

# *Entkunstung*

Artistic Models for the End of Art

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## **Declaration**

I, Kerstin Stakemeier, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

## Abstract

*Entkunstung* is a term coined by philosopher Theodor W. Adorno to describe the disintegrating influences of mass culture on the production and reception of modern art. It characterises what he understands as the fate of art in the 20th century, the dissolution of boundaries between its media as well as between art and other cultural productions.

In my thesis I discuss this process not as a fate but rather as an enabling principle of artistic production since the beginning of the 20th century. I delineate a history of *Entkunstung*, a history of artists who attempted to desert the field of art in reconstructing its means and materials in accordance with the popular culture of their time and its schemes of production.

Starting from the productivist artistic approaches of the Russian Revolution and their understanding of art's possible dissolution into a general characteristic of a revolutionized form of industrial labour, I proceed to discuss the practices of a group of architects, artists and critics who introduced practices of popular culture into the arts in Western Europe in the early 1950s. The London-based Independent Group's exhibitions, discussions and works, I argue, operate as actualizations of the practices of Russian Productivism in an altered political and economic context. The figure of "actualization" (from Walter Benjamin's Arcades Project) is a central methodological principle of my project. Benjamin introduces it to critique historical narratives of progress and replace them with the notion of history in flux, a web of figures in actualization. He suggests that historical moments are never sublated within their aftermaths but reappear in unresolved and still open aspects. I consider the actualisations of Productivism in, first, the affirmation of American popular culture in the Independent Group, and second, in the "dematerialising" practices in American Conceptual art in the 1960s. Where Production Art sought to assimilate artistic to industrial practices, and the Independent Group explored the implications of consumerist models for art production, certain Conceptual practices aimed at disassembling art into a set of practices and performed gestures, into an action in and also outside of art.

The thesis seeks to assemble the fragments of a history of *Entkunstung*, a history of artistic models for the end of art.

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I want to dedicate this thesis to Roger Behrens as he continues to hold on to Theodor W. Adorno whilst still affirming all the media of culture.

## Introduction

Conversely, *Entkunstung* is immanent to art, to that which is determined as much as to that which sells out.<sup>1</sup>

In his *Aesthetic Theory*, published posthumously in 1970, Theodor W. Adorno characterises the *Entkunstung* of art as modern art's immanent state of disintegration.<sup>2</sup> In *Entkunstung*, Adorno's investigations into the role of the aesthetic in what he describes as the bourgeois culture of Western capitalism culminate in one idiomatic figure: *Entkunstung* captures the antagonistic autonomy of the arts in the twentieth century in the face of their gradual identification with the cultural industry on the one hand and their inevitable alienation from inherited forms of aura on the other. *Entkunstung* for Adorno performs a systemic function in that it seeks to establish to what extent art in the twentieth century begins to exist 'beyond itself'.

In the *Aesthetic Theory* Adorno attempted to reformulate his previously elaborated philosophical concept of late modernism as a system of negative dialectics<sup>3</sup>, what he sees as the disintegration of human emancipation in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, through the notion of the aesthetic value of art, which might explain, why *Entkunstung* is mostly translated as *de-aestheticization* rather than *de-artification*. My own attempt to re-introduce this concept as an artistic model for an end of art is in many ways based on the rejection of the identification of the arts with their philosophical conceptualization in the aesthetic, which Adorno founds his rejection of *Entkunstung* on. I shall therefore briefly lay out Adorno's reasons for this identification, before opening *Entkunstung* to a different reading, one in which art is posited as a material practice rather than a philosophical figure, delineating an art history of *Entkunstung* rather than a philosophy of *Entkunstung*.

In the philosophical figure of the aesthetic, art for Adorno figures as a faculty of knowledge and, as in his other philosophical writings, the historical horizon of his reflections

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<sup>1</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970) p. 94. (all quotes are translated by the author where not noted otherwise, K.S.)

<sup>2</sup> The German word '*Entkunstung*' is mostly translated into English as deaestheticization (see Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*. (London: Continuum, 2004), p. 22). The translator remarks "*Entkunstung*": Literally the destruction of art's quality as art." (ibid., p. 58), which is correct but does not explain his translation into deaestheticization. The term de-aestheticisation mixes the ideology of the aesthetic with art as a praxis as well as art as an object. I will stick to the German original as it expresses more adequately the characteristics of *Entkunstung* in describing the social status of art and its production rather than an aesthetic assumption. The ability of the German language to create nouns as combinatory words here serves the purpose of Adorno's intention--as well as my discussion of it.

<sup>3</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970).



is provided by what Adorno defines as the rise of bourgeois culture in Europe in the era of industrialisation and nation building in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno attempts to reflect the aesthetic potentials, which historically emerged in this moment, in the light of their dramatic historical collapse in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He proposes the field of bourgeois culture, and more specifically that of bourgeois high culture, of art, as a privileged sphere of reflection, vouchsafed by social detachment, which provided the realm of art with an ambiguous sense of social and economical autonomy. Through this detachment, art for Adorno can figure as the potential scene of radical criticality of those social structures it is itself implied in, but only if the ideological figure of its autonomy is affirmed as a central facilitating measure of this criticality. Within this system of aesthetic criticality in art, *Entkunstung* consequently figures for Adorno as a threat, a figure of that negative teleology which he sees art as a countering force to. In that sense, the common English translation for *Entkunstung*, de-aestheticization, adequately captures Adorno's own identification of art with its philosophical formulation as aesthetic. De-aestheticization presents *Entkunstung* as the potential loss of art's philosophical significance, a threat which Adorno clearly sees and which for him dramatically undermines any artistic potential for criticality. This potential loss of the philosophical integrity of the artwork, captured in its *Entkunstung*, threatens to identify art with other cultural productions existing in the realm of the everyday, those of popular culture, which Adorno identifies as figures of affirmation. Even though Adorno remains ambivalent about the possibilities of art in a state of *Entkunstung* he does so on the grounds of an aesthetic theory of art. In my project, however, I want to turn to *Entkunstung*'s other, more material, side, understanding it as the idiomatic remainder of the factual social as well as economic heteronomy of art in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I want to counter Adorno's assumption of the primacy of the aesthetic in art philosophically as well as art historically, proposing *Entkunstung* as a de-artification instead of a de-aestheticization, as a figure that enables an art history of *Entkunstung*, a history of artistic attempts to produce art as a "fait social"<sup>4</sup> from the perspective of its social and economic heteronomy.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970) p. 374.

<sup>5</sup> Due to the primacy of the aesthetic in Adorno's formulations of art's *Entkunstung*, its discussion in much of the secondary literature on the author does not extend beyond its inherent critique of the culture industry. (See f.e. G.K. Lehmann, "Der wissenschaftlich-technische Fortschritt und die Kunst. Die 'Entkunstung der Kunst' und ihre philosophischen Hintergründe, in *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie*, Vol. 35, No.2, (Berlin Akademie Verlag, 1987) pp. 134-143, Uta Kösser, *Ästhetik und Moderne : Konzepte und Kategorien im Wandel* (Erlangen: Filo, 2006), Gerhard Gamm (Ed.), *Das unendliche Kunstwerk : von der Bestimmtheit des Unbestimmten in der ästhetischen Erfahrung* (Hamburg : Philo, 2007) or Jonathan M. Hess, *Reconstituting the body politic: enlightenment, public culture and the invention of aesthetic autonomy* (Wayne State University, 1999)) Some of the US-American re-appropriations of the concept in that regard prove to be far more productive, as, even though they use the term in a similar manner, they do not fail to point to its polemic potential, thus not mourning art's *Entkunstung*, but rather discussing its ideosyncratic existence (See f.e. Harold Rosenberg, "The Art World:

*Entkünstung* in my reformulation of Adorno's concept therefore is staged as a historical process. It describes the challenges to art, the artistic attempts to force an end to art, suggested by the critique of art by revolutionary artistic producers in Russia in the 1910s and 20s. Russian Productivism<sup>6</sup> sought to assist art's immanent antagonisms in proposing its disintegration into an artistic utilitarianism.<sup>7</sup> Throughout the second half of the twentieth century, however, the tendency toward *Entkünstung* shifted from being a structural phenomenon of art's antagonistic social function into an artistic position in its own right. The affirmation of popular culture in 1950s Britain proposed strategies of what Adorno had denounced as *Entkünstung* as art's only possible source of renewal,<sup>8</sup> and the diffusion of art into actions in many conceptual practices in the US barely ten years later<sup>9</sup> proposed *Entkünstung* in the temporal and spatial disintegration of the work of art as art's proper theme and occupation, which remains an important theme of contemporary artistic practices. In proposing fragments of an art history of *Entkünstung*, I do not intend, in this thesis, to rewrite the theory of the avant-garde or to reformulate a philosophical aesthetics of *Entkünstung*. My project is, so to speak, anti-modern in that it seeks to reassemble fragments of a history of modern art's wilful disintegration. By focussing on three historical moments in which I identify *Entkünstung* as a historically recurring but varying set of artistic strategies against art, I want to delineate moments of an art history of *Entkünstung*, an art history of past interruptions of art, which point towards its present state.

Adorno coined the term *Entkünstung* to describe what he perceived as modern art's series of artistic articulations of instability, of structural weak points, in the aftermath of the Second World War.<sup>10</sup> He identifies art's internal differentiation as well as its external

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Deaestheticization" in *The New Yorker*, January 24th (New York, 1970) pp. 62-67.). More recently, the concept of *Entkünstung* in Adorno has been criticized for affirming an understanding of the work of art as a self-enclosed entity, while artistic practices since the 1960s have wilfully exposed the permeability of such boundaries (See f.e. Jason Gaiger „Dismantling the Frame: Site-Specific Art and Aesthetic Autonomy“ in *British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 49, No. 1, January, 2009 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) pp. 43-58.) It would be interesting to bring these philosophical as well as more art historical attempts into relation with discussions of other figures of *Entkünstung* in contemporary aesthetic and art historical writings, such as John Robert's discussion of deskilling (John Roberts, *The Intangibilities of Form: Skill and Deskilling in Art After the Readymade* (Verso London, New York, 2007) but this would clearly exceed the limits of this project.

<sup>6</sup> Throughout the thesis I will use the word 'Productivism', as Christina Lodder uses it (see Christina Lodder, *Russian Constructivism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), pp. 75f), unlike the more common „Production art“, used for example by Maria Gough, as it acknowledges the fact that Productivism did not want to produce art but to give rise to an –ism of production through art.

<sup>7</sup> See Boris Arvatov, „Thesen zur bürgerlichen Kunst und proletarischen Produktionskunst“, in: Boris Arvatov, *Kunst und Produktion*, ed. by Hans Günther und Karla Hielscher (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1972), pp.7

<sup>8</sup> See Allison and Peter Smithson, „But Today We Collect Adds“ and Lawrence Alloway, „The Arts and the Mass Media“, each in *Pop Art: A Critical History*, ed. by Steven H. Madoff (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

<sup>9</sup> Lucy R. Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997)

<sup>10</sup> Adorno, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

professionalization as inescapable characteristics of *Entkunstung*, which lie at the core of modern art. For Adorno, the economization<sup>11</sup> of culture,<sup>12</sup> the danger of art becoming kitsch,<sup>13</sup> and its gyration towards the culture industry are the objective social forms of *Entkunstung*. “The poles of the artwork’s *Entkunstung* are, that it becomes ‘object’ amongst ‘objects’ as well as the medium of its beholder’s psychology.”<sup>14</sup> The subjective corollary of this danger of art becoming a pure surface for its recipients’ projections is the modern artistic ideal of individual expression, which was always ideologically fraudulent at the same time as it was precariously desired.<sup>15</sup> In *Entkunstung*, Adorno identifies modern art’s urge to escape? from itself, which he equates with the tragic status of emancipation in the twentieth century and the collapse of enlightenment in Europe. Following Adorno in his historical analysis, but not in his aesthetic judgements, I want to propose *Entkunstung* as a productive process in which art does not play a passive but rather an active role. And it is these artistic realizations of art’s *Entkunstung* which I follow up in my project, identifying parallel artistic practices in Russian Production art, British turns towards the popular in the 1950s and the Conceptualisms which rose in the US with the 1960s, in order to discuss them as one another’s dissimilar actualizations. I want to contradict Adorno’s account of *Entkunstung* as a diminution of art proper and instead propose it as a figure of expansion in artistic practices and of artistic attempts to materialize art’s social status out of art. My object of study is the *Entkunstung* of art, not the art of *Entkunstung*.

Delineating moments of an art history of *Entkunstung*, I want to assemble a historical set of actions, strategies, material, media and exposures, all of which start with art in order to exceed it. My historical methodology in concatenating traces of artistic productions of *Entkunstung* at radically different moments throughout the last century and seeking to identify relationships between artistic leaps beyond art, is not one of linear development or retrospective congruity, but rather one of repetitions, differences and semblances. In this, the historiographic figure of “actualization”,<sup>16</sup> introduced by Walter Benjamin in *Arcades Project* and taken up by Gilles Deleuze in *Difference and Repetition*,<sup>17</sup> is central to the mode of

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<sup>11</sup> What Adorno describes as an economization (*Ökonomisierung*) rather than a commodification (*Kommodifizierung*). The former describes a more general, structural process, which is not only concerned with the products but also with their terms of production. I will therefore use the unelegant translation economization throughout this text.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. p. 322.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. p. 465.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. p. 33.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. p. 255.

<sup>16</sup> Benjamin, Walter, *Gesammelte Schriften. V [Das Passagenwerk]*, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991), p. 273.

<sup>17</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* (London: Continuum, 2010), p. 273.

thought of my project. In Benjamin's writings, the figure of actualization serves as a historiographic lever. In one of the fragments of his *Arcades Project*, Benjamin suggests actualization as the materialist counter-concept to the idea of linear progression,<sup>18</sup> a desire to pull past events into our present times. "The true method of bringing past things to one's mind, is, to imagine them in our space (not us in theirs). (...) The things, imagined that way, do not allow any mediating construction from 'greater views'."<sup>19</sup> I want to imagine Russian Productivism, British Pop and the rise of artistic conceptualism, and discuss them as one another's actualizations. I shall describe the radical difference of their parallel strategies and the commonality of their non-parallel productions in relation to their specific historical surroundings. I am interested in the presentness of these pasts within a philosophically grounded art historical analysis of the objects, materials, situations, actions, commitments, institutions and relations, positioning collectives and institutions like the Proletku'lt, the INChUK and the VChUTEMAS, group formations like the Independent Group, New Brutalism, Team 10 and the Gruppe SPUR, the Artist Placement Group and General Idea, and artistic producers like Vladimir Tatlin, Varvara Stepanova, Lyobov Popova, Reyner Banham, Nigel Henderson, Alison and Peter Smithson, Allan Kaprow, Claes Oldenburg, Mierle Landerman Ukele and Mary Kelly in relation to one another and to present figures of *Entkunstung*. In my conclusion I will shortly allude to what I perceive as the function of the figure of *Entkunstung* within contemporary art today, ending with an open set of observations.

Benjamin's figure of actualization allows me to deal with the history of *Entkunstung* not as a given, an undercurrent of canonized histories of art proper, but as the proposition of ongoing processes between art and its ends, reoccurring in its pasts and presents, an activation of past histories of art in order, in this case, to reconstruct *Entkunstungen* within the present. In Benjamin's own writings this function becomes apparent in his introduction of the figure of actualization in the course of his critique of historicism:<sup>20</sup> "It can be seen as the methodological endeavour of this project to demonstrate a historical materialism, which annihilates the idea of progress from itself. Its core concept is not progress but actualization."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> See Benjamin, *Das Passagenwerk* and "Über den Begriff der Geschichte", in *Gesammelte Schriften I.2*, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991)

<sup>19</sup> Benjamin, *Das Passagenwerk*, p. 273.

<sup>20</sup> See Walter Benjamin, Rolf Tiedemann (Ed.), "Eduard Fuchs, der Sammler und der Historiker", in *Gesammelte Schriften. II.2* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991), and "Über den Begriff der Geschichte".

<sup>21</sup> Benjamin, *Das Passagenwerk*, Konvolut N2, quoted from Günther Mensching, "Zur metaphysischen Konstellation von Zeit und Fortschritt in Benjamins geschichtsphilosophischen Thesen", in *Materialien zu Benjamins Thesen 'Über den Begriff der Geschichte'*, ed. by Peter Bulthaup (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1975), p. 171.

Benjamin himself relentlessly takes up moments in history that remained unfulfilled, threads that were lost or ended abruptly, to contest their status as mere pre-histories of the present, suggesting their actualization, their realization<sup>22</sup>. For Benjamin, actualization bears the chance to reassess the nineteenth century, the pre-histories contained in the architecture of the arcades, the early histories of photographic portraits or the feudalist remains in the everyday<sup>23</sup>. In my own project I want to narrow this universal schema down to the artistic articulations specifically of art's 'shifting borders' within the changing social orders of the 20th century. This includes the recurring question 'is it art?' as much as that of art's potential end<sup>24</sup>. To what extent did Lyobov Popova's and Varvara Stepanova's attempts to reconstruct and refigure the social and artistic function and production of textiles within Russia's post-revolutionary society in 1923 figure the industrial end of art in their own times, even though it is today simply considered artistic avant-gardism, or a mere design pattern?<sup>25</sup> Looking at such practices of *Entkunstung* in actualization, cutting them off from their contemporary restraints and consequences, their possible implications and historical counterparts become explicit against the background of another time, namely ours.<sup>26</sup>

Consequently, following Benjamin's model of ongoing historical refigurations in time, the parallelisms and actualizations of modes of *Entkunstung* that I want to confront with one another in my project will not be inserted into the construction of a linear development. Unlike Adorno's own assumption of a destructive negative teleology<sup>27</sup> of art, which retrospectively obliges one artistic production to have presupposed the fate of its predecessor, Benjamin's model of a history in actualization proposes, as I have tried to suggest, a sense of time that punctures moments of significant actions and works out their historical particularities, that recognizes their reappearances throughout history in their differences and parallels. In this dynamization of Adorno's principle of *Entkunstung* through the introduction of Benjamin's sense of a non-linear and fragmented history, Deleuze's reassertion of the principle of actualization adds another element of historical thought central to my project. In Deleuze's recovery of the Benjaminian concept of actualization, the historical dynamisms implied in the *Arcades Project* are set into motion and result in an ongoing disintegration and

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<sup>22</sup> See Benjamin, *Das Passagenwerk* and "Über den Begriff der Geschichte".

<sup>23</sup> See Benjamin, *Das Passagenwerk*.

<sup>24</sup> See Grant H. Kester, "Aesthetics after the End of Art: An Interview with Susan Buck-Morss", in *Art Journal*. 56 Vol. 1 (1997), pp. 38-45.

<sup>25</sup> Lodder, *op. cit.*, pp. 146ff.

<sup>26</sup> From 2007 to 2008 I ran a project space, together with art historian Nina Köller in Hamburg (Ger) by the name of *Aktualisierungsraum*, in which we tried to put his concept into practice. We invited artists, musicians and authors to actualize events, objects or specific characters of the past within an art space [www.aktualisierungsraum.org](http://www.aktualisierungsraum.org)

<sup>27</sup> Adorno, *op. cit.*, pp.210ff.

reconfiguration within narrations of history. This challenges an understanding of history that perceives it as a series of detectable voluntary acts that are to be understood as instrumental. In Deleuze's view, means and ends do not stand in a clearly defined relation to one another but rather are in a constant mode of deviation, shot through with social structures in which sense is produced but not given.<sup>28</sup> Deleuze implies that the moments of actualization themselves are not simply voluntarily shifted by a historical subject and transposed from one historical moment to another, but instead themselves imply a discrete sense of temporality. Actualizations, so to speak, surface in the course of repetition. Here the concept of actualization is taken as a model not so much of historiography but of historicity, a mode more than a method. For Deleuze, the present itself becomes the most contested temporality. It is shot through with past times and past temporalities: "It becomes clear, that the process of actualisation always contains an inner temporality, according to what is actualised, to what changes. Not only each type of social production has an extensive inner temporality, but its organised parts, too, imply specific rhythms."<sup>29</sup> Deleuze's sense of actualization is not one in which one temporality is sought in order to be actualized, as it is in Benjamin's attempts to recover past instances, threads, battles, expressions and materials. For Deleuze fulfilment is never fully reached, but never fully negated either. In one sense, Deleuze realizes Benjamin's idea of a "positive barbarism":<sup>30</sup> he exchanges sets of historical values and conventions with their 'endless returns',<sup>31</sup> their repetitions, in which, again and again, sense rises from non-sense.<sup>32</sup> In Deleuze's construction, actualizations are repetitions in which involuntary recollections occur. Here, pasts are transversing into the present, actualized and actualizing at the same time. Adorno assumes a negative teleology in which history gravitates towards its own negation, failing to actualize its own concepts and thus counteracting itself constantly and missing its realization. Benjamin, in contrast, identifies discrete entities to be actualized, moments of lived realizations, fragments to be excavated from their present and transposed into ours. For Deleuze, a teleology would imply a sense beyond its nonsensical realization. His empiricist approach, at the same time, can understand teleology only as a paranoid non-sense that produces sets and planes of identical narrations. Consequently, Deleuze contests the

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<sup>28</sup> Gilles Deleuze, "How Do We Recognize Structuralism?", in *Desert Islands and Others Texts*, 1953-1974, Semiotext(e) foreign agents series, ed. By David Lapoujade (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2004), pp.170ff.

<sup>29</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Woran erkennt man den Strukturalismus?* Internationaler Merve-Diskurs, 166 (Berlin: Merve-Verl, 1992), pp. 29ff.

<sup>30</sup> See Walter Benjamin, "Erfahrung und Armut", in *Gesammelte Schriften. II.1*, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991) p.215.

<sup>31</sup> Gilles Deleuze, "Conclusion on the Will to Power and the Eternal Return", in *Desert Islands and Others Texts*, 1953-1974, Semiotext(e) foreign agents series, ed. by David Lapoujade (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2004), p. 126.

<sup>32</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Logik des Sinns* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1993), p. 97.

existence of such detectable entities as Benjamin proposes them, subjects or objects, instead expanding a dynamism, actualizations in repetition, involuntary structures, leaping forward into the past as well as the future. For him actualizations have retrospectively already altered the temporalities and identities of the past, and the present cannot hold on to itself other than in accounting for the different temporalities and structures of multiple temporalities subsisting in it. “It is only the present that exists in time, it brings together the past and the future and contains them within itself. But it is only the past and the future together, which insist in time and divide the present ad infinitum. Not three consecutive dimensions but two concurrent readings of time.”<sup>33</sup> Deleuze opens up the present as a blind-sighted field of temporalities, which gains sight only through the insistence of the past and future in it. In this multiplied actuality *Entkunstung* turns into the persistency of a modernist *fatum*, which exists as reoccurrences, in repetitions and differences. By providing a frame of thought dedicated to the contemporary, i.e. my own historical point of departure, Deleuze provides the starting points and the end points of my project. He also reappears, within the chronology of this project, in the third and last chapter, which opens up the past into the present, locating the historical point at which, as I want to argue, the contemporary rose.

This triangle of

- a) Adorno’s narration of art’s intrinsic self-negation in *Entkunstung* from within an integrated modernism,
- b) Benjamin’s attempt to evacuate modernity from its historical association with the ideology of linear progression in his concept of actualization, and
- c) Deleuze’s retrospective disintegration of modernity’s significant identities into intertwined structures of signification in which the localization of sense rises in the advent of non-sense

allows me to look at *Entkunstung* as a productive momentum which stages the disintegration of modernism in artistic practices. In it modernity was not sublated into postmodernity, but disintegrated. Modernity subsisted, I want to argue, as a persistence of practices, centrifugal forces, affinities and decentred threads of realizations. Tracing *Entkunstungen* in the affective materialities of Russian Productivism, the enthusiastic affirmations of British Pop and the longing for the real in 1960s Conceptualisms, my aim is not to carve out a reconfigured

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

history of an avant-garde but, on the contrary, one of modernity as a productive failure – of artistic productions longing to leave the realm of art, for art's *Entkünstung*.

In the following I will outline my project in relation to its methodological principles. Discussing the methodological frame of the first chapter, I want to call on Adorno and other proponents of a dialectical critical theory such as Walter Benjamin and Ernst Bloch as witnesses to the defeat of the revolutionary developments of the early twentieth century. Their conceptualizations of cultural and artistic productions in the rise of culture's economization provide a belated contemporary understanding of Russian Production art's attempted shortcut from the artisanal Realism of the nineteenth century to art as a direct intervention in the real in the turn towards "the artist as producer".<sup>34</sup> *Entkünstung* here appears as an artistic aggression directed against art. Russian Productivism art takes up precisely those characteristics which Adorno half a century later identified as the vertices of *Entkünstung* and articulates them as its programmatic focuses.

In the second chapter, I want to delineate post-war British artistic approaches to popular culture, concentrating on the British Independent Group (IG), which formed in the early 1950s around London's ICA, to discuss their discourses, lecture series, stagings and productions as an attempted actualization of Productivism's *Entkünstungen* within an art as mass culture. Where Productivism sought to establish a mass culture from the disintegration of art, the IG was confronted with the sudden insignificance of art in relation to a fully industrialized culture industry, one that was not so much tangible as an active consumer culture in Britain at that time but much more as a North American structure to come. Methodologically, I want to group contemporary writings such as those of the IG themselves, Reyner Banham or Lawrence Alloway with art historical accounts of early Pop, like those of Hal Foster or Thomas Crow, to understand British Pop as a move for concretization, a de-theorizing practice that attempted to twist art into its now superior opposite: commodified mass culture, made possible by the war machinery of the Second World War. *Entkünstung* here figures as the artistic affirmation of an objectified situation in art: a strategy to escape the insignificance of the historically established genres of art production.

The third and final chapter looks at the implications of the rise of art's conceptual reformulations between the late 1950s and early 1970s. The conceptual reformulations of art, which attempted to circumvent its materializations followed in some ways the same linear

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<sup>34</sup> Maria Gough, *The Artist As Producer: Russian Constructivism in Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).



structure that Adorno's concept of *Entkunstung* suggested, but proposed it as a cut through art's traditional and commodified genres. Looking at the implications of the rise of the conceptual in art in the 1960s, I want to primarily concentrate on those expanded artistic practices that aimed to move art towards action. From Allan Kaprow's and Claes Oldenburg's early actions to Mierle Laderman Ukele's and General Idea's gendering of culture I want to concentrate on the actionism of conceptual practices, as they try to expand art with the life they position it in. The rise of these actions of *Entkunstung* is intrinsically connected to the wake of the political revolts of the 60s, as attempts to reach out for a lost sense of the 'real' in explicating artistic practices. *Entkunstung* here becomes a positive term of reference again, a positive rendering of Adorno's ambivalent notion of intellectualisation (*Vergeistigung*), the replacement of art through aesthetics. Deleuze's contestations of the existence of straight sense,<sup>35</sup> which exists distinct from non-sense, turns not only modernism but also conceptualism into a site of temporal and structural disintegration. Deleuze's modes of post-structuralist empiricism<sup>36</sup> provide me with a perspective outside of the aesthetics of modernism in art, a perspective in which the distinction between culture's different sectors, just like in conceptual actions, no longer necessarily guides the understanding of art. Discussed with allusion to Deleuze's understanding of actualization, art's disintegration is no longer a question of art but one that might be posed in any cultural sector into which characteristics of art have migrated through the commodification of culture and the conceptualization of art. Art's *Entkunstungen* here appear as actualizations of productivist models of re-identifying artistic practices through art's social functions, filtered through Pop's relentless affirmations and comprehension of the mechanisms of commodified mass culture, which by the 1960s had resurfaced as individualized consumer culture.

