressive temporal model—history—in which "development" is achieved through negation, a movement driven by the utopian promise of reconciliation as an ultimate goal. It thus takes the same shape as Christianity: dependant upon a primordial unified past, from which the present—a time of absence and alienation—is experienced as fallen or degraded; it sustains itself on the promise of a messianic end to these struggles. Acknowledging modernity as a fragmented and rationalised space, Adorno mourns for a lost state of unified presence and posits a utopian hope for a future in which alienation and domination will end, in which reconciliation will take place. The hope of redemption and reconciliation merges with the idea of a prelapsarian state of grace, and becomes a return to a lost unity: the end of history, this future is a return to the past. Adorno's vision of modernity, Lyotard thus claims, is *nostalgic*.

It is against this nostalgia that Lyotard's work protests, against a desire for "the whole and the one, for the reconciliation of the concept and the sensible, [for] the transparent communicable experience" ("Answering" 81-82). For all that such nostalgia serves to do, as he sees it, is to reinforce the very structures against which it protests; dialectical narratives of progress are implicated in the techno-scientific system. Adorno's Marxism, as anti-capitalism and as a result of his refusal to give up the utopian impulse, unwittingly conspires with the operations of capital. "One sees that such an analysis, made by Marx-Adorno, is constrained to produce its antibody, the natural, as that which capitalism comes to lack. Capitalism is thought nihilistically, relative to a

natural subject" ("Adorno" 131).[252] Lack of presence, in other words, can only be thought of in terms of an absence. Likewise, insisting on its possibility, Adorno is only able to figure reconciliation in its absence or impossibility, in the negative. Such thought, as Lyotard puts it in "Adorno as the Devil," remains "inside faith" (130).[253] Negating, as he declares elsewhere, is "deeply rational, deeply consistent with the system. … [T]he critic remains in the sphere of the criticized, he belongs to it, he goes beyond one term of the position but doesn't alter the position of the terms" ("Adrift" 13).[254] The dialectical historicism of the Frankfurt School, in other words, is unable to alter the critical relation: rather than revealing and changing the conditions of its particular "reality" it operates to conceal them. It is the omnipotence of this narrative which goes by the name "Marx-Adorno" that Lyotard, by revealing its structure, seeks to challenge.

Stepping aside from this critique for one moment, it is worth noting once again the schism in Lyotard's reading of Adorno. For although it is posed as an attack on Adorno's thought, the discussion of the magical square and Lyotard's claim that negating is a movement that is consistent with the dominant structures of rationality, directly recalls Adorno's claim (outlined in Chapter One) that decisions instigated at the level of the artwork are interchangeable, that anti-art does not challenge art but rather reconfirms it. The potential Adorno assigns to art, the potential to challenge the omnipotence of such structures, is what Lyotard transfers to philosophical thought. Thus, it begins to seem that Lyotard's attack on "Adorno" is in fact generated by

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[252] Here, of course, we are returned to Bernstein's argument, set out in Chapter Two, which is also based on a nostalgic conception of contemporary experience becoming increasingly "unnatural": indeed, in this chapter, it is as a counter to this specific aspect of Bernstein's reading of Adorno that I am attempting to set Lyotard up.

[253] This is a sentiment that Duchamp also formulated: "I am against the word 'anti,'" the artist told Arturo Schwarz, "because it's a bit like atheist, as compared to believer. And an atheist is just as much of a religious man as the believer is, and an anti-artist is just as much of an artist as the other artist" (Schwarz 1:33).

[254] Lyotard can thus be understood as echoing Paul Mann's declaration that "discourse has no negative force that is not reduced to dialectical systems-maintenance" (88). Yet, unlike Mann, Lyotard refuses to fall silent in the face of this apparently totalising force. Instead, for Lyotard the scenario that Mann describes is the emergence of the magical square, and thus the emergence of possible alternatives.

radicalising Adorno's thought on aesthetics and art and turning it against what Lyotard presents as his conceptions of history and subjectivity.[255]

Adorno, Lyotard argues, can see neither the consequences nor the contingency of the magical square, the critical relation of Marxist thought, which puts his thought into perspective. In a phrase that suggests the Christian notion of the passion—the suffering of martyrdom and the pain that must be endured in order to achieve reconciliation— Lyotard describes Adorno as caught in "the passion of meaning", as suffering for his belief in a unified truth and unified subject. He is caught in the seductive illusion of dialectics which, in its claim to reveal the truth, binds itself to falseness and negation. "Dialectics has not *degenerated* into a State religion" as Adorno claims, Lyotard writes, in fact "the modern State can only have for its religion dialectics, this catchall for skepticisms and nihilisms, this ready-to-wear for melancholy" (133). Adorno's thought is not simply *on* the consequences and expressions of the dominance of techno-scientific capitalism but reveals itself as a consequence and expression of this very system.

> The *Aesthetische Theorie* is not constructed like a Phenomenologie or a Dialectics, like a discourse proceeding to its proper conclusion, it is fragmented, full of silences and full of silence …. It carries the loss of totality in its form: the sweeping of a field, a fragmentation never reclosed. But why say loss of totality? This discourse of rhetoric and classical and romantic philosophy is a deployment (implying representation of the totality by its very construction), this deployment is disinvested. (136)

In other words, Adorno's nostalgia is the result of the framework in which his narrative is constructed. It is this structure that generates the idea of a lost unity or totality (which it names as Eden or nature, depending on religious preference). Once this framework is revealed as such, as a framework, it loses its claim to be *the* truth and the idea of a lost totality relinquishes its grip.[256] That Adorno himself could not recognise this

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[255] This is to say that Lyotard develops the idea of internal discordance that Adorno associates with art as a way of thinking about history (which, he claims, Adorno has a unified vision of) and the subject (which is, in Adorno's thought, unlike art, potentially unified).

[256] It is at this point that Bernstein's argument that the medium is a stand-in for the lost authority of nature begins to sound questionable, appearing as the articulation of precisely this kind of nostalgia. Just as Lyotard asks why we say "loss of totality" we might ask why Bernstein /Adorno mourn "nature." I will

disinvestment, that he continued to think in terms of a loss, is why, for Lyotard, "Adorno is criticism's finale, its bouquet, its revelation as fireworks" (130).

Lyotard's attempt to transform theory by means of art is of course his attempt to work through and critique the critical relation that he considers "Adornian" Marxism to have left unexamined. In both *Duchamp's TRANS/formers* and *The Inhuman* he also explicitly reworks the categories that he perceives as uncriticized in the framework of Adorno's thought; the subject and representation. Before moving on to examine these critiques, however, I want to briefly take note of the fact that in Lyotard's verdict on Adorno there is the resounding echo of the criticism levelled at Adorno by Peter Bürger. Both suggest that Adorno's key failure is his inability to see his work as contingent rather than necessary. "Adorno as the Devil" argues that *Aesthetic Theory* is the finale of a particular critical movement, while *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, which was published in the same year as Lyotard's essay, argues that Adorno's "theoretical position is itself part and parcel of the epoch of the historical avant-garde movements" (63). Yet while these two claims may sound alike, they must be carefully distinguished. Bürger locates Adorno in this manner because of the latter's refusal to give up the idea of art as a critical space. However, without recognising it, Bürger remains within the framework of Adorno's thought, no more able to go beyond Frankfurt-School Marxism than Adorno whose work he sees as becoming "historical" with the death of the avant-garde. Bürger moves one step in the same framework; rather than a utopian vision, his is a dystopian vision of the increasing dominance of the recuperative techno-scientific system. What Bürger provides, then, is the antithesis to Adorno's thesis: "he goes beyond one term of the position but doesn't alter the position of terms" (Lyotard "Adrift" 13). While Bürger is able to critique what he terms the "sub-system" of art he is unable to critique the critical relation. He can be accused, as a result, of precisely the system-immanent type of criticism of which he accuses Adorno, the system here being extended beyond "art" to indicate the Marxist theoretical framework which positions "art" and "life praxis" as separate from one another.

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return to this later in this chapter, when I draw a comparison between Lyotard and Bernstein's notions of the task of art.

For Lyotard on the other hand, Adorno's thought (which, as we have seen, articulates a considerably more dynamic and complex relationship between art and "life" than that assumed by Bürger) is vital because it reveals itself as a product of the system which it seeks to oppose. *Aesthetic Theory* is, for Lyotard, the site in which the magical square emerges—"it carries the loss of totality in its form"—a finale, but also a revelation. The moment of Adorno's magnum opus is, for Lyotard, at once an ending and a beginning. It is the site in which the necessary contingency of the Marxist narrative as one "putting into perspective" among others is made visible. As a result, it is Adorno's work that opens out the possibility of different relations, a space from which criticism and the critical relation can be re-written. As we shall see shortly it is this possibility that generates Lyotard's reformulation of the term "avant-garde." In fact, the polemics of "Adorno as the Devil" distract from the fact that Lyotard takes as much from the Marxist theorist as he rejects: it is this relationship that I want now to sketch out, as I explore how Lyotard's philosophy develops Adorno's aesthetics and expands his complex concept of "art" beyond the realm of "aesthetics".

3. The Hinge

The central concern of all of the essays in *Duchamp's TRANS/formers*, Lyotard remarks in *Peregrinations,* is the idea of the "paradoxical hinge." This is part of a broader pattern, he goes on to confess, which develops out of his "obsessive concern with open 'space-time' in which there are no more identities but only transformations" (31). The notion of an "open 'space-time'" takes on particular significance in Lyotard's phrasing of the avant-garde, as we shall see shortly. For the moment, however, I want to concentrate on the idea of the paradoxical hinge.

The hinge joins two distinct things; it links them and holds them in relation to one another. This simple device fascinated Duchamp throughout his career: in his last work *Given*, for example, the hole in the door operates with a hinge-function between the gallery space in which the viewer is standing and the imaginary space of the bride

into which he/she looks. That this interest was also evident earlier in Duchamp's career is demonstrated by one of the notes in the *Green Box*, which reads

> Perhaps make a *hinge picture* (folding yardstick, book…) develop *the principle of the hinge* in the displacements 1st in the plane 2nd in space.
> Find an *automatic description* of the hinge.
> Perhaps introduce it in the Pendu femelle.
>
> (*Writing* 27)

Like so many of Duchamp's notes, this one alludes to a number of vague ideas without clarifying them and suggests a number of strange connections without developing them. The unfolding yardstick may relate to the *3 Standard Stops* which form the capillary tubes of the bachelor section in the *Large Glass*. The mention of a book might be taken as prefiguring the geometry book, *Unhappy Readymade* (1919), which Duchamp asked his sister to hang on her balcony until its pages were destroyed and scattered by the weather, though it might also be a simple reference to the physical form of the book as pages hinged by a spine. The sentence goes on to associate the hinge principle with non-Euclidean geometry and Duchamp's attempt to imagine the 4th dimension: displacements in the 2-D plane (which create three dimensions) and in 3-D space (which create four) are imagined as helping to develop an independent "principle." The notion of an "*automatic description*" alludes to both Duchamp's concern with machines and mechanical processes and to the indifference to taste and subjective values which he famously attempted to harness by way of chance mechanisms. Finally, there is the reference to the "pendu femelle," the bride of the *Large Glass*. This once again suggests an interest in the fourth dimension although the phrase can also be associated with *Fountain*: the urinal was hung in Duchamp's studio and is referred to as female in the notes.[257] Thus the early note on the hinge principle seems also to hint at the connection between the readymades and the *Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* that would later be drawn in the *Boîtes-En-Valise*.[258]

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[257] The note in question is from *The 1914 Box* and reads "-one only has: for *female* the public urinal and one *lives* by it" (*Writings* 23).
[258] See Chapter Three, 166n68.

These allusions, then, draw a large number of Duchamp's works into a single constellation and these works, disparate though they may seem, have one thing in common: a concern with the relation between the measurable or calculable and the immensurable or incalculable.[259] It is perhaps in terms of how geometry and the weather are brought together in the *Unhappy Readymade* that this is most immediately obvious. The interest in the fourth dimension, however, also involves a similar relationship: non-Euclidean geometry is a system of measurement which predicts the existence of a dimension which it cannot know, which it can only postulate. In one sense, then, the fourth dimension can be understood as marking the connection between the proof of reason and the power of the imagination. In terms of the *Large Glass,* the connection is between the "rational" space of the Bachelor machines in the lower part, a mechanical realm organised according to the laws of classical perspective, and the "non-rational" space of the four dimensional bride and her resplendent "blossoming" taking form in "the milky way." If, furthermore, the hinge connects the readymades to the *Large Glass*, then it connects a process which Duchamp described as using mechanical "canned chance" (at a pre-selected moment, to select from a range of "readymade" objects) with a process of elaborately working out a highly personal and unique "masterpiece". Again, then, we have the measured and the rational brought into connection with the immensurable and non-rational. Finally, the two objects that Duchamp imagines as "hinge pictures" fit the same pattern: a scale of measurement that—ironically—can become smaller than it is and yet remain that measure, the folding yardstick is like the standard stops, a measure "diminished" (*Writing* 22); the book is an object which presents language (rational, commonsensical, man-made) as non-rational matter, marks on a page. In Duchamp's note, we may conclude, the hinge appears to be a figure for connecting incomparables, a figure for the point of contact between spaces and systems that operate according to different laws. It is not a space like the magical square in which differences are annulled, but rather a figure in which different orders are held together but distinctly: like the door of *Given,* the hinge separates as it joins. This is the paradox

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[259] Lanier Graham reads this interest in bringing the rational and intuitive together in terms of a male/female balance and Duchamp's persistent interest in androgyny (see *Duchamp & Androgyny*).

to which Lyotard refers: the hinge "designates the connection between unconnected elements" (*Duchamp's* 80).