In the conclusion I shall look at the present as a point of convergence in which *Entkunstung* as a trope has gained a crucial function: that of stabilizing artistic practices in their constant migration to diasporic fields in search of artistic dignity. Art in the perspective of its *Entkunstung*, as I want to shortly discuss, has turned into a merely formal reference under the heading of which an infinite number of cultural practices and scientific methodologies are performed as art.

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<sup>35</sup> See Deleuze, *Logik des Sinns*, p. 13.

<sup>36</sup> See John Rajchman, Introduction to Deleuze, "Immanence: A Life", in *Pure Immanence: Essays on a Life*. (New York: Zone Books, 2001).

## 1 *Productivism against Art: Entkünstungen after the Russian Revolution of 1917*

### 1.1.1 Entkunstung and the History of Kunst

Those entrapped by culture industry and thirsting for its goods are residing on the other side of art: this is why they are perceiving its inadequacy to the contemporary forms of social life—not their own untruthfulness—more unveiled than those who are still remembering what once was an artwork. They are pushing towards the *Entkunstung* of art.<sup>37</sup>

In this instant, where he describes the context of art's shifting into popular culture as *Entkunstung* in the introduction to his *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno identifies art's structural and whole-hearted inclusion into the capitalist market not so much as an implication of art as an immanent function of modern bourgeois societies, but much more as one of those recipients who stand outside the bourgeois understanding of art. Not unlike influential art historians and critics of the immediate post-war period like Clement Greenberg, Adorno identifies *Entkunstung* as a loss of artistic distinction, as a threat to art's traditional media and their immanent telos of progression.<sup>38</sup> But while Adorno in other passages also goes on to consider *Entkunstung* as a dynamic force in art's immanent progression,<sup>39</sup> as a dematerialization expanding from within art, Greenberg, on the contrary, proposes art's immanence as *the* countermove to *Entkunstung*, preserving art's bourgeois domains of excellence, its media specificity<sup>40</sup>, the distinction of its disciplines and its social techniques. In articles such as "Art and the arts",<sup>41</sup> Adorno perceives the destruction of art's social distinction implied in the *Verfransung* of art, or the erosion of borders between its different genres. He does not, however, argue in favour of a new order that could reconstruct these distinctions, but instead confronts *Entkunstung* as a contemporary topos of art. "Immunity against the *Zeitgeist* in itself is no merit in itself. (...) That which tears down the boundary-posts of the genres is animated by historical forces which wake up within these boundaries and are flooding them subsequently."<sup>42</sup> The dynamism Adorno describes here is that which he ascribes to

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<sup>37</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970) p. 32

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73 and pp. 211f.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 123.

<sup>40</sup> Clement Greenberg, "Towards a Newer Laocoon", in: *Partisan Review* (New York City: Partisan Review, 1936).

<sup>41</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, "Die Kunst und die Künste", in *Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft Bd. 1* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970), pp. 432ff.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 433f.

*Entkünstung*. Adorno aims to hold on to the category of the individual work as a regulative idea,<sup>43</sup> but he is critical of its disintegration within its own *Zeitgeist*. In this light, art histories of preservation, like that opened up by Greenberg's texts of the 1940s and 50s are not central for my project. In contrast to Adorno, they tend to identify *Entkünstung* as an external threat to art and thus fail to perceive its incorporation in forms of artistic production.

This first chapter of my thesis focuses exclusively on artistic practices between 1914 and 1924 in pre-, post- and revolutionary Russia.<sup>44</sup> Discussing in that sense what has later been perceived as modernism's apogee, I want to concentrate on two different methodological approaches. On the one side, there are historians of art who have expanded Adorno's discussion of art's immanent *Entkünstung*, like Otto Karl Werckmeister or Peter Bürger, and thus regard modernism from the perspective of its disintegration. These critics have aimed to define the revolutionary moments of high modernism<sup>45</sup> retrospectively, seeking to reconstruct its threads in their present. On the other side I shall consider more contemporaneous writings of the time by figures who commented on and were involved in the artistic tactics of *Entkünstung* in Russia, in my case secretaries and teachers at the Prolekul't studios, namely Boris Arvatov (figure 1.1), Nicolaj Tarabukin (figure 1.2) and Vladimir Tatlin (figure 1.3). Generally speaking, this chapter deals with the material practice of the revolutionary productivist artists in Russia on the one hand, and the post-revolutionary art historical evaluations of their practices under the heading of 'modernism' or 'avant-garde' on the other. Contemporary criticism and historiographies, like those of Tarabukin and Arvatov, of course play an important role, but one which is, unlike the later Western accounts of the same period, very concentrated on the contemporaneity and desired social impact of their thought at the time. Few of these writings have been translated even today.<sup>46</sup> And even where contemporary personal accounts from the side of Western historians exist (as in the case of Alfred H. Barr's

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<sup>43</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Reinen Vernunft*, ed. by Raymund Schmidt (Hamburg: Meiner Verlag 1990), pp. 510ff.

<sup>44</sup> It would be interesting to relate these practices to those in the West, which, like the early George Grosz or Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, have attempted to side with the revolutionary practices in Russia, this would however, exceed the possibilities of this thesis.

<sup>45</sup> Modernism and Modernity within the German language, in Adorno and Bürger, as well as in Werckmeister, are used indiscriminately. I will use these words accordingly as their retrospective re-distinction would disintegrate the texts I am referring to. This would be a project of its own.

<sup>46</sup> See Boris Arvatov, *Kunst und Produktion* (Munich: C. Hanser, 1972), ed. by Hans Günther, and Karla Ortrud Hielscher, Arvatov, *Arte y producción: [el programa del productivismo]* ed. by José Fernández Sánchez (Madrid: Alberto Corazón, 1973) and N. M. Tarabukin, Andrei B. Nakov, *Le Dernier tableau, écrits sur l'art et l'histoire de l'art à l'époque du constructivisme russe. 1. Du chevalet à la machine. 2. Pour une théorie de la peinture*. (Paris: Éditions Champ libre, 1972), Boris Groys, *Am Nullpunkt: Positionen der russischen Avantgarde* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2005), Maria Gough, *The Artist As Producer: Russian Constructivism in Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005) and Christina Kiaer, *Imagine No Possessions: The Socialist Objects of Russian Constructivism* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005).

journals about his journey to Russia in 1927/28)<sup>47</sup> their concerns were not that different from later historical accounts: both seek to formulate the Russian attempts to find the terms of a revolutionary art within the framework of the evolution and formal disciplining of a Western Modernism. *Entkünstung* as an aesthetic as well as artistic contestation of these modernist values – Vladimir Tatlin as well as Lyobov Popova (figure 1.4) and others had visited or worked in Paris, so that context was by no means alien to them – thus figures in my project as a lever with which to question this perspective, an attempt to understand forms of deviation as forms of distinction. In this regard, my project is at its core concerned with modernism and the avant-garde as Western predefinitions of artistic practices beyond them, which were, in this case, fundamentally challenging artistic proceedings. Through the topos of *Entkünstung* I look at modernism from the perspective of its inherent disintegration.

This chapter concentrates on those Productivists, whether in the Proletkul't, the VChUTEMAS or the INChUK, who employed artistic practices to defy artistic modernism in favour of a modernization of artistic practices themselves. My aim is to set up a force field in which the figure of *Entkünstung* enables me to present those historical artistic practices within the grid of their since refigured historiographies, confronting the modernist categories they were challenging, as well as those more contemporary art historical reflections which have reconsidered them in regard to modernism's disintegration.

Such retrospective art historical accounts of modernism are by no means homogeneously oriented towards an unambivalent affirmation, but since the 1970s, art historians such as Rosalind Krauss, have developed a consciously retrospective account of what came to be called modernism, considering in particular the history of media specificity within it. Krauss' structuralist approach allows for an understanding of the historical artistic formations, which is less focussed on the singularity of the work and more on that of its formal accomplishments. Nevertheless, this does not lead to an affirmation of *Entkünstung's* challenging of art as a veritable challenge to art, even though Krauss' (and others') contestation of affirmative art theories and histories of modernity proposes a sustained turn of art histories towards an expanded understanding of artistic practice. In the essay collection *The Originality of the Avant-garde and Other Modernist Myths*, published in 1985, Krauss opens by proposing to replace the understanding of artworks as organisms with that of artworks as structures.<sup>48</sup> On the one hand this leads to an understanding of the artwork as one

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<sup>47</sup> See Alfred H. Barr, "Russian Diary, 1927-28", in *October*, Vol. 7, *Soviet Revolutionary Culture* (Winter, 1978)

<sup>48</sup> See Rosalind E. Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985)

which is shot through with structures, differences and materializations in itself, and thus in a way expands Adorno's idea of immanence towards a productive disintegration. On the other hand, this move identifies artworks as surface structures, appearances, which need to be unfolded rather than deciphered. Krauss has extrapolated those assumptions in a whole array of writings, which I want to allude to methodologically, even though I do not share the majority of their specific art historical fields of research, or her insistence on art as a discrete and integrated field. In her seminal two-part text "Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America" (1976/1977)<sup>49</sup> Krauss introduces, in an exemplary way, structuralist notions into her discussions of artworks, opening them up in a textual manner, exposing their literacy and indistinction from the texts in which they are inscribed. In many ways this linguistic approach renders the sharp distinction between art and its other, be it *Entkunstung* or its recipient, more permeable (which makes it interesting for my project), but in other ways it also makes it less dynamic. Here, the existence of art as such is never in question, because it seems to have always been justified a priori by its linguistic content. Like Krauss, I am not interested in reformulating a history of the avant-gardes, an art history founded on exception, genius and the new. I agree that the significance of artistic objects does not primarily lie in their individual distinction and their hermetic production of sense, but rather in their ability to perform contestations of sense through sensibility within a more permeable sense of structure. However, I want to propose the concept of *Entkunstung* as a challenge to the existence of art's proper domain, something that is in Krauss' writings uncontested. The concept of *Entkunstung* may have been developed by Adorno as a partially defensive account of modern art's disintegration, but it also implicitly accounted for this disintegration as a productive process, a shift of art production towards artistic production, of a culture of distinction towards a distinction of culture or, finally, an introduction of the popular into art which no longer confuses exception with distinction.

Productivism was not an *artistic* project but rather one which embarked on an examination of art's material basis,<sup>50</sup> in a conscious shift from composition to construction and from construction to production,<sup>51</sup> as has already been discussed in Christina Lodder's early study of 1983. Art histories which concentrate on the formal developments of these artistic actions and productions fail, I argue, to recognize their significance, simply classifying and ordering them in a canon of valorised artistic formalizations of visual representation, in which, for example, Alexander Rodchenko's (figure 1.5) and Vladimir Mayakowsky's (figure

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<sup>49</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> See *Vladimir Tatlin, A Retrospektive*, ed. by A. A. Strigalev and Jürgen Harten (Köln: DuMont, 1993).

<sup>51</sup> See Christina Lodder, *Russian Constructivism*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983) pp. 83ff, pp. 101ff.

1.6) collaborations for the visual representations of objects of the communist everyday are retrospectively determined by the appropriations in which capitalist commodity advertising re-represented them.<sup>52</sup> (figure 1.7) Structuralist readings, by contrast, which stress the linguistic aspects of these works, ignore their origin in a specific field of production – namely art – and its material negation. They thus see Rodchenko’s serial drawings, in which he aimed to emancipate line from painterly gesture, not in their affirmation of repetitive creation but instead in terms of individual artistic hand – or its absence (figure 1.8).<sup>53</sup> But the Russian Productivists never sought to create ‘good art’ but rather to put the state of their reconstruction of art into a more generally artistic praxis on display<sup>54</sup>. With regard to the art historical literature on this period, I will be informed mostly by discussions, which, like recent publications by among others Christina Kiaer and Maria Gough, enable a view onto what within the expanded art historical canon today is conceived as Constructivism beyond its art objects.<sup>55</sup> *Entkunstung* only becomes visible and intelligible where it is taken seriously as a practice that materially attempted to escape from art, not where it is simply accounted for as a weak phase or a by-product. This is prefigured in earlier discussions of the subject such as Christina Lodder’s *Russian Constructivism* of 1983, which, although it attempts to establish a monographic introduction into its subject, accounts for its specific organizational and social setting.<sup>56</sup> Others, like Brandon Taylor in his *Art and Literature under the Bolsheviks* of 1992, have attempted to turn this relation around, developing an account of artistic production from its social and political setting and thus be able to account for changes in media or technique as decisions on art and not merely on its style.<sup>57</sup> Taylor’s discussion of the Bolshevik period in art problematically implicates itself in the political commitments of the revolutionary era, failing to distinguish between a sympathetic but retrospective account of this past revolution and a nostalgic re-imagination of it. This enables Taylor to produce an art history of Bolshevik art productions which takes the artists seriously in their political ambitions against art but fails to inform a contemporary understanding of their artistic practices, acknowledging his own as an interpretation developed after Stalinism, after 1945 and after 1968.

*Entkunstung* is not an artistic question but one about art as such, which makes monographic accounts of the works of those figures of Russian Productivism who became art historically valorised as Constructivists (like Rodchenko, Tatlin, Stepanova, Popova or, more

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<sup>52</sup> See Margarita Tupitsyn. *Rodchenko and Popova: Defining Constructivism*. (London: Tate Gallery Publishing, 2009) pp. 162ff.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid,

<sup>54</sup> OBMOKhU. *Vue de la troisième exposition* (Art into Life, 2004).

<sup>55</sup> See Christina Kiaer, *Imagine No Possessions* and Maria Gough, *op. cit.*

<sup>56</sup> See Lodder, *op. cit.*

<sup>57</sup> See Brandon B. Taylor, *Art and Literature Under the Bolsheviks* (London: Pluto press, 1991).

recently Carl Ioganson) interesting only as collections of material, not as proper assessments of its significance. The same is true for aesthetic writings on the subject: where monographic art histories render Productivism's significance as a social process invisible, philosophical aesthetics remain unable to account for any forms beyond the status of art proper.

As much as Adorno himself proposed the *Entkünstung* of art to be a phenomenon of aesthetic theory, one in which mass culture closes in on art and fundamentally reconstructs its inner formation, this uncontested affirmation of aesthetic theory as an adequate problematic to deal with artistic production after 1945 also remains questionable. This, I want to argue, is intrinsically related to the complete lack of any concept of artistic labour in relation to other forms of labour in Adorno's understanding of art.<sup>58</sup> For Adorno the distinction between artistic labour and labour in general is a total one: art seems to be an individual act of expression, which gains social significance, while labour seems to be a social but un-individual act, an enforced metabolism. This is true in the sense that the division of labour, which structures reproduction in capitalist societies, leaves the individual worker devoid of any meaningful relation to his actions.<sup>59</sup> But this juxtaposition fails to register the omnipresent bridge between those two extremes, that cultural production not considered art and characterized by Adorno with the term "culture industry."<sup>60</sup> Culture industry figures as a central characteristic of art's *Entkünstung*, the motor behind the professionalisation of the arts, the systematisation of its terms of production and distribution and its reception as a commodity form. In this respect the aesthetic tends towards the culture industry, as the development of artistic labour and wage labour follows the same lines: professionalisation, specialization, division of labour, refinement of the means, the 'how', of production paired with an utterly uncritical acceptance of the 'why' of production. Adorno's treatment of art as a positive and in itself uncontested category falls into this ideology, because he affirms art's social status within this division of labour in order to secure what he perceives as its potential as a form of intellectual labour. Art as an aesthetic entity is consequently challenged by a seemingly external power, that of industrialization, of those forms of manual labour significant for the production of popular culture, which usurps it. *Entkünstung* denotes the precarious status of artistic labour within general labour, but despite Adorno's efforts, it can only be actively and productively perceived if the status and social function of art itself is put

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<sup>58</sup> A point I will come back to later in this chapter, where I will more extensively discuss the question of artistic and other labour in relation to the Productivist's attempt to bring them into accordance.

<sup>59</sup> Karl Marx, *Das Kapital*, Vol. 1 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1990), p. 531ff.

<sup>60</sup> Adorno, "Kulturindustrie: Aufklärung als Massenbetrug", in: Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung: Philosophische Fragmente*. Gesammelte Schriften Vol. 3, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1981).

into question. My project starts from a discussion of the productivist practices of the 1910s and 20s, because in them precisely these premises were ambitiously interrogated. This could happen not because of any individual genius or artistic distinction, but because of the revolution of all productive means in which they were participating.

Adorno narrows down his consideration of art to that which can be considered within the parameters of an aesthetic theory, and this in many ways prevents him from genuinely historicising his approach to art. He introduces aesthetic theory as a philosophical discipline which has, in many ways, an arbitrary relation to art's practices as it is based on an affirmative understanding of art's socially distinct, even if antagonistic, status.<sup>61</sup> As a philosophical discipline, aesthetic theory guides art towards its status as knowledge (*Erkenntnischarakter*),<sup>62</sup> a figure central to Adorno's appreciation of art's production: Art in Adorno's sense is 'justified' in its antagonistic social role through being a form of knowledge (*Erkenntnis*). This is what distinguishes art for him as a practice of thought from capitalism's commodity culture as a practice of production and consumption. By way of this insertion of philosophical dignity into the realm of art, as a materialization of the "negative dialectics"<sup>63</sup> of critical thinking, it remains a stabilized, stabilizing and uncontested figure for Adorno, one which confronts society's drastic failures in the realm of emancipation in the twentieth century but also paralyses any approach to contemporaneous artistic practices as material actions from which emancipation could emerge. For Adorno, art is not a contested and antagonistic practice, but a materialization of contested and antagonistic thought.<sup>64</sup> Here, intellectualisation (*Vergeistigung*) does not signify the dematerialization of art, as Lucy Lippard has famously called the rise of Conceptual art (and to which I will return in my third chapter),<sup>65</sup> but its becoming philosophy. I want to turn Adorno's concept of *Entkunstung* against itself, and make use of it for an anti-aesthetic approach to art that actively dismantles its canonical social function in favour of its distribution over different fields of cultural production. An art history of *Entkunstung* is not a history of aesthetics, but of artistic actualisations.

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<sup>61</sup> See Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie*, pp. 56ff.

<sup>62</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 383f.

<sup>63</sup> See Adorno, *Negative Dialektik; Jargon der Eigentlichkeit*. Gesammelte Schriften. Vol. 6, ed. by Gretel Adorno, Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1984).

<sup>64</sup> This is also why Adorno at one points discusses in the Aesthetic Theory if there can be dumb but still valuable artists.

<sup>65</sup> As Lippard, I am speaking of 'Conceptual art' not of 'Conceptual Art', as the former refers to the predominance of the conceptual in these practices figuring as art. See Lippard, *Six Years: the Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972; A Cross-Reference Book of Information on Some Aesthetic Boundaries* (New York: Praeger, 1973).



Adorno registers those processes of art that tend towards a dismantling of its *Werkcharakter*, its character as a ‘work’, in the emergence of disintegrative practices,<sup>66</sup> but for him they represent primarily a weakening of art’s negational forces, beyond the integrity of which he sees no productive function of art other than an affirmation of social and cultural conformity. In privileging philosophical aesthetics over art, Adorno initiates an art theory of highly articulate but passive representations.

In his early essay collection *Das Ende der Ästhetik*, Otto-Karl Werckmeister argues that Adorno’s concept of bourgeois culture in itself constructs an ahistorical and in that sense monolithic understanding of modern art, in that it affirms the idea of the bourgeois origin of modern culture. Werckmeister exemplifies this with the professionalisation of artists and the drastic shifts this has implied historically for their becoming contemporaneously visible.<sup>67</sup> One could argue that it is in part this historical immobility of bourgeois culture in Adorno’s thought which renders art passive in relation to the rise of economic factors within its disciplines – *Entkunstung* thus becomes a *fatum* and is no longer perceivable as an immanent but productive dynamic. Adorno’s insistence on the negative force of art deprives him of any possibility of ascribing social responsibility or accountability to it. Published in 1971, three years before Peter Bürger’s seminal *Theory of the Avant-Garde*<sup>68</sup> and only one year after Adorno’s posthumously published *Aesthetic Theory* of 1970, Werckmeister’s *Ende der Ästhetik* assembles essays on Adorno, Ernst Bloch and Herbert Marcuse, as well as a critique of the discipline of philosophical aesthetics, entitled “Von der Ästhetik zur Ideologiekritik” (From Aesthetics to the Critique of Ideology). Werckmeister formulates a sympathetic account of Adorno’s attempt to formulate an aesthetic theory, which aims at art’s salvation through an assertion of categorical negativity. But Werckmeister importantly corrects two of Adorno’s formulaic assumptions. I want to briefly map out these critiques, because my aim to analyse Russian Productivism as the paradigmatic rise of *Entkunstung* as an artistic means in modern art is based on the critique of that function which the concept has in Adorno’s affirmative account of modernism in art.

Against Adorno, Werckmeister argues that modern painting in the middle of the nineteenth century did not emerge from bourgeois culture but rather developed in ignorance of it; only at

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<sup>66</sup> F.e. Adorno’s dismissal of engagement in art, see *Ästhetische Theorie*, pp. 372f.

<sup>67</sup> See Otto Karl Werckmeister. „Das Kunstwerk als Negation. Zur geschichtlichen Bestimmung der Kunsttheorie Theodor W. Adornos“ in *Ende der Ästhetik: Essays über Adorno, Bloch, Das gelbe Unterseeboot und Der eindimensionale Mensch* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1971).

<sup>68</sup> See Peter Bürger, *Theorie der Avantgarde* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1974) or in English: Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*. Theory and history of literature Vol.4 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

the beginning of the twentieth century did it gain ‘value’<sup>69</sup> for bourgeois culture. Along the same lines, Werckmeister points out that Adorno’s concept of historicity in art follows the dialectic concept of a universal history that defines the present as the “historical state of consciousness” in Adorno’s abbreviation of Hegel.<sup>70</sup> As such, art remains void of a history of its own while at the same time it is elevated to being an expression of truth, a process which Werckmeister senses as a redemptive rather than a politically progressive function. In another essay from the same volume, Werckmeister distils a more general argument resulting from this, namely that Adorno’s Aesthetic Theory aims for a totality of truth because it strives to complete a philosophical system, while art histories aim at completion only in the context of their national and museal function of representation.<sup>71</sup> The question of the extent to which completion is a virtue at all thus arises: it might be for an aesthetic theory of value, but not for a history of dynamisms of artistic production.

Adorno’s aim to equate art to aesthetics in the middle of the twentieth century demonstrates a categorical problem in which *Entkunstung* represents one of art’s worldly functions, namely the worldliness of art’s means of production. Adorno argues for an aesthetic of emancipation against an artistic reality, after 1945, to which I will come back in more detail in the second chapter of this text. However, this also determines his retrospective understanding of the avant-garde not so much as an active artistic adequation of reality, but more as an adequation to a projected negation. The term *Entkunstung* signifies the material disintegration of a philosophical vow, art’s voluntary as well as involuntary adequation to a state of cultural production, in which sense is not primarily produced through an ideal to be adequated but rather through the processing of a displacement.

In his seminal *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, first published in 1974, Peter Bürger tries to expand Adorno’s aesthetic theory by adding to it a concrete social function, the formation of what he calls “art as an institution”.<sup>72</sup> Bürger attempts to systematize the avant-garde’s proposition of art as a life praxis and thus exchanges Adorno’s focus on an aesthetics of art and its intrinsically philosophical structure for a more materially grounded Marxist attempt to apprehend art as an institution of capitalist value production. Bürger differentiates between the “historical avant-gardes” of the first half of the twentieth century and the “neo-avant-garde” of the second.<sup>73</sup> Even though Bürger expands Adorno’s understanding of art into an

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<sup>69</sup> See Werckmeister, „Das Kunstwerk als Negation. Zur geschichtlichen Bestimmung der Kunsttheorie Theodor W. Adornos“, p. 9.

<sup>70</sup> See Ibid. 13

<sup>71</sup> See Werckmeister, “Von der Ästhetik zur Ideologiekritik”, *ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>72</sup> Bürger, *op. cit.*, German version, p. 70.

<sup>73</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 79.

understanding of its attempts to function as a social practice, in contrast to Werckmeister he significantly fails to emancipate his own terms from those of Adorno. In a contradictory way, his *Theory of the Avant-Garde* remains within the parameters of the *Aesthetic Theory*. From within the confinement of the categories of Adorno's modernist aesthetics – autonomy, the work and the new – Russia's revolutionary Productivism,<sup>74</sup> British Pop and conceptual artistic and action-based practices remain alien to Bürger's thought. His aesthetic categories register only artistic approximations of convergences with life, which leave the territory or art untouched. He sees movement only where art expands its realm. For Bürger, as for Adorno, the regulative points of reference are the aesthetics of Immanuel Kant and Friedrich Schiller.<sup>75</sup> The inadequacy of pre-industrial aesthetics in relation to the historical avant-garde's confrontations with this rise of industrialised terms of production inside and outside of culture are registered in Bürger, as in Adorno, as the failure of artistic productions to live up to the implications of this system of thought, not as the historical disintegration of that system itself. He notes "that the historical avant-garde movements negate those determinations that are essential in autonomous art: the disjunction of art and the praxis of life, individual production, and individual reception as distinct from the former."<sup>76</sup> Bürger, however, chooses Dada and Surrealism to exemplify this de-autonomization, both appropriating art *in* life, and thus, again, leaves the domain of art untouched. On the one hand, his distinction between the 'historical' and the 'neo' avant-gardes is, as I will come back to later, based on the assumption of a narrative of loss. He registers the political strategies of the avant-garde, but at the same time asserts their predictable failure. For Bürger, this failure is based on the avant-gardes' proximity to mass culture and the latter's affirmative tendencies, which leaves the question of an alternative, possibly revolutionary, relation unposed. Again, Productivism is only alluded to in a footnote, and Duchamp, who might be discussed in terms of his deconstruction of art's classical genres through the culture of his time in, for example, the *Large Glass*,<sup>77</sup> is reduced to his ready-mades, which serve Bürger merely as props for his argument.<sup>78</sup> Like Adorno, Bürger is writing a theory of art's representational function for society, not one of artistic praxis in that society. In Dada, for example, he identifies shock as the central productive characteristic, a purely receptive function, which, as Bürger rightfully criticizes, can be transformed into a consumable trait.<sup>79</sup> He neither accounts for shifts within the productive

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid, p. 112, footnote.