It is precisely Duchamp's attempt to think the hinge as a figure of connection between the rational and the non-rational, sense and nonsense, which interests Lyotard. For the Duchampian hinge is an alternative to the magical square: a figure of heterogeneity and incommensurability, it does not maintain itself by the logic of homogenisation and assimilation. It is a figure in which difference is held, a figure for the opening out of possibility and alterity, not as entirely remote or disconnected from that which is already known/mapped but rather as something in relation. In fact this problematic notion of the connection between unconnected spaces or systems—or, as he prefers, incommensurables—is also central to Lyotard's thought and operates far beyond the confines of *Duchamp's TRANS/formers,* motivating his various enquiries from *Discours Figure* (1971) through *The Postmodern Condition* (1979) to *The Differend* (1981). It pertains directly to his rephrasing of the sublime—itself a paradigmatic figure of incommensurability—by means of which, in *The Inhuman,* Lyotard re-conceptualises the task of the avant-garde.

As a figure of internal difference, characterised by its ability to differ from itself, and its ability to hold difference in tension, the hinge recalls Adorno's complex concept of art. As I attempted to show in Chapter One, Adorno conceives of art as composed of internal heterogeneity, a constellation of different orders. Art is the dynamic crystallisation of heterogeneous materials, marked by what Adorno calls its "empirical incommensurability," its differing from itself. The artwork, then, is a hinge figure: it cannot be reduced to the rational or the material, to sense or nonsense but, Adorno claims, emerges through a process of separating itself from the material out of which it takes shape and to which it remains tied. Its relationship to empirical reality, in other words, is precisely the connection/separation of the hinge. Operating within and as a product of reason, the artwork does not conform to the rules of rationality: it does not arise from a framework, cannot be reduced to a set of concepts. Objectified in the tension between the pole of unified rationality and the pole of the diffuse and mimetic, art, as Adorno thinks it, is a hinge, a binding force, which holds the rational and the non-

rational together. What the "paradoxical hinge" can be taken to represent, therefore, is firstly, Lyotard's extension of the structure of Adorno's artwork beyond the realm of "art" (as defined by the framework Bernstein labels "aesthetics") and secondly, a shift of emphasis from the question of autonomy as separation to the question of relation or connection. Lyotard adopts the complex structure by which Adorno thinks art as a figure by which to think structures more broadly; he does not accept, in other words, the border between art and life put in place by "aesthetics".

Libidinal Economy is also concerned to elaborate this kind of hinge, which takes the shape of what Lyotard calls the "energetic dispositif" (3). In this figure structure collides with the immensurable intensities of what Lyotard calls the "great ephemeral skin" or "libidinal band." The opening section of *Libidinal Economy* is dedicated to describing this band, which depends upon a deliberately provocative and graphically described process of cutting open and dissecting the "so-called body" of the humanist subject.[260] It is a movement which recalls and intensifies Duchamp's obsession with the violence of "stripping bare." Indeed, in *Duchamp's TRANS/formers*, Lyotard makes this connection, suggesting that the artist's protest against the "retinal stupidity" of the painter should be understood as a protest against "the stupidity that gives credence to the 'body,' to the organic machine of reproductive centralism" (76). The only move by which this "body" can be discredited, Lyotard argues in *Libidinal Economy*, is if we construct a new figure, if we

> go immediately to the very limits of cruelty, perform the dissection of polymorphous perversion, spread out the immense membrane of the libidinal "body" which is quite different to a frame. It is made from the most heterogeneous textures, bone, epithelium, sheets to write on, charged atmospheres, swords, glass cases, peoples, grasses, canvases to paint. All these zones are joined end to end in a band which has no back to it, a Moebius band which interests us not because it is closed, but because it is one-sided, a Moebian skin which …[has]… therefore neither exterior nor interior. (2-3)

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[260] Interestingly Lawrence Schehr argues that the libidinal band is a problematic figure because, as figure for the non-individual, it should thus be non-sex but is in fact masculine: a tumescent space which throws up or erects dispositions through desire (see "Lyotard's Codpiece").

This band or skin, is composed not only of bodily material and material charged with intensities (among which, we might note, Lyotard includes artistic media: sheets to write on, canvases to paint) but intensity itself; heterogeneous and immensurable affects, sensualities and desires. It is important to note, however, that the libidinal band is emphatically not some kind of primordial "flesh" of the world: it does not displace the individual body in order to return back to more authentic experience but rather is a figure for that which is held and repressed within the experience of embodied subjectivity. In this sense, the libidinal band can be associated with the way that aesthetic experience is set up in Adornian modernism: not as something removed from or detached from rational "life praxis", but rather as an aspect of experience which is repressed within the structures of rationality.

The band of libidinal intensities is contrasted with the "theatre of representations" (3), a figure of structure or disposition. The metaphor of the theatre recalls the practice of staging that, I have suggested, Lyotard's work is engaged in. Although we can and should think the entities that *Libidinal Economy* describes—intensities and structures or representations—as in conflict, it is of course a mistake to consider them antithetical. Intensities are not external to the structures of representation but rather inherent to them, necessarily present but repressed within them. For, Lyotard claims, representations themselves result from a type of labour or event on the libidinal band. It is precisely such labour that generates the "energetic *dispositif*," or "chamber of representation" (3). Lyotard describes this as a "box closed upon itself, filtering impulses and allowing only those to appear on the stage which come from what will come to be known as the *exterior*, satisfying the conditions of interiority" (3). In other words, the dispositions that are generated by the energies of the libidinal band operate to internalise and contain those energies, to turn them into players on their stages or to send them off-stage, to exclude and repress them.[261] This domination is, however, a

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[261] Lyotard warns against confusing his notion of the chamber of representations with the idea that "there is no outside...—don't go confusing this crestfallen message and this representation of an entirely closed theatre with our Moebian-labyrinthine skin, single-sided patchwork of all the organs (inorganic and disorganized) which the libido can transverse: for however well it is closed upon itself, it too, like a good Moebius band, is not at all closed in the sense of a volume, it is infinite and contrary to the representative cube, intensities run in it without meeting a terminus, without ever crashing into the wall of absence"

paradoxical task: just as the intensities of the libidinal band are unknowable and unthinkable except through structures, so structures are driven by the band.[262] The energetic dispositif is a hinge, holding the rational form of structures and the immensurable intensities of the libidinal band in tension: it is a figure through which Lyotard attempts to think the non-unified and riven without either nostalgia or hope of reconciliation. In this figure structure and intensity coexist in a constant state of movement: the chamber is never able to finally close upon itself, but remains (perhaps unwittingly) an open structure, constantly being changed by the flow of intensities. The space of possibility opened out by an event such as the emergence of the magical square, then, is not a space "next to" the structure which is revealed but rather within that structure: difference and possibilities are held within structures, not simply excluded by them. The challenge is to find ways to release these possibilities, to generate transformations. The name that Lyotard gives to this process, the generation of transformations in structure by intensity, is dissimulation.

Before moving on to discuss how Lyotard uses the notions of the energetic disposition and dissimulation to critique the subject and the critical relation, it is important to note once again the proximity between this hinge figure and the figure of the artwork developed in Adorno's aesthetics. The libidinal band and the theatre of representations can be grasped as corresponding to the two poles between which, as I tried to show in Chapter One, Adorno understands art to emerge. The libidinal band is diffuse and mimetic; the theatre of representations is rational and unifying. Yet, just as Adorno disputed the "omnipotence" of these poles, Lyotard's work suggests that they cannot be grasped independently of one another as "pure" or unified forms: it is the clash between them that generates structures, as we know them. Structures are born of and hold within them the intensities of the libidinal band, it is these intensities that give a transformative force to structures. In this, the relationship between the energetic disposition and the band mirrors that of the relationship between the Adornian artwork

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(*Libidinal Economy* 4). Here, Lyotard can be read as arguing against the nihilism which Plant reads into his work (see 175n13).
[262] Lyotard is of course consciously working within and against the theatre of representations, hence his "staging" of Adorno.

and empirical reality, and just as the Adornian artwork is a force that reconfigures the different elements that it holds in its constellation so too is the energetic disposition a dynamic collision. The key difference here, again, is that while Adorno reserves the potentially transformative power of this force to art, to the sphere of "aesthetics", in his early philosophy Lyotard envisages this energetic and transformative power as at the basis of all structures.[263] This leads, as Lyotard argues it, to quite different understandings of history and subjectivity than those set forth by Adorno: strikingly, it is on these grounds, as I will now try to show, that Lyotard's project begins to appear comparable to that of Warhol.

4. A Mechanical Asceticism: Automatism, Bachelor Machines and the Critique of Subjectivity

It is, as the title *Duchamp's TRANS/formers* suggests, as a mechanics of dissimulation that Lyotard positions Duchamp's work: of particular significance here are the bachelor machines, a kind of energetic disposition that brings the human and the mechanical into conflict. The machine, in its more familiar guise, is a tool by which humans dominate nature; here, however, Lyotard resists the idea of the machine as "anti-natural." Instead he describes the machine as "a combination of resisting bodies, assembled in such a way that, by means of them and certain determinant motions, the mechanical forces of nature are obliged to do the work" (41).[264] Following Duchamp's lead, in Lyotard's book the machine becomes not an inhuman opposite of the subject, but an analogy for the subject: bodies which resist, which do not work but rather "oblige" something else (nature, which is here described as mechanical) to do the work. Such a pairing should be understood not as anthropomorphic, an attempt to figure the machine in human terms, but rather as a mechanisation of the human, an attempt to figure the human in machinic

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[263] In the later work, Lyotard seems to take a more Adornian line, discussing this force as something that belongs peculiarly to art (although not necessarily exclusively). This shift is no doubt part of the broader shift away from the earlier work that was outlined at the beginning of this chapter.

[264] Here Lyotard is in fact adopting the definition of machines given by kinetics pioneer Franz Reuleaux, director of the Technische Hochschule in Berlin in the mid nineteenth century and author of the *Kinematics of Machinery: Outlines of a Theory of Machines* (1875).

terms. In this sense, the bachelor machines recall the way in which Warhol positions the subject: as I tried to show in the last chapter, the technologisation of the subject is a favourite trope in the Pop artist's work, one which *a; a novel* in particular plays upon. In *Duchamp's TRANS/formers,* the analogy is compounded by Lyotard's description of the mechanical operation as a "coupling" with nature, a phrase that deliberately hints at an erotic or sexual relation between the mechanical and the natural.[265] Not a tool for the domination of nature, Lyotard's machine is

> an apparatus that lets us overturn relations of force…neither an instrument nor a weapon, but an artifice, which is and which is not coupled with nature: it is so coupled in that it does not work without capturing and exploiting natural forces; it is not so coupled in that it plays *a trick* on these forces, being itself less strong than they are, and making real this monstrosity: that the less strong should be stronger than what is stronger. (41-42)[266]

The machine connects the immensurable forces of nature with the "rational" artifice of the mechanical structure: it is a space (like the *Glass*) in which nature and artifice are held together but not unified, a hinge space that is characterised by what appears as an almost revolutionary potential to generate transformative energy. The bachelor machines do not seek to dominate nature but rather to outwit it. Like the Warholian subject who brings out their "recordings" when needed, they are "cunning machines," traps set, waiting for the energies of nature to move through them. This idea of waiting, which in fact points forward to the temporality of Lyotard's later description of the avant-garde, is

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[265] This echoes Warhol's comments about the televisions and his "wife" (the tape-recorder) which were cited in Chapter Three 151n51. Given Warhol's homosexuality, however, the idea of technology as his "wife" perhaps sets in motion not so much an erotic relation than the idea of adhering to social norms responsibility, duty and the cliché of marriage as a limitation on male freedom. In this light, the tape-recorder might be seen as a "ball and chain" and thus technology appears as something that enslaves the human subject as much as it enables it. For references for more on the queer and masculine sexual politics of the Factory see Chapter Three, 146n44).

[266] This last formulation—that the less strong should be stronger than what is stronger—provides, I think, a good way of thinking about how Warhol's work engaged with an art scene that was dominated by Abstract Expressionism. Next to the macho and spiritual art of someone like Pollock, the light-heartedness of "swish" Pop appears transient and ephemeral, yet, as I have tried to show at various points in this thesis, it is precisely by harnessing the energies of abstraction and allowing the clash between high and low, serious and humorous etc. to happen, that Warhol's brand of Pop is generated. In other words, rather than attempting to overthrow Abstract Expressionism, Warhol uses it to shape his art.

a waiting-in-vain. For the revolutionary promise will never be fulfilled: the bachelor machines are destined to remain celibate for the machine/nature coupling/not coupling is like that of the bride and bachelors, neither pairing can form a unity. Indeed, it is at the very moment of consummation that the disparity between the two is confirmed.

> It's always when there is contact between two bodies in movement …[nature and artifice,] the suitors and their lovely objects, and when from one side a claim arises to unite them, to unify them in one body animated by the same movement, hence when the aim of coupling or of composing forces appears, it's then that retortion comes along to foil this claim, erecting the dissimilating partition between the partners. (*Duchamp's* 45)

The coupling of disparate forces does not result in the stronger being finally overthrown; the order of the machine or structure does not replace that of nature. To substitute one order for another is to work within the magical square, to simply repeat the laws upon which domination is based: the cunning machine, in contrast, will allow itself to be dominated by nature and in so doing will *use* the power of nature, in the same way that the structure is built on and transformed by the energy of the libidinal band.

This description of the bachelor machines and their coupling resonates with the controversial description in *Libidinal Economy* of the relationship between the proletarian worker and the machine and thus should be understood as being not just a response to Duchamp but also a development of Lyotard's critique of the Marxist subject. Discussing the industrial revolution—and in deliberately incendiary language— Lyotard writes that the worker becomes "the slave of the machine, the machine of the machine, fucker fucked by it" and, again eroticising the relationship, claims that "there is a *jouissance* in it, … they [the workers]—hang on tight and spit on me—*enjoyed* the mad destruction of their organic body which was indeed imposed upon them, they enjoyed the decomposition of their personal identity" (109). The idea that the proletariat take pleasure in their oppression is designed to be offensive, of course, but the key point is that the worker to some extent allows himself to be used and thus participates in his own oppression. This clearly recalls the production processes of *a; a novel* discusses in the previous chapter and Ondine's role as cultural "worker," using as much as being

used.[267] Warhol's work again can be seen as the deliberate performance of the structures of domination, mirroring the processes of capitalism.

In *Duchamp's TRANS/formers,* staging a dialogue with a hostile interlocutor, Lyotard returns to his provocative statement and writes

> I'm talking about a mechanical asceticism. The proletariat, in being subjected to it, contributed to modernity. It is inaccurate and foolish to see them as cattle who couldn't enter the future except backwards and under a hail of blows … "Jouissance." The French think it means the euphoria that follows a meal washed down with Beaujolais. Proletarianization as prostitution, they don't believe that's in Marx; it's only a literary metaphor. (17– 18)

This is not to say that the worker "gets what he deserves" nor to say that the system is either just or defensible, it is to say that the Marxist proletarian subject is a figure that can exist only by means of its position within the frameworks that repress it: if capitalism is a structure generated by the repression of the worker, the worker is a structure generated by capitalism. Just as the worker provides the raw material for industry, industry creates the worker, generates a position in which the subject can locate him or herself. The subject, then, is an energetic disposition, created by the structures by which it is also oppressed.[268]

It is at this point that we might briefly respond to some of the charges set out at the beginning of this chapter. The first of these is that, according to Crowther, Lyotard regards any attempt to demarcate boundaries between disciplines as an attempt at domination and therefore as undesirable. It is certainly the case that domination, in Lyotard's early work as in Adorno's, is the imposition of structure by the forces of

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[267] Here we might also think of the typists. Warhol recalled that they took 18 months to finish what should have been a relatively short project. "I would glance over at them sometimes with admiration because they had me convinced that typing was one of the slowest, most painstaking jobs in the world. Now I realize […that] they just liked being around all the people who hung around at the studio" (*Philosophy* 95).

[268] Later, in *The Inhuman*, Lyotard will claim that the condition of subjectivity is always riven and that it is this rivenness that prevents us from becoming fully inhuman. See "Introduction: About the Human" 1-7. For another version of this argument see Lyotard's essay "The Other's Rights": "What makes human beings alike is the fact that every human being carries within him the figure of the other. The likeness that they have in common follows from the difference of each from each" (136).

rationalisation and so it is true that the attempt to demarcate boundaries is in some sense a form of domination. Yet, it is important to note that for Lyotard such domination is necessary: without it structures cannot exist. Lyotard is not a utopian thinker; he does not see the end of domination as a possibility. However, he does see strength and force as something that can be used in the way that the machine uses nature. In other words, domination is not a purely negative power and, most importantly, the form it takes is contingent. Crucially, this means that the lines of demarcation, the structures of domination, are open to transformation. Lyotard does not, then, protest against all domination but rather attempts to think through how domination works and how its structures can be transformed.

As I have already suggested, Lyotard does this by adopting Adorno's model of the artwork: the model of the libidinal band as the ground and substance of the structure, is the same model as that sketched out by Adorno when he writes of the "collective unconscious" as the ground and substance of the artwork.[269] For Lyotard, structure and intensity are as mutually dependent upon one another as art and non-art are for Adorno. It is this movement of aesthetics beyond the sphere of art, of course, that is seen as problematic by Eagleton, who critiques Lyotard's work as aestheticism or anti-philosophical intuitionism. Again, what this critique fails to take account of is the place of structure in Lyotard's thought. Lyotard's work does not reject structure, it is not anti-reason or anti-theory: it simply reveals these forms as dependent upon the differences that they seek to repress in the name of "truth." Such structures are necessary but they are also contingent: they do not constitute *the* truth. Lyotard does not value art, intuition or intensity over and above philosophy, reason and structure; he reveals them as mutually dependent.

Marxist revolution as a resolution of inequality, a vision of the absence of domination, can do nothing to challenge the "magical square" of capitalism: attempting

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[269] As I mentioned in chapter one, Adorno's notion of the collective unconscious can be approached in terms of Heidegger's discussion of the relation between Being and beings. That Lyotard's thinking of the event can also be approached this way is suggested by his use in *The Inhuman* of the term *Ereignis*: see Malpas's "Sublime Ascesis" for an exploration of the relation between *Ereignis* and the Lyotardian event. For an alternative Heiddeggerian model of the avant-garde as event see also Ziareck, *Force*.

to exchange one totalising system for another (even if this attempt is carried out in the name of redistribution and equality) it repeats the laws upon which domination is based. It is a negative reflection of capitalism. To really alter this structure, Lyotard argues, we have to be able to see our own complicity with it, how structure generates the subject as well as represses it, and crucially we need to be aware of its necessary contingency.[270] The structure of the Marxist narrative of history and subjectivity is one way of putting into perspective, not *the* way: the moment of integral nominalism at the heart of all structures (political as well as theoretical and artistic) should be grasped. This is what is at stake, for Lyotard, in both art and politics, "to make seen what makes one see, and not what is visible" ("Sublime" 102). For, once the magical square emerges, then the possibility of other structures which operate to different, more just laws unfolds.

These stakes call not for the active resistance of rebellion against the system but rather for a kind of passivity in which the necessary contingency of the structure is allowed to expose itself as such and can thus be transformed. It calls, in other words, for a kind of automatism that suspends conscious will and instead allows the operations of structures to be revealed, an automatism that (like the automatic talking of *a; a novel*) reveals the dependency of human thought on these structures at the same time as it reveals their contingency. Thus it is that thought proceeds by means of a mechanical ascesis, an ascesis of the conscious will: "the artist no longer composes, he lets his deployment's desire go its way" ("Adorno" 132). Rather than predetermining the meaning of events, it is the duty of thought, as Lyotard puts it, to "[scan] the situation sincerely (as in the case of the painter)" (*Peregrinations* 26), to allow change to happen and to judge what happens on a case by case basis, without forcing events to conform to predetermined criteria. Thinking moves, in Lyotard's work, through a kind of aesthetic judgment, a judgment which takes place without determinate criteria. Its duty is to resist the movement of synthesis, of unification and instead to bear witness to what Lyotard has "always tried, under diverse headings –work, figural, heterogeneity, dissensus, event, thing – to reserve: the unharmonizable" (*Inhuman* 4). This term clearly gestures

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[270] Lyotard has also formulated the same idea in directly political terms a discussion of his time and activities in Algeria in *Peregrinations* (see 26).

towards the categories and arguments of aesthetic theory and in particular the notion of the sublime. It is the task of bearing witness to the unharmonizable, moreover, which emerges in Lyotard's writing as the task of the avant-garde. Before examining this connection, however, it is necessary to briefly outline how Lyotard's critiques of subjectivity and representation re-configure the critical relation, for this reconfiguration not only illuminates Lyotard's thinking more generally but also opens out a site in which to compare his work with the theories of the avant-garde discussed in previous chapters.

5. I'll be Your Mirror: Dissimulating the Critical Relation

> The world is a multiplicity of apparatuses that transform units of energy into one another. Duchamp the transformer does not want to repeat the same effects. That is why he must be many of these apparatuses, and must metamorphose himself continually. He wants to win first prize every time, in all the competitions, for new patents.

> *Duchamp as several transformers.* (36-37)[271]

Duchamp attempts, in other words, to dissimilate the intensities within himself and his own work. Through repetition, indifference, canned chance and "mirrorical returns" he avoids replication—of ideas, of social structures, of works, of his own "authorial" identity—and instead generates difference. This process of transformation through repetition, dissimilation, becomes in Lyotard's thought an alterative to the critical relation set up by Frankfurt-School Marxism.

In *Duchamp's TRANS/formers,* Lyotard sets up a distinction between two different types of relation or response, namely the "mirrorish" and the "specular". The latter, which returns us to the idea of the spectacle as a set of reified relations, describes a relation of simulation or replication. The specular mode homogenises, generates copies. It is this specular relation that grounds the idea of representation as a "true" reflection, and thus grounds the assumption that criticism can reproduce in language the meanings and propositions of art works. The specular relation is that of capitalism, but

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[271] This final sentence is italicised and in English in the French original thus, like Duchamp, Lyotard uses foreign languages and italicisation to draw attention to the materiality of his text. See Chapter Three 161-162 for a fuller discussion of this strategy in Duchamp's work.

equally that of the "Adorno/Marx" narrative which Lyotard attacks in "Adorno as the Devil". In contrast the mirrorish relation that Lyotard associates with Duchamp is a dissimilating relation. For a mirror, although it may seem to present a true reflection of what stands before it, in fact what it presents us with, as Duchamp's occasional practice of mirror-writing reminds us, is an inversion:[272] "a duplicating machine" Lyotard writes "the mirror can be taken as a duplex/duplicitous machine… its fidelity and its infidelity are produced together" (91). The "mirrorish" relation, which clearly owes something to Duchamp's "mirrorical return", is thus a relation that, while appearing to copy, actually transforms.[273]

"Similitude," Lyotard writes, "like causality and implication, comes from the stupidity of the eye, out of which its power is engendered. Dissimilation foils this power: it puts it in check" (*Duchamp's* 76). In this formulation we get not only the attack on the stupidity of the eye of Duchamp's project, of course, but also that of Lyotard's early work. In fact, what *Duchamp's TRANS/formers* represents is the coupling/non-coupling of artist and philosopher, the mirrorish transformation of Duchamp's work in Lyotard's response. Lyotard's text takes on the character of Duchamp's nonsensical notes and from the givens of his work dissimulates a mirrorishly faithful/unfaithful reproduction. [274] Suppressing the question of original and copy, author and imitator, Duchamp and Lyotard allow for transformation, not identity, to be given priority. This is a useful way

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[272] By inscribing words backwards, mirror-writing is only able to be read when a mirror it held to it, reflecting its inversion into "proper" writing. See *Correspondence* 135, for example, where Duchamp signs a letter (dated 26th July 1923) to Ettie Steheimer in this script.

[273] Lyotard's distinction between the specular and the mirrorish clearly recalls Debord: the specular return is a return that reproduces the reified relations of the spectacle, while mirrorish activity, like détournement, bears a resemblance but is in fact different. These, however, are not true echoes but themselves mirrorish dissimilations for, as we have seen, Lyotard's work refuses the opposition between the spectacular and the authentic.