<sup>75</sup> – and – in Adorno's case – that of Hegel; see. f. e. Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie*, pp. 115ff.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>77</sup> See f.e. David Joselit, *Infinite Regress: Marcel Duchamp 1910-1941* (October Books; MIT Press, 1998)

<sup>78</sup> See Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Bürger, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

means of the art he discusses, nor for those strategies, that were not primarily aimed at art's reception and its related distinction from other forms of culture. For Bürger, the avant-garde is a strictly European artistic project with a fundamentally pedagogical aim. In his sense, Russian Revolutionary art was not avant-gardist, as their constructions did not start from art but called art into question. The Productivists' idea of reception was one, which aimed at universality, at a form of reception exceeding art, one which no longer distinguished its products from those of the everyday.<sup>80</sup> I agree with Bürger's classification of the avant-garde as an artistic project, but I want to use the concept of *Entkunstung* to argue that such a characterisation precisely identifies the limitation of the concept of an artistic avant-garde. His art historical definition circumscribes a rejection of art's autonomous functions *within* the realm of art. *Entkunstung* was embraced neither in Dada nor in Surrealism. There were, however, artists who sought to reach beyond art through Dada (Richard Huelsenbeck in Berlin, for example),<sup>81</sup> but their practices remain insignificant for Bürger's point: they were, so to speak, not avant-gardist. Bürger can not integrate Russian Productivism, to which he alludes only in a footnote, or British Pop, which was not part of the art canon in Germany in the early 70s, or conceptual artistic practices, which, within his understanding of neo-avant-garde, could be accounted for as something like an aesthetic treatise or as the preliminaries to an unfinished work. None of them proposed an artistic avant-gardism at the centre of their claims, and, as differently as those historical moments have articulated themselves or have been articulated since, all of them sought to achieve a reconceptualization of art itself. I am arguing this explicitly here because I want to stress that even though my project shares Adorno's, Bürger's and Werckmeister's interest in the political potentials of a historical as well as a contemporary artistic productions, I do not locate this politicisation within art but rather in its disintegration.

For Bürger, not unlike Adorno, the history of the visual arts as a specific field of production remains external to his theoretical framework. Adorno's musical approach to the visual arts as well as Bürger's literary one both narrow artistic articulations down to their semblances to those fields on the one and to the representational functions they share with other media in the other. As both of their initial conceptualizations of art originate in fields other than visual artistic practices, they remain unable to understand these as a form of practice and thus identify their social aspects in its classical forms of representation forms, their reception and surface structures. *Entkunstung* herein can only be articulated in its effects,

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<sup>80</sup> Peter Gorsen, Eberhard Knödler-Bunte. *System einer proletarischen Kultur*. *Problemata*, 22,1 (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1974), pp. 171ff.

<sup>81</sup> See *Dada Almanach*, ed. by Richard Huelsenbeck (Berlin: Erich Reiss Verlag, 1920).

not in its actions. Art to them appears as ‘obvious’ in many ways. Their representational understanding of art reaffirms its integrity at the cost of any admittance of its possibly productive expansions. Adorno and Bürger turn art into a relentless revenant, a remainder of bourgeois self-expression, free from the means of its own actualisation. Neither Bürger nor Werckmeister nor Adorno could see in *Entkunstung* a productive way of confronting the bourgeois field of art and its equalizing forces, as art remains to them a context of voluntary exile from the field of mass produced culture. With his notion of *Massenkunst* in his more recent texts,<sup>82</sup> Werckmeister goes furthest in avoiding the transposition of an understanding of the early twentieth-century historical avant-gardes to the late capitalist terms of artistic production today, but, as mentioned above, succeeds only by means of a retreat to the realm of visual studies. Werckmeister takes *Massenkunst* as the paradigm of a visual culture in which a concentration of art as a distinguished field of visibility is no longer justifiable. He turns to the imagery of *Massenkunst*, of graphic novels and photojournalism.<sup>83</sup>

From an art historical perspective, the effects and productive potentials of *Entkunstung* emerge in a much more ambivalent light. In art since 1900 *Entkunstung* has surfaced in many different roles and forms – as voluntary artistic means, institutional threads of canonization, economic factuality or a social status, among others. Even though, as mentioned before, art history as a discipline has not proven very eager to challenge its own area of competence in affirming threads of *Entkunstung*, and visual studies as well as cultural studies have often considered art only as a form of visual image production, *Entkunstung* has played a significant part in the confrontation of modernist and avant-garde theories on the one hand with those of (post)structuralism and ‘an-art’ (Marcel Duchamp)<sup>84</sup> on the other. This is a shift in discourse that I will consider in the different chapters of this project, specifically with the rise of Conceptual art in the 1960s, which will be the focus of my third chapter.

Elaborating on the term *Entkunstung* presupposes, I want to argue, an understanding and analysis of the specific artistic media the *Entkunstung* of which is discussed. Adorno’s musical, Bürger’s literary and Werckmeister’s visual take on art in general result in, as I have argued, a passive understanding of the relation of art and sociality in which *Entkunstung* appears as a fate of art in industrialized societies. Discussing *Entkunstung* within a history of art, however, which aims to specify the developments and contestations of material artistic practices in relation to their reception, can provide an understanding of art that deals not with

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<sup>82</sup> See Otto Karl Werckmeister, *Der Medusa-Effekt. Politische Bildstrategien seit dem 11. September 2001*, (Berlin: Form und Zweck, 2005).

<sup>83</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> Arturo Schwarz. *The complete works of Marcel Duchamp: with a catalogue raisonné*, Vol. 1 (London: Thames & Hudson, 1969). p.45.

reduction or preservation but rather with a praxis of expansion and actualisation. *Entkunstung* can only be understood, I want to argue, if its praxis is reflected in relation to the media specificities of artistic practices in a given historical period. *Entkunstung* marks not necessarily a step from “art into life”<sup>85</sup>--for that too had a specific historical context--but nonetheless a step of art towards action, an activation of art as a social act, so to speak. This is not a matter of style, but rather of realizing art’s social status within its production and presentation. Many of the artists, like Vladimir Tatlin, currently discussed as ‘Constructivists’ had proposed their Productivism as an artistic realization of the everyday. An everyday of a proposed collective of producers becoming real, not one of artistic renderings of a negative site: *Entkunstung* as an ever changing urge of art to become action.

Looking at artistic production from its moment of disintegration, my project finds its temporal point of origin at the moment of modernist climax when *Entkunstung* was proposed as art’s voluntary step into contemporaneity. In the Russian Productivist constellation of artists, writers, performers and art historians which collectivised and then disbanded in revolutionary Russia between the mid 1910s and late 1920s, art was treated as a historical phenomenon which, with the revolution’s re-definition of the terms of production of all labour, had to come to an end. “Death to Art! It arose naturally, developed naturally and disappeared naturally. Art is finished! It has no place in the human labour apparatus. Labour, technology, organization!”<sup>86</sup> as Aleksei Gan put it in 1922.

First under the aegis of the Commissariat of Enlightenment and its Proletkul’t section,<sup>87</sup> later under that of the INKhUK, the VcHUTEMAS, conceptualized by figures such as Boris Arvatov, Osip Brik (figure 1.9), Carl Ioganson, Lyobov Popova, Varvara Stepanova and Vladimir Tatlin, Productivism, the most radical and systematic step into *Entkunstung* at the time, as I will argue, was a programme to turn art production into artistic production. Later in this chapter I will discuss in more detail in how far this quite literally meant an *Entkunstung* of art, a systematic deconstruction of its artistic proceedings: shifting artistic production from composition to construction and from construction to production, as it was put in the INKhUK resolution of 1921.<sup>88</sup> *Entkunstung* was, to be sure, not the word they used, but the practices that became central in this context led towards Adorno’s *fatum* of modernity, the redefinition of art through its social function and the ascription of its means to their origin

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<sup>85</sup> See *Tatlin*, ed. by Aleksejevna Shadova, (Dresden: VEB Verlag der Kunst, 1984).

<sup>86</sup> In: *Art into Life: Russian Constructivism, 1914-1932* (Seattle: Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington, 1990), p. 83, footnote.

<sup>87</sup> See Sheila Fitzpatrick *The Commissariat of Enlightenment; Soviet Organization of Education and the Arts Under Lunacharsky, October 1917-1921*. Soviet and East European Studies. (Cambridge: University Press, 1970), pp. 89ff.

<sup>88</sup> See *Art into Life: Russian Constructivism, op. cit.*, p. 258.

within everyday production.<sup>89</sup> Productivism was not a style but instead the systematic attempt to lead art towards its *Entkunstung*. In my account of its history, I want to re-assemble practices commonly identified as Constructivist in style and reassess some of their objects, actions and means according to their concept of what art should have become after the Russian Revolution of 1917.

What Adorno and, more elaborately, Bürger identify as the artistic avant-garde, and what art historically is most often identified with this term is, I want to argue, not at all a project of *Entkunstung*. Even though some Productivists, like Tatlin, or, more recently Stepanova and Popova, have emerged as icons within the history of avant-garde art, they earned this label not for their conceptual rejection of art as a historical model of artistic production – but rather in spite of it. Where they have been acknowledged in the history of art, this has happened in spite of their productivist efforts to produce artistically beyond artistic value or artistic inventiveness. Where the groups like OBMOKHU<sup>90</sup> (figure 1.10) presented their exhibitions not as those of artworks but as those of a stage in their process of working on art, its objects today are discussed as Constructivist sculptures. Within the last ten years, a generation of younger art historians has reassessed these artistic practices: scholars such as Christina Kiaer and Maria Gough have all looked at productivist strategies from an angle more determined by an interest in a history of artistic procedures than one of art objects. Nevertheless, Gough, and even more so Kiaer, still treat Productivism as a *style in art* not an *end to art*, and thus their sometimes impressively precise analyses fall back into judging these historical documents by the very standards they sought to undermine. I am not myself interested in the avant-garde value of Productivism, for the concept of the avant-garde presupposes progress within the field of art, progress driven still by originality and mastery, even if these were meant as an attack on their modernist identifications. The attention to the everyday central to accounts of the avant-garde, which, with Bürger, examine the threads leading from ‘art into life’, may induce art historians to quote Tatlin. But in concentrating on avant-gardists active in capitalist Western Europe, they fail to address art’s *disintegration into life*, which is the focus of this thesis. *Entkunstung* is not a practice of an artistic avant-garde: instead, it presages art’s forthcoming end.

Russian Productivism marks the only historical moment in which the political and artistic revolution were so closely connected that the revolutionization of the general means of production for a short moment seemed to allow for the revolutionization of artistic

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<sup>89</sup> See *Art into Life: Russian Constructivism*, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

<sup>90</sup> See *Art into Life: Russian Constructivism*, *op. cit.*, pp. 32f.

means of production. It remained unparalleled in its attempt to dissolve art production into a general and collective artistic production for all.

### 1.1.2 Modern Beyond Art

Artworks are a priori negative by the law of their objectification: They kill what they objectify by tearing it away from the immediacy of life. Their own life preys on death. This defines the qualitative threshold to modern art.<sup>91</sup>

Gradually distancing an art history of *Entkunstung* from one of the avant-garde, the confrontation with the rivalling art historical scheme of the time arises, that of modernism. Modernism, modernity<sup>92</sup> or, as Adorno specifies here, modern art, circumscribe a field defined by shifting distinctions. Modernism, like avant-gardism, did not historically signify one identifiable style, one artistic tendency or movement; it rather marked, and still marks today, the persisting narrations of the end of one epoch within the wake of another: the end of the feudal rule of nobility and the rise of that of the bourgeoisie. This bourgeois rule, socially as well as economically intrinsically bound to what culturally was termed modernity, has, from its rise in the beginning of the nineteenth century, been an incomplete project, a puzzled utopia yet to come. Modernity in art as never been fully realized, and its declared peak, to which I will return in the second chapter, set in after its social disintegration, in the 1950s.<sup>93</sup> Modernisms' greatest supporters, like Adorno in his *Aesthetic Theory*, Clement Greenberg as its post-war lobbyist or T.J. Clark as its mourning apologist, have all instituted their notions of modernism within this delay. Their calls for modernisms' salvation against external threats was predominantly directed against its subsequent conflation with mass culture, which, at the same time, had always built the core of modernism: its relation to popular culture denominated the fundamental themes, materials and references of social distinction.<sup>94</sup> If one looks at the characterizations of modernity in art from today, one might argue, as has been

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<sup>91</sup> Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie*, p. 175.

<sup>92</sup> For a discussion of the term see Fredric Jameson, *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern, 1983-1998* (London: Verso, 1998), Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986).

<sup>93</sup> Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986).

<sup>94</sup> See f. e. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London: Routledge, 2008).



done<sup>95</sup>, that what rose as modernism might very well have consisted, and still today consists, in precisely this notion of distinction, of the ‘a priori negative’ to quote Adorno.

The question of *Entkunstung* for Adorno is, one might argue, that of the measures of this distinction, of negativity. Adorno classifies modern art as an absolute stance, an uncompromised expression of negativity.<sup>96</sup> *Entkunstung* for him strikes as a diluting fate, as it turns this negativity around and confronts art itself in its social and economic functions. *Entkunstung* refuses the distinction a categorical negativity offers and replaces it with a negative concept of art, which is thoroughly modern: its distinction lies in its gradual differentiations from art. *Entkunstung* in times of modernism inverts the distinction of art into one from art. If, however, negativity is negotiated as a relation of differentiations, of distinctions from a changing set of preconceptions, modern art not only preys on life, as Adorno suggests in the above quote, but falls also prey to it itself. Its claims to contemporaneity, to ‘being modern’, are productive only through their integration of the everyday as, so to say, a living *Entkunstung* from within. What Adorno describes as the threshold quality of modern art at the same time defines the threshold of its instant antiquity: where it objectifies, as Adorno puts it, the world, it necessarily implies an aesthetisation of that world by means of formal strength, for good and for ill. And where, on the other side, this strength is lacking, as Adorno describes it, for example, in the case of the engaged art of Jean-Paul Sartre or Bertolt Brecht,<sup>97</sup> where he sees the unity of the work broken, the artwork itself becomes the object of an objectification itself - it returns as a commodity, as one identifiable object of mass culture amongst others.<sup>98</sup> Where Adorno tries to argue modernity in art as an essential opposition to its mass cultural expressions<sup>99</sup> – a position which he only relativises in relation to the commodity status of art,<sup>100</sup> as an external characteristic of its reception – he fails to account for artistic attempts to thematise art’s characteristic traits of production in other than aesthetic terms. This marks a structural obliteration common to philosophies of the aesthetic, like Adornos, as well as to art histories of modern art. The focus of the both fields lies on the artwork, not on the labour it requires, and this complicates any attempts for artistic transitions into other cultural practices outside of the distinctive field of art. Where Adorno rejects avant-gardist practices of modern art, he does so on the explicit grounds of their

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<sup>95</sup> See Briony Fer, introduction into Francis Frascina, *Modernity and Modernism: French Painting in the Nineteenth Century*. Modern art – practices and debates. (New Haven: Yale University Press, in association with the Open University, 1993), and Krauss, *op. cit.*

<sup>96</sup> See Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie*, p. 55f.

<sup>97</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 365f.

<sup>98</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 372f.

<sup>99</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 362.

<sup>100</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 32ff.

introduction of materiality dissimilar to art into the works.<sup>101</sup> This figure of sublation of the labour of art into the work of art is on the one hand essential to that which Adorno proposes as its expressive distinction from other objects of culture,<sup>102</sup> and on the other is exactly that aspect of modern art which attempts at *Entkunstung* in art turned around at that time. In the artistic procedure of Russian Productivism, the work of art is, quite on the contrary, sublated into the process of its production. Art is envisioned anew within the terms of industrialized labour, be it in Tatlin's uncompleted *Monument to the Third International*,<sup>103</sup> (figure 1.11) the projection of which assumed means of industrial production far more advanced than those available in Russia at that time, or his systematic redesign of ten of the most essential everyday objects (figure 1.12), created according to minimal reproduction costs.<sup>104</sup> I will return to the highly problematic affirmation of Fordist models of work in some of those practices later in this chapter.<sup>105</sup> Here I want to first focus on the relevance this industrialization of art had to its social function. The singularity of the work, its specific negation of the world it entails,<sup>106</sup> which Adorno's perception of modern art is centred around, here turns into the serial production of prototypes, which propose socially as well as artistically altered models. *Entkunstung* as Adorno introduces it, denominates the conversion of art by its internalization of external forces – and what is perceived as a force external to art changes relentlessly by the way in which art is socially situated. *Entkunstung* is not, I want to argue, an extreme measure of artistic self-destruction, but it is the reformulation of art in accordance to a contestation of its social function.

The art historical discourses around art's antagonistic role are, I argue, still today based on those artistic claims to autonomy, which Adorno identified as the core of modernity in art, and in to which *Entkunstung* appears as an external threat. In Russian Productivism the modern dictum of artistic autonomy was perceived as art's claim to irrelevance.<sup>107</sup> The long standing failures of artists to contest art's autonomy, the fact that *Entkunstung* remained heteronomous to art, is bound to the failure of other, social attempts of revolutionizing the means of labour outside the field of art.<sup>108</sup> This historical precariousness of *Entkunstung*, its

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<sup>101</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 65ff.

<sup>102</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 361ff.

<sup>103</sup> See *Art into Life: Russian Constructivism, op. cit.*

<sup>104</sup> See Strigalev, Harten, *op.cit.* and Kiaer, *op.cit.*

<sup>105</sup> See Gorsen, *op.cit.* pp. 35ff.

<sup>106</sup> See Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie*, pp. 209f.

<sup>107</sup> Osip Brik, "Der Künstler-Proletarier", from: *Iskusstvo kommuny*. Newspapers from the era of the Russian Revolution and Russian Civil War 1901-1922 No.2 (Saint Petersburg, 1918), p. 1, cited in: Hubertus Gassner, Eckhart Gillen. *Zwischen Revolutionskunst und sozialistischem Realismus: Dokumente und Kommentare: Kunstdebatten in der Sowjetunion von 1917-1934* (Köln: DuMont, 1979) pp. 4f.

<sup>108</sup> Taylor, *op. cit.*, Vol.2, pp. 94f.

status as an ever returning and actualizing recommencement, has determined art historical as well as aesthetic afterthoughts. It has determined its history to be one amongst many artistic schools, styles and epochs. Discussing *Entkunstung* as a means against art, my own approach aims to sideline the focus on the work of art in its integrated form, and proposes to approach modernity as a contestation of traditional contexts of artistic production.

What I want to argue in relation to Modernism, is that *Entkunstung* here signifies more than anything else the defiance of the auratic singularity of the work of art, which Walter Benjamin criticized so sharply in his famous essay “The Artwork in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”.<sup>109</sup> His approach remains singular for its time and context, in that he, unlike Adorno or other writers associated with the Frankfurt *Institut für Sozialforschung* at the time, explicitly attempts to change the direction of reception of cultural production from its contemplation towards its production. However, Benjamin could not yet account for the interrelation of these changing processes of production in culture and of the actual return of the aura in those fetishized perceptions of the artwork, which no longer refer to it by cult but by its commodity status.<sup>110</sup> Benjamin however grasps the intrinsic changes within cultural and more specific artistic terms of production by way of the contemporaneity of his thought, which in those theories of modernity that have been functioning as its philosophical or art historical afterthoughts, be it in the aesthetic theories of Adorno and Herbert Marcuse or in more art historical approaches such as Clement Greenberg or T.J. Clark, have been lacking. Benjamin discusses the work of art as a production unit rather than an entity, an approach I am following in my own discussion of modernist artistic productions in this chapter.<sup>111</sup>

In Benjamin’s writings, modernism as a historical moment characterizes the establishing of a context<sup>112</sup> of artistic production – and only much later one of its reception.<sup>113</sup> The artistic productions, in which the emergence of reproductive characteristics within art becomes apparent, mark the rise of artworks as propositions, as explicit representations of a contested individual position within a specific social setting which gradually differentiate themselves from the more traditional representations of academic art in the nineteenth century. This shift signifies the establishing of a much more individualized context of production, an artistic stance rising from the immediacies of life, from one’s own position

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<sup>109</sup> Walter Benjamin, “Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit”, in *Gesammelte Schriften. I.2*, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991), pp. 431ff.

<sup>110</sup> See Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie*, pp. 32ff., and Benjamin, *op. cit.*, pp.443ff.

<sup>111</sup> See Esther Leslie, *Walter Benjamin: Overpowering Conformism*. Modern European thinkers (London: Pluto Press, 2000), pp. 149f. Leslie here delineates this development through the terms of reproduction.

<sup>112</sup> Fer, *op. cit.*

<sup>113</sup> See Werckmeister, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

within general reproduction. The artistic developments in France after Gustave Courbet have become the art historical benchmark for this discourse.<sup>114</sup>

What Adorno terms, in the quote above, the negativity of the modern artwork has been delineated in art historical discussions of the same period as a rather fragile sense of the modern, mediated through the emergence of an individual producer, visible in the inclusion of the artist as a visible figure in the work, in gestures, brushstrokes, perspectives, obliterations and visual formations of interest:<sup>115</sup> thus a subjectivisation which presents individual imprints of the world at large as formations of art. Adorno on the contrary signifies this turn as an objectification per se, as an imprint of ‘the’ subject, not of ‘a’ subject. Adorno’s objectification performs a cutting loose of the subject-producer from the work’s existence, because Adorno does not perceive the rise of modernity as a challenge of and for the subject rising from within it, but rather as an integrated expression of this newly gained subjectivity, embodied in an exemplary way by the modern artist, whose expression is determined by his self-consciousness.<sup>116</sup> Even though Adorno accounts for the historical fragility of this construction, his guiding idea remains that of its future realisation. What he centres his vision of modernity on, in social terms, is the rise of the one social class which he associates with the historical moment of possible emancipation, the bourgeoisie, and this concentration provides him with a perspective which registers other social classes and forms as merely accessory elements. For him, whatever cultural attack against this class is launched--whether artistic, as in Dadaism or Expressionism, or political, as in the attempted and realized Socialist revolutions, or even regressive, as in Fascism in Europe--figures as an attack on the rise of bourgeois emancipation. That this for Adorno figures unambivalently as a defeat of emancipation is a perspective that I want to challenge in putting forward his very own concept of *Entkünstung* as a productive factor of modernity based on its disintegration.

The ideal of an uninhibited bourgeois subjectivity remains questionable not only from a contemporary point of view now, but was also not indisputably supported by those artists of ‘modern times’ who pushed art towards its *Entkünstung*. Within the context of the Russian revolution of 1917, it was no longer, as in the revolutions of the mid of the nineteenth century,<sup>117</sup> the emancipation of the individual citizen which was at the centre of the political disputes, but much more the relation of this individuality to the political community it was

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<sup>114</sup> See Linda Nochlin, *Courbet* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2007), Timothy J. Clark, *The Painting of modern life: Paris in the art of Manet and his followers* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1985) and Fer, *op. cit.*

<sup>115</sup> See Fer, *op. cit.*

<sup>116</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie*, pp. 53ff.

<sup>117</sup> See Marx, Engels. „Der achtzehnte Brumaire des Louis Bonaparte“, in *Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels: [Werke]. Band 18, [März 1872 bis Mai 1875]* (Berlin: Dietz, 1989).

implicated in. For Tatlin, Rodchenko or Stepanova the question of an individual stance within the artistic production of their revolutionary times returned as one of a possibly collective individualism.<sup>118</sup> This ambivalence of modernity, its contested centre, the individual in its relation to its sociality, has prompted contesting readings of its histories in and outside of art. For Adorno, as I have already argued previously, modernity is an epoch unified by its subject and endangered by its contested status in the early twentieth century.<sup>119</sup>

Even though the moments of the history of artistic practices affiliated with Russian Productivism seem to be generally implied in the historiographies of the avant-garde,<sup>120</sup> I want to specify here why their attempts at the *Entkünstung* of art were not expressions of an artistic avant-garde but rather point towards an inverted history of modernity. *Entkünstung* brings to the fore how modernity as a hope for progress inhibited its own realization in the implication of social traditions, artistic conventions and the cult of the new to be created by the individual genius.<sup>121</sup> Unlike Adorno's hopes for it, the history of modernity<sup>122</sup> was not one of constant self-revolution but rather, one might argue, one of convention and transgression. Like many of his contemporaries, Boris Arvatov, one of the theoretical proponents of Russian Productivism, attacked this problem as a core inhibition of the European artistic avant-gardes.<sup>123</sup> Like Nikolai Tarabukin, a fellow teacher at the Proletkul't studios in the late 1910s and early 20s, he rejected French Cubism and Italian Futurism for the sensationalism and artistic self-preservation they implied.<sup>124</sup>

Thus I return to a discussion of the concept of the modern here, because when Adorno argues that *Entkünstung* signifies a tendency immanent to modern art, he himself identifies modernity's disintegrative core: the antagonistic role of bourgeois culture within a society on the verge of industrialization.<sup>125</sup> The relevance of reintroducing a reflection on the implications of invoking modernism here is two-fold: on the one side Adorno intrinsically links his concept of *Entkünstung* to his idea of modernity. Modernity for him signifies, as argued before, the historical rise of a subjectivity, which, however flawed, hints towards a

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<sup>118</sup> See Hubertus Gaßner, "Von der Utopie zur Wissenschaft und zurück", in *"Kunst in die Produktion": sowjetische Kunst während der Phase der Kollektivierung und Industrialisierung 1927-1933*. (Berlin: Neue Gesellschaft für bildende Kunst, 1977), p. 58.

<sup>119</sup> See Otto Karl Werckmeister, *Ende der Ästhetik: Essays über Adorno, Bloch, Das gelbe Unterseeboot und Der eindimensionale Mensch* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1971).

<sup>120</sup> See Camilla Gray, *The Great Experiment: Russian Art 1863-1922* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1962), Lodder, *op. cit.*, Gough, *op. cit.*, Kiaer, *op. cit.*

<sup>121</sup> See Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie*, pp. 55ff.

<sup>122</sup> Modernism and modernity are not distinct in Adorno. See Werckmeister, *op. cit.*

<sup>123</sup> Boris Arvatov, "Der Futurismus als soziales Phänomen", in *Kunst und Produktion*, (Munich: C. Hanser, 1972), pp. 97ff.

<sup>124</sup> See Groys, *op. cit.*, "Von der Staffelei zur Maschine".

<sup>125</sup> See Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie*, pp. 58.

coming transcendence of instrumental reason,<sup>126</sup> the social constellation of means which Adorno identifies as centred around the mastery of man over nature and which for him is most ‘presently’ and effectively counteracted in art alone. This becomes specifically clear in the large chapter on “natural beauty” in which he discusses art as a container for a yet un-lived but anticipated reconciliation of man and nature against the logic of industrialization.<sup>127</sup> *Entkunstung* for Adorno thus enters the scene from the side of the instrumentalities to be defeated. In it, art’s partial complicity with the forces of industrial modernization becomes apparent, its serialities, its commodity form, its labour evolving character. In his reflections on art’s commodity character in the *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno bears no illusions about the affirmative character of art’s function within bourgeois industrialization – but at the same time, as quoted above, claims that the works of art themselves maintain a reserve towards these functions wherever they advance their status as self-enclosed entities.