[274] In this respect, the immense care that has gone into the presentation of the English translation of *Duchamp's TRANS/formers* should be applauded. Not only has the book been bound in the same green baize-like material as Duchamp's *Green Box*, but the text is preceded by a sequence of pages whose contents work as a kind of prefiguration of the work that follows. Firstly, there is a quotation from Duchamp, one that is now familiar; "I was thinking of a book, but I didn't like that idea." On the following page, introducing both the trope of sexual difference and the possibility of a slippage between identities, the famous Man Ray photograph of Duchamp's feminine alter-ego appears, signed "lovingly Rrose Sélavy, alias Marcel Duchamp." Finally, in a phrasing that clearly indicates the possibility of such slippage between Duchamp and Lyotard, the title page reads "Duchamp's TRANS/*formers*: A book by Jean-François Lyotard," the typography of the title indicating graphically both the coupling of dissimilars and the partitioning of unities.

of thinking about Lyotard's project during this period more broadly in fact and, in particular, his *Libidinal Economy*, which can be understood as the mirrorish reflection or "evil twin" of capitalism. The libidinal economy as Lyotard imagines it operates not through exchange value (it does not offer a better or even a different system) but rather through the investments of immensurable intensities. While the economy of capitalism is based on the specular mode of reproduction, assimilating different values to the commensurable value of money, the libidinal economy works to the mirrorish mode, dissimulating the same into difference. Lyotard's work is not only a mirrorish reflection of capitalism, of course, but also, as I have attempted to show, of Marxism and a mirrorish transformation of Adorno's aesthetics, both faithful and unfaithful to his thought.[275] Recognising the implication of the idea of revolution in oppression, Lyotard does not attempt to overthrow the nostalgic modernism against which his early work protests; rather than replace it, he attempts to hold a dissimulating mirror to it.[276] It is this same tactic, I will suggest shortly, that he uses in his later work when approaching aesthetic modernism.

"To raise doubts about representation," Lyotard writes in "Adorno as the Devil", "is to manifest the theatrical relation (in music, in painting, in politics, in the theatre, in literature, in film) as being directed by an arbitrary libidinal deployment [*disposif libidinal*]" ("Adorno" 128). In other words, it is to understand representation, history and politics, as we know them, to be not logical necessities but rather contingent

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[275] For more on the relationship between Marxism and Lyotard's *Libidinal Economy*, see David Carroll's chapter "Aesthetic Antagonisms" 44-52. As this chapter should make clear, however, I would refute Carroll's claim that Lyotard is unaware of the proximity of his work to Frankfurt School Marxism and that, in positing the "libidinal as the negation of all theorization" (49) he simply mirrors "Adorno's" negative theology. I am arguing that Lyotard is more than aware of the proximity between his thought and Adorno's and that at various points he deliberately "mirrors" his work in order to speak to and about it, without negating or opposing it.

[276] As I have tried to show at various points in this thesis, is the very strategy that lies at the heart of Warhol's work. The pop artist's paintings mimic advertising and mass media *as well as* abstract painting and aesthetic formalism, holding each up as the mirror image of the other and revealing their mutual complicity in the structures of domination. Warhol's work shows that abstract painting does not exist outside society but is as much a consequence and expression of it as "literary" art. With *a; a novel* he postures as though the work directly and faithfully reflects/records reality, like a mirror, and in fact reveals the fact that realism is a set of conventions, a magical square. The moment of this revelation, the moment in which these conventions become available, is the moment in which the possibility of their transformation opens out.

manifestations of libidinal energies. The critical relation is "theatrical", a manipulative process of staging. Representations are modes of "putting into perspective." It is capitalism itself, Lyotard goes on to suggest, that, by continually extending its rationalising, homogenising structure over all social spheres and domains, exposes its own reliance on such intensities. There is no sense in attempting to negate such a system, he argues, for (as Paul Mann also argued) it can recuperate and neutralise all critiques. Yet such recuperation (thought mirrorishly, as an "inverted" critique) becomes, in Lyotard's thought, a productive event.

> [Capitalism] places everything inside representation, representation doubles itself (as in Brecht), therefore presents itself. The tragic gives way to the parodic, the libido retracts its investment from the stage, and invests the ensemble stage/hall, the whole interior of the theatre, including the wings and underneath the stage. ("Adorno" 128)

It is the totalising drive of capitalism, in other words, that reveals the presence of libidinal intensities in structures. Representation doubles itself, thus reveals itself as something that is internally riven, a structure differing from itself: the process of recuperation, then, dissimulates the intensities within representation. While it is Brecht that Lyotard mentions, this could very well be a description of the operation of *Fountain*, disinvesting the object of art and reinvesting the gallery space, or of Warhol's *Campbells' Soup Cans*, disinvesting the conventional subject matter of painting and reinvesting the banal objects of everyday life. Indeed, it is as this mirrorish reflection of capitalism, that Lyotard recognises Pop's drive to reveal the libidinal basis of the art economy and consumerism more broadly. In Warhol's art, he writes,

> not only is the libidinally charged character of [consumer/art] objects shown, but also their obsolescent, exchangeable character, and the fact that they will disappear, be consumed, that they have no importance. And in showing that, it is indicated (but only negatively) that what is important is energy, fluidity, desire in its displaceability, and that these object are concretions destined to disappear, just as what is important in a commodity for capital is not what it is, but what it can be transformed into; it is the metamorphosis that counts, and not the object itself. ("Painting as a Libidinal Set-Up" 327-328)

In other words, dissimulation as transformation is an exchange of intensities that mirrors the monetary exchange of the capitalist economy. Rather than exposing capitalism as at the basis of all structures (forms of domination), then, Lyotard positions capitalism as a form of structure or representation. He dissimulates Adorno's thought to reveal "the entire society as an economy (in the Freudian sense), as the expense and metamorphosis of libidinal energy" ("Adorno" 130).

This is a revelation with consequences for all forms and structures, including the "rational" discourses of philosophy and theory. The essay, with its serial structure and paraesthetic experimentation, exposes the necessity/contingency of the conventions by which a philosophical text differs from a literary text. It implies thereby that philosophical texts do not have greater "truth claim" than literary texts, which is to say that it questions the autonomy of art, its separation from "rational" discourse. Lyotard's thought posits a mirrorish relation in which forms or structures (artworks, genres, subjects etc.) are generated through the internalisation of difference, by holding themselves in relation to alterity. It reminds us that not just art but dispositions such as theory and philosophy are shot through with intensities and so also provide fertile pastures for the activity of dissimulation. His work stages a conflict between art and philosophy in the attempt to think through and generate difference. Lyotard's tactics of dissimulation are designed, like Duchamp's "hilarious picture" (the *Large Glass*), not to oppose rationality and the discourse of philosophy but rather to open up "hilarious perspectives… in matters of theoretical discourse" (*Libidinal* 53).

More importantly still, this revelation is a serious challenge to the notion of autonomy upon which the theories of the avant-garde put forward by Bürger and Greenberg depend. If all structures are generated through the conflict of alterity, objectified like Adorno's artwork by their being in relation to what they are not, then autonomy can no longer be conceived of as separation, independence or self-determination. Such a phrasing would only reinforce the Marxist critical relation that is generated on the nostalgic promise of reconciliation. The oppositional structures upon which thinkers like Greenberg and Bürger build their notions of the avant-garde—avant-garde and kitsch, art and life, the visual and the literary—are precisely those that

Lyotard rejects. Lyotard's thought, therefore, can be understood as pre-empting the idea (discussed in Chapter Two) that the formulations of the avant-garde set forth by Bürger and Greenberg are not in fact oppositional but rather manifestations of the same impulse. Both Bürger and Greenberg are trapped in a cycle of nostalgia and negation: "modernity, in whatever age it appears," Lyotard writes, "cannot exist without a shattering of belief and without discovery of the "lack of reality" of reality, together with the invention of other realities" ("Answering" 77). The project of Bürger's avant-garde is the shattering of belief, it "unmasks" art, reveals it as just as corrupted as the society from which it emerges. Greenberg's avant-garde sees society as lacking and posits an art that is truer, more authentic. Each formulation is based on the same structures and epistemologies as Lyotard ascribes to Adorno: autonomy is the central question. Here the very framework upon which this idea is predicated is revealed as modernist nostalgia. The magical square which grounds both theories of the avant-garde emerges and the possibility of an alternative post-aesthetic avant-garde unfolds.

Both Greenbergian formalism and the dialectics that underpin Bürger's work are reactions towards the period of the individual subject. Lyotard's thought, on the other hand, is an attempt to "act toward the time of the circulation of energy liberated from the law of value" ("Adorno" 133). In the realm of capital and under the law of value, time and space become history ("now" and "then") and representation ("on stage" and "off stage"). The critical relation seeks to contain difference, neutralise intensities, and reduce heterogeneity to a system of commensurability. Lyotard, in contrast, attempts to think incommensurability and difference: this is what is at stake in his self-declared obsession with "an open space-time". Moving on to discuss Lyotard's later work now, I want to argue that it is as a philosophy of the *event*, of the open space-time, that Lyotard's thought recasts the material motive of art as a material moment. He thereby echoes the gestures of Duchamp and Warhol who, as I tried to show in the last chapter, reformulate the question of *what* art is as the question of *when* art is.

6. The Sublime as Material Moment

In *The Inhuman* there are two key statements on the avant-garde, "Newman: the Instant" and "The Sublime and the Avant-garde." Both focus upon delineating what Lyotard sees as the peculiar temporality of the avant-garde art work which he describes as a *now*. This *now* is, he writes,

> a stranger to consciousness and cannot be constituted by it. Rather it is what dismantles consciousness, what deposes consciousness, it is what consciousness cannot formulate, and even what consciousness forgets in order to constitute itself… [it is the] it happens…Just an occurrence. (90)

Like the intensity of the libidinal band, unknowable unless congealed into structures but nevertheless the condition of their emergence, the event is that which makes history and representation possible yet evades their attempts to represent it. It is a moment of transformation, "the fact or case that something happens," as Bill Reading puts it, "after which nothing will ever be the same again" (xxxi). For Lyotard, as I have tried to show, it is the presence of this "putting into perspective" of the event, that both art and philosophy must attempt to make visible. The avant-garde is the mode of art which bears witness to the *now* of the event.

This is not to say, however, that the avant-garde artwork represents the event or stands in for it. Rather, as Lyotard writes in "Newman: The Instant," the task of the avant-garde artwork is "ontological" and "chronological" in that "it accomplishes it without completing it. It must constantly begin to testify anew to the occurrence by letting the occurrence be" (88). The art work, Lyotard thus claims, manages to maintain something of the event within itself and in so doing operates *as* event. It is this capacity to operate as event that Lyotard understands as giving art its power, because it is as an event that the artwork demands a response without providing in advance the laws under which that response must be formulated.[277] "It isn't a matter of sense or reality bearing

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[277] If the artwork is conceived of as anything other than an event (i.e. as a commodity, as an example of a particular genre, as the articulation of a prior conceptual idea etc.) then the response it provokes takes

upon what happens or what this might mean," Lyotard writes.

> Before asking questions about what it is and about its significance, before
> the *quid*, it must "first" so to speak "happen," *quod* … [thus] the event
> happens as a question mark "before" happening as a question. *It happens* is
> rather "in the first place" *is it happening, is this it, is it possible?*
> ("Sublime" 90)

It is as this questioning, as an ascesis of narrative or a privation of consciousness, that
Lyotard thinks the avant-garde: its task is to disarm "that which we call thought" and to
open out towards what eludes or escapes consciousness ("Sublime" 90). In Lyotard's
thought, therefore, the avant-garde does not seek to capture and represent the event, nor
to create it, but rather, by questioning and listening, waiting like the cunning machine, to
allow it to be felt. Disarming consciousness, its task is "that of undoing the presumption
of the mind with respect to time" ("Sublime" 107) and allowing that which is forgotten
by consciousness, repressed in the narrative of "rational" mind, to make its presence
apparent. The avant-garde is a mechanism of dissimulation, a privation or waiting in
which that which is other to representation makes itself felt.[278]

It is as a privation of thought, an ascesis which allows the incommensurable to
manifest itself as such, that Lyotard locates the avant-garde within the aesthetic mode of
the sublime. Indeed, rather than seeing the avant-garde as a specifically twentieth-
century phenomenon, made possible by the full historical unfolding of aestheticism,
Lyotard traces the roots of what he sees as avant-gardism further back, claiming that it is
"present in germ in the Kantian aesthetics of the sublime" (98). According to Kant,
Lyotard writes, the sublime is a "failure of expression [which] gives rise to a pain, a kind
of cleavage within the subject between what can be conceived and what can be imagined
or presented" (98). This cleavage is at the same time pleasurable because it demonstrates
the inability to represent Ideas and is thus "a negative sign of the immense power of
Ideas" (98). The sublime, as a failure of synthesis, is a mode in which the rational mind

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place within a pre-determined framework (i.e. according to its economic value, according to the laws of
genre, according to how it measures against the idea).

[278] Such a description resonates with Ziareck's recent claim that it is "this ability to let go of power, to
transform relations and enable their alternative configurations, [that] constitutes the paradoxical force of
contemporary art" (*Force* 4).

is made aware of its limitations, made aware that there is something which exceeds its grasp.[279] The sublime can thus be understood as a kind of hinge figure, a sign of the connection between unconnected or incommensurable forces.