Attempting to bring together a fragmentary art history of *Entkunstung*, I want to suggest that it is exactly this self-enclosed status of artistic works within the modern context that secures itself as a structure of convention and tradition; and that this is something that artists like those who proposed a turn towards Productivism in Russia after 1917 theoretically problematised and practically tried to eliminate from their artistic productions. In that sense, the concept of modernism, with its claims to artistic autonomy and cultural distinction, seems to be a much more precise base from which to differentiate *Entkunstung* than that of the avant-garde. While art historical concepts of the avant-garde (like the ones Bürger or, in his critique, Hal Foster) propose the avant-garde as a discourse on the political significance of art’s representative function in society, artistic propositions of *Entkunstung* lead, as I have argued, out of art.

So, does *Entkunstung* lead out of modernism in offering a distinction from art, where the avant-garde offered one of art? “What is modern”<sup>128</sup> in *Entkunstung*? In her answer to this question Briony Fer stresses the construction of a sense of difference as that which defines modernism at its core.<sup>129</sup> I want to use her response to this question as an art historical counterpoint to Adorno’s aesthetic discussions of the very same question. Fer is discussing the rise of the modern not as one of anticipated avant-gardism, but one of differentiation in artistic procedures regardless of camps. Fer tackles the same problem Adorno tries to allude to, that of social and cultural distinction, but focuses on its artistic instead of its aesthetic

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<sup>126</sup> See Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung: Philosophische Fragmente*, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1981).

<sup>127</sup> See Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie*, pp. 97ff.

<sup>128</sup> Fer, *op. cit.*, pp. 3ff.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, p.8.

phenomena and materials, its painterly surfaces, its figurations and disfigurations and the changes in its media. This enables Fer to imply the relevance of those worlds represented *within* the paintings *for* the paintings as processes of signification, where for Adorno the significance of an artwork is measured by its ability to articulate a material negation of the world it is implicated in. For him, Kandinsky's spiritualism signifies the rise of a radical modernity in art,<sup>130</sup> while Fer approaches the question of the modern through the representation of women in French paintings of the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>131</sup> What I want to stress here is that the difference between an aesthetic and an art historical approach to the question of modernity does not only lie in the divergence of the interests, one being that of art as a figure of philosophy, the other one being that of art as a figure of cultural production, but also, in this case, in the ability to specify a historical interest and track the historical materializations of difference. *Entkunstung* as a figure of aesthetic theory is a modern fate of art, closing in on it, while *Entkunstung* as a figure of art history might potentially be a productive end of art, the possibility of which emanated from modernism.

Thus modernism in Fer's terms is, unlike Adorno's, not a historical moment in which an unfinished promised arose, the value of which has to be preserved by each contemporary art in order to allow for its ultimate fulfilment. In her text, modernism figures as a constant praxis of difference, an open series of figurations, which are related primarily in the mutual artistic discourse over the shifting distinctions of the represented and the representing.<sup>132</sup> For Fer modernism signifies the rise of an instability, for Adorno that of its possible end.

What remains emblematic for both approaches, however, is the rise of the artist as a distinct subject, as a model of expression. But where Adorno suspects the value of that which he defines as modern art in the annihilation of the subjective position in the process of production and the consequent convergence of the work with a truthful, and thus critical articulation of its time,<sup>133</sup> Fer discusses the rise of this subjective function in art as the source of a productive irritation. An artwork is modern because it demands that its spectators reflect on it, decipher it, establish a rapport with the subjective perspective it stems from and those it allows for.<sup>134</sup> Subjectivity here becomes much more a historically variable interrelation of specific difference than the establishing of a self-contained structure, the precarious emancipation of which characterizes Adorno's writings. This allows for opening up the discourse of modernity into other times, into actualisations instead of perpetuations. This

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<sup>130</sup> See Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie*, pp. 134.

<sup>131</sup> Fer, *op. cit.*, pp. 7f.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 25ff.

<sup>133</sup> See Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie*, pp. 289f.

<sup>134</sup> Fer, *op. cit.*, pp. 30f.

methodological ability to transfer discourses within their times, to actualize them, remains central for my attempt to reconstruct a history of *Entkünstungen* of art – on the one hand, because my analysis of *Entkunstung* attempts to trace actualisations of practices through moments that differ significantly in artistic as well as in social terms, and on the other to be able to discuss the production of art as the formation of an always precarious subjectivity, and not as its failed or accomplished realization. It is this discourse around the integrity of the subject in art and of art, which for Adorno marks *Entkunstung* as a figure of decline. Fer argues that modernism might be classified in its rise as a historical moment in which, in the middle of the nineteenth century, painters like Edouard Manet or Gustave Courbet figured a socially differentiated sense of the real in their paintings, one which marked the initiation of a precariously subjective new foundation of artistic production that still subsists within our own times. "It may be that we are not in a position to construct a heroic, monolithic version of modernism out of the fragments which remain to us. Instead, speculation has become conditional upon recognizing the problems of modern art and its possible interpretations."<sup>135</sup>

Modernism is a formally and socially identifiable and closed period only for those who aimed to canonically enclose its artistic values, as Clement Greenberg did in his attempted "New Laokoon"<sup>136</sup> in the 1940s or as Adorno did in his attempted actualisation of a philosophical aesthetic of modernism in the 1960s. It is only in retrospect, only in Adorno's gaze onto the rise of the bourgeoisie, only in Greenberg's desire to rescue the historical avant-gardes from their historical failure that there seems to be an epochal style of modernism. It was only after the Second World War that art historians have attempted to emphatically instituted modernism as a style, at a moment when it seemed vital to secure art's status as a modern phenomenon. *Entkunstung* defies such an understanding of modernism, because it expands on art's antagonistic relation to the social, which rose with modernism and has persisted in various differentiations since. The Greenbergian art historical as well as the Adornian aesthetic canonizations of modernism in art attempted to stabilize the idea of the modern in emphasizing one of its occluded parts--in Greenberg's case in giving dignity to a painterly tradition, in Adorno's the preservation of modernity's historical moment of progression, its rise against feudal rule. As Werckmeister has criticized rightfully in his *Ende der Ästhetik*, modernity for Adorno is one, in itself undifferentiated, timespan.<sup>137</sup> I have emphasized this point before in relation to the immobility in which this positions artistic

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<sup>135</sup> Fer, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

<sup>136</sup> See Greenberg. "Art and Kitsch", in *Art in Theory, 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, ed. by Charles Harrison, Paul Wood (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, 2003), pp. 539-548.

<sup>137</sup> See Werckmeister, *op. cit.*, pp. 13f.



practices. Here, I want to take up this point again in order to address a different context: the historical value of the concept of modernity in relation to Russian Productivism. It was a movement which rose against previous feudal forms of art production and adopted the forms and methods of modernity in art but also, and much more importantly, outside of it, to overcome art itself, realizing its modernity, one might argue.<sup>138</sup> In that regard, in relation to the Russian revolutionary artists of the 1910s and 20s in Russia, the term modernism, much more than that of the avant-garde, signifies a historical function – that of modernization, which Productivism, the *Entkunstung* of its time, was based upon, for good and for ill. Thus the conceptualization of modernity, contemporary and retrospectively, play a central role in my account of *Entkunstung*: *Entkunstung* figures modernism as an attribute of fundamental reorganization, which has not ceased.

In this sense, modernism did not end but expanded its antagonistic traits. I have previously referred to Fer's circumscription of modernism, because in articulations of difference as the core principle of what is modern, the past does not inhabit the present as a secluded and yet unrealized prospect, but it was and is initially diverted, representing a promise of subjectivation which never materialized as a fully positive reference but always remained ambivalently tied into the contemporaneous rise of national industrialization in Europe.

### 1.1.3 Ends of Utopia

In Adorno's model, it's the utopian perspective of modernity, which is played out against its reality. Art for Adorno expresses a stance of negativity<sup>139</sup> towards reality, whereas in Fer's art historical identification of modernism as a reoccurring characteristic of artistic perspective, reality becomes a much more tangible element of art itself. Here, modernism in art still remains a claim for subjective initiation but it becomes historically more agitated and retrospectively more open to reinterpretations. Looking at modernism as a historically continuous formation that marks the rise of our own perception much more than one characteristic of a long secluded past, its contemporaneity confronts us with open ends, which, as I want to argue here, might lead out of modernity, into ends of *Entkunstung*. But within Adorno's history of modernity as one of inadequacies, *Entkunstung* figures as an off-peak phenomenon, not only as one of the many privations of modernism but as a moment of

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<sup>138</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>139</sup> Werckmeister, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

neglect, in which any utopian perspective has vanished. Following Adorno in his analysis, in the anti-utopianism he ascribes to *Entkunstung*, one might nevertheless argue that the concrete vanishing of the modernist utopia within *Entkunstung* does not necessarily imply an inadequacy. Rather *Entkunstung's* anti-utopianism historically figures as a progressive element in those political moments of art in which modern utopianism was rejected in favour of its enforced realization. It is for this reason that I have chosen artistic positions, which developed in relation to the rise of the Bolshevik revolution in Russia as the initiating examples of artistic attempts of *Entkunstung*. Here, *Entkunstung* expanded its attested anti-utopianism in a context in which reality seemed to be within reach, within which what Adorno describes as the business of utopia – to formulate a distinct negation of the present<sup>140</sup> – actually became a positive project. Productivism reinitiated the production of art as the distinct negation of what characterized art's utopian outlook.

In revolutionary Russia, modernity and modernization revealed their social, cultural and economic impacts in much more immediate forms, because the intelligentsia, that social group most identifiable with the traits Adorno characterizes as the social grounds of emancipated thought in Europe under the name of the bourgeoisie, did not gain a social role quite as dominant as in Europe at the same time (and I shall return to this point). In fact, its relative alienated role within Tsarism and even more so within revolutionary Russia<sup>141</sup> was by no means accidental to the revolution itself. Even though Lenin himself rose out of the social context of the intelligentsia, this was not true for the majority of the Bolsheviks, nor (as I also will come back to) was it for Lenin's early productivist opponents within the party such as Alexander Bogdanov,<sup>142</sup> one of the later guiding figures of the first productivist mass organization, the Proletkul't.<sup>143</sup> The identification of cultural production with a class, the intelligentsia in Russia and the bourgeoisie in Europe, was certainly not totally incomparable in both social settings. But while the European avant-gardes based much of their distinction from the paradigm of modern art on their proficiency of it, on the immanent reflection and supersession of its conventions, one could argue that the Russian artists who emerged as the main proponents of Russia's revolutionary arts between 1913 and 1915 (for example Vladimir Tatlin, Varvara Stepanova or Alexander Rodchenko) already took European modernism into

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<sup>140</sup> See Ernst Bloch, „Etwas fehlt ... Über die Widersprüche der utopischen Sehnsucht“ (Ein Rundfunkgespräch mit Theodor W. Adorno, Gesprächsleiter: Horst Krüger, 1964), in *Tendenz, Latenz, Utopie*. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1978), p. 361.

<sup>141</sup> See Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia*. Ithaca, (N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1992) pp. 17ff.

<sup>142</sup> See Zenovia A. Sochor, *Revolution and Culture: The Bogdanov-Lenin Controversy*. Studies of the Harriman Institute (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), passim.

<sup>143</sup> See Peter Gorsen, and Eberhard Knödler-Bunte. *Proletkult* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1974).

account, but perceived its avant-gardes as mere extensions of previous painterly propositions.<sup>144</sup> In Russia, modernism was, as mentioned before, perceived as a European style of artistic production, emblematically identified in French Cubism and Italian Futurism, but what proposed itself as an avant-garde there could, from a Russian perspective, hardly be seen as a fundamental deviation from the modernist logic.<sup>145</sup>

I am stressing the art historical relation of modernity, modern art and the avant-gardes here again, because I want to make clear that I am arguing (as have others before me)<sup>146</sup> that the avant-garde performed an immanent function within a European concept of modernity, one that did not depart from modernism but rather attempted to establish art's status against the grains of industrialization and mass culture. In the Russian situation, however, modernism was from its outset more specifically related to the formation of industrial models of production out of a feudalist and predominantly agrarian country. Here art and artists devoted to the end of the feudalist rule had no reason for much nostalgic recollections of the past in their practices. Productivism, in this sense an adversary to Lenin's cultural politics after 1917, hoped to bypass bourgeois culture and realise a general reconstruction of all labour as artistic work, putting an end to purely repetitive functions of human labour for good.

### 1.2.1 Industrializing Popular Culture

A person's cultural type is created by *all* of his material surroundings, just as a society's cultural style is created by *all* of its material constructions.<sup>147</sup>

In this emblematic statement from the early 1920s, Boris Arvatov, who was an influential theoretical figure of Russian Productivism ever since he joined the Proletkul't as an academic secretary in 1918,<sup>148</sup> proposes that culture is not just one branch of society but rather that factor running through it which enables the individual conception and perception of the world surrounding us. He suggests that culture is thus not to be examined as a separate and distinct sphere of the social but as the binding factor of its individual as well as its collective determinations. Arvatov was one of the most eminent supporters of Productivism, to which he

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<sup>144</sup> See Lodder, "Aleksei Gan", in *op. cit.*, pp. 98f.

<sup>145</sup> See Taylor, *op. cit.*, Vol. 1., pp. 14f; Kiaer, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

<sup>146</sup> See Taylor, *ibid.*, p. xii.

<sup>147</sup> Boris Arvatov, Christina Kiaer, "Everyday Life and the Culture of the Thing (Towards the Formulation of the Question)", *October*, Vol. 81, 1997, p. 120.

<sup>148</sup> See Lodder, *op. cit.*, p. 239.

understood Constructivism to be a preliminary step, concentrating in much of his writings after 1920 on possible reconsiderations of artistic to industrial practices. Arvatov advocates an art which produces “hypothesis in the world of concretions”,<sup>149</sup> which he opposes to sciences producing “hypothesis in the world of abstractions”.<sup>150</sup> Art for him was just one stage of cultural production, which was to be overcome in the systematic deconstruction of its bourgeois heritage. *Entkünstung* for Arvatov was the revolutionary telos of art.

This motif, the deconstruction of art in the service of the cultural empowerment of the working classes, was not only at the centre of much controversy during the revolution, omnipresent in the question of how to form a new society from the combination of a Marxist critique of the rising capitalist terms of industrial production and the projected formation of an only nascent working-class. It had also been previously staged, as early as 1908 by then Bolshevik Central Committee member and later Proletkul't theoretician, Alexander Bogdanov. Bogdanov gained notoriety through Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* of 1909,<sup>151</sup> in which Lenin openly attacked his strong opponent in the Bolshevik faction and finally succeeded in having him expelled from it in the same year. For Lenin, this had meant *the* decisive gain of leadership in the party, and for Bogdanov it resulted in the formation of a new Bolshevik current, namely, *Vpered* (Forward) together with Lunacharsky and Gorky<sup>152</sup> and later in that of the Proletkul't, in which he and Lunacharsky were involved from its initiation. Both currents insisted decisively on the formative role of culture in the revolutionary process, an opposition to the Bolshevik party line, which has elsewhere been interpreted as an opposition between the struggle for economic hegemony and the struggle for cultural hegemony.<sup>153</sup> And even though this comparison problematically indicates the absence of the one in the other, it nonetheless indicates quite clearly the antagonistic points of departure. The theoreticians, historians, agitators, critics and artists, whose struggle was dedicated to the formation of Productivism and thus to the consequent *Entkünstung* of art, form the central interest of my perspective onto Russian artistic practices of this time. The political relevance of these attempts within the early years of the revolution here remains vital, as *Entkünstung* was not an artistic effort rising in relation to the political revolution but rather a component of the conflicts of that political revolution itself. Lenin's position on the

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<sup>149</sup> See Arvatov, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>151</sup> V. I. Lenin, “Materialism and Empiriocriticism”, in *Lenin Collected Works* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972).

<sup>152</sup> See Zenovia A. Sochor, *Revolution and Culture: The Bogdanov-Lenin Controversy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. 8.

<sup>153</sup> See Richard Lorenz *Anfänge der bolschewistischen Industriepolitik* (Köln: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1965).

role which culture had to play was, particularly in his enmity to Bogdanov, quite clearly a different one. In 1923 he still stated that “for the start we should be satisfied with a truly bourgeois culture.”<sup>154</sup>

Lenin’s stance was widespread in the Bolshevik fraction and also amongst artists. As Brandon Taylor has pointed out, the retrospective perception of Russian revolutionary art being predominantly Constructivist in style, or at least abstract in form, is neither appropriate in relation to the actual proportion of Constructivist and Suprematist works in relation to those following other, more traditional schools of Russian art (namely Realism or Symbolism), nor does it do justice to the former’s explicit objections against artistic productions by style or formal distinction.<sup>155</sup> In order to establish a dynamic perception of culture in the sense in which Arvatov suggests it in the epigraph above, practices originating from the field of art were perceived as tools which potentially would enable all producers to actively determine their “society’s cultural style” and gain an active understanding of their “cultural type”. Constructivism here occurred as a stage on the way towards Productivism.<sup>156</sup> Art herein is not affirmed as a specific and detached sphere of production, but rather, for Arvatov and others, it provided a model of labour, which, combined with technological progress, led beyond art. To consider artistic production during this phase of general reorganization in the terms of European avant-gardist modernism retrospectively initiates a history of artistically outstanding figures, where in fact it was one of collaboratively staged renunciations of this model in favour of artistic production which produced ongoing “hypothesis in the world of concretions”.<sup>157</sup>

This conception of art’s dissolution, which turns artistic labour into the starting point of a future cultural self-determination of all people, has remained unique in the history of modern artistic practices. That it appeared at all was due to the short experimental and in many ways devastatingly chaotic phase of war communism in Russia between 1917 and 1921, which generated a laboratory-like situation for revolutionary artist in which they could establish a strong sense of active participation in the formation of a future socialist society.<sup>158</sup> Even though many of their practices have been referenced, re-enacted, copied or even actualised in artistic production since, the effect of those productivist tactics underwent considerable changes in their re-appearances because they were never again projected as part of a society’s

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<sup>154</sup> Lenin, *W.I. Lenin Werke. Ins deutsche Übertragen nach der vierten russischen Ausgabe* (Berlin: Dietz, 1956), p. 61, see p. 59.

<sup>155</sup> Taylor, *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, p. 64.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>157</sup> See Arvatov, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>158</sup> See Lodder, “VKhUTEMAS: The Higher State”, in *op. cit.*, pp. 109ff.

wholesale reformation. In this regard, the productivist theoreticians and practitioners of Soviet Russia in the 1920s provide an invaluable example for reflections on the nature of artistic labour today, because they allow us to reflect on the specificities of artistic labour from the perspective of its possible end.

Productivist theorists such as Arvatov, Nicolai Tarabukin, Boris Kushner and others based their political interventions on a rejection of art's social role as a specific realm of individual expression, and suggested instead that all production includes artistic formation and aesthetic judgement, that all existing objects have a mutable aesthetic appearance and that consequently all production is potentially artistic. In this collective re-evaluation of the aesthetic appearance of all material production at which Productivism aimed, all producers would become artists, while all artists would become producers. Productivism redefined artistic labour as the experimental core of revolutionary terms of production. This not only challenged the concepts of labour, which at the same time arose with the belated generalization of the industrial revolution in Russia,<sup>159</sup> but also the concept of artistic labour which stemmed from Russian as well as Western art's academic tradition.

In the following I want to analyse the most influential strategies Productivism deployed in its short-lived life between 1917 and the early 1920s<sup>160</sup> to enforce this revolution of (artistic) production, proposing a view of the most experimental artistic attempts of Russia's revolutionary period that counters the art-historical commonplace today, one which largely ignores the fundamental challenge Productivism posed to the social role and function of art - then and now. Productivism proposed *Entkunstung* not as an artistic but as a social act. Within the revolutionary situation, artists found themselves in a radically new situation. They could envisage art as a social factor beyond representation and envision *Entkunstung* as art's political lever. The fact is that Lenin, and with him the Bolshevik party, did not affirm art's potential for disintegration but helped instead to sustain its representative function for the political collective which rose from its politics. Much art historical writing has, even if unwillingly, underwritten this political constriction of Productivism's attempted *Entkunstung*.

Part of my argument entails a discussion of contemporary writings on the subject, which have significantly dominated and altered its recent reception. In case of the earlier art-historical publications on that period, Productivism does not figure prominently, if at all,

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<sup>159</sup> Before 1917, the industrial production in Russia was limited to private investors, and the Tsarist state capitalism, which had produced several highly specified industrial plants. See Lorenz, *op. cit.*

<sup>160</sup> As I will come back to later, the early 1920s mark an important date, because with the introduction of the New Economic Policy by Lenin in March 1921 the state ceased to support the artists in their living and they were thus setback onto the 'market' in which Production art could not sustain as it was not producing representation art objects. See Gassner, Gillen, *op. cit.*, p. 409.

because its material productions in the majority of cases are not of high value for discussions of art's formal development. More recently, however, there have been several attempts to include major figures of productivist practices such as Boris Arvatov and Carl Ioganson in the art-historical debate, most notably the publications of Christina Kiaer and Maria Gough.<sup>161</sup> These contribute considerably to the research in Productivism, which Christina Lodder's *Russian Constructivism* of 1983<sup>162</sup> as well as the more pedagogically oriented publications in Germany in the late 1970s had already engaged with.<sup>163</sup> It is important to analyse these attempts with regard to their ability to acknowledge the fundamentally different concept of artistic production, which underlies those revolutionary practices, because it is only when considered as such, as voluntary *Entkünstungen* of art, that their historical as well as their contemporary value can be understood properly. And it is only this that allows for an art history of *Entkünstungen*, an art history dealing with ends of art.

To understand what the Productivist concept of artistic labour had to offer, it is first of all necessary to consider the Productivisms' critique of the more traditional concepts of art with which they were confronted in Russia. For Arvatov, as well as for others, art as a traditional profession consisted primarily in the bourgeois construction of an academic realm in which producers, that is artists, were trained (paraphrasing Arvatov) to create concepts of possible objects instead of objects themselves.<sup>164</sup> Art in their understanding was an important social tool of the ruling class, one, which helped them to preserve and continuously reproduce traditional values, thereby confronting the subordinate classes with their cultural inferiority. Culture thus was, in Arvatov's sense, a major battleground of the socialist revolution. To overcome the traditional role of the arts, he, as well as such artists as Vladimir Tatlin, Alexander Rodchenko, Gustav Klucis and others, proposed a shift of artistic production away from spirituality towards 'material culture'<sup>165</sup>. Russian Productivism wanted to achieve *Entkunstung*, to deartify art in distributing its characteristic traits into all spheres of use value production, establishing elective affinities with those spheres of labour, which shared its materials, its tools and its techniques. As I have argued previously, that modernist evaluation

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<sup>161</sup> See Kiaer, *Imagine No Possessions* and Gough, *op. cit.*

<sup>162</sup> See Lodder, *op. cit.*

<sup>163</sup> See Gabriele Gorzka, *A. Bogdanov und der russische Proletkult Theorie und Praxis einer sozialistischen Kulturrevolution* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus-Verlag, 1980), Vladimir Vladimirovich Gorbunov, *Lenin und der Proletkult* (Berlin: Dietz, 1979), Lorenz, *op. cit.*, Heinrich Vogeler, *Proletkult: Kunst und Kultur in der kommunistischen Gesellschaft*. Die Silbergäule, Vol. 54 (Hannover: Paul Steegemann, 1920), Harald Olbrich, *Proletarische Kunst im Werden* (Berlin: Dietz, 1986) or Chris Bezzel, *Das Unvermögen der Realität: Beiträge zu einer anderen materialistischen Ästhetik* (Berlin: Klaus Wagenbach, 1975).

<sup>164</sup> See Arvatov, *op. cit.*, p.7.

<sup>165</sup> See Anatolii Strigalev, 'Introduction' in *Art into Life: Russian Constructivism, 1914-1932* (Seattle: Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington, 1990), p. 10.

of culture which characterizes Adorno's fear of *Entkunstung* was not historically as dignified in Russia as it was in Europe: the intelligentsia, unlike the bourgeoisie, had not claimed political power in the institutionalized form of a modern nation state and thus its cultural taste was not formative in the same way. Productivism could thus hope to surpass bourgeois culture, affirming economic industrialization as a possible means of art, hoping for art's generalization through *Entkunstung*.

In 'Art into Production', Arvatov writes as follows:

In the art academies colour is discussed not with the help of physics textbooks but with those of aesthetics (...), writing is taught by 'laws' of rhythm and other formal concerns of poetry without much relation to the real material of the language (...), in the music schools everything is studied but the construction of the instruments, which means the most elementary within the production of music. (...) The working class has to turn those academies into polytechnics, in which the arts are studied in a scientific manner, whose laboratories are based on the general technologies of the materials and whose terms of production are related to the working methods and technical demands of the present.<sup>166</sup>

In suggesting 'polytechnicity', artistic labour was redefined as a motor of that revolutionary collectivisation of all efforts that had led to the October Revolution in 1917. Within the sphere of art, this revolution had already begun during the Tsarist period, when between 1914 and 1915 Kasimir Malevich had set out to introduce the 'non-objective space' of his *Black Square* (1915) (figure 1.13) and Vladimir Tatlin had produced his first *Counter-Relief* (1914/1915) (figure 1.14). These two contrary ways of overcoming the recent compositional experiments of the Western avant-gardes – Cubism or Futurism – marked the appearance of a rising number of artistic producers who explored art for its capacity to revolutionize not only itself but even more the world surrounding it. The attempts to put 'Art into Life'<sup>167</sup> (Vladimir Tatlin) through Productivism lasted only from around 1917 until the beginning of the 1920s, when the NEP (New Economic Policy), instituted in March 1921, deprived them of their economic substance<sup>168</sup> and support, and came to a total standstill in the beginning of the 1930s, when they were stopped by CPSU's 'Decree on the Reconstruction of Literary and Artistic Organizations' of 1932.<sup>169</sup> But in this period, two transitions can be traced around which the concepts of artistic labour were most rigorously debated.

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<sup>166</sup> Arvatov, *Kunst und Produktion*, p.20.

<sup>167</sup> *Art into Life: Russian Constructivism*, p. 261.

<sup>168</sup> Kiaer, *Imagine No Possessions*, p. 25, and Paul Wood, "The Politics of the avant-garde" in *The Great Utopia: The Russian and Soviet Avant-Garde, 1915-1932* (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1992), pp. 1-24.