In "The Sublime and the Avant-garde," however, Lyotard attempts to distinguish his notion of a modern sublime from the Romantic sublime of Kantian aesthetics. This distinction operates on three levels. Firstly, Lyotard claims, while the art of the Romantic sublime is concerned with representing sublime objects, creating an expression worthy of the sublime, modern art is concerned with expressing the failure of expression itself: "The art object no longer bends itself to models," Lyotard writes, "but tries to present the fact that there is an unpresentable; it no longer imitates nature, but is … the actualisation of a figure potentially there in language" ("Sublime" 101). Significantly, then, as Lyotard sees it, there is a break between art and nature, art no longer tries to imitate nature. With this phrase the key difference between his position and the Adornian position set out by Bernstein begin to appear: unlike Bernstein's modernism, Lyotard's avant-garde does not mourn "lost nature" but rather attempts to inscribe the failure of expression, to inscribe the *now* that evades the structures of presentation or expression. In this sense the avant-garde work (including the literary work) inscribes that which language cannot express: it writes without "saying yes to the sea of language".

This difference is important in the context of the second mode of differentiating between the Romantic and the contemporary sublime: unlike the Romantic sublime, Lyotard's sublime does not promise transcendence nor does it offer reconciliation. Rather what it reveals is immanent presence: it is the "occurrence of a sensory now [that] cannot be presented and which remains to be presented" (103). As Simon Malpas explains, "what flashes up is the *quod* of the quotidian: the occurrence, the isolated 'it happens' that has always been immanent in what happens but has remained occluded by

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[279] Kant describes the sublime as that "which is *absolutely great*" (§25, 64) and which cannot be attained by an Idea. (See *Critique of Judgement* §23-29, 60-90) For discussion of the Kantian sublime see Lyotard's *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*; for a discussion of Lyotard's reading of Kant, see Gasché.

realist representations" (205).[280] Thus, in painting, Lyotard suggests, "the indeterminate, the 'it happens' is the paint, the picture. The paint, the picture as occurrence or event is not expressible, and it is to this that it has to bear witness" (93). The art-event, in other words, is the "putting into perspective" of art; the inscription of the inexpressible is *the materiality of the medium itself*.[281] The material motive of art is reconfigured as a material moment, the *now*, in which the medium does not stand in for the lost authority of nature but presents itself as a doubling of presence, as the *it happens* of the event. This a key difference between Bernstein's material motive and Lyotard's material moment, a difference upon which the argument that follows will depend. For the moment though, it suffices to say that the unpresentable is not an absence, not a "lost" state of grace; "the inexpressible does not reside in an over there, in another world, or another time, but in this: in that (something) happens" ("Sublime" 93). This flashing up of the immanent unpresentable within presentation is the sublime *now*: "it's this painting. Here and now there is this painting, rather than nothing, and that's what is sublime" (93). The "nonsense" of the occurrence is "the most precious treasure" to which art and philosophy must bear witness.

The immanent *now* marks the final mode by which Lyotard distinguishes his thought from Romantic aesthetics: temporality. The pain of the sublime, Lyotard suggests, can be thought as the pain of waiting, the fear that nothing will happen that marks the questioning of the avant-garde *is it happening?* In other words, the sublime is marked by the fear that the failure of expression, the failure of synthesis, might not be overcome. At the same time, however, this sublime waiting holds within itself the pleasure of anticipation, the sense that "something will happen, despite everything, within this threatening void, that something will take 'place' and will announce that everything is not over" ("Newman" 84). The sublime holds out the possibility of joy as

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[280] Lyotard's insistence on the *quod* of our encounter with art, on its material presence, is a mirrorish dissimilation of formalism. It may seem to align his thought with Greenberg's because both thinkers locate art's power in the affective capacity of this encounter, but, as I will suggest shortly, this is deceptive. See Costello for an in depth reading of Lyotard's sublime in relation to Kant's aesthetics and a comparison to Greenberg's modernism.

[281] This is not to say that all events are artworks, of course, nor that all artworks are events. What I am describing here is specifically the art-event of the avant-garde work as Lyotard thinks it.

the *it happens*, the realisation of the event or *now* as a moment of freedom which is intrinsically open to the future without pre-determining what that future will be.

It is the temporal drive of consciousness—"the presumption of the mind with respect to time"—Lyotard suggests in "The Sublime and the Avant-garde," that leads to a confusion between the now and the new, modes which must, he argues, be carefully differentiated. Like avant-garde art, capitalism has something of the sublime about it: "it is, in a sense, an economy regulated by an Idea – infinite wealth or power" ("Sublime" 105). In highly developed capitalist societies, economies are no longer driven by the production of products, but by the circulation of information. But information, as soon as it is accessible, becomes redundant:

> We 'know'. It is put into the machine memory. The length of time it occupies is, so to speak, instantaneous. Between two pieces of information, 'nothing happens', by definition. A confusion thereby becomes possible, between what is of interest to information and the director, and what is the question of the avant-gardes, between what happens – the new – and the *Is it happening?*, the *now*. (105-106)

Information operates according to the logic of innovation and the new, Lyotard suggests, and is defined by constant streaming: information accounts for all time and operates through the logic of consumption. It constructs a sequence with no gaps, a narrative in which one piece of information links seamlessly onto another. Because information operates with the temporality of the instant it may appear to operate like the event, but, Lyotard argues, this is to mistake the occurrence for mere innovation. To innovate, one does not invent but rather one simply "re-uses formulae confirmed by previous success, one throws them off-balance by combining them with other, in principle incompatible, formulae, by amalgamations, quotations ornamentations, pastiche" (106).[282] Innovation,

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[282] This formulation clearly recalls Greenberg's notion of avant-gardi*sm*, as a magpie tactic of medium scrambling. Indeed, in his differentiation between the new and the now Lyotard's thought seems almost equivalent to aesthetic modernism (hence Costello's accusation, mentioned at the outset of this chapter): innovation, driven by capitalist consumption, can be easily aligned with kitsch and, as Lyotard figures the avant-garde by means of Barnett Newman's work, his claim for the *now* as an alternative temporality to the new appears very close indeed to Fried's notion of the "presentness" of abstract painting. The choice of Newman's paintings as the key examples in the essays on the avant-garde has in fact been read as

then, is a process of repetition, the performance of a competence: it is a programmed synthesis, the rules of which are pre-determined by the demands of consumption and capitalism. To innovate is "to behave as though lots of things happened, and to make them happen. Through innovation, the will affirms its hegemony over time. It thus conforms to the metaphysics of capital, which is a technology of time. The innovation 'works'" (107) and, in its powerful efficiency, it prevents the questioning and waiting of the avant-garde. A product of the will to make sense, information is that which shores up and arms "that which we call thought."

It is this demand for efficiency and desire for innovation that leads, in *The Differend,* we might note, to a vision of the future of writing that brings to mind Warhol's project in *a; a novel*. "In the next century," Lyotard writes,

> there will be no more books. It takes too long to read, when success comes from gaining time. What will be called a book will be a printed object whose 'message' (its information content) and name and title will first have been broadcast by the media, a film, a newspaper interview, a television programme, and a cassette recording. (*Differend* xv)

In other words, the drive of information/capital will erase the materiality of writing, the matter of words. Capital operates to erase the medium, to make us forget matter and to replace it with information: "where there is a message," Lyotard writes in *Libidinal Economy,* "there is no material" (43).[283] In contrast, the event (which, as I have tried to show, is *material* in Lyotard's thought) works to destabilise the structures of representation: it attacks the representations of historical and narrative time, for "with the occurrence the will is defeated" (107). The avant-gardist task is to resist the will that drives capital, to resist the demand to save time by making consumption easier through the seamless production of the new, to resist its reduction of everything to a unit of

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Lyotard claiming painting as the paradigmatic form of modern art, as Greenberg and Bernstein did. I will argue, however, that this is not the case: as I hope the discussion so far has shown and as I will continue to argue in what follows, in fact Lyotard's thought resists the frameworks of such modernist aesthetic theory and should not be read as privileging painting.

[283] Of course, what *a; a novel* actually shows, as I argued in the last chapter, is that this erasure of matter is an illusion. Lyotard too recognises this, as we shall see shortly: here his "vision" echoes Adornian pessimism closely.

information. As a process of anamnesis, art and philosophy must attempt to bear witness to what consciousness forgets: as a privation of consciousness, the failure of programmed synthesis, it is an opening in which a kind of passive synthesis may (or may not) occur, during which the unpresentable event may (or may not) make itself felt.

There is an obvious debt to Adorno in Lyotard's formulation of avant-garde art as a process of bearing witness to that which is suppressed within techno-scientific rationality and as driven by something other than the forces of innovation which power capitalism. For both, the avant-garde work bears witness to that which is repressed or forgotten in consciousness, that which the forces of rationalisation seek to erase. It thus holds open the possibility of alterity and difference in the face of a system which moves towards homogenisation and totalising domination. Certainly, Lyotard's distinction between the *now* and the new echoes Adorno's attempts to distance art from the idea of the new (which Adorno too considers one of the driving forces of capitalism).[284] Yet, Lyotard's distinction is also meant to be set in contrast to the progressive historical narrative which, if we are to believe "Adorno as the Devil", underwrites the German philosopher's thought: Lyotard does not position the avant-garde as future-oriented in the manner of Bürger, nor as nostalgic in the manner of Adorno and Bernstein but rather as operating recursively. Like Foster, he adopts a psychoanalytic model of repetition and working through to characterise the temporal mode of the avant-garde.

> Thought works over what is received, it seeks to reflect on it and overcome it. It seeks to determine what has already been thought, written, painted or socialized in order to determine what hasn't … this agitation (agitation is the word Kant gives to the activity of the mind that has judgement and exercises it), this agitation is only possible if something remains to be determined, something that hasn't yet been determined. One can strive to determine this something by setting up a system, a theory, a programme or a project – and indeed one has to, all the while anticipating that something.

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[284] For an interesting discussion of Adorno's position on the new see Cunningham, "A Time for Dissonance and Noise". Interestingly, as Cunningham shows in another essay, "The Futures of Surrealism", this *now* temporality in fact might be understood as developing from the work of another Marxist thinker, Walter Benjamin, whose Arcades project describes the notion of *Jetztzeit* (see Cunningham 54 – 55). This would provide an interesting point of reconnection between Lyotard's work and Frankfurt School Marxist thought.

One can also enquire about the remainder, and allow the indeterminate to appear as a question-mark. ("Sublime" 90-91)

As this passage indicates, the task of the avant-garde, as Lyotard presents it, is, like the task of thought in general, to work over and dissimulate what is given, to transform tradition, convention and received ideas. The avant-garde, as the question-mark, resists programmes, projects and theories: it attempts to reveal that there is something that remains to be thought, something that resists the structures of reason, without anticipating (and so pre-determining) what that is. The avant-garde operates within and on the structures of tradition and convention. While consciousness, or the will, operates by imposing structure and imposing meaning (through dominating and reigning in the event) the avant-garde is an ascesis, an opening that allows the indeterminate, the un-thought, to be given.

It is at this juncture, through his use of this recursive model, that Lyotard can be seen to open himself to the same charge that, as I suggested in Chapter Two, could be levelled against Foster. Lyotard may be understood as replacing the utopian nostalgia for nature, or the original and authentic, which characterises both Adorno and Bürger's work, with a negative origin in the form of an absence or traumatic event, a gap in history. As I indicated in Chapter Two, the avant-garde conceived as a working through of the traumatic event (as absence or gap) might therefore appear as a compulsive return to the scene of trauma, repeatedly attempting to recall and rewrite the missing event. The event as a lost origin, that which is forgotten and repressed in discourse and which haunts it, thus appears to set the parameters of future action and so to deny agency, closing down possibilities rather than opening them up. Such a model, as Jacques Rancière has recently argued, comes dangerously close to falling into the same negative theology that Lyotard critiques under the name Adorno: it is at risk of turning art into "the mourning of politics" which is a move, Rancière argues, that substitutes "repentance and memory for any will to political transformation" (22). Drawing out the relationship between Adorno and Lyotard, Rancière writes that

> For Lyotard, as for Adorno, the avant-garde must indefinitely draw the line severing modern art from commodity culture. But Lyotard pushes this "task" to its point of reversion. In Adorno's construction, the external separation and the inner contradictions of the artwork still kept the Schillerian promise of emancipation, the promise of an unalienated life. In Lyotard's version, they have to witness to just the contrary: the drawing of the dividing line testifies to an immemorial dependency of human thought on the power of the Other, that makes any promise of emancipation a deception. (22)[285]

In other words, Rancière reads Lyotard's refusal of autonomy as articulating a dependency which forecloses on the possibility of freedom that art, according to Adorno, is a reminder of. The trauma model thus appears to replace autonomy with subservience, agency with passivity, and hope with despondency.[286] The artwork, rather than standing in for the lost authority of nature, as we saw it do in Bernstein's Adornian account, stands in (equally mournfully) for the event as a past disaster, the historical calamity after which nothing will ever be the same again.