<sup>169</sup> See Gassner, Gillen, *op. cit.*



The first transition was that from ‘composition’ to ‘construction’. This was already central Vladimir Tatlin’s 1915 productions, and after 1917 it continually dominated the artistic as well as the political battles between those artists who in art history became known as Constructivists, and the more traditional Russian painters and sculptors who sought to re-establish their bourgeois professional status within the socialist country.<sup>170</sup>

Construction here is proposed as the first step towards a complete reconsideration of the nature of artistic labour, one which constitutes itself in contrast to compositional models of artistic practice represented by artists such as Wassily Kandinsky at that time, which relied on the constant reformulation of art’s representational or imitational tradition. Constructivism instead attempted to produce art in (re)constructing the world and in that sense was never a style but much more a debate over the very media of art. Such constructivist approaches today are mostly identified with central artistic figures of the Russian avant-garde such as El Lissitzky, Varvara Stepanova or her husband Alexander Rodchenko, as well as with some of its Moscow-based institutions like the VKhUTEMAS (Higher State Artistic and technical Workshops) or the INKhUK (Institute of Artistic Culture). I argue, however, that their practices, in their early experiments in Productivism, were not avant-gardist, did not entail artistic innovation or progress, but aimed for the reconstruction of what art itself was. This is true for theoretical advances in this direction, like those of Arvatov and Tarabukin, but also those put forward in the INKhUK by Osip Brik and Boris Kushner in 1921, which followed discussions led in the *Iskusstvo kommuny* (The Art of the Commune), the official publication of the Commissariat of Enlightenment’s arts section, the IZO, and more specifically its Petersburg branch, since 1918.<sup>171</sup> The artistic practices, which attempted to reorganize artistic production beyond art, like those of Tatlin, Stepanova, Ioganson and others, are interesting not so much where they establish new formats for art production. Those are documented widely, as in Kiaer’s book *Imagine no Possessions*, in which Rodchenko’s and Mayakovsky’s advertising designs are analysed in the same terms as Tatlin’s everyday objects (figure 1.15).<sup>172</sup> This makes sense if Productivism is discussed as a revolutionary but artistic practice. My interest, however, lies with the inherent *Entkunstung* which those approaches aimed at in their time: the assignment of art to its own overcoming, its *Entkunstung* in art’s active

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<sup>170</sup> Gassner, Gillen, *op. cit.*, p. 408. The enmities between the constructivist artists of the left and those reintroduced the realist tradition of the nineteenth century front dominated the political fights over art, even though they were far from clearly separable. See Taylor, *op. cit.*, Vol.2, London, 1992, pp. 123ff.

<sup>171</sup> Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Commissariat of Enlightenment; Soviet Organization of Education and the Arts Under Lunacharsky, October 1917-1921*. Soviet and East European studies. (Cambridge: University Press, 1970.), pp. 125f.

<sup>172</sup> Kiaer, *Imagine No Possessions*, pp. 175ff.

sublation into the industrialized crafts, resulting in the radical reconstruction of all labour through *Gestaltung*.

The second transition central to the revolutionary reconstruction of artistic labour is that which takes those experiments in art one step further – from ‘Construction’ to ‘Production’. Arvatov stresses the role that Constructivism played in this attempt to turn artistic production towards scientific methods and functions in his comment to Stepanova’s paper ‘On Constructivism’, given at the INKhUK on December 22, 1921: “Constructivist artists, I would assert, have immense historical significance. The only way to destroy art is to enhance the significance of Constructivism. (...) Comrades, be informed and responsible and realize that this is the end. It isn’t a bad end, it could be the beginning of a positive new turn in history, but it is a climax, and so you should use the experience offered here in a vast array of achievements.”<sup>173</sup> This transition, the *Entkunstung* of art through a precise Constructivism, an active deconstruction of art through its analysis in the face of the socialist revolution, marks a historically unique attempt to not only theorize art’s possible relation with other forms of material labour but to actively put this fusion into practice.

### 1.2.2 The Industrial Labour of Art: A Concept

Broadly discussed in the beginning of the 1920s with the emergence of Productivism<sup>174</sup> at the INKhUK (Institute of Artistic Culture) in Moscow, the artist-engineer became the model of a new type of ‘polytechnical’ producer. To quote Arvatov, “artistic production [is] turned into the means of organizing all spheres of life, not as its ornamentation but as its purposeful formation.”<sup>175</sup> What was envisaged here was not the reformulation of artistic production to produce a better art for that society, but the remaking of society according to art. For Arvatov (who was one of the leading figures of the INKhUK, and in 1923 became one of the founders of the equally productivist oriented journal *LEF* (from *Levyi Front Iskusstv*, Left Front of the Arts), together with Osip Brik, Boris Kushner, Nikolai Chuzhak, Sergei Tret’iakov and Vlamimir Maykovski)<sup>176</sup> the artist, or more precisely, the artistic labourer, was thereby prefigured as part of an avant-garde, because artistic labour was able to volunteer its own utilization in a historical situation in which the industrialized crafts were only slowly

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<sup>173</sup> *Art into Life: Russian Constructivism*, document 22, p. 85.

<sup>174</sup> See Selim O. Khan-Magomedov, *INKhUK i ranni konstruktivizm*. (Moskva: Architectura, 1994), p. 231f.

<sup>175</sup> Boris Arvatov, ‘Die Kunst im System der Proletarischen Kultur’, In: Boris Arvatov, *Kunst und Produktion*, p. 23 (translation from German by the author).

<sup>176</sup> See Kiaer, *Imagine No Possessions*, p. 20.

being revolutionized. The radicality of their attempted *Entkünstung* thus lay in their pioneering task for the whole of society: instead of imagining a revolutionized visuality, they were to construct a revolutionized sensibility. *Entkünstung* was sought to lead to what Adorno later feared: a fundamental reconstruction of cultural life; but unlike Adorno's entropic vision of it, *Entkünstung* in the terms of Productivism sought to offer a generally activated understanding of culture through the disintegration of art, not an expansion of arts' contemplative characteristics into the anaesthetising gestures of consumerist objecthood.

In the fierce debates on art's role within revolutionary everyday culture in Russia in the 1910s and 20s, artistic producers and critics saw their chance to claim a central position in the general socialist reconstruction of society. If all labour was to be reconfigured after the revolution, empowering the workers<sup>177</sup> – why not artistic labour? In search of the artist as producer, Russian Futurism, Constructivism or Suprematism, the major artistic currents of that period longing for artistic as well as social change, figure as seminal settings in which artists developed different ways of approaching their material. The programmatic formulation of Productivism as a scheme might have been located within the INKhUK and a few other institutions and initiatives like the Proletkul't (Organization for the worker's cultural education), the VKhUTEMAS (Higher State Artistic and technical Workshops, Moscow), the LEF (Left front of the Arts) and the late October Group (Association of the Producers of New Forms of Artistic Labour) and closely connected to a few theoreticians, but productivist practices were far more diffuse, strewn across different artistic camps as well as different social strata. The Productivists were those who superseded their status as figures of the artistic avant-garde and replaced it with measures of *Entkünstung* in art, seeking to transform the nature of artistic labour. This distinguished Tatlin's efforts from, for example, those of Kasimir Malewitsch, whose Suprematism remained an artistic approach to a world in reconstruction, which would not let go of art itself.<sup>178</sup> Again and again, Tatlin figures as a benchmark figure of productivist practices, also in contemporary texts like Nikolai Tarabukin's essay "From Easel to Machine" (1923)<sup>179</sup>, in which Tatlin is discussed prominently for his development from painting to material aesthetics. This is mostly due to the fact that Tatlin had already been an established artist before the Revolution of 1917, and thus his turn, was taken as a significant stance. Today it means that his work is much better

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<sup>177</sup> See Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, *Das Kommunistische Manifest* (Berlin: Dietz, 1972), p. 25f.

<sup>178</sup> Kazimir Malewitsch, "From Cubism an Futurism to Suprematism: The new Painterly Realism" (1915) in: *Russian art of the avant-garde: theory and criticism, 1902-1934* ed. by John E. Bowlt (New York: Viking press, 1976), pp. 116-135.

<sup>179</sup> See Gough, *op. cit.*

documented than that of many other productivist practitioners of the time, reinforcing a monographic structure onto the discussion of this anti-monographic approach to art.

In 1921 Aleksandr Rodchenko eliminated painting from his artistic practice, realizing *Pure Red Colour, Pure Yellow Colour, Pure Blue Colour* (figure 1.16).<sup>180</sup> In 1919 he had worked out the design of a newspaper kiosk.<sup>181</sup> In 1921/22, Varvara Stepanova began to integrate design into her teaching at the VKhUTEMAS,<sup>182</sup> including interior spaces as well as sports dress (figure 1.17). Most of her textile designs, however, date from her work at the First State Cotton Printing Factory, where she worked together with Lyobov Popova in 1923-1924.<sup>183</sup> Popova too started her textile work in 1921, realizing the costumes as well as stage design for Vsevolod Meyerhold's theatre production of *The Magnanimous Cuckold*,<sup>184</sup> (figure 1.18) the forms of which are prefigured in her 1915 sculptured painting *The Jug on the Table*,<sup>185</sup> (figure 1.19) where she had literally modelled a cubist-like fragmented perception of a jug out of the surface of the easel, shaping the object's body from strictly rectangular but floating forms. In that same year, with his 'counter-reliefs',<sup>186</sup> Vladimir Tatlin established industrial material as an integral resource of artistic production. It was not until 1924, however, that he tried to transport those terms of production into everyday objects such as clothes, furniture or tableware.<sup>187</sup>

These facts are well known. The point I want to make is that there is no chronological relation of the artistic and the theoretical productivist attempts in the period between the 1910s and the 20s, because changes in the industrial development of Russia and its proletarian population were producing far more significant breaks in the development of the artist-engineers than stylistic changes within art.<sup>188</sup> No strictly developmental narrative can grasp the potential of the artist-engineer, because within such a narrative the determining factor would always be its product, not the elective affinities produced on the way. Neither the theoretical leaps forward – some of Arvatov's most significant texts on the subject were not published before 1926 – nor the artistic realizations of productivist practices can be related to each other in a strict historical progression. There are some focal points – relating to the establishment of the IZO and the founding of the Proletkul't in 1917, the change of course at

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<sup>180</sup> See *Art into Life: Russian Constructivism*, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

<sup>181</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 193.

<sup>182</sup> See Aleksandr N. Lavrentjev, *Warwara Stepanowa: ein Leben für den Konstruktivismus*. (Weingarten: Kunstverlag Weingarten, 1988), p. 59.

<sup>183</sup> See *ibid.*, p.85f.

<sup>184</sup> See *Art into Life: Russian Constructivism*, *op. cit.*, p. 107

<sup>185</sup> See Camilla Gray, *op. cit.*, 15.

<sup>186</sup> See *ibid.*, plate 25.

<sup>187</sup> See Kiaer, *Imagine No Possessions*, p. 39.

<sup>188</sup> See Taylor, *op. cit.*

the INKhUK in 1921, the establishing of the VKhUTEMAS in 1919, or the attempts of some artists to construct objects for mass production around 1924 – but those can only serve to guide our orientation through a field of practice which is laid out between the pre-revolutionary Futurist movement of the 1910s and the October Group up to 1930.

In general, Productivism was marginal throughout all of its existence.<sup>189</sup> The practices of its artist-engineers are thus today scattered across those histories, which, though also of changing influence in their time, have been more successfully transported into the present, like those of formal developments within Constructivism or Suprematism. I am concentrating on taking up those loose ends and tying them to the present in order to outline a history of developing concepts of artistic labour. One of the moments in which the artist-engineers were shortly held up as the exemplary artistic producer was in 1921, when Osip Brik replaced the likeminded Aleksandr Rodchenko as the head of the presidium at the INKhUK. With Brik, Boris Kushner, Boris Arvatov and Nikolai Tarabukin at the forefront, the institute was taken into a more politically than artistically oriented direction. Their productivist approach rejected all artistic production indebted to a self-contained development of ‘artistic form-creation (*formoobrazovanie*)’<sup>190</sup> and instead opted for taking account of the development of the means of general production and thus also of industrial practices.

Scholars like Christina Kiaer or Selim Khan-Magomedov have, in their recent publications, taken a clear stance against this change of course within the Constructivist movement, because of its exclusive concentration on the utilitarian capacities of artistic creation.<sup>191</sup> Their problematisation of what we could call utilitarian artist-engineerism points out weaknesses of the assumed concept of utility, but it underestimates the importance of the contemporary future-orientated perception of history and embraces instead a more post-modern, more melancholic recollection of the past. It may be that Kiaer’s concentration on the current commodity culture of late capitalism is so predominant for her writing that to *Imagine no Possessions* seems a sufficiently radical step; it stands, however, in no close connection to the contemporary productivist imagination which did not simply want to alter the shape of products but to ‘imagine no labour’.

Kiaer tries to establish the artistic value of objects, which Aleksandr Rodchenko, Varvara Stepanova and Vladimir Tatlin produced *outside* of the field of art. Her research is extremely rich in material and sources and in this regard provides many new insights into the actual practices between the beginning and the middle of the 1920s in Russia. In her accounts

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<sup>189</sup> See *ibid.*, Introduction.

<sup>190</sup> See Kiaer, *Imagine No Possessions*, p. 13.

<sup>191</sup> See Kiaer, *Imagine No Possessions*, p. 13f.

of advertisements, textile works and other everyday objects she justifiably counters those monographic appreciations of Constructivist art, which have supported a purely formalist interest in the development of artistic production in Russia after 1917. In the end, however, Kiaer merely widens this formalist understanding of artistic progress by arguing that because of the specific social situation in Russia at that time – that is, the revolution – those everyday objects should be art historically recognized as art. Again, productivist practices are not taken seriously in their own terms but incorporated into that the very sphere of art that they were trying to abolish.

Maria Gough's 2005 book *The Artist as Producer* is monographic in structure. Her analysis of 'Productivism (*proizvodstvennoe iskusstvo proizvodstvennichestvo*)'<sup>192</sup> concentrates on the figure of Carl Ioganson, whose development she follows and through which she summarizes central positions of productivist politics and practices. Again, it seems somewhat contradictory to investigate a genuinely collectivist strategy like Productivism on the basis of a monographic study of an individual producer, which is complemented by Gough's total detachment from the political perspective of Productivism. Her discussions of the debates between Kushner and Tarabukin are *sociological* recollections of genuinely *political* fights. Large parts of the book are thus devoted to the formal inventiveness of Ioganson. However, in contrast to Kiaer, Gough does, in her final chapter, discuss the necessity to shift the focus of the discussion from the discrete objects to their terms of production; and in following up Ioganson's 'career' at the metalworking factory Prokatchik (Roller) between 1923 and 1926, she delineates the course of that realisation of productivist theory in an impressively rich way. Nevertheless, like Kiaer, Gough fails to grasp the wider context of such productivist attempts, the challenge they posed to the concept of art as such, and thus she ends up describing the adventures of an artist in the alien sphere of industrialization. In this regard it is significant that the Proletkul't is hardly mentioned in either of the books, because its intrinsic importance for the development of Productivism seems insufficient to compensate for its failure to produce objects of high artistic value.

Productivism as a movement may not have given extensive importance to the development of artistic 'vocabulary', but in effect, it took the faculties of artistic development much more seriously than any point of view that limits itself to the established spheres of artistic products. Productivism defined artistic labour in relation to the specific difference between what it was and what it could be – not just from what it represented. Following Arvatov, this process takes over each and every part of society: "The everyday, which means

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<sup>192</sup> Gough, *op. cit.*

something static and paralysed [will be abolished] because [in fully developed socialism] the *forms of being* will constantly alter with the alteration of the means of production.”<sup>193</sup>

### 1.2.3 The Labour of Art

Artistic crafts can only exist where non-artistic crafts exist.<sup>194</sup>

The work of the artist-engineer will build a bridge from production to consumption, and this is why the organic engineer-like diffusion of the artist into production will, amongst all other things, be an indispensable condition of the economic system of socialism, ever more necessary as the course of socialism is completed.<sup>195</sup>

Introducing the ‘artist-engineer’ as an ‘indispensable condition’ of the socialist society of the future in his 1926 text “The Arts Within the System of Proletarian Culture”, Boris Arvatov argued for dispensing with the idealist concept of artistic autonomy in order to eliminate the hierarchical distinctions between different forms of artistic productions on the one hand, and that between artistic and non-artistic production on the other. What Adorno not much later envisaged as the art’s inherent disintegration enforced by the rise of industrial popular culture, for Arvatov opened up a potentially anti-hierarchical cultural production. And, as Cristina Kiaer has discussed in relation to Arvatov’s visions of culture, both he and Adorno were looking to the US as the most developed model of cultural mass production.<sup>196</sup> But while for Adorno this signalled the threat of the adaptation of artistic practices to the receptive biases created by mass entertainment, for Arvatov it signalled the hope for a generalization of culture, a culture yet to be determined by the *Entkünstung* of art through Productivism. For Arvatov, every craft should be allowed to actively develop its artistic capacities, while every art should be obliged to realize its utilitarian potentials. Herein, he redefined artistic labour as a material practice and generalizes its subject: the artist-engineer performs a vanguard function for the initiation of potentially all workers to become creative performers of utilitarian arts in whatever field of production. Productivism was retreating from bourgeois art’s mystification of the artist as creator, which remained intrinsic to Adorno’s understanding of modern art.<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>194</sup> Arvatov, *op. cit.*, p.20, p.8.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>196</sup> See Kiaer, *Imagine No Possessions*.

<sup>197</sup> See Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie*, p. 334.

In the socialist society Arvatov speaks of, art and craft would merge, erasing the hierarchy separating them, whilst enabling a collective and yet individual consumption that actively relates to its objects as the products of a utilitarian and yet artistic material practice. The subject of this change, the artist-engineer, is so to speak the pioneer of the socialist future who does not limit his practices to one special field or profession, but becomes a revolutionary practitioner of whatever media necessary. The artistic genre and media serve as starting points for the systematic *Entkünstung* of art, as levers to open up the more restricted fields of industrial production. For Arvatov this turns them into models of revolutionary practices as such: “Until socialism is reached, the proletariat has to utilize the visual arts as a specific professional pursuit in the organization of class.”<sup>198</sup> From the perspective of Productivism, artistic practices are a powerful means for the working classes to appropriate cultural means because they can actively put into collective practice what the ruling classes hitherto had sourced out to a specifically-trained class of producers, the artists. The artist-engineers, be they artists or workers, were in that sense not a specific group of producers; they did not only produce prototypes for industry but were themselves a prototype of that industry themselves: the prototype of a collective artistic production.

Given the desolate state of industrial production after the 1917 Revolution, what Arvatov proposed was to make artistic labour the model of general labour, in order to pave a socialist path *into* industrialization. Constructivism, as I argued before, was neither an artistic style nor a school but instead a battlefield on which the status of artistic labour and that of the industrialisation itself was contested. Where art-historical research has focused upon, and indeed fetishized, the objects of that dynamically shifting production, I argue for a more in-depth concentration on the terms of that production itself, on the changing meanings of artistic labour between 1915 and 1932 in order to make those practices productive for an art history which accounts for arts’ ends. What Adorno describes negatively as *Entkünstung* here performed a positive function, namely that in which it was their task to change society, not the way its objects look. Studying these objects themselves, and not the questions to which they represent answers, tells us very little indeed.

In 1921, Osip Brik, a literary critic and lawyer by profession, proposed to the INKhUK that all those artists who rejected easel painting should move towards ‘real practical work in production’<sup>199</sup>, and with the support of twenty-five artists the change of policies

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<sup>198</sup> See Kiaer, *Imagine No Possessions.*, p. 34.

<sup>199</sup> Lodder, *op. cit.*, p. 240.



towards Productivism within the institution was effected by the end of that year.<sup>200</sup> In 1922 Brik asked how to proceed further: “What can the artist do now, in this transitional time, when the conditions have not yet been born in which our programme, proposed by Marx – Productivism – can be realized?”<sup>201</sup> This question remained programmatic for the *Entkünstung* of art through Productivism – and as its task was never fully realized, it remains pertinent in the question of how and in what form these practices resurfaced in artistic productions and conceptualizations since.

Historically, the Productivists were the first to practically challenge the modern concept of artistic labour within the system of industrialized production. The Arts and Crafts Movement, the Deutscher Werkbund and the Bauhaus, as major examples of collective attempts to re-organize the theory and practice of artistic labour, all approximated engineerist, and in some cases even productivist, practices, but they did not fundamentally question artistic labour in relation to the system of reproduction of which they were part. Their challenge was fundamentally one to art, not one of *labour*. This fundamental understanding of *Entkünstung* from the characteristics of artistic labour was intrinsic to what became translated as Productivism, and it was possible only within the state of revolution, within a collective social attempt at a fundamental reformulation of the terms of labour. As part of a project to achieve a socialist society, *Entkünstung* differs sharply from its contemporary and also its subsequent counterparts in the capitalist West. In the coming chapters I will look at two historical moments of *Entkünstung* which sought to leave art within capitalist economies. Neither of them claimed to challenge the terms of general labour through the disintegration of art, as neither of them could. Their perspectives turned more towards challenging the reception and institutional frameworks of art in their times.

Within Russian revolutionary society, the attempts to realize *Entkünstung* were based in mass organizations and official institutions, while the realizations of *Entkünstung* in post-war societies were carried out either individually or by artists’ groups in opposition to art’s current social status. Where *Entkünstung* in Russia’s 1910s and early 20s was part of a project

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<sup>200</sup> Christina Kiaer in her book *Imagine No Possessions* traces the discussion around ‘Productivism’ back to the essay collection *Iskusstvo kommuny* (Art of the Commune) of 1918. Printed by the state publishing house, this was a collection of essays published previously in the journal of the same title, an organ of the early IZO in Narkompros. Kiaer however sees ‘Productivism’ as a craft related understanding of art a “beautifying the products of industry” (271). Boris Arvatov in his essay ‘Thesen zur bürgerlichen Kunst und zur proletarischen Produktionskunst’, Hanser, 1972, p.7-10 (Theses on the bourgeois art and the proletarian Productivism), as well as in ‘Kunst im System der proletarischen Kultur’ Hanser, 1972, p. 11–36 (Art within the system of proletarian culture), both in Arvatov, *op. cit.*, is setting up his position exactly in contrast to his craft-related understanding of Productivism and in contrast to this stresses the reconfiguration of both art and crafts in the evolution of a socialist industry. The same can be argued for presentations given at the INKhUK around 1921 by various of its members including Lyobov Popova. *Art into Life: Russian Constructivism*, p. 69.

<sup>201</sup> Lodder, *op. cit.*, p. 202.

of consciously working towards the realization of a future society, *Entkunstung* within an industrialized cultural production might not even be conscious of the challenge it actually poses towards their contemporary state of the arts.

Following the traces of the historical debates on the nature of artistic labour, documents and collections published predominantly in the late 1970s and early 1980s provide extremely rich sources. Nevertheless, those with an art historical focus underestimate the value of some of the artistically less advanced institutions, groups or individuals within the debates over the status of artistic labour,<sup>202</sup> while most of the more historically oriented compendia fail to recognize artistic production as anything more than mere representations of the contemporary politics.<sup>203</sup> In order to formulate a historically specific understanding of artistic labour, one has to start from a reorganization of material brought up in different areas of historical research, to undertake a reformulation of the historical contexts of revolutionary Russia. The possibility it still offers that of considering art as work and not as product, as a verb and not as a substantive.

#### 1.2.4 The Industrial Labour of Art: A Practice

But if our contemporary artists and intellectuals arrive at the factory from the polytechnic, i.e. become engineers, this will be the first historic advance – but only the first.<sup>204</sup>

To reconfigure the social and material meaning of artistic as well as non-artistic labour, general labour had to come into the focus of productivist artists and theorists.<sup>205</sup> For this reason Arvatov, along with other members of the INKhUK such as Tarabukin, Rodchenko, Sergei Eisenstein and Olga Rozanova from 1918 onwards, were involved with Proletkul't – in Arvatov's case as academic secretary.<sup>206</sup> This was an organization that approached the questions of art's revolutionary reconstitution from the side of the industrial workers.

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<sup>202</sup> For example John E. Bowlt, *op. cit.*, or Gassner, Gillen, *op. cit.*

<sup>203</sup> For example, Gorsen, Knödler-Bunte, *op. cit.*, or Richard Lorenz, *Proletarische Kulturrevolution in Sowjetrussland, 1917-1921: Dokumente des Proletkult.* (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1969).

<sup>204</sup> Arvatov, "The Proletariat and the Leftist Art" (1922), in Bowlt, *op. cit.*, p. 229.

<sup>205</sup> Arvatov, 'Die Kunst im System der Proletarischen Kultur', p. 27f.

<sup>206</sup> Kiaer, *Imagine No Possessions*, p. 28

The Proletkul't-circles ('Proletarian cultural-educational organizations')<sup>207</sup> for the workers were founded in Petrograd in 1917 a few days before the revolution<sup>208</sup>, and in 1918 had already developed into a national institution. With widely ramified forerunners in the pre-revolutionary worker's movement as well as in different branches of the Bolshevik party culture (most notably in the 'Vpered'-Group, founded in 1909 by Aleksandr Bogdanov, Anatolii Lunarcharski and Maxim Gorki on Capri),<sup>209</sup> the Proletkul't was at its strongest during the early stages of the socialist revolution, between 1917 and 1921. Due to its pre-revolutionary, clandestine origins, one of its strengths consisted in its de-centralized and autonomous organization. This is of major importance in that it resulted in very heterogeneous programmatic routines, which made productivist interventions, like those of Tarabukin or Arvatov, possible<sup>210</sup>. The Proletkul't was at no point an avant-garde formation in the limited sense of artistic inventiveness, but – and this is of far more importance for the artist-engineers – it was in its attempts to revolutionize artistic and non-artistic labour in combination.

At its height in 1920, the Proletkul't had – like the Bolshevik party itself – nearly half a million members,<sup>211</sup> but even in 1925, when its size had considerably diminished, a much recognized volume was published entitled *Al'manakh Proletkul'ta* (Proletkul't almanac), to which several productivists – Arvatov, Tarabukin, Dziga Vertov, Aleksei Gan and Sergei Tretyakov – contributed. The Proletkul't's goal, to develop a specifically proletarian culture and thus to complement the economic with a cultural revolution, had always been the subject of much critique, specifically since one of its major theoreticians, Alexander Bogdanov, had been the target of Lenin's political attacks as early as 1908, when in *Materialism and Empiriocriticism*<sup>212</sup> he accused Bogdanov of an idealist deviation. The fact that the early Proletkul't achieved nearly the size of the Bolshevik party is of major importance in several regards. Firstly, it suggests the autonomous political position, which the revolutionary artists' organizations reached in the early years of the revolution. Secondly, it makes clear that their Productivist proposition was not at all an addition to the Bolshevik party's politics but a challenge to them. Thirdly, this challenge was very much acknowledged by the party in general and by specifically Lenin, who not only published invectives against the Proletkul't in

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<sup>207</sup> Lynn Mally, *Culture of the Future: The Proletkult Movement in Revolutionary Russia*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), p.xviii

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., p. xviii

<sup>209</sup> Gabriele Gorzka, *op.cit.*, p. 19.

<sup>210</sup> This eclecticism within the group also result in large discrepancies in the research done on their history, which is why, also here I will primarily account for the translations of original texts.

<sup>211</sup> Gorzka, *op.cit.*, p. 8.

<sup>212</sup> See Lenin, *Materialism and Empiriocriticism* (London: Martin Lawrence, 1927), passim.

the *Pravda* in 1920, but also later supported politically conservative ‘heroic realist’ initiatives in order to weaken the Productivist’s influence in the Free Studios and Commissariats.<sup>213</sup> However, directly after the October revolution Anatolii Lunacharskii, who was himself a member of the Proletkul’t, became the head of the NARKOMPROS and in it founded a commissariat for the ‘encouragement of independent educative class organization’, also called the ‘Proletkul’t section’,<sup>214</sup> safeguarding the autonomy of the Proletkul’t, in invoking the pioneering spirit of its exclusively proletarian membership.<sup>215</sup>

After 1919 the Proletkul’t’s lead made it obligatory for the worker’s clubs to offer a minimum range of eight different course types, amongst them political and cultural history, art history and the history and theory of socialism,<sup>216</sup> and at least four artistic sectors, in theatre music, literature and art.<sup>217</sup> The artistic studios of the Proletkul’t during that period became increasingly popular amongst the workers, even though their student body changed constantly due to wartime recruitment, and despite the lack of materials and resources and unheated studios. However, the studios produced large numbers of posters and agitational materials, and even opened ‘front studios’ within the Red Army. In 1918, the Proletkul’t’s central studios for visual arts received the commission to organise the festivities around the First anniversary of the October Revolution in Moscow as well as in Petrograd and opened a special section for the design of agitational trains and ships. Unlike the more academic institutions, they presented their work to the public in each and every stage of production. As a result, much of the material output was not of a high artistic quality,<sup>218</sup> but it presented an artist-engineer’s ‘work in progress’ – that is the worker’s collective effort to artistically reconfigure their own productivity and culture.

Even though the Proletkul’t’s studios were positioned *within* factories,<sup>219</sup> their integration into general production in most cases failed because of the limited possibilities for developing the means of artistic-engineerism, which were needed to realize this practical connection, while at the same time maintaining general production in the industrial unit. This often resulted in the studio’s limitation to the promotion of talented artist-workers, like Ivan Leonidov, who worked as a docker in Petrograd before being admitted to the studio of architects first at the Svomas Tver and then to Moscow’s VKhUTEMAS.<sup>220</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> See Gassner, Gillen, *op. cit.*, p. 264.

<sup>214</sup> See Gorzka, *op. cit.*, p. 20f (translation by the author).

<sup>215</sup> See Fitzpatrick, *The Commissariat of Enlightenment*.

<sup>216</sup> See *ibid.* p. 49f.

<sup>217</sup> See Mally, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

<sup>218</sup> See *ibid.* p. 129.

<sup>219</sup> See Gorzka, *op. cit.*, p. 39f.

<sup>220</sup> See Selim O. Khan-Magomedov, *Ivan Leonidov*, New York, 1981.

The studios for visual arts were just one small part of the Proletkul't's artistic programme. More adaptable forms of artistic practice--theatre, literature and music--were more easily integrated into the realm of the factory, but they are of less interest for my research as they identified themselves as amateurs and thus did not challenge their position within the factories. It was only in the studios for fine art, however, that Productivism gained major acceptance. In 1918 Olga Rozanova had even won general acceptance in the Moscow Proletkul't for a turn towards Productivism<sup>221</sup> and in 1919 Anna Dodonova successfully proposed the introduction of Productivism as the major directive of all artistic production within the national Proletkul't. In most, especially the more rural studios, this directive was never really put into practice. But in the first Issue of *Gorn* (Furnace) in 1918 a statement was published by the Moscow Proletkul't, urging factories and unions to send their most talented to the organization's studios so that they could be trained in Productivism's fusion of artistic and industrial labour and then transfer this knowledge back into the factory.<sup>222</sup> The Proletkul't clearly preceded the academic institutions in incorporating 'productivist art' in their studios, and surely served as a model for those coming from the Proletkul't who later entered the INKhUK, such as Arvatov, Tarabukin and Rodchenko, to promote the artist-engineer there. The Proletkul't thus was, so to speak, the first stage.

Another major step towards the realization of the artist-engineer was the reconfiguration of the art academies in 1918, which reassessed their traditional educative structures by confronting their disciplines with polytechnical strategies. The introduction of the Open Studios of the Fine Arts (Svomas) in many Russian cities in 1918 by David Schterenberg, the governmental Commissar for the Fine Arts (IZO) in the NARKOMPROS, ended the separation of the academies of the high arts, painting, sculpture and architecture from those of applied arts, such as the production of religious icons. The Svomas Moscow, the VKhUTEMAS, existed between 1920 and 1930.<sup>223</sup>

The core of the model of the Svomas was its concept of the Free Studios. Students could either elect their professors or choose to work freely in groups. With those studios, the Free Arts, a loose grouping of different faculties, were introduced, and they were arranged by the use of materials in them rather than by genres. The classical faculties of painting, sculpture, architecture, which were inherited from the MOUJVZ (School of Painting) were complemented by those of wood, metal, ceramics, textiles and graphic arts inherited from the

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<sup>221</sup> See Camilla Gray, *The Russian Experiment in Art 1863-1922* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976), p. 245, Lodder, *op. cit.*, p. 259.

<sup>222</sup> See Mally, *op. cit.*, p. 151f.

<sup>223</sup> See Khan-Magomedov, *VKHUTEMAS, op. cit.*, p. 38.

Stroganov Industrial Art School. Further, open, preliminary courses were offered on colour (taught by Popova and Aleksandr Vesnin),<sup>224</sup> graphic construction (taught by Rodchenko)<sup>225</sup> and volume (taught by A. Lavinski, B. Korolev, A. Babitchev),<sup>226</sup> with additional courses, for example on in, psychological methods (taught by N. Ladovski in the United Left Studios, (OBMAS)).<sup>227</sup>

Looking at the list of instructors at the VKhUTEMAS is like looking at a full roster of what later became known as the Russian avant-garde. Apart from those listed above, Wassily Kandinsky, El Lissitzky, Stepanova, Leonid Vesnin, Aleksandra Exter, Kazimir Malevich and Vladimir Tatlin also taught there. Still, as those are only half of the instructors of the VKhUTEMAS, the stage of revolutionized artistic practices was here too only propaedeutic. Unlike the INKhUK, which from 1921 onwards dedicated itself to a productivist programme,<sup>228</sup> the VKhUTEMAS was more of a battleground. Not only had many of those advanced students in the studios of painting and sculpture who came from the Stroganov School and the MOUJVZ, maintained much of their previously established traditionalism, but also the newly arriving professors of the Free Studios were far from sharing the same premises. The reason why many artists chose to teach at VKhUTEMAS was that the education of the next generation of artists was seen as the pivotal test to the Productivists' own material practices. It was here that the new generations were supposed to be freed from the traditional art education that the Productivists themselves had undergone.

Searching for the practices of the artist-engineer, whose theoretical conception many of the VKhUTEMAS instructors were heavily involved in within the INKhUK, it is especially the material studios – metal, wood, ceramics, textiles and graphic arts – that come into focus. In conclusion, I want to emphasize the relation of artistic labour and its products that was envisaged in Productivism, elaborating the early example of Vladimir Tatlin's *Model for the Monument to the Third International*<sup>229</sup> (figure 1.20)

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<sup>224</sup> See *ibid.* p. 261ff.

<sup>225</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 267ff..

<sup>226</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 279ff.

<sup>227</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 285.

<sup>228</sup> Bowlton, *op. cit.*, p. xxxv.

<sup>229</sup> See Shadova, *op. cit.* p. 291.

### 1.2.5 Tatlin's Projected Future

What happened from the social aspect in 1917 was realized in our work as pictorial artists in 1914, when ›materials‹ volume and construction‹ were accepted as our foundations (...) We declare our distrust of the eye, and place our sensual impressions under control (...) The result of this (...) stimulate us to inventions on our work of creating a new world.<sup>230</sup>

The quote above is taken from the text “The work ahead of us”, which Tatlin published in the magazine “The Art of the Commune”, published by the IZO, the department of Fine Art in the Commissariat of Enlightenment. The occasion of the text was the presentation of his *Model for the Monument to the Third International*, which was realized throughout 1919 and publicly shown in Tatlin's studio in Petrograd in November of that year, to than be transported to Moscow to become part of the revolutionary festivities. (figure 1.21) Tatlin was a frequent contributor to public discussion, and he wrote numerous letters to administrative offices concerned with the steel industry, museum building, public architecture and journals like *The Art of the Commune*, which was established already in 1918 to communicate the developments of the arts and to build a broad basis for the inclusion of artistic into general production. In this context, Tatlin performed a central function for a number of reasons: as the state commissioned builder of the monument to the revolution, as an art educator, as the head of IZO Moscow and also as a central figure of the pre-revolutionary art movements of the 1910s. Tatlin's reference to 1914, his insistence on the precursory function of the artistic to the political revolution, remains remarkable here because it negates any representational political claims towards art and at the same time stresses art's own inherent reconstruction. Tatlin suggested a constructive understanding of artistic labour. He proposes art as a testing ground for general construction, a proposition not to be granted by political authority but already under way since 1914.

What was realized in Russian art before becoming politically projected by the Bolshevik party, was the rejection and systematic abolition of modes of representation from artistic production. Politically as well as artistically, representation seemed to render passive the vigour of thought and action. The success as well as the failure to turn representational traditions around and reconsider them in accordance to their productive potentials beyond the

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230 Vladimir Tatlin, “The Work Ahead of Us”, 1920, in *Russian Art of the Avant-garde: Theory and Criticism, 1902-1934*, ed. by John E. Bowlt (New York: Viking press, 1976), p.206.

confined realm of art can be drawn as a red line through artistic productions from 1914 to 1932. It can be used to separate the revolutionary practices and critiques from those that finally anticipated the realist consolidation of the revolution under the decree “On the Reconstruction of Literary and Art Organizations” announced in 1932, which laid the basis to bind all artists into state-run unions and to abolish all free artist associations,<sup>231</sup> a political agenda which had risen already from Lenin’s cultural politics. Lenin had dismissed the Proletkul’t publicly in the Pravda already in 1920 and had at the same time reintroduced traditional realist painting into political relevance, one year later supported also by his NEP politics, in order to weaken the forces of the Proletkul’t and the Productivist artists from early on.<sup>232</sup>

As early as 1918, when the Fine Arts Department of the Commissariat of Enlightenment (IZO in Narkompros) was established, David Sterenberg, its head, announced its commitment to “art’ penetration into production”.<sup>233</sup> Amongst its members were Vladimir Mayakovski and Osip Brik, and its Moscow head was Vladimir Tatlin, who, early in 1919 was commissioned by the IZO to build a monument to the revolution.<sup>234</sup>

Vladimir Tatlin, who had already been actively involved in the Russian ‘futurist’ movement of the 1910s as an artist as well as an organizer of exhibitions,<sup>235</sup> became also one of the predominant proponents of the Constructivist, or more precisely of the material culture programmatic of the 1920s. His approach to artistic production had been more materially oriented than most of those of his fellow futurists already in the 1910s, when he developed his *Counter-Reliefs*, (figure 1.22) wall sculptures made from discarded found materials, which refigured geometrical abstraction in formation through its materials rather than through an abstraction from them. At a very early stage, Tatlin had begun to reconfigure his artistic practices through the material characteristics of his means of production and in the 1920s was, in that sense, more consistently artistically materialist than most of his constructivist comrades. In the middle of the 1920s, he began to replace all metal constructions in his works with wood and staged a series of experiments on the ranges of artistic formations of wood, the most prominent being his chair of 1927.<sup>236</sup> (figure 1.23) In this Tatlin’s production proposed a negation of art which was never based on its categorical rejection, much unlike that of the

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<sup>231</sup> See Kerstin Stakemeier, “Polytechnik und Realismus in der frühen Sowjetunion“, in Phase 2, Vol. 24 (Berlin, Leipzig: Phase 2, 2007), <http://phase2.nadir.org/rechts.php?artikel=464&print=>

<sup>232</sup> See Lenin, *Werke*, Vol. 33, (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1962), p. 91.

<sup>233</sup> Fitzpatrick, *The Commissariat of Enlightenment*; Tatlin, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

<sup>234</sup> See Lodder, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

<sup>235</sup> See Tatlin, *op. cit.*, and Sochor, *op. cit.*

<sup>236</sup> See Shadova, *op. cit.*, p. 378f.



theorists of this movement, who, like Arvatov, Kushner and Tarabukin, in some cases presented abstract renunciations. Tatlin's artistic practices of the 1910s and 20s figure *Entkünstung* as a gradual transfer of art production into artistic production. The precision as well as the fundamental impact of his procedures lies in what I would call a concept of 'projective production'. This projective character of his materializations was overly present in the Monument project.

In a factual sense, the project was projective because it could not materially be realized at that time due to the material scarcity of the Russian economy of the early 1920s. Metal was rare in Russia at the time. Tatlin, as Rodchenko and others, built his 'metal works', in wood, which were then painted in silver. The monument's dynamic construction, which I will explain in detail later in this text, reached in its sheer scale far beyond the mechanical stages of metal production in Russia, or anywhere else, at the time. Tatlin's monument was hoping for a not yet existing industry. This was not due to a somehow artistic refusal to proceed 'realistically' but resulted, on the contrary, from the conscious and precise transgression of the technical standards of the time. The monument was dedicated to the revolution, which is not presented as a memorable past but as a process in the making which introduced a new time, a new calendar, and a new perspective: one of permanent projection. For the monument, Tatlin worked in collaboration with engineers, metal workers and architects to find a solution for the extremely variable structure they elaborated together. The material had to be highly flexible, as the monument was supposed to be in constant movement (figure 1.24) and its realization was planned to be itself the realization of a general artistic production. The banners presented with the model in Tatlin's studio in 1919 said "Steelworkers of the world, unite to build this monument."<sup>237</sup> (figure 1.25) The monument was, one could say, under collective construction and would only have been realized if Tatlin's slogan "art into life" had come into being, if his active terms of *Entkünstung*, which lay in the active reconstruction of all production in a collective initiation of all materials according to their projective potentials, had been realized. Tatlin envisaged artistic production as an activation, an open structure to be extended. *Entkünstung* here stages a revolutionary setting of micrological realizations under collective elaboration. Ivan Punin, who reported on the monument's becoming in mid-1919, tried to capture its preoccupation with its viewer or, better, recipient: "Least of all one should stand still or sit down on it, you must be mechanically taken up, down, carried away against your will, in front of you must flash the powerful laconic phrase of the orator-agitator."<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>237</sup> Ibid., p. 300.

<sup>238</sup> Quoted in Lodder, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

What is envisaged here is an artistic *Entkunstung*, a production, which expands onto different fields of production in order to distribute artistic structures into production in general. Tatlin's work was driven by a constantly processing desire for a 'material culture'.<sup>239</sup> His model for a *Monument for the Third International* in that sense signifies a central trope of artistic actions directed against representation as well as the projectiveness it is based on. His monument is formulated not as a 'preview' but as an active attempt to put "art into life".<sup>240</sup> Although it was commissioned by the Russian State in 1918 as a monument to the revolution, Tatlin had decided against a commemorative structure of glorification; he decided against representation and consolidation. The revolution he was honouring consisted of the presence of its future in its present. His monument was designed as an utilitarian building transcending not only the industrial standards of the late 1910s – and especially those of post-revolutionary Russia – but also the model of their national organization, hosting the organizations, prospective world-government, the Comintern, its different departments, as well as a central agency for press and propaganda and spaces for public involvement. The three spatial components suspended in the tower's spiralling grid, from bottom to top – a square a rectangular, and a hemispherical space – were thought to be themselves mobile, enforcing as well as embodying the active structures of the fully developed 'material culture' Tatlin envisaged.<sup>241</sup> His monument anticipated future revolutions, not primarily in the arts but more in politics as well as in production. Art here was a lever to actualize the potential of man, to perform politics, which would turn 'art into life'. The reason for the monument to have remained a model again lies in its projective character. It was built for a society which never transformed into its own ideal. The cultural politics of the newly built Soviet state shortly after the revolution envisaged art in a far more conservative, representational function. The only oscillation point was Productivism's inherent problematic: its utilitarian understanding of industrial labour, which was shared by the Bolshevik party.

In 1924 Leon Trotsky, who was very sceptical of the construction of the tower – of the mobility of its steel grid – wrote in *Literature and Revolution*: "That Tatlin despised the national style, allegorical sculpture, ornamentation, decoration and all that bauble and has tried to let his project be guided by the correct and constructive utilization of material – in that he is absolutely right. (...) It is not yet proven if Tatlin was right in his own invention: the rotating cube, the Tatlin pyramid and the hemisphere of glass." One has to say that Tatlin's utilitarian inventions were not always guided by much technical success, but nevertheless the

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<sup>239</sup> See Strigalev, Harten, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

<sup>240</sup> See Lodder, *op. cit.*, p. 261.

<sup>241</sup> See Strigalev, Harten, p. 250.

question remains if that was his personal failure or one due to the fact that all those models were based on a collectivized production, which was aimed at in the early stage of the revolution but abolished partially with Lenin's introduction of the NEP and fully with Stalin's re-nationalization of socialism and the subsequent return to the law-of value into the Russian economy. Under Stalinism, Tatlin's works had to fail, and, eventually, to stop. Even though Tatlin remained an approved artist in Russia in the 1930s, he retreated to painting in that decade, as all of his preceding practices were made impossible by the restraining cultural politics after the cultural revolution of 1928 to 1930.

Tatlin's Productivism had been based on collaborative practices. His *Entkünstung* had opened up art into a potential industry in a moment when the traditional industry could hardly ensure Russia's reproduction. In the middle of 1919, after Tatlin had moved to Petrograd, he not only became head of the free studios of volume, material and construction there but also – something that was and remained unprecedented – established a productivist connection together with the theoretician Boris Arvatov, Tatlin and Arvatov opened a “production laboratory” in a then newly established industrial production site, the Lessner Factory in Petrograd, as part of the “Institute of Artistic Culture”, the INKhUK in Moscow.<sup>242</sup> With Tatlin and Arvatov, not only a new production but also a new kind of reception was envisaged. “I want to make the machine with art and not to mechanize art – there is a big difference in understanding.”<sup>243</sup> Tatlin sought to activate production in concentrating on its artistic aspects on every level, not to just subordinate it to mechanization. The constant and systematic projectiveness, the everyday antagonism of attempting to produce in the future, put into practice, not only by the producers (of art) but also by its recipients, lies at the core of what makes the Russian Productivism practitioners revolutionaries in artistic practice. Productivism after 1917 actively tried to leave art. In his 1936 essay “The Work of art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”,<sup>244</sup> Walter Benjamin proposes art as a force of production able to produce a need, which cannot yet be fulfilled.<sup>245</sup> In Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* this idea returns as a distant promise, which emanates from the work. In the *Entkünstung* of this integral artwork the promise is, one might say, opened up to become a practice, to intervene and propose itself as an active occupation. *Entkünstung* liberates art from its representational traits in order to develop out of it new productive measures which reach beyond the field of

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<sup>242</sup> See Lodder, “Constructivism and Productivism in the 1920s”, *Art into Life: Russian Constructivism*, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

<sup>243</sup> Quoted in: Christina Lodder, *Russian Constructivism*, New Haven/London, 1983, p. 213.

<sup>244</sup> Benjamin, “The Work of art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”, in *Illuminations* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968).

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*

art. *Entkunstung* in Productivism offered the perspective of a new entitlement to all labour, its reconstruction.

Tatlin's works and also more generally that of the Russian Productivists were always at their most radical when they proposed a future state as the basis for present actions; like Benjamin, they hoped for a nonlinear capacity in aesthetic production, for its capacity to construct. Like Ernst Bloch' idea of an "ontology of the 'not-yet'",<sup>246</sup> the present here is regarded as just one of many temporal perspectives implied in one's actions. This projective perspective characterized productivist artistic projects of the time as well as the central objective of the agitational work of the Bolshevik party preceding the revolution, which had been to convince the agrarian peasants of Russia's main land of being workers, bearers of a class-consciousness. And even though their lives were mainly dominated by the late feudal rules of the Tsarist regime, in taking a class standpoint, the peasants exceeded their own present and chose a social status of active participation: they chose to supersede their state of dependency in identifying with the potential rather than with the material limitations. This did, in part, facilitate the mass agitation and revolution but – as in the case of Tatlin and other revolutionary artists – did not enable the actual industrialization, the actual material development of the country. Consequently Boris Arvatov and others saw the developments and restrictions of Productivism in the perspective of Russia's general state of production: "It seems very odd. I suppose we have a proletariat in the West and an ideology of proletarian culture in Russia. We have Constructivist ideologists in Russia, and technological Industry in the West. This is the real tragedy."<sup>247</sup> Arvatov here points out how the productivist projection failed its own reality. This is what became the real tragedy of non-simultaneity for Russian attempts of *Entkunstung*, and in a more fundamental sense also that of the Russian post-revolutionary politics after Vladimir I. Lenin's death in 1924.

This non-simultaneity, to refer again to a concept from Ernst Bloch's writings, could thus be named as a central productive as well as destructive principle within the Russian revolution, even if, unlike Bloch's concept of it in *Heritage of Our Times*,<sup>248</sup> it functions here as the sought-for actuality of the not-yet-lived and not as the threatening actuality of an outlived tradition. This asynchronous and hopeful presentiment of a leap in history through

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<sup>246</sup> See Ernst Bloch, *Erbschaft dieser Zeit*, Frankfurt am Main, 1985 (written in 1935), p.111ff. Translated by Neville Plaice and Stephen Plaice, »Heritage of Our Times«, Berkeley/Los Angeles, 1990.

<sup>247</sup> See Walter Benjamin, *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit*, (1. Fassung), in *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. I.2., ed. by Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1991), p. 462.

<sup>248</sup> See Ernst Bloch, *Erbschaft dieser Zeit*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1985).

revolutionary arts and politics, its similar rejection of a linear development in nature and culture, turns the figure of actualisation into one of its central levers.

This is surely the case for many of the artist-engineers. Tatlin, for example, raised the model for a steel tower in honour of the revolution in 1919 but thereafter turned to construct predominantly with bent wood, a material available in Russia at that time. He actualized the means of his ‘material culture’. Where within capitalist production, the division of labour forces the artist into the role of representation (I will return to this in the following chapters) the artist in a collectively organized production plays the role of a general model, which allows for a range of different specifications in accordance to its specific procedures. But Arvatov in the quote clearly senses why the artistic attempts to enter general production, whether Tatlin in the Lessner Factory or Varvara Stepanova and Ljubov Popova in the textile Industry, failed: the practices of *Entkunstung* which Productivism had elaborated were characterized by a clear ideology of an apparatus which did not yet exist in Russia at the time, an industry, the initiations of which more and more resisted being build on experiment. In the second half of the 1920s an ever more aggressive form of collectivism rose: an obligation to collective realism in art and production.<sup>249</sup> To use an idea from critical theorist Peter Bulthaup, we could say that the rise and fall of the Russian revolutionary movement was intrinsically one of different concepts of voluntarism.<sup>250</sup> Where Productivism had hoped for a collectivism built in individual efforts and had put forward art’s *Entkunstung* as one of its levers, Soviet economic politics, especially after the end of the NEP in 1928 with initiation of Stalin’s first Five Year Plan, had initiated a different route. Not only were the pseudo-capitalistic characteristics of the NEP undone and a fundamental collectivism and collective ownership was reinforced, this was also done through the rigorous alignment of all of society’s productive forces in accordance to party doctrine. In art, this meant the rise of the state controlled artist union “The Artist” in 1929, in which artistic producers were forced to register in order to be allowed any commissions.<sup>251</sup> Here, to quote Bulthaup, “the voluntarism of decision making had as the basis of the possibility of its practical realization the drastic restriction of the discussion of reasons for this decision, when the resources were neither sufficient for probing simultaneously alternative strategies, nor for an experience of the planning and coordination of production processes within a national economy devoid of the

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<sup>249</sup> See Fitzpatrick, *op. cit.*

<sup>250</sup> See Peter Bulthaup, “Herrschaft, Sprache, Revolution”, in *Das Gesetz der Befreiung* (Lüneburg: Zu Klampen Verlag, 1998).

<sup>251</sup> Gassner, Gillen, *op. cit.*, p. 409f. Gassner and Gillen discuss this organization as a state funding for the arts, which is true but does not problematize the alternativeless and desperate situation of this construction.

market, which would only be gained on the basis of experiment and thus were not capable of allowing the regulation and development of the industry.”<sup>252</sup> The individual form of voluntarism, which was sought by artists such as Vladimir Tatlin, proposed an individual activation of productive and creative potentials. It had tried to insert the idea of a revolutionary change of reception on the basis of individual collaborations with industry, and by that implied the restructuring of all production according to an artistic perception of construction as the general possibility to engage in a new revolutionary culture. However, on the basis of general production, this individual voluntarism in Russia was soon replaced by a collective, or more specifically a state voluntarism. The artistic attempts to restructure not only the artistic realm but general production as such came to an end as the slow development of industry did not allow for experimental production, while the majority of the socialist government held a rather traditionalist view on artistic production. In the following I want to take a closer look at those artistic attempts to restructure production, to turn to *Entkunstung* in restaging art as a potential industrial pattern of all labour.

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<sup>252</sup> See Peter Bulthaup, „Herrschaft, Sprache und Revolution“, in Peter Bulthaup, *Das Gesetz der Befreiung*, (Lüneburg: Zu Klampen Verlag, 1998), pp. 45f.

## 2 Actualization and Avant-Garde - *Entkunstung* and Pop

### 2.1.1 Historisizing a Break

Plastic has climbed down, it is a household material (...) for the first time artifice aims at something common, not rare (...) The hierarchy of substances is abolished: a single one replaces them all: the whole world can be plasticized.<sup>253</sup>

Mass production advertising is establishing our whole pattern of life – principles, morals, aims, inspirations, and standards of living. We must somehow get the measure of this intervention if we are to match its powerful and exciting impulses with our own.<sup>254</sup>

The end of the Second World War marked a rupture in thinking about the social significance of art on many different levels. The National Socialist and Fascist regimes in Europe and Japan and their support by the national populations, and the development and use of the atomic bomb which terminated the war in 1945 – all this cast into doubt the assumed relation between the progress of technology and the progress of humanity. The project of modernism, which had seemed to run parallel to other forms of enlightenment, began to look just as dubious.<sup>255</sup> Modern artistic production, whether the revolutionary affirmation of *Entkunstung* in Russia, or the modernist hope in the elaboration and refinement in the arts within dominant high culture, had always relied on an alliance with the social as well as technical developments that surrounded it.

The Russian Productivists had to cease their labour of *Entkunstung* when they no longer had access to the means of mass production, because their attempt to formulate artistic production as an implication of society's general terms of reproduction was predicated upon their own participation in the reproduction of the reproductive forces.<sup>256</sup> Likewise, the Bauhaus, and more specifically producers such as Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, had sought to implement cooperation with industrial plants into the curriculum as a way of fostering a form of artistic production that materially grasps its own contemporaneity. The developments of the Second World War had severed this connection between the arts and the reproductive productions in the West as well as in the East. The machinery of multiple sectors of

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<sup>253</sup> Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), p. 99.