It is at this point that connecting Lyotard's notion of the art-work *as* event (rather than as response to or reminder of a past event, for this is what differentiates his model from the trauma theory put forth by Foster) to the idea of the energetic disposition that his earlier work outlines becomes particularly important. For while it is certainly the

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[285] Rancière, in fact argues that Lyotard replaces Adorno's messianic vision, with a past disaster for which mourning never ends, an alternative form of nostalgia. In both cases, Rancière writes,

> it is the same theology of Time which is overturned, namely the vision of the historical event which breaks through History, separating a time before and a time after. For a long time, that event had been the forthcoming revolution. In the ethical turn, that orientation of times was reversed. History is no more cut by the promise of revolution ahead of us; it is cut by the event of Extermination that lies behind us, an event which stands for the endless disaster, debarring any process of emancipation. (23)

Rancière's reading of Lyotard, as I think this passage makes plain, is a response to *The Differend*'s setting up of "Auschwitz" as the Unpresentable, a move that once again draws an obvious parallel between Lyotard's work and Adorno's. Rancière's critique is undoubtedly important: Lyotard's choice of the theological term "evil" for his earlier work, moreover, suggests that he himself may have come to see it as falling into this trap. Yet, as I hope to show in what remains of this chapter, in terms of the avant-garde as it presented in *The Inhuman*, the event cannot be considered as either past or disastrous in this way but rather is figured as present and emancipatory. In this sense, I will try to suggest, Lyotard's work on aesthetics and art in fact offers a model of progression and a sense of hopefulness for the future that Rancière overlooks.

[286] The application of the psychoanalytic model of trauma to cultural production became an established critical manoeuvre in the 1990s. It has received a good deal of critique; see Kansteiner, Ball and Seltzer.

case that Lyotard does not see emancipation (thought of as the end of domination) as a possibility, this is not to say that his position is one of resignation and despair. Indeed, as I hope my reading of his early work showed, Lyotard views aesthetic experience as opening up possibilities, as a force of transformation. Thus, as he acknowledges in the late lectures gathered under the title *Peregrinations* (1988), his work on art and aesthetics can be understood as articulating an alternative model of progress to the techno-scientific narrative of the new, a model of progress driven by the hope of transformation rather than what he considers (as we saw in the earlier discussion of the machine) to be the illusion of complete emancipation. In this sense, I want now to suggest, Lyotard's avant-garde, by pushing Adorno's aesthetics beyond the boundaries of art, provides an alternative model to the modernism that Bernstein describes in *Against Voluptuous Bodies*. In Lyotard's work, the avant-garde's attack on aesthetic theory—waged through its refusal of the rational categories imposed upon it—emerges as something considerably more profound and important than a simple negation or "anti-art" gesture.

7. The Post-Aesthetic Avant-Garde: Freedom, Invention and Obligation

One key difference between Lyotard's avant-garde and Bernstein's modernism lies, as I have already indicated, in how they lay emphasis on the significance of art's materiality. Both describe the importance of a particular event, the collapse of form, the flashing up of the materiality of the medium. In Bernstein's account, this event reminds us that sensory experience was once orientational and capable of formative significance: the material motive of art is the mourning of the lost authority of nature. In other words, art is an effigy; the material motive of art is a reminder of a type of knowledge that is no longer possible. By this account, as I tried to explain in Chapter Two, painting, as the art form most able to collapse into its own materiality, is the paradigmatic form of modern art. In the well-known essay "Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?" Lyotard acknowledges this idea of failure as central to modern art. Yet, he points out, this failure need not be thought negatively: "The emphasis can be placed on the

powerlessness of the faculty of presentation, on the nostalgia for presence felt by the human subject" (79) or it "can be placed on the increase of being and the jubilation which result from the invention of new rules of the game, be it pictorial, artistic or any other" (80). For Lyotard, then, the sublime failure to synthesise does not signify absence but rather is a material moment in which presence is doubled (held, hinge-like, in its difference, rather than collapsed into one). Instead of the tension between art and its materiality revealing the loss of the authority of nature, for Lyotard it reveals the power of sensory experience in the present. Working out the possibilities of Adorno's thought, Bernstein presents an account of modernist art which appears as a form of nostalgia, a form disinvested of energy and intensity; engaged in the same project, Lyotard emphasises the force of art as a transformative conflict.

It should come as no surprise, then, that although the abstract paintings of Barnett Newman play a pivotal role in the essays of *The Inhuman*, Lyotard is not engaged in a defence of painting. Indeed, his writing on the avant-garde is as concerned with cross-disciplinarity as his early work, as his readings of Newman and Duchamp show. In "Newman: the Instant" Lyotard suggests that there are two key differences between the works of Newman and Duchamp, the first thematic and the second poetic. Thematically, Duchamp's work is a *Vanitas,* a meditation on the vanity of human aspirations and a reminder of human limits. "Duchamp's great pieces are a plastic gamble," Lyotard writes "an attempt to outwit the gaze (and the mind) because he is trying to give an analogical representation of how time outwits consciousness" (79). Poetically speaking Duchamp's work is a story, or many stories:

> the time it takes to "consume" (experience, comment upon) these works is, so to speak infinite: it is taken up by a search for the apparition itself (the term is Duchamp's), and "stripping bare" is the sacrilegious and sacred analgon of apparition. Apparition means that something other occurs. … Duchamp organised the space of the *Bride* according to the principle of "not yet" and that of *Etant donnés* according to the principle of "no longer." Any one who looks at the Glass is waiting for Godot; the voyeur pursues a fugitive Albertine behind the door of *Etant donnés.* These two works by Duchamp act as a hinge between Proust's impassioned anamnesis and Beckett's parody of looking to the future. (79)

The mentions of Proust and Beckett here are not coincidental for Duchamp's work is a plastic work that speaks to literature, as I have tried to show. It takes the temporality of literature into the visual arts in order to reveal that the unpresentable event which eludes consciousness can no more be seen by the eye than can be captured in narration. Duchamp works on the structures of modernism "notably by researching multi-dimensional space and all sorts of 'hinges.' His work as a whole is inscribed in the great temporal hinge between too early/too late" (80).[287] In this reading Duchamp's work represents that there is an unpresentable, it holds back the event in a sequence of delays. A painting by Newman, in contrast, belongs to the thematic of annunciation: "Newman is not representing a non-representable annunciation: he allows it to present itself" (79). Newman neither tells nor demands a story: his work is an announcement that renders us speechless. "It is a feeling of 'there' (*Voilà*). There is almost nothing to 'consume,' or if there is, I do not know what it is. One cannot consume an occurrence but merely its meaning" (80). This comparison, however, should not be seen to reduce Newman's work to pure form or pure materiality, to suggest it appeals to eyesight alone. In fact for Lyotard, Newman's work is not addressed to the eye, but rather—like Duchamp's work and in "literary" fashion—to the ear. Lyotard explains:

> Newman is concerned with giving colour, line or rhythm the force of an obligation within a face-to-face relationship, in the second person, and his model cannot be *Look at this (over there)*; it must be *Look at me*, or, to be more accurate *Listen to me*. For an obligation is the modality of time rather than space and its organ the ear rather than the eye. Newman thus takes to extremes the refutation of the *distinguo* introduced by Lessing's *Laocoon* …. (81)[288]

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[287] Interestingly, this reading differs somewhat from the reading in *Duchamp's TRANS/formers* where Lyotard writes that the attempt to "represent unpresentable space is the point (which is not a point) [on which] all the work of Duchamp oscillates" (90). Given that Lyotard consistently argues against univocal interpretation, such a shift does not indicate a problematic inconsistency in his thought but rather simply indicates that the philosopher has a deep and ongoing engagement with Duchamp's work.

[288] Lyotard's attack on the "so-called" body of the human subject should thus also be understood as an attack on the way that body is refined and constructed in Romantic aesthetic theory. To recap, if art is a product and expression of the fragmentation of the subject in modernity, then the diversity of the arts mirrors that fragmentation; each art, as we have seen both Adorno and Lessing declare in earlier chapters, is assigned to a different sense. The great romantic dream of the harmonious unification of the sister arts in the *Gesamtkunstwerk* is, of course, a version of the utopian hope of reconciliation: it is born of nostalgia. The narrative of aesthetic modernism, the narrative of Greenberg and Fried, in which each art

Duchamp and Newman, in different ways but both by refuting the aesthetic theory of the arts, interrogate the relation between presentation and the unpresentable and reveal the conditions of visibility as the unpresentable sensory *now*. Their work bears witness to the immanent unpresentable within presentation by appearing as a failure of expression, a failure of synthesis. They are energetic dispositions in which heterogeneous materials, ideas, times and spaces are held in dynamic conflict: in both cases, the constellations of difference which the works constitute draw on an aesthetic or "visual" moment *and* a "literary" moment. Their works differ in how they respond to and articulate the failure of expression which underwrites the sublime feeling, but they share the drive to cross-disciplinarity and the resistance to aesthetic theory which characterises the avant-garde.[289]

The material moment of art or of thought, conceived of as an increase of presence rather than as the mourning of an absence, is not the hibernation of the formative significance of sensory experience in the material of the medium, but rather the announcement of the *quod* of matter immanent in the *quid* of meaning. This announcement, as paraesthetic works such as "Adorno as the Devil" and *Duchamp's TRANS/formers* attempt to show, is as much a concern of writing as it is of painting.

> A text differs from painting by its medium. The distinctive medium of a text is made not of colour but of words. In inscribing these words in perceptible time-space, it is only a question of giving them the thickness that is theirs

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finds its purity and achieves a unified presence, articulates a similar longing. All of these theories attempt to institute a hierarchy of the arts, to claim that one or another is dominant, more important, or closer to a purity of presence. It is in opposition to such aesthetic theory, as interrogating the *unharmonizable*, that Lyotard situates his work.

[289] In "Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?" Lyotard suggests that the nostalgic mode of presenting the unpresentable as an absence, *melancholia*, and the mode of *novatio*, the euphoria of invention, are difficult to distinguish from one another. "The nuance which distinguishes these two modes may be infinitesimal; they often coexist in the same piece, are almost indistinguishable; and yet they testify to a difference (a differend) on which the fate of thought depends and will depend for a long time, between regret and assay" (80). This coexistence of different modes in a single work again recalls the energetic disposition, formed through internal conflict, a differend. It also helps to explain how Lyotard's reading of Duchamp changes between the early work, in which he appears very much on the side of *novatio* and "Newman: The Instant" in which he appears as verging on the melancholic. In these different pieces Lyotard stages different aspect of his work: the mode of operation is dissimulation again, the same mode that Lyotard adopts in response to Adorno.

and that is forgotten in the reading of the printed word, the immaterial thickness of the forgotten language. ("Foreword" xviii)[290]

This is what it means to inscribe the inexpressible; to draw and paint with words, to give them their materiality and their opacity. In a formulation which invokes the idea of the mirrorish dissimulation at work in art and in his own philosophy, Lyotard writes that "the obvious meaning of the writing hides other meanings. The written sentence is never transparent like a windowpane or faithful like a mirror" (Foreword xvi). This is to say that writing, like painting, is a constellation of heterogeneous materials and intensities: it is not that informational message, pre-recorded (captured on tape), of pre-digested kitsch regurgitated on command. In another of the essays in *The Inhuman*, Lyotard, once again using the arts to read one another and drawing an analogy between painting, music and writing, describes words as the material moment of thought:

> Words themselves in the most secret place of thought are its matter, its timbre, its nuance, i.e. what it cannot manage to think. Words "say", sound, touch, always "before" thought. And they always "say" something other than what thought signifies, and what it wants to signify by putting them into form. Words want nothing they are the "un-will", the "non-sense" of thought, its mass. They are innumerable like the nuance of a colour- or sound- continuum. They are always older than thought. They can be semiologized, philologized, just as nuances are chromatized and timbres gradualized. But like timbres and nuances they are always being born. Thought tries to tidy them up, arrange them, control them and manipulate them. But as they are old people and children, words are not obedient. As Gertrude Stein thought, to write is to respect their candour and their age, as Cézanne or Karel Appel respect colours. ("After the Sublime" 142-143)

Words are material—just as paint on canvas and the vibrations of a musical note are material—but they exceed this materiality. Writing cannot be reduced to mere matter, marks on a page, but at the same time cannot be removed from its material occurrence. In this light, theory, rational discourse, appears as the attempt to erase matter, "the attempt by which the mind tries to rid itself of words, of the matter that they are, and

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[290] Lyotard's "Foreword" introduces a collection of essays by the conceptual artist Joseph Kosuth. In his essay, Lyotard reads conceptual art—held by both Greenberg and Bernstein to be the antithesis of abstract painting—as equally concerned with material moment as Newman's work.

finally of matter itself" ("After the Sublime" 143).[291] Here we arrive at the same apocalyptic projection of the complete domination of nature by rationality that both Adorno and Bernstein envisage. Lyotard, however, is not as pessimistic: "happily, this attempt has no chance of success. One cannot get rid of the Thing. Always forgotten it is unforgettable" ("After the Sublime" 143). To put this slightly differently, in practice all writing, literary or philosophical, takes place, as Mallarmé put it, in black on white.