<sup>254</sup> Alison and Peter Smithson, "But Today We Collect Adds", in: Steven H. Madoff, *Pop Art: A Critical History*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997) p. 3-4.

<sup>255</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialektik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1966), p. 314.

<sup>256</sup> Karl Marx, *Das Kapital*, Vol. 1 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1990), pp. 640ff.

production had profited immensely from the expansion of the war machine world wide and thus enabled a technical leap forward, one which, however, stood in no relation to the developments of the social relations in which and for which this machinery was developed. “Nonsimultaneity”, a concept originally introduced by Ernst Bloch, in his *Heritage of Our Times*<sup>257</sup> of 1934<sup>258</sup> in relation to the life of the working class in Wilhelminian Prussia<sup>259</sup>, which I already introduced in relation to Tatlin’s productions in the last chapter, intensified through the war and disaligned different spheres of production, disassociating traditional forms of life from their social groundings and rendering art as an antagonistic asset of general production, no longer fitted to any social class or emancipatory movement. Under the Heading of an “uneven development in the technic-base and in the superstructure” (*Ungleichmäßige Entwicklung in Technik-Unterbau und im Überbau*),<sup>260</sup> Bloch here uses the (questionable) orthodox Marxist distinction between base and superstructure to describe a relation, which, unlike the orthodox reading of this schema, does not indicate a hierarchy, but a difference in function.<sup>261</sup> He argues that, it might occur that the (economic) base pushed for a development, which within the (cultural) superstructure results in an actual decline of cultural development, that technical progression might cause cultural regression.<sup>262</sup> This, as I want to argue, was exactly the situation of Europe after 1945. The Second World War had pushed the national economies into a technical development, which was established at the expense of social and cultural ‘humanism’. Not only had this cultural life not developed, it was redeemed. What Bloch calls the “surplus of remnants of the past” (*Überschüsse aus Gewesenem*)<sup>263</sup>, and with which he wants to stress the irredeemable value of what he distinguishes as cultural heritage, had, after the Second World War become useless. “Nonsimultaneity” is, as I want to argue, not just driven by the impotence of situations in which the production seems to advance the mind, which has created it, but has the most profound effects in the individual self-perception it precipitates. The nonsimultaneity Bloch describes here results in the alienation of the individual from the world it inhabits and produces and can no longer perceive this world as an expression of its own will. Nonsimultaneity thus installs experiences of profound alienation. This might be turned into a

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<sup>257</sup> Ernst Bloch, *Gesamtausgabe in 16 Bänden Band 4, Erbschaft dieser Zeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977)

<sup>258</sup> See Frederic J. Schwartz, *Blind Spots: Critical Theory and the History of Art in Twentieth-Century Germany*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), p.103

<sup>259</sup> Ernst Bloch, *Tübinger Einleitung in die Philosophie: [Vorlesungen]*. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1963).

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.*, 120ff.

<sup>261</sup> For an in depth discussion of Bloch’s relation to Marxism in regard to his concept of nonsimultaneity see Schwartz, *op.cit.*, pp.105.

<sup>262</sup> Bloch, *Tübinger Einleitung in die Philosophie*, p. 121.

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid.* p. 122



productive effect, as in Tatlin's projective productions of a future machinery through art, but it might also, as it was the case in Europe after 1945, return as the inability to perceive the world as an inhabitable cultural ground.

European everyday life had been brought to a standstill by the effects of war; Russia's revolutionary left had long been diminished by the political purges under Stalin; and hopes for the development of a progressive political struggle in Europe had long been replaced by the devastation politics of the popular front. In this, art experienced a crisis of its own after 1945, performing attempted returns to the pre-war avant-gardes, trying to resume its pre-war means, which implied an artistic contestation of its former affirmation of the idea of the identity of technical and social progress.<sup>264</sup> The formal repetitions of avant-gardist tactics, strategies and artistic attacks returned as nostalgic remainders of a lost connection between artistic and social actions.<sup>265</sup> This marks the historical moment at which historically minded art critics such as Clement Greenberg called for a return of the arts to their traditional media.<sup>266</sup> What he proposed was nothing less than an anti-avant-gardist account of the avant-garde, which called for a more narrow identification of those very media, which had been rightfully put into question in the process of artistic contestations of the arts in the early 20th century. Greenberg's search for genius, originality and the new within an artistic production divorced from the everyday was aptly criticized by art historians like Rosalind Krauss, who argued that this retrospectivity not only undermined contemporary artists' attempt to approximate post-war contemporaneity but also freed the past from any invested artistic interests other than that of artistic immanence.<sup>267</sup>

My own perspective on this turn within the history of the avant-garde is many ways indebted to that of Krauss, whose introduction of structuralist thought into the history of contemporary art marks a fundamental change in the relation of artistic and art historical thought, which is central to the debates surrounding the rise of Conceptual art in the 1960s, subject to the third chapter of this thesis. In relation to the post-war debates around art, however, Krauss has taken a somewhat different stance. In *Art Since 1900*,<sup>268</sup> an extensive textbook published in 2004 by Krauss in collaboration with Benjamin HD Buchloh, Hal Foster and Yve-Alain Bois, the history of art in the 20th century is represented through the

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<sup>264</sup> See for example the German debate surrounding the Darmstädter Gespräch, 1951: *Das Menschenbild in unserer Zeit*, ed. by Hans Gerhard Evers (Darmstadt: Neue Darmstädter Verlagsanstalt, 1951).

<sup>265</sup> Clement Greenberg, Avant-garde and Kitsch, in: Charles Harrison, Paul Wood. *Art in Theory, 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*. (Malden: Blackwell Pub, 2003) pp. 539.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid. 562ff.

<sup>267</sup> Rosalind E. Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985), pp. 2.

<sup>268</sup> *Art Since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism*, ed. by Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Yve-Alain Bois, Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2004).

lens of each of its four authors' approaches, suggesting four lines within contemporary art historical thinking: a psychoanalytic approach, a formalist and structuralist approach, a post-structuralist and deconstructive and a social history of art. My own take on traces of *Entkunstung* within this history is very much positioned within this field. In the first chapter, I attempt to lay out the history of Russian Productivist attempts within a frame of social history of art *avant la lettre* and this chapter discusses the disintegration of its modernist hopes in the rise of the popular after 1945. However, as I am concerned with *Entkunstung*, the social history of art suggested by Benjamin HD Buchloh here is mostly of interest in its theoretical framing, in its relation to the Critical Theory developed around the Frankfurt *Institut für Sozialforschung* and its first generation of thinkers. The same is true for my affirmation of the shift of art history towards post-structuralist theories of the kind scholars such as Krauss have argued for. In my history of *Entkunstung* in art, I share the theoretical framework which this approach is grounded on; I do not, however, share the understanding of the category of art as a fundamentally uncontested entity, a formal unit or a desirable social function that one usually encounters in such work.

In his criticism of *Art Since 1900*, Otto Karl Werckmeister rightfully asserts that the second half of this canonical reflection on art in the 20th century fails to register the contested social role of art after 1945.<sup>269</sup> Where *Art Since 1900* characterizes the relation of art and mass culture or popular culture as one in which art increasingly and voluntarily incorporates mass cultural tropes and means into its productions, Werckmeister argues that art actually is not only voluntarily but unavoidably feeding on mass culture and emerging from it after 1945 because after the economization of cultural production through WWII, it no longer commands a domain of its own. Werckmeister here takes up a position not unlike that of Adorno in understanding art from its social function, rather than understanding, as *Art Since 1900* does in many instances, the social through its significations in art. Werckmeister can thus account for a structural *Entkunstung* as a form of expanded demand made of art, whereas Krauss *et al.* can only register it as a shift in artistic methodologies, producing an expanded field of art. But where *Art Since 1900*, on the other hand, rightfully examines artistic productions as practices of signification, of structural affinities and claims artistic as social practices, Werckmeister draws up a materialist reformulation of a theory of visual studies, which privileges the image over its artistic terms of production, even though its it these terms which lead him towards replacing 'art' with mass art (*Massenkunst*) in the first place.<sup>270</sup> Krauss and her peers remain

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<sup>269</sup> Otto Karl Werckmeister in a talk given at the Kunstverein Hamburg, 01.November 2007.

<sup>270</sup> See Otto Karl Werckmeister, *Der Medusa Effekt: politische Bildstrategien seit dem 11. September 2001* (Berlin: Form + Zweck, 2005)

more able to register social forms as material, structure and dynamism within art's domains, where Werckmeister's more visually oriented approach concentrates more exclusively on the visual representation of such social forms. Looking into *Entkunstung* as an immanent phenomenon of modern art, histories of art in which art's terms of production are explicit in the discussion of its products remain central to me. Here structuralist thinkers like Krauss in her writings on the avant-gardes and Marxist authors like Andrew Hemingway in his writings on artists on the left<sup>271</sup> share an art historical materialism, which perceives artistic productions as force fields of a materialised discourse and not just as its representation.

I would like to suggest that Bloch's trope of nonsimultaneity helps to formulate an art historical account of artistic production in the decade following the end of the Second World War, which registers its terms of production as well as those of perception within an understanding of the inherent nonsimultaneity of art as a social function at that time. I will thus deal with the retrograde re-initiation of the avant-garde only in so far as it signifies the specific difference in the choices of medium, material and expression in relation to those pre-war practices, which they try to approximate.

### 2.1.2 *Entkunstung* out of Insignificance

After 1945, as I have tried to argue here, the function and role of *Entkunstung* of art and in art altered significantly. Within the turmoil of the attempted and intermittently successful revolutions of the first decades of the 20th century, *Entkunstung* appeared as one aspect of a larger and socially embedded effort to contest the labour relations and practices that capitalism implemented against the grain of the traditional social bonds and hierarchies of the 19th century. And as authors like Siegfried Kracauer, Ernst Bloch and again, Benjamin have registered, culture as a field of social life and the potential for mass production in this field played a significant and exemplary role from the 1910s to the 1930s.<sup>272</sup> In their writings they elaborated on the productive social uses and sustained effects of this culture, as well as on socially conforming. *Entkunstung* here lies in the distraction, which Benjamin notes as a progressive turn in cultural reception<sup>273</sup> as well as in its opposite, the passivisation of a catered

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<sup>271</sup> See Andrew Hemingway, *Artists on the Left: American Artists and the Communist Movement, 1926-1956* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002)

<sup>272</sup> For a reconstruction of the social and cultural fieldwork these writings implied see Schwartz, *op. cit.*, 66ff., and 137ff.

<sup>273</sup> See Walter Benjamin, „Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit“, in: id. *Gesammelte Schriften I.2* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991), p. 459.

cultural experience.<sup>274</sup> On the other side, *Entkunstung* after 1945, also re-appeared as the definite loss of the bourgeois hopes of the 19th century, in the social and cultural predominance of mass culture, the *de facto* disjuncture of the systemic thought and the social reality of bourgeois high culture became painfully apparent. In the post-war situation of the decades after 1945 these two directions of social and artistic progression were no longer neatly separable, because the idea of progress itself had, with the rise of Fascism in Europe and the entrenchment of Stalinism in Russia, lost its social base. The technical and the social processes of progress had separated and become antagonistic, and art itself had become a practice that in Europe represented little more than a realm of cultural distinction. As Alison and Peter Smithson describe it in their characterization of advertising as a function of the modern everyday quoted above, advertising, the sheer visual multiplication of the material outputs of the capitalist machinery, of its consumable commodities, had taken over the production of sense, while the sense that artistic productions had produced in materializing and reconfiguring social relations, prospects and their physical realizations had historically disintegrated and returned as commodity styles, nostalgic remainders or accessories to the present. Where Adorno had constituted art as an ongoing process of conclusions that does not result in a final judgement<sup>275</sup>, this artistic process was, as it is registered in the Smithson's quote, no longer able to make sense of art as a discernable process of conclusions but rather as one of constant re-representations. The sense of progress, of sense to be constructed, that had characterized the first decades of the century, and which had constituted the avant-garde that Bürger and others have identified as the driving force of artistic production in times of attempted revolutions, had itself relied on the social stability of the category of art itself. For Bürger and Adorno, as well as for historically-minded critics like Clement Greenberg, this categorical affirmation of art as a category of embodied sense, as a medium of reason and emancipation, and its identification with what Bürger calls the historical avant-gardes, rendered the post-war period as a phase of mourning work, in which sense seemed to be irredeemable, only represented in formal innovation on the one and unyielding negativity on the other hand.

As I have said before, my project does not aim to propose another theory of the avant-garde, but rather wants to outstrip such a theory in favour of a concentration on those artistic producers who attempted to circumvent, leave or destabilize art as an integrated field of practice altogether, and thus have formulated a self-empowering position in relation to art's

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<sup>274</sup> Siegfried Kracauer, *Das Ornament der Masse*. Nachwort Karsten Witte, (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1977).

<sup>275</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970), pp. 207.

objective role and function within modern (European) nation states. I do not intend to write the history of a counter-avant-garde but to suggest instead focusing on a sidetrack within the common narratives of art in the 20th century. I want, that is, to try to write an art history of production instead of one of products, to leave aside the formal dignity of the art objects in favour of that of the artistic practices preceding it and to lay open their precise positioning within the more general terms of labour at their time. These are the margins at which *Entkunstung* develops, and looking at art from its *Entkunstung* means, in many cases, looking at unfinished products, intermediary objects and failed or unfulfilled intentionalities. In that sense, I am interested in artistic strategies that did not so much, as Adorno describes it, exemplify and define a position of intransigent negativity towards society, but rather those which sought to revolutionize artistic production through the affirmation of contemporaneous impulses and traits from outside of art and their subsequent prioritization within art. This is true for the Productivist attempts in art made in Russia in the first decades of the 20th century, which have been the subject of my first chapter as much as for those artistic productions which, after the end of the Second World War concentrated their efforts on the effects of the intensive industrialization and mass consumption of popular culture, which were the result of the war and its inherent nationalization of culture – work such as that of the Smithsons and others which came to known as the Independent Group in London in the 1950s. On a formal level, one could easily argue for a parallelism between Productivism and the artistic affirmation of popular culture in Britain after the Second World War: both share an embrace of mass culture, a reconstructive perspective on traditions, and the organisation form of the discussion group. But, if one does not rely on the formulation of an artistic avant-garde as the basic scheme of looking at those practices, but instead focuses on the particularities of their productive means and their historical strategies of production, they become considerably less similar. *Entkunstung* may run through all of their references to art, but the social status of art as well as that of its implication in society's other fields of production had altered significantly. Where Productivism aimed at the affirmation of the political outcomes of the Russian Revolution in acting out its implications for an understanding of artistic production beyond a bourgeois understanding of culture, the Independent Group aimed at the affirmation of a capitalist, industrialized popular culture that seemed to have rendered the hegemony of bourgeois culture obsolete<sup>276</sup>. So even though the *Entkunstung* of art was at the centre of both projects' artistic efforts, their affirmation of mass culture took them in completely different

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<sup>276</sup> See Smithsons, *op. cit.*

directions. Where Productivism wanted to inaugurate a Bolshevik mass culture, the Independent Group reconstructed its industrialized figurations in and through art.

Dealing with the world “as found,”<sup>277</sup> the proponents of the Independent Group did not just mirror their present, but, again not unlike the Productivists, took it seriously as the ‘state of the art,’ the state of production to construct from, the state of sociality to be dealt with. The artistic practices of *Entkunstung* after the Second World War are, I want to argue, in many ways anti-utopian: they do not project a future beyond the reconstruction of tendencies pushing to become real within their present, tendencies materializing within art itself and resurfacing in its other, in popular culture. Again, this anti-utopian stance on the status of projective productions in culture aligns their interest with that of Productivist practices in Russia more than thirty years earlier. But the range of what could be projected was now confined within capitalist industrialized culture. And within the range of different practices evolving amongst the Independent Group’s members, *Entkunstung* figured often as series of reformulations of reality expressed through the material affinities of its objects and subject, deconstructing their actual social status and conventional functions. This, rather than an art historical analogy of form or medium, constitutes a bond between different historical practices of *Entkunstung* in art. *Entkunstung* is not a style of art, but an interest in art as a socially mobile field of praxis.

### 2.1.3 Methodologies in Pop

Confronting three quite distinct historical moments of artistic production--revolutionary Russia of the 1910s and 20s, post-war Europe of the 50s and the US American leap into the conceptual present – I am exploring *Entkunstung* as a prolonged field of artistic commitment which has been either identified as an artistic strategy of the avant-garde (in the case of Productivism), as its repetition (in the case of Pop), as its dematerialization (in the case of conceptual practices), or has simply been neglected as an art historical object of study because the practical negation of the field of art did not seem to be an appropriate subject of its academic or scholarly historisation. My project methodologically tries to position itself between three different bodies of thought. Firstly the philosophical reflections on art and culture proposed by Adorno, Benjamin, Bloch and Deleuze and secondly art historical attempts to relate those philosophical discussions. This means on the one hand attempts like

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<sup>277</sup> *As found: the discovery of the ordinary*, ed. by Thomas Schregenerberger, Claude Lichtenstein (Baden: Lars Müller Publishers, 2001).

those of Peter Bürger or Otto Karl Werckmeister to relate Adorno's and Benjamin's aesthetic theories to a history of the avant-garde, but also more distinctly art historical attempts, like those of Rosalind Krauss in relation to (post)structuralist theories, of Frederic J. Schwartz in relation to the early critical theories and their social settings, or of Hal Foster in relation to the theories of the avant-garde and Pop. I want to consider these writings in relation to the contemporary authors of those periods I am looking at. My thesis is thus characterised by methodological focuses and alliances that shift with the periods of research. And where Productivism itself maintained a close and productive relationship between the theoretical and practical realizations of its programmatic, the turn of artistic towards popular cultural practices, which I focus on in this chapter, was built much more on the distinct digression of artists from the aesthetic theories associated with modernism. As I have already argued, these modernist aesthetics did, within the role they played in the 1950s, not allow for an engagement with the popular beyond its understanding as a thread or an extra to the revenant teleologies of modern art. The early Pop affiliations in 1950s Britain focussed more on visual anticipations of aesthetic development--Eduardo Paolozzi's *Bunk* continuation of the image collections of Amedée Ozenfant (*Foundations of Modern Art*, 1942),<sup>278</sup> Laszlo Moholy-Nagy (*The New Vision*, 1931)<sup>279</sup> and Sigfried Giedion (*Mechanization Takes Command*, 1947)<sup>280</sup> – and turned more, as Brian Wallis argues, towards the sciences and design, or more precisely, their visual representations<sup>281</sup>. Specifically looking to the US, they turned towards those fields of society which, after 1945, seemed to have outgrown all other fields: that of applied sciences, of aircraft and automobiles and that of commodity culture and its mass distribution in magazines, radio and TV. Many of their strategies to assimilate their own approaches to art to contemporary mass cultural productions thus turned directly against the modernist defences of art as a field of culture distinct from popular culture. In Britain this position was, antagonistically, held primarily by the very proponents of a post-war attempt to open up art towards contemporaneity: the founders of London's ICA, Herbert Read and E.L.T. Mesens and Roland Penrose.<sup>282</sup> Here, at the ICA, what later became called the Independent Group formed in the beginning of the 1950s. And some of its proponents, like Richard Hamilton, Nigel Henderson and Reyner Banham, were already active there from the end of the 1940s.

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<sup>278</sup> Amédée Ozenfant, *Foundations of Modern Art* (New York: Dover Publications, 1952).

<sup>279</sup> László Moholy-Nagy, *László Moholy-Nagy, The New Vision: and abstract of an artist*. (1947).

<sup>280</sup> Sigfried Giedion, *Mechanization Takes Command, a Contribution to Anonymous History* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1948).

<sup>281</sup> See Brian Wallis, "Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow: the Independent group and Popular Culture", in: *Modern Dreams: The Rise and Fall and Rise of Pop*, ed. by Edward Leffingwell, Karen Marta (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1988), p. 14

<sup>282</sup> See Anne Massey, *The Independent Group: Modernism and Mass Culture in Britain, 1945-1959* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), p.19ff.

And what was debated, between them and the founders was, to a large degree, the question of contemporaneity of art and in art.

I will take the approach of those associated with the Independent Group in the 1950s, to deal with the world as found, as my starting point to think about *Entkünstung* in a state of actualization after the Second World War. To discuss *Entkünstung* in this period of reconstruction as the return of a move out of art from outside of art, not a return as an artistic gesture but as a precondition of art through its other, popular mass culture. This anti-aesthetic approach to art, is in many regards indebted to Tatlin's material aesthetics – and eventually, during installation of Richard Hamilton's, John Mc Hale's and John Voelcker's contribution to the exhibition *This is Tomorrow* of 1956 the three staged a photo of them installing which re-enacts one showing Tatlin and his peers in the installation of the model for *The Monument to the Third International*.<sup>283</sup> And like Tatlin the Independent Group expanded their practices over different fields of profession – Alison and Peter Smithson were architects, Nigel Henderson was a photographer, Eduardo Paolozzi a sculptor, Reyner Banham a design historian and Richard Hamilton a painter. But as, within their times the division of labour their professions were objected to were much more elaborate and consequential than in Tatlin's times, in which individual deviations had been easier to enact, their strategies differ largely to those of Tatlin, not only in their visual results but also in their procedures. Formally, however, their production as the Independent Group did not, in most cases, amount to series of self-contained artworks – a characteristic which they, again, share with the Russian Productivists. But in contrast to their Russian predecessors, this was not primarily due to the wilful exhibition of intermediary work results, but instead because in the series of exhibitions they staged together, they presented their own artistic productions in the same formats as clippings from science, design and other fields: as visual reproductions, as photographs. Their own artistic works, which were not replaced but figured by those photographs, which were quite clearly not considered to be delicate objects, placed in the exhibitions for reasons of artistic relevance but as stand-ins for their significant relation to the imagery of contemporary popular culture. Where Productivists had exhibited their stages of work in constructing a future culture, the Independent Group exhibited the stages of the culture they found themselves in. They created propositions of recombinations and elective affinities inherent in contemporaneity. As the Smithsons make clear in their introductory quote, what they perceived as the task for art in the 50s was to confront a new situation in

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<sup>283</sup> See *Modern Dreams: The Rise and Fall and Rise of Pop* (Cambridge: MIT Press, The Institute for Contemporary Art, 1988), p. 15, and Shadova, *Tatlin*, ed. by Aleksejevna Shadova, (Dresden: VEB Verlag der Kunst, 1984), p. 291.



which *Entkunstung* might in fact already have been accomplished, and art might just be the last to know. In Pop, *Entkunstung* returns. It returns not as a voluntary move of artists who want to shape the mass culture to come but of those who want to claim a perceptual reconstruction of its present state, as a conscious privileging of reproduction over production in order to produce art significantly.<sup>284</sup>

The common perception of Pop as, in Bürger's terms, a "neo avant-garde"<sup>285</sup> produces a problem, which, I want to argue, cannot be solved on the side of art itself, because it makes artistic practices responsible for the cultural field they are performing in. More precisely, considering Pop a "neo avant-garde" requires that it be considered in parallel to the anti-art of Dada or the Productivism of the Russian revolutionary artists. The latter, however, attacked art as an institution of bourgeois feudalism, the former as a purification of cultural life. British Pop, I argue, did not rise up against art, but rather re-enacted art's contemporaneous social status as a challenge to it. Its commitment was one to the present; and in that present, art as an institution with an avant-garde history performed an antagonistic role: that of a formerly emancipated revenant. This is what Bürger, considering the art of the 50s and 60s under the heading of the "neo-avant-garde," holds against it: that they failed to reinstitute the utopian aims of the artistic stances produced by the historical avant-gardes. But these utopian stances had resulted in the uncontested status of these avant-garde objects as art productions in the 1950s already that had already left behind the social relevance they were able to claim in times of political struggle in Europe. To take such an artistic stance in Europe in the 1950s would not have been a sign of political or artistic awareness, but rather of ignorance. Where those claims were made, as in the case of the Situationist International (SI)<sup>286</sup>, art's role in it rapidly reached the point of *Entkunstung*, a tendency I will come back to at the end of this coming chapter. Here, however, art was only one of many means of political action. With the exception of the Munich-based Gruppe SPUR, most SI affiliates were interested predominantly in art's representative functions.<sup>287</sup> This is my reason for starting from the IG. *Entkunstung* for them rose from art's materials, their re-organization within the terms of popular culture.

Introducing my attempt to frame Pop, and more specifically British Pop of the 1950s, as the actualization of artistic moves towards *Entkunstung*, which I characterized for Russian

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<sup>284</sup> This is an indirect quote of Jean-Luc Godard's statement that he is not making political films but making film politically. See. <http://translate.eiecp.net/transversal/0307/vilensky/en>

<sup>285</sup> Peter Bürger, *Theorie der Avantgarde* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1974), pp. 79.

<sup>286</sup> See Roberto Ohrt, *Phantom Avantgarde: eine Geschichte der Situationistischen Internationale und der modernen Kunst*. (Hamburg: Edition Nautilus, 1990), p. 67f.

<sup>287</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 139f.

Productivism in the 1910s and 20s, I here want to shortly discuss the framing of Pop in relation to its representation in a notion of “neo-avant-garde.”<sup>288</sup> There have been very productive art historical readings, mostly of American Pop Art, which have convincingly argued that artists such as Andy Warhol enacted, as Sven Lüttiken calls it, art’s “Doppelgänger” function<sup>289</sup> in enacting art as mass culture. Similarly, that Claes Oldenburg, in expanding the physical traits of commodity fetishism beyond its physical distinctiveness,<sup>290</sup> did not simply, as Bürger argues in relation to Pop, re-enact a failed utopia, but instead committed himself to reality in anything but a nostalgic way.<sup>291</sup> I want to focus my own study on the British predecessors of these practices, because, as has been argued elsewhere (Wallis, for example), while the American artistic production of the 1960s presented the repetition of commodity fetishism as an artistic project in the commodity boom of Pop Art, the IG presented Pop as a way of life outside of art in Europe after the war. The IG utilized the commodity and magazine culture of the US as the projective focus of a fully distributed internationalized mass culture.

To define the problems I want to look at more precisely, I want to return to a Marxist reading of mass culture, which rose from the German discussions of the late 1960s and early 70s, many of which I have already quoted in relation to my discussion of the terms avant-garde and modernism in the first chapter. For me, the writings from this specific context remain methodologically vital to grasp the notion of *Entkunstung* as being implied in a constant state of actualization, not least because Adorno coined the concept at this moment to capture what he perceived as an expanding degradation of modern art<sup>292</sup>. Adorno’s posthumously published *Aesthetic Theory* still tried to characterize the present through a lost past, whereas those whose writings followed a few years afterwards in his tradition – like Peter Bürger, Otto Karl Werckmeister or Wolfgang Fritz Haug, whom I want to introduce here in relation to the question of Pop – tried instead to come to terms with the cultural and artistic production and representation of what Adorno and Max Horkheimer had termed the culture industry<sup>293</sup>. I am framing my own perspective on the artistic contestations of

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<sup>288</sup> Peter Bürger, *op. cit.*, pp. 79.

<sup>289</sup> See Sven Lüttiken, “Secrecy and Publicity”, *New Left Review*. No.17, (London: New Left Review Ltd., 1960).

<sup>290</sup> See Barbara Rose, “The Street: A Metaphoric Mural”, in *Claes Oldenburg: the Museum of Modern Art, New York, [September 25 - November 23, 1969]* (Stuttgart, London, Reykjavik: Edition Hansjörg Mayer, 1970), pp. 37-51.

<sup>291</sup> See Thomas E. Crow, *The Rise of the Sixties: American and European Art in the Era of Dissent* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), pp. 34, pp. 91.

<sup>292</sup> See Otto Karl Werckmeister, *op. cit.*

<sup>293</sup> See Theodor W. Adorno, Max Horkheimer, “Kulturindustrie, Aufklärung als Massenbetrug”, in *Dialektik der Aufklärung: Philosophische Fragmente*, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1981).

modernity within their realm of thought, because Adorno and Bürger especially represent an understanding of art as a social factor and political expression that has been equally influential and misleading. In their sense, the politicality of artistic productions lies in the appropriation of representational means and the formal rigour with which they are artistically expressed, rather than in artistic actions taken. Their arguments are centred around the artwork in its entity and it is precisely this entity, which *Entkunstung* challenges in its actions. Haug's *Kritik der Warenästhetik* of 1971<sup>294</sup> also tries to look at the rise of industrialized popular culture from the side of its representational function; however, he tries to develop a theory of contemporary knowledge from these representations of mass culture, namely from the influence that advertising has on human behaviour. Quite unlike the IG's approach, Haug's work focuses primarily on what he characterizes as the passivising and manipulative characteristics of this industry<sup>295</sup>. (I shall discuss Haug's theory only in regard to an understanding of mass culture as an industry, touching on practices of art *ex negativo*). However, where he comes to the analysis of the forces of production incorporated in this industry, Haug discusses the introduction of what Karl Marx had named the "socially necessary labour time"<sup>296</sup>, a term, which in Marx is exclusively used to describe the social organization of reproductive labour. Haug's introduction of that phrase in relation to cultural productions opens up a question central to the beginnings of Pop. It describes the new situation of the productive forces Pop saw itself confronted with: the international distribution of the national culture industries after the American model. The IG's interest in North America's fully evolving consumer capitalism prematurely grasps this relation through the means of art.<sup>297</sup> This 'earliness' of art, its prefiguration of rising social antagonisms, already appeared in Tatlin's works of the 1915s.<sup>298</sup> Where philosophical systematizations, as Hegel stated in his *Philosophy of Rights* in 1821 arise only in the aftermath of history,<sup>299</sup> art evolves in this prefigurations. This is also a reason for Deleuze's attempted overlapping of art and philosophy: to bring the latter into a movement, which exceeds its preservation within the

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<sup>294</sup> See Wolfgang Fritz Haug, *Kritik der Warenästhetik*. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1971). In the whole book, as well as in its re-edited later version, Haug never refers directly to Adorno, even where he quotes his and Horkheimer's concept of the culture industry. He does refer to Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin and Bertolt Brecht.

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28

<sup>296</sup> Karl Marx, *Werke. 23, Das Kapital ; Buch 1: Der Produktionsprozess des Kapitals* (Berlin: Dietz, 2008), p. 53, and Haug, *op. cit.*, p.23.

<sup>297</sup> David Mellor, „A Glorious Technicature in Nineteen-Fifties Britain: The Many Cultural Contexts of the Independent Group“, in: David Robbins (Ed.), *The Independent Group: Post-war Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty*. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990) pp. 229-236.

<sup>298</sup> Vladimir Tatlin, *The Work Ahead of Us, 1920*, in *Russian art of the avant-garde: theory and criticism, 1902-1934*ed. by John E. Bowlt (New York: Viking press, 1976), pp. 205-208.

<sup>299</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie der Rechts* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1968)

aesthetic realm and relates it to the material productions within their processes, contemporaneously as well as retrospectively. In the third and first chapter of this thesis, this relation will thus become thematic again, attempting to refigure Deleuze's desire to turn philosophy from a method into a mode of thought and action,<sup>300</sup> which, within the rise of Conceptual art, finds its equivalent to perform simultaneities of action and thought. In the post-war era which forms the background for the IG's actions, however, culture had become a branch of considerably industrialized consumer capitalism, which was in an ongoing process of actualization and specification, as Reyner Banham noted in his essays on the designs of the everyday life. Here, the 'refurnishing' of the everyday set in. The praxis of the IG was closely tied to the surfaces of this newly industrialized mass culture: Paolozzi's clippings of American advertising, Banham's scrutiny of American everyday design items, Henderson's documentation of the changing storefronts of London's East and the Smithson's attempts to think towards a *House of the Future*.<sup>301</sup> Yet, starting with the latter, those surfaces were all but arbitrary. They were demonstrating a post-war understanding of communal life. The *House of the Future* exemplified a paranoid architecture of the post-war nuclear family;<sup>302</sup> Henderson's photographs of East London street life registered the non-simultaneity between the development of the commodification of the everyday and the degradation of a sociality that, after the war was characterized by deepened class differences;<sup>303</sup> Banham's investigations into car designs<sup>304</sup> aimed to set into motion a manifested expendability of the everyday; and Eduardo Paolozzi's *Bunk* collages<sup>305</sup> extrapolated the culturalisation of all life in capitalism, from war machinery to pornographic imagery.

The IG proliferated artistic labour in a state of experiment: it did not so much produce 'works' as 'labour'. Skimming the surfaces of the modernist remains and post-war pulp culture of the 50s in its instable and overbearing attempts to establish a recreated everyday life after the war, they sought a placement of artistic production within the texture of these surfaces, within the very structure of the new post-war popular cultural schemata, productions which did not necessarily need to result in art proper. To think of these changes in Haug's terms of an introduction of the "socially necessary labour time" into the realm of culture opens up a perspective which understands *Entkunstung* after World War Two not only as

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<sup>300</sup> Gilles Deleuze, „Immanence: A Life“, in: Gilles Deleuze, *Pure Immanence: Essays on a Life* (New York: Zone Books, 2001), pp. 25-34

<sup>301</sup> *The Independent Group: Post-war Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty*, ed. by David Robbins (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), p. 115.

<sup>302</sup> Beatriz Colomina, *Unbreathed Air*, in: *Grey Room*, No. 15 (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2004), pp. 28-59.

<sup>303</sup> In *As found: the discovery of the ordinary*, pp. 84ff.

<sup>304</sup> See Reyner Banham, Penny Sparke (Ed.), *Design by Choice: Ideas in Architecture* (London: Academy Ed, 1981).

<sup>305</sup> In *As found: the discovery of the ordinary*, pp. 8ff.

yielding under the crushing weight of consumer culture, but more as an endeavour of professionalisation and specification within artistic production. It was, in other words, a repositioning of its potentialities beyond art and the implications of its materials and procedures into the distinction of “socially necessary labour time”. The IG pushed art towards these measures, exposing it to its *Entkunstung* through them.

Another one of Haug’s observations becomes relevant in this context: his reflection on the relation of the possibility of knowledge production within mass culture’s expansion. Haug argues that the culture industry tends towards the centralization of production and thus to the monopolization of practical and active knowledge of the everyday.<sup>306</sup> Even though the monopolization thesis remains debatable from today’s perspective, what Haug here shares with the early members of the IG is the sense in which the accumulation of knowledge through culture has altered from being primarily a trait of social privilege to becoming a necessity of the everyday. The IG, and especially the Smithsons, insisted on the perception of this complex as a given landscape, in that they argued for the necessity to deal with it “as found”<sup>307</sup>. This is an approach to the recognition of the commodified nature of the post-war everyday that aligns their work with the results of Paolozzi, Banham and the turn away from architectural projects in Team 10.<sup>308</sup> In contrast to Haug, they did not perceive the apprehension and possible appropriation of mass culture as being determined by its origins in the industrial complex, but rather investigated in art’s possibly active relations to this complex. Here again the question of “socially necessary labour time” comes back into play, because the *Entkunstung* of art in relation to industrially organized mass culture is profoundly dependant on the terms of production which art implies in relation to its own implication in this field. Like the Productivists, the IG explored the expansion of their own production to an industrial level, (in this case in taking up scientific measure within culture not, as in the Productivist case, attempting to reconstruct these scientific measures through culture) but again like the Productivists, they remained in a stage of speculation and fragmentary experiments. They performed *Entkunstungen* of art, but not as an end to art. They were working *in* the industry but their practices effected only the sphere of art. Here, the discussion of artistic in relation to reproductive labour, which Karl Marx only hints at, assumes central importance.<sup>309</sup> It is the differences between value production that apply for artistic endeavours on the one hand, and those that apply for reproductive forms of labour on the other, which

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<sup>306</sup> Haug, *op. cit.*, pp. 125f.

<sup>307</sup> In *As found: the discovery of the ordinary*, pp. 8ff.

<sup>308</sup> In *Team 10: 1953-81, in Search of a Utopia of the Present*, ed. by. Max Risselada, Dirk van den Heuvel (Rotterdam: 2005).

<sup>309</sup> See for example Marx, *op. cit.*, pp. 200ff.

here produce symptoms of *Entkunstung*. It is here that art and the realms, which border upon it in the culture industry differ intrinsically in the terms of their social and economic distinction and produce significant friction. Discussing *Entkunstung* in its formulation in Britain in the 1950s thus implies a discussion of how changes within the terms of production were perceived and how this affected not only production but also the producers themselves. As Adorno and Horkheimer already remarked in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment* of 1944/47, art, with the full development of the culture industry, has turned into but one field of cultural production, an obscure branch of mass culture. This objective change within the social function and economic structure of artistic production after World War Two marked a shift, which Alfred Sohn-Rethel, in his epic *Geistige und körperliche Arbeit*, published in 1970, formulated as the difference between the ‘personnel’ and the ‘social’ identity/or non-identity between manual and intellectual labour.<sup>310</sup> As Adorno has analysed in many of his writings<sup>311</sup>, art had, within bourgeois societies always been part of the social division of intellectual and manual labour, as art had never fulfilled any economically reproductive functions for society. Culture was and remained based on its antagonistic status as being socially identified as intellectual labour but being based on individual manual labour. Culture bore ‘personnel’ the identity of intellectual and manual labour, which outside of it was divided into different strands of production. With the rise of the systematized industrial production of culture, this relation shifted in that the individual identity of intellectual and manual labour which before had characterized this field began to vanish. Culture, too became based on the internal separation of intellectual and manual labour (a development which I will return to when discussing the rise of Conceptual art). Even though artistic labour in the 1950s was still mostly characterized by the identity of intellectual and manual labour, its affiliation to the field of culture in which this identity had long been in question but now was systematically negated, altered art’s own status. To formulate it in Bloch’s term: art’s objective nonsimultaneity became painfully apparent. The IG turned to *Entkunstungen* of art’s status through an analysis of industrialized mass culture in order to enhance art’s social simultaneity.

This distinction between the prewar and the post-war artistic attempts to expand art or to make art expandable--commonly termed as the relation of “historical” and the “neo-avant-

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<sup>310</sup> See Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Geistige und körperliche Arbeit: zur Epistemologie der abendländischen Geschichte*. (Weinheim: VCH, 1989), p. 126.

<sup>311</sup> See for example the various essays In Theodor W. Adorno, *Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970).

garde”<sup>312</sup> – were introduced by Bürger to suggest a relation not only of historical affinity but even more so one of dependency. In his analysis, the historical avant-garde set out to dismantle the false autonomy of bourgeois art, to problematise its social status as an unproductive extra but not its status as a state of knowledge (*Erkenntnis*).<sup>313</sup> This is a very Adornian figure, and one which brings about a substantial problem not only for the perception of the avant-garde but even more for any historical consideration of a neo avant-garde. What is introduced through the privileging of the knowledge-character (*Erkenntnischarakter*) of art – the ability of art to produce a sense of knowledge external to philosophical thinking – is the division of intellectual and manual labour within art, which attempts to secure the former from the latter. Thus what led to the assumed failure of the historical avant-garde that Bürger notes was its material core, its entanglement with the rise of industrial production and distribution. This might be one reason why Bürger touches upon the Russian Productivists only in a footnote, where he mentions Boris Arvatov’s writings. These had by the early 1970s been published in German, at the same time as a whole range of literature on the work of the Proletkul’t, with which Arvatov had been involved. But in Bürger’s sense the Productivists were not an avant-garde movement *within art*. I am stressing this here again, because it today might seem evident that Bürger discusses Dada and Surrealism as the two central examples of avant-garde practices, but the fact that he neither discusses Expressionism in any extensive sense, which through Bloch and others had been intrinsically bound to the discussion of Realism and the popular front and thus to Marxist debates, nor Russian Productivism, which had been widely discussed in the field of critical pedagogy in Germany in the 1960s and early 70s, is a choice which very distinctly separates art and engagement and favours a canonical approach to artistic inventiveness, again following Adorno. Bürger chooses to discuss those movements in art, which by his time had clearly been canonized as ‘proper’ arts as historical avant-gardes. Consequently, his discussion of what he calls the neo-avant-garde, and this for him is primarily American Pop Art, moves along the same lines: it picks an established field of canonized artistic production, proves its dignity as art while at the same time questioning its standing as a form of knowledge (*Erkenntnis*). Bürger sets out a trap, so to speak, which always catches art as a material production and thus implied in the division of capitalist labour, while at the same time exempting its intellectual capacity as being immaterial and thus unrelated to art’s commodity character.

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<sup>312</sup> Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), p. 8.

<sup>313</sup> See *ibid.* pp. 76ff.

As Hal Foster, in his critique of Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, has remarked, Bürger's narration of the avant-garde as an intact point of origin necessarily leads to the understanding of neo-avant-garde as a degraded version of this origin.<sup>314</sup> For one, Bürger stages the historical avant-garde as a place of immediate perception. This, as Foster argues, turns its historical failure into a "heroic and tragic" moment, while it presents the neo-avant-garde as nothing but its "pathetic and farcical" return.<sup>315</sup> According to Foster, for Bürger "to repeat the historical avant-garde, (...) is to cancel its critique of the institution of autonomous art; more, it is to invert this critique into an affirmation of autonomous art."<sup>316</sup> What neither Bürger nor Foster take into account in this opposition is that the avant-garde's critique of the autonomous artwork did not just alter in accordance with the developments of and in artistic production, as Foster suggests, but that even seemingly analogous forms of artistic production factually alter their status within the different historical moments according to the development of cultural production *outside* of the specific artworks. If regarded as a re-initiation of its predecessors' confrontational status, the neo-avant-garde remains untouched by its own present; and where it is perceived as a re-initiation of the avant-garde's formal achievements, it is inhibited from an active relation to its own media and materials. This concerns the commodity status of the art works as well as the status of their producers. Foster rightfully criticizes Bürger's linear narrative of failure, his posthumous purification of the historical avant-garde, but at the same time he himself aims at saving these categories in reiterating them in an a-linear and more openly defined fashion. Foster quotes Burkhardt Lindner's criticism of a Bürgerian avant-garde's struggle against the autonomous artwork as being the plain mirroring of its function, but he does not himself reject the notion of the avant-garde as a contested attribution (as, for example, Marcel Duchamp, whom Foster refers to for his ready-mades, did in his perception of an-art).<sup>317</sup> As he states in the introduction to his book *The Return of the Real*, Foster himself aims at narratives of an "innovative art" and thus only immanently criticizes the historical construction of an avant-garde. Foster suggests regarding the neo-avant-garde as the 'comprehension'<sup>318</sup> and enactment<sup>319</sup> of the avant-garde in order to activate past and present equally in the refiguration of the concept. His account of the IG itself does not differ from this.<sup>320</sup> Taking up Foster's criticism of Bürger's historical conception of a

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<sup>314</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 8ff.

<sup>315</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>316</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>317</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>318</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>319</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>320</sup> See Foster, „Survey“, in *Pop*, ed. by Mark Francis (London, New York; Phaidon Press, 2005) and *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*, *passim*.



linear perception art's history originating in the avant-gardes, I investigate the initiation of Pop in Britain as a historical moment of *Entkunstung*, expanding this criticism to the category of art as an intellectual sphere of production and thus to the implied separation of art's material and art's intellectual capacities.

In the face of the newly developed culture industry of the post-war era, *Entkunstung* is, I want to argue, first and foremost a praxis, an engagement in and commitment to popular culture from the fields of art. Imposing the avant-garde distinction between the intellectual capacity and its 'realization' in artistic materializations does an injustice to these practices first and foremost because they were practically counteracting it in being a fundamentally non-intellectual praxis of art. The IG did not, I want to argue, thrive for a new aesthetic theory, but rather for a recombination of those theories of science and design, which dominated in their own mass cultural present. Aesthetic theory here remains external as its value judgements here face no counterpart. Pop in the 50s was an attempted individual enactment of a collective industrial stance. It did not seek a new or revolutionized aesthetic but assumed practically that this new and revolutionized aesthetic was already in place: that the industrializations of science and design had taken over its realm. The theories to which they turned to were those of science, and it is through them that they looked back onto the art histories of their immediate past. An aesthetic theory of the avant-garde narrows this perspective down to the question of artistic or aesthetic innovation, where in fact innovation had been displaced. It had been relocated in the ad-man and his plasticized world. *Entkunstung* here means to confront the realm of art with the displacement of its modernist heritage, the heritage of the new, of innovation and of artistic originality.

Strategies of *Entkunstung* surrounding the Independent Group in the 1950s in Britain in my project stand exemplary for systematic attempts of artistic production to expand beyond itself without being any longer able to base their self-conception on the existence of any broader social movement. As Adorno has argued consistently, *Entkunstung* lies within the modern social identity of art itself and this remains vital also after this social identity has been fully relegated into being one branch of industrial cultural production after World War Two. Against Adorno I want explore this as a productive tendency, one which enables art to realize itself as an action rather than the representation of one and thus to participate in a wider sociality than that distinguished by the confines of art proper.

In their attempts to institute an *Entkunstung* out of dislocating scientific and other procedures into art, the IG in Britain was paralleled by cognate practices in Europe. It attempted the practical renewal of the art of *Informel* and in its *Entkunstungen* shared

affinities (and personal connections to) the early period of the Situationist International.<sup>321</sup> What I am trying to grasp in tracing *Entkunstung* in and out of art is a structural phenomenon of art's social and economic function throughout the last century, not moments of artistic innovation. I shall limit my project to the in-depth discussion of few specific tendencies, because I want to open up and explore this entanglement of art called *Entkunstung* in its clearest and most active examples.

#### 2.1.4 *Entkunstung* from the popular: the Post-war years

What today is Pop-culture, was, until the 1950s, the Culture Industry (...) and throughout the nineteenth century the mass-culture and its fixation towards technical progress.<sup>322</sup>

The historical shift from the mass culture of the nineteenth century to the fully industrialized culture industry of the early twentieth century could be described by the extension of what Karl Marx had called "primitive accumulation"<sup>323</sup> into the field of culture, and what I already hinted at with my reference to Sohn-Rethel's analysis: the separation of the producers of mass culture from their means of production. Where late feudal cultural production had been organized on the basis of serially produced individual products, produced in different versions according to social position of their buyers<sup>324</sup>, culture industry introduced culture as an industry, a systematic reorganization of the field of everyday life as a field of capitalized objects, commodities to be consumed. The distinction between necessities and luxuries, which separated classes as well as their desires in during the early 20th century was slowly replaced by an interweaving of the two, by the culturalisation of needs, as Adorno puts it.<sup>325</sup> And while cultural life had been fundamentally nationalized through the Second World War, it had also gained mass audiences and elaborated its means of production. Phenomena like radio and magazine culture and the invention of the television had opened up new branches of industry which slowly rose in Europe, due to the aftermaths of the war's destruction, but flourished in the US, where in the 1940s and 50s, popular culture was reinvented as a consumerist option,

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<sup>321</sup> See Stewart Home, *The Assault on Culture: Utopian Currents from Lettrism to Class War*. (Stirling: AK Press, 1991), p. 37.

<sup>322</sup> Roger Behrens, *Die Diktatur der Angepassten: Texte zur kritischen Theorie der Popkultur* (Bielefeld: Transcript-Verlag, 2003), p. 30.

<sup>323</sup> See Marx, *op. cit.*, pp. 741ff.

<sup>324</sup> See Frankfurter Kunstverein, *Populism* (Frankfurt am Main: Frankfurter Kunstverein, 2005).

<sup>325</sup> Adorno, „Thesen über Bedürfnis“, in *Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft Bd. 1* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1972), pp. 392-396.

as the garnishing of everyday life with endless ranges of expendable design objects. Reyner Banham, an architectural critic and historian and one of the early active members of the Independent Group in London,<sup>326</sup> assessed these objects and their intrinsic opposition to the modernist functionalism that had preceded them in numerous articles in the 1950s and 60s<sup>327</sup>. In *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age* (1960),<sup>328</sup> his PhD completed at the Courtauld Institute with Siegfried Gideon as supervisor, he opens his analysis of the architectural developments leading to the International Style of high modernism with a description of his own age, sharply distinct from that of the prewar era. What he sees he calls the „Jet Age, the Detergent Decade, the Second Industrial Revolution“ an era in which „the transformation of science and technology (...) [has] powerfully affected human life, and opened up new paths of choice in the ordering of our collective destiny. Our accession to almost unlimited supplies of energy is balanced against the possibility of making our planet uninhabitable, but this again is balanced, as we stand at the threshold of space, by the growing possibility of quitting our island earth and letting down roots elsewhere. Again, our explorations into the nature of information have made it possible, on the one hand, to set electronics to work to take the drudgery out of routine thought, and on the other hand to tailor human thinking to suit the needs of some narrow-minded power-élite.“<sup>329</sup> Banham holds on to the avant-gardists’ perspective of a collective destiny of mankind but sees this destiny framed by techno culture, not by social movements.

These attributes of the ‘Jet Age’ with its army of new objects of mass consumption marked the rise of Pop, of an expendable popular culture. In the 1950s, when Banham wrote his PhD and the IG formed and disbanded, this popular culture was only fully developed in the US, to which none of the IG’s members travelled before the second half of the 1950s.<sup>330</sup> But the documents of mass culture which were increasingly available in Britain carried with them a new perspective, a perspective which countered the nationalised aura of post-war culture in Britain<sup>331</sup> with the rise of a global commodity culture. Pop re-identified cultural products by their commodity status and thus their production was aligned to cater to the greatest possible number of buyers irrespective of their nationality.

This post-war reappearance of popular culture as an industrial and economic factor introduced ambivalent notions into the field of culture. It is often argued that the

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<sup>326</sup> See *As found: the discovery of the ordinary*, p. 29.

<sup>327</sup> See Banham, *op. cit.*

<sup>328</sup> See Banham, *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age*. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1980).

<sup>329</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>330</sup> See *As found: the discovery of the ordinary*, p. 11.

<sup>331</sup> See Massey, *op. cit.*, pp. 6ff.

economization of culture meant the ‘democratization’ in terms of values and access<sup>332</sup>, but the democratic qualities of consumerism are exhausted in a purely formal aspect, the indiscriminate access of all individuals to culture, restricted ‘only’ by monetary resources and not by social position. But the convergence of individual monetary and social resources, which had surely been more exclusionary in pre-capitalist culture, remained nevertheless powerful. What had changed fundamentally, however, was the status of high culture within this economized field of culture.

In terms of its production, the industrialization of culture did in fact lead to a sharper distinction between mass culture on the one hand and high culture on the other hand, as both distinguished themselves more and more as two separate fields of specialized production. Seriality became a characteristic of cultural mass production while singularity remained, as a principle, the traditional ‘value’ of high culture. Mass culture thus developed as a branch of industrial labour<sup>333</sup>, while artistic production became exposed to what Otto Karl Werckmeister has noted as the sudden simultaneity of art’s production and reception<sup>334</sup>. Art had to accommodate itself to being consumed--and worshipped--as one kind of commodity amongst others, one expendable product amongst others, one period style amongst others. The post-war era saw the rise of ‘contemporary art’<sup>335</sup> in opposition to ‘modern art’. This becomes perceivable most overtly in the distinction of American art of the 50s from the European avant-gardes of the previous centuries, in the formers’ self-institution and marketing. (figure 2.1.) But it also appears, and more interestingly for my attempt to sketch an art history of *Entkunstung*, in the turn of the IG (and, in a quite different manner, that of the Situationist International) towards popular culture as the legitimization of artistic practice in an age of industrial mass culture.<sup>336</sup> Both factions attempted to overcome the sharp distinction between popular and high culture – reintroduced by the reorganisation of their respective means of production – by questioning traditional artistic terms of production. Both introduced mass cultural imagery into their procedures as a central element, not merely as a supplement to painting, sculpture or drawing, but instead as a way of reorganising the process of its creation – as a means of *Entkunstung*, a radical reassessments of art’s points of departure. In the

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<sup>332</sup> See Wallis, *op. cit.*

<sup>333</sup> See Esther Leslie, *Hollywood Flatlands: Animation, Critical Theory and the Avant-Garde* (London: Verso, 2004). (for example the footnote on the strike at MGM).

<sup>334</sup> See Werckmeister, „Das Kunstwerk als Negation. Zur geschichtlichen Bestimmung der Kunsttheorie Theodor W. Adornos“, in *Ende der Ästhetik: Essays über Adorno, Bloch, Das gelbe Unterseeboot und Der eindimensionale Mensch* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1971), p. 11.

<sup>335</sup> Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), *passim*.

<sup>336</sup> See Roberto Ohrt, „How New York Stole the Idea of Abolishing Art“, in *Les Grands Spectacles – 120 Years of Art and Mass Culture*, ed. by Agnes Husslein-Arco (Salzburg: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2005), pp. 184-198.

following I will delineate different aspects of the IG's practices of *Entkunstung*, and I will also introduce some of the SI's strategies as a way of clarifying the different choices of means in relation to mass culture. Where the IG welcomed *Entkunstung* as a potentially progressive reorganisation of culture, the SI rejected its reproduction of reactionary schemes and its spectacular character<sup>337</sup>. For the latter, art and popular culture remained distinctive battlefields, while for the former both served as raw material, regardless of their social recognition or distinction. The SI explored the negative aspects of consumerism, the IG the specific qualities of its materials. But before discussing some of these strategies in more depth, I want to first return to the intrinsic ambivalences of the relations of high and popular culture, which emerged with the culturalisation of the everyday in the 1950s.

As I have already argued, on the one side the distinction between high and mass culture was enforced by the economization of both fields and the specialization of labour this implied. In the 1950s, this was perceived as an American phenomenon, and arguably in high culture it only became evident in the 1960s, when the art market emerged from its earlier systems of patronage and evolved into a branch of sales culture. With American Pop Art the terms of artistic production changed rapidly: not only did Andy Warhol turn to the 'factory' production of art, but he also turned this into a signature style, a trademark.<sup>338</sup> Pop Art