The sublime feeling which accompanies the avant-garde in Lyotard's thought marks the failure of expression, the failure of synthesis (which is also the failure of synthesis between the different arts, the "unharmonizable"). In the aesthetics of the beautiful, the faculties of reason and imagination are considered to be engaged in a pleasurable and harmonious free play;[292] the form of the beautiful object is the synthesis of sensory and cognitive experience. In the aesthetics of the sublime, art must testify to the failure of expression; "form is no longer the point of esthetic feeling" (*Peregrinations* 41). It is by locating the avant-garde within the "formlessness" of the aesthetics of the sublime, however, that Lyotard is able to connect it with a sense of progress, a progress driven not by the forces of innovation and efficiency but by responsibility and obligation.[293] This provides a second and equally important means by which to compare his formulation of the avant-garde to Bernstein's modernism.

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[291] In "Theory as Art" Lyotard argues that critical theory must be considered as one of the arts: throughout the paper he talks as though theory and philosophy were exchangeable terms. In later essays, however, the term "theory" takes on negative associations, coming to be aligned with the notion of a rigid "structure" or set of determining criteria which absolve the thinker of a truly critical engagement. The writing of *The Differend* marks this change, taking place in a context that Lyotard describes as "the weariness with regard to 'theory,' and the miserable slackening that goes along with it (new this, new that, post-this, post-that, etc.) The time has come to philosophize" (xiii). It is for this reason that I claim that it is "philosophy" and not "theory" that Lyotard considers art.

[292] See Kant, *Critique of Judgement* §9, 38-40.

[293] It is crucial to make this connection with a sense of progress, of course, for otherwise there would be little sense in insisting on the term avant-garde for, as Cunningham writes, "before any apparent locatability of something called *the* avant-garde within the disputed limits of a socio-historical or art-historical periodization, the concept of an avant-garde inscribes a particular mode of temporalizing history in its own right" (Cunningham, "Making an Example" 256). Lyotard as we have seen challenges "history" as representation; yet, without some notion of progress or development (the words are imbued with connotations which make them less than ideal) his thought would indeed slip into the despondency of which he is sometimes accused. For Lyotard, it is the idea of the avant-garde which opens up this alternative mode of progress, which is why the idea is so important throughout his thought. Adorno's notion of autonomy, as Cunningham argues, opens up the importance of progress (for it is though a

For Bernstein, as I tried to show in Chapter Two, developments in art are driven by the need to find generative conventions by which the material motive may express itself. Art depends on its materiality as the site in which a lost sensory significance is preserved. The more that art is encroached upon and dominated by techno-scientific rationality, the more pressing the need to separate out and conserve the (autonomous) space of art that the medium represents. In other words, the development of media is envisaged as the negative reflection of the progress of techno-scientific domination, a result and expression of that progress. Lyotard, in contrast, sees the sublime, with its combination of pain and pleasure, as opening out the possibility of a different mode of progress. "The entrance of suffering into esthetic feeling" Lyotard writes "must be understood as a shadow cast over imaginative work by an Idea of reason" (*Peregrinations* 40). The idea of reason *casts a shadow*, it mediates the experience of the sublime but it does not grasp it: the sublime feeling, like the hinge, reveals the connection between unconnected and incommensurable things, the connection between the aesthetic and the rational. It reveals that there is something for which existing expressions, existing ideas are inadequate; something that exceeds their grasp, remains incommensurable. In other words, the aesthetics of the sublime challenges thought, asks it to move beyond itself, to develop. Thus, Lyotard argues, "there is no sublime without the development of the speculative and ethical capacities of the mind" (*Peregrinations* 41). In other words, the pain of the inability of thought to synthesise imagination and reason is accompanied by the pleasure of the development of these capacities. The open space-time of the sublime thus allows an alternative force to that of the will to be felt. "The impotency of the empirical will can be felt as a pleasure" writes Lyotard "to the extent that it reveals the presence of an independent causality which is incommensurable with any natural force: it is the causality of freedom" (*Peregrinations* 41).[294]

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continual process of renewal that art maintains itself), an importance which Adorno, because of his social theory, is reluctant to acknowledge: it is this latent possibility that Lyotard develops.

[294] It is at this juncture that some of the other Kantian ideas that Lyotard is reworking as a part of his discussion of the sublime come into play. For example, the obligations that come with freedom are part of his thinking through Kant's categorical imperative and, as Crowther has suggested, Lyotard's work in the avant-garde owes something to the Kantian idea of genius (see *Critical Aesthetics* 157-160, and, for more on genius, this thesis Chapter Two 81n23). For artistic creation as the touch of the independent causality

To put this point slightly differently, we might say that Bernstein's notion of artistic development takes place as an inversion of the progress of rationalisation. It is a programmed synthesis, its goals are fixed, its outcomes predetermined. In contrast, Lyotard's notion of progress through the sublime feeling operates without such restrictions; it is driven not by techno-scientific rationality, but by freedom, the freedom to invent expressions and formation which do not yet exist, to bring into existence different modes of thinking, different modes of expression. The sublime event opens towards the future, but as an open space-time not governed by the logic of representation, it does not determine in advance what that future will be. In other words, invention is not the product of a pre-programmed synthesis, but rather holds the potential to open out infinite possibilities. Driven by the development of the ethical and speculative capacities of mind, it is a progress, Lyotard writes, "of the responsibility to the Ideas of reason as they are negatively 'presented' in the formlessness of such and such a situation which could occur" (41), which is to say that alternatives to the structures of rationality (which are *not* anti-rational, but rather oppose the opposition between rational and aesthetic) are presented in the sublime feeling by means of the formlessness of *possibility*.

Lyotard's avant-garde is the response to an obligation, to the *Listen to me* of Newman's painting. It is a response to the obligation pressed by freedom to acknowledge the inadequacy and injustices of existing expressions and structures, the failings of what has been thought.[295] It attempts so to find new idioms, new ways of "putting into perspective" new modes of bearing witness to the fact that there is an

of freedom suggests that the truly inventive artist is one that allows that force to flow thought him/her, in much the way that the Kantian genius allows nature to move through him/her. Moreover, as Crowther writes, the primary quality of the art of genius is originality, but since there can also be original nonsense (Kant admits) it must also be "'exemplary' that is it must involve not just a breaking with the old rules but also the invention of *new* ones" (160). Lyotard's work is not a straight-forward adoption of Kant's notion of genius as Crowther seems to suggest, however, and should be understood as being modified by his critique of subjectivity.

[295] In its mode of working over what is given, Lyotard's avant-garde might be compared to the model set out by de Duve. For de Duve, as I tried to show in Chapter Two, the avant-garde addresses the past but has significance for the future. This is also the case with Lyotard's model. However, in de Duve's argument the avant-garde was located as engaged in a process of addressing art history while for Lyotard art (the autonomy of which is no longer considered as a *separation* from society) is important precisely because it addresses a wider, socio-political context.

unpresentable: its task is to experiment with material (or media) in order to allow what cannot be phrased, what cannot be thought to present itself within presentation. It is this obligation that underpins the avant-garde's mechanical ascesis, the waiting, questioning and listening: indeed, as a mode of listening, Lyotard writes, the avant-garde "is closer to an ethics than any aesthetics or poetics" (Newman 81). Through experimentation, through a willingness to open itself out towards the unpresentable of difference, the avant-garde dissimulates what is given without pre-determining what is possible.

For both Lyotard and Bernstein, the avant-garde artwork is a gesture of integral nominalism, a moment in which established expressions fail and a new expression is demanded and/or given. Yet for Bernstein, what art expresses will always be the lost authority of nature: for art is an effigy of nature, the consequence and expression of its domination through the forces of rationalisation. For Lyotard, in contrast, the moment of integral nominalism is a more radically transformative moment: the avant-garde artwork must be understood as not simply a set of conventions (however generative) in which to express something, but also as a *now,* an event in itself, a site of transformation. The avant-garde experiments with media in an attempt to give voice to what has been silenced, and to call new and more just forms into being for the avant-garde work, if powerful enough, "will wind up producing its own readers, its own viewers, its own listeners" (*Just Gaming* 10). In other words, the artwork figures alternative realities and transforms existing realties by reconfiguring relations, critiquing representations and changing the constellations in which thought and expression move. It disperses the intensities congealed in reified relations and in so doing, Lyotard argues, "today's art is the equal of being as the power of things possible" (190). The political task of the avant-garde, then, is not to engage in socio-historical "reality" but to transform the structures upon which that reality is based, to reveal "realisms" as constructions and to figure alternative realities. While Bernstein's material motive is the preservation of a corpse, the reminder of nature, Lyotard's material moment is birth of the new, the touch of freedom.

It is as a striving towards such freedom, towards new clouds of thought, that Lyotard's philosophy should also be understood, which returns us to his claim that

philosophy should be considered an art. It is a claim which operates with the same movement as Duchamp's *Fountain* or Warhol's *a; a novel*. While such works constitute a threat to art, only if taken as sceptical nominalism and thus as operating in the framework of art/anti-art, Lyotard's claim is threatening only if it is taken as sceptical, if it is framed in the context of an opposition between art and philosophy/truth. But just as the avant-garde work, understood as integral nominalism, promises a certain freedom, so too does Lyotard's proposal. The philosopher, like the artist, he argues, should not be guided by theories or pre-determined criteria: instead he or she seeks to reveal the hidden conditions of the visible, the "putting into perspective" of thought. The task is not to perform a competence in the field of the magical square, but rather to reveal the square as such and to dissimulate the intensities which it attempts to annul. To do so, philosophy must give up its claim to speak *the* truth. Artists make no such claim, Lyotard reminds us, they respond only to the question "what is art?" They do not create treatises but "instead they essay. And so through them we glimpse the importance that must be given to the Essay" (191). It thus becomes clear here why Lyotard himself also works primarily in the essay form and why his paraesthetic essay experiments are so vital to grasping what is at stake in his thought.

Rather than an articulation of nostalgic modernism, Lyotard's avant-garde writing on the avant-garde extends the importance of the material moment to which it bears witness far beyond the realm of the canvas and the conventions of painting. The avant-garde artwork creates new idioms; it reconfigures the critical relation and thus it offers the possibility of different relations. It is precisely this task that Lyotard's response to Adorno performs, responding to the latter's aesthetic theory and reinvigorating the idea of art's social responsibility. What is significant about Lyotard's work on the avant-garde, then, is not what it says about art and literature but what it allows them to do: Lyotard displaces art and philosophy as an art in order to infect, complicate and open out critical discourse, history, aesthetics and politics. He responds to Adorno not by reflecting his pessimism and adopting his conclusions, but by mirrorishly transforming his thought into a more optimistic model, releasing the power of things possible from within it. The avant-garde, as it emerges in Lyotard's work, as

one of Duchamp's notes puts it, is "*the figuration of a possible* (not as the opposite of impossible nor as related to probable nor as subordinated to likely) The possible is a *physical "caustic"* (vitriol type) burning up all aesthetics or callistics" (*Writing* 73).

Conclusion: Interfering with the Avant-Garde

"The construction of mass utopia, was the dream of the twentieth century," writes Susan Buck Morss, a dream which was "the driving ideological force of industrial modernization in both its capitalist and socialist forms" (ix). As Buck Morss reminds us however, the century was characterised not just by this dream but also by crimes against humanity wrought in its name. It is as an intrinsic part of this twentieth-century ideological pattern that the avant-garde has been understood. Its project of social engineering through art has been grasped, on one hand, as a protest against the conditions of modern experience and an attempt to create a better life from a basis in art and, on the other, as an attempt to aestheticize life.[296] The avant-garde artist has been both heralded as the idealistic engineer of the future and declaimed as a dictator seeking a power that reduces everything in his or her path to mere material for construction. The avant-garde is seen to partake not only in the utopian dream, but also in its inverse, the nightmarish project of totalitarianism. From either perspective, though, the avant-garde thus appears as a, if not *the*, key cultural manifestation of the twentieth century, an idea which articulates the most important and vital contradictions and complexities of its time.

The twentieth century is over, however. We stand at the beginning of a new century in which new ideological constellations are being formed, new dreams created. Indeed, we might argue that it is only on the condition of the emergence of this new century that we are able to recognise the ideological patterns of the last as such: the magical square that structures the twentieth century emerges as the possibilities of the new century begin to unfold. Given its close connection to the dreams and disappointments of the twentieth century, then, does the idea of an avant-garde have a part to play in the twenty-first century? This thesis has attempted to show that, thought somewhat differently, it does. Through an examination of how it has been put into perspective or constructed, I have attempted to suggest that it is possible to think about

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[296] This argument was developed at length by Boris Groys in *The Total Art of Stalinism* (See Chapter One 29n22). See Buck Morss' "Afterward" (214-278) for a discussion of this text, the circumstances of its production and its reception. Her book is an attempt to counter this reading.

the avant-garde in different terms, terms which move beyond negation. By way of a conclusion, then, I want to reflect very briefly on the implications of my argument for contemporary aesthetics.

One theorist who would argue that the avant-garde has a key role to play in the future is media theorist Lev Manovich. In his influential essay "Avant-garde as Software" (1999),[297] Manovich argues that it has been technology rather than any critical impulse that has been the driving force behind developments in modern art. The avant-garde is a force of progress and innovation: it does not oppose the logic of capitalism but rather, in the form of the industrial arts such as graphic design and advertising, connives with the dominant ideology of the late twentieth century in the dream of a techno-utopia. Computer software, Manovich announces, is the form in which the avant-garde vision has been realised and the form in which it lives on into the twenty-first century. "This statement should be understood in two ways," he writes. "On the one hand, software codifies and naturalizes the techniques of the old avant-garde. On the other hand, software's new techniques of working with media represent the new avant-garde of the meta-media society" (11). Manovich's digital avant-garde, then, is purely affirmative: the strategies of the twentieth-century avant-gardes are seen as motors in the engine of capitalism. Not concerned with changing the structures of society, nor with challenging aesthetic and social theory, Manovich's avant-garde is a form of product development, a mode of innovation in which old media are recycled for the sake of recycling alone. "The new avant-garde is no longer concerned with seeing or representing the world in new ways," writes Manovich, "but rather with accessing and using previously accumulated media in new ways" (8). Works and media are reduced to bits and codes as the avant-garde adapts itself to the logic of information: the materiality of works (and indeed the world) is no longer considered to be of importance. In this sense, Manovich concludes, "new media is post-media" (8).

It is against such a vision, of course, that Bernstein's recent defence of modernism is directed. Indeed, the urgency of *Against Voluptuous Bodies* stems from its

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[297] Manovich is not alone in seeing avant-garde potential in digital technology: for alternative positions in the debate see Block and Wohlfarht.

author's sense that the kind of sensuous, formative encounter that art represents is in immanent danger of being subsumed into the rationalising force of techno-scientific capitalism. The last critical space of late modernity is in danger of recuperation. As I tried to show in Chapter Two, Bernstein claims that the sense-making potential of an artwork depends upon its materiality and thus that the question of autonomous art "has been from the outset the question of mediums, and the fate of the claim of art bound up with the possibility of there being artistic mediums" (*Against* 17). In the twenty-first century, Bernstein goes on to acknowledge, technological development threatens to make the medium redundant. Referring to the potential of digitalization to replace and erase the differences between media, the potential that Manovich celebrates, Bernstein argues that in its reduction of matter to bits and codes,

> digitalization does for media what the Cartesian reduction […] did for nature in general: it reduces material form into abstract numbers. Once this occurs then in principle any medium can be translated into any other. […] Digitalization thus represents the apotheosis of concepts without intuitions. (17)

The materiality of the medium is erased as art is reduced to information: in other words, digitalization represents the triumph of techno-scientific rationality over the lost authority of nature that the medium, according to Bernstein, stands in for. For Bernstein, this signals the end of art and the realisation of the danger to which it bears witness. In the face of this threat, modernist painting appears as the retreat from "information", hibernation appears as the only option. As I attempted to demonstrate, in this framework the avant-garde appears as secondary to modernism, a mode that fails to grasp the real stakes of art.

These oppositional positions adopted by Manovich and Bernstein are generated by the same ideological pattern identified by Buck Morss. They are performances of the same structure: Manovich's avant-garde articulates the dream of a techno-utopia, Bernstein's apprehension about the digital is a dystopian nightmare of total rationalization. That this structure can be disinvested and transformed has been the central line of argument of this thesis. In Chapters One and Two, I attempted to show the

crucial move of recent work on the cross-disciplinary avant-garde has been to think it in relation to the medium specificity of modernism: to show that these impulses constitute a false opposition. This insight was developed through Adorno's aesthetic theory, as I tried to show the importance of his commitment to thinking through the relation between the abstract/general and the concrete/particular. As I set it out in Chapters One and Three, the real challenge presented by the avant-gardes is in fact to think through the relationship between conceptual thought and the materiality of art. Allowing materiality and sense to interfere with one another, the avant-gardes operate against any easy opposition between the aesthetic and the conceptual and, despite Manovich's hopes and Bernstein's fears, show that erasing one in the name of the other is an unachievable fantasy: the signal is a noise. The avant-garde work, as I argued in Chapter Three, reveal this by highlighting the way in which the interference of matter impacts on thought.

In Chapter Four, I tried to show how these insights ground Lyotard's important but seldom discussed response to the avant-garde. Lyotard's philosophy develops the implications of "avant-garde" media hybridity in order to critique Adorno's work and to drive it beyond the limitations its sets for itself and the pessimism that marks Bernstein's position. Lyotard, while acknowledging the precariousness of art, shows how this impulse to cross-disciplinarity is as important and as critical as "modernist" medium specificity. Importantly, while distinguishing the logic of the avant-garde from the logic of innovation that drives Manovich's vision—while arguing that its development does not conform to the logic of efficiency and innovation that drives capital—his work also offers a way in which to think about how the avant-garde impulse might develop. Lyotard presents the avant-garde as a mode or moment of transformation, a questioning that raises the challenge of how to respond to that which evades categorisation and rational or conceptual understanding. The avant-garde as it emerges from his work is a response to the question of how we might read beyond conceptual "meanings" and how we might inscribe what is inexpressible in established and conventional idioms. The post-aesthetic avant-garde that I have attempted to present in this thesis thus challenges not just aesthetic theory but also continually reconfigures its critical links with
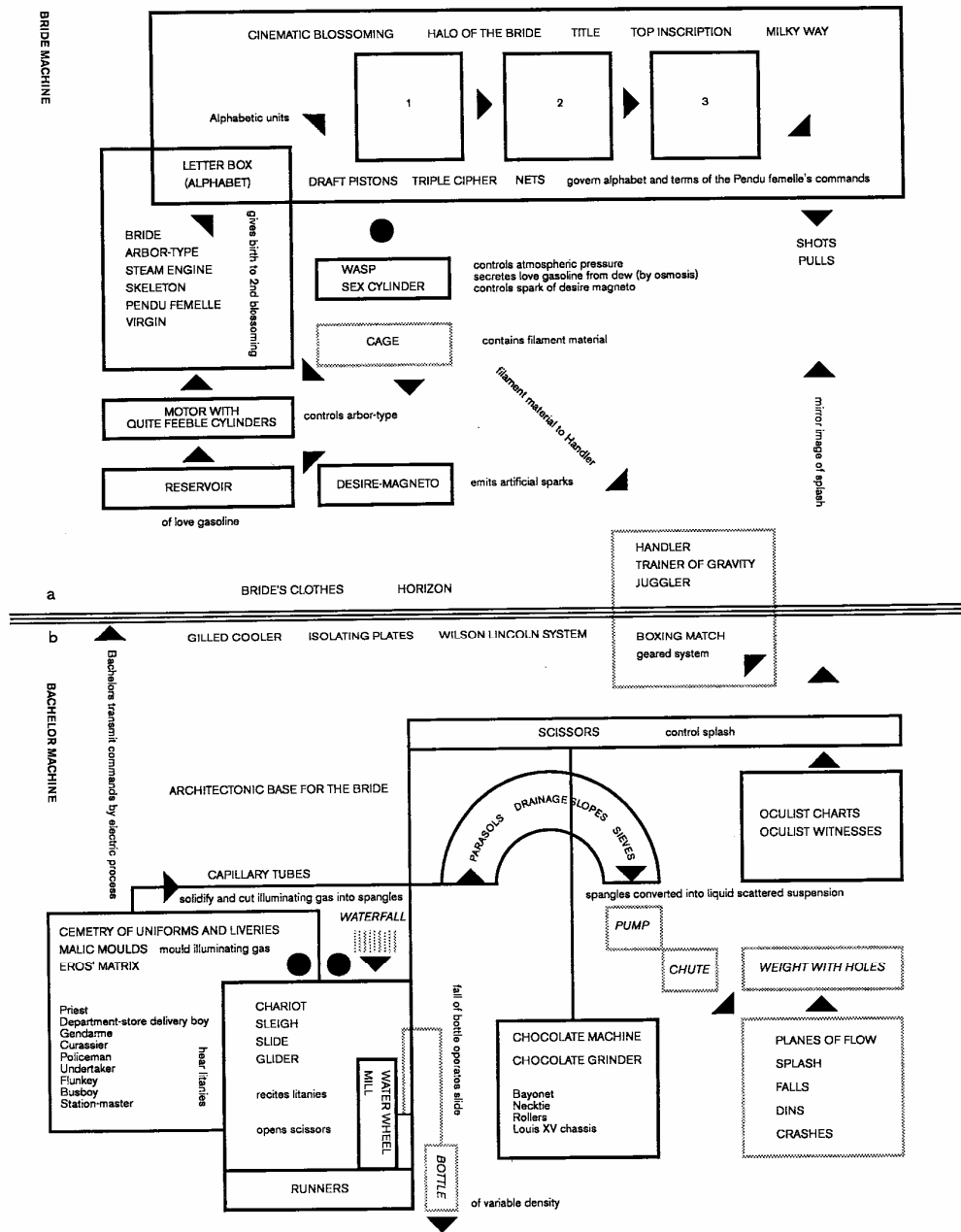
experience. In this sense, as I have tried to show, the avant-garde is a transformative force rather than a specific, historical field.

The contemporary debate on digital art is the product of the kind of nostalgia against which Lyotard's avant-garde operates. Once the positions of Manovich and Bernstein are recognised as belonging within this structure, they immediately appear less compelling. What becomes clear is that digital media do not necessarily represent either the advance or the fall of the avant-garde. In other words, digital media should be viewed as another set of *material* conventions: conventions which may or may not be generative of new possibilities and which need to be investigated for both the opportunities which they open out, as well as for those that they disallow, the expressions that they suppress. All of which is to say that digital media are no more or less generative of avant-garde activity than any other media: the avant-garde operates against the hierarchical structuring of media/arts that such aesthetic theory inscribes.

If the avant-garde is to have relevance for the twenty-first century, then, it needs to be thought beyond the models of utopianism and negativity in which it is currently mired. The ideological structure which Buck Morss sees as underwriting the twentieth century, as I hope my reading of Lyotard shows, can be disinvested. Moreover, this disinvestment, as I have presented it, develops out of the work and theorizations of the avant-gardes. What is at stake in theorising the avant-garde is not the labelling of specific phenomenon or specific fields, but rather the reconfiguration of relations upon which society is grounded, the possibility of art as having an intrinsic political and social task. This is why it is important to recognise that the avant-garde, by questioning the relationships between the arts as well as between art and non-art, does not resolve but rather opens and holds open the question of art's relation to society. It is as an opening, a site of possibility, that the avant-garde retains its relevance today.

Appendix

Richard Hamilton, "Diagram of Marcel Duchamp's *Large Glass*" (1956)

BRIDE MACHINE

CINEMATIC BLOSSOMING   HALO OF THE BRIDE   TITLE   TOP INSCRIPTION   MILKY WAY

Alphabetic units   1   2   3

LETTER BOX (ALPHABET)

DRAFT PISTONS   TRIPLE CIPHER   NETS   govern alphabet and terms of the Pendu femelle's commands

BRIDE
ARBOR-TYPE
STEAM ENGINE
SKELETON
PENDU FEMELLE
VIRGIN

gives birth to 2nd blossoming

WASP
SEX CYLINDER

controls atmospheric pressure
secretes love gasoline from dew (by osmosis)
controls spark of desire magneto

SHOTS
PULLS

CAGE   contains filament material

filament material to Handler

MOTOR WITH QUITE FEEBLE CYLINDERS   controls arbor-type

mirror image of splash

RESERVOIR   DESIRE-MAGNETO   emits artificial sparks

of love gasoline

HANDLER
TRAINER OF GRAVITY
JUGGLER

a   BRIDE'S CLOTHES   HORIZON

b   GILLED COOLER   ISOLATING PLATES   WILSON LINCOLN SYSTEM   BOXING MATCH geared system

BACHELOR MACHINE

Bachelors transmit commands by electric process

SCISSORS   control splash

ARCHITECTONIC BASE FOR THE BRIDE

PARASOLS   DRAINAGE SLOPES   SIEVES

OCULIST CHARTS
OCULIST WITNESSES

CAPILLARY TUBES
solidify and cut illuminating gas into spangles

spangles converted into liquid scattered suspension

WATERFALL

CEMETRY OF UNIFORMS AND LIVERIES
MALIC MOULDS   mould illuminating gas
EROS' MATRIX

PUMP

CHUTE   WEIGHT WITH HOLES

Priest
Department-store delivery boy
Gendarme
Curassier
Policeman
Undertaker
Flunkey
Busboy
Station-master

hear litanies

CHARIOT
SLEIGH
SLIDE
GLIDER

recites litanies

opens scissors

WATER WHEEL MILL

fall of bottle operates slide

BOTTLE

of variable density

CHOCOLATE MACHINE
CHOCOLATE GRINDER

Bayonet
Necktie
Rollers
Louis XV chassis

PLANES OF FLOW
SPLASH
FALLS
DINS
CRASHES

RUNNERS

(Buskirk and Nixon 60)

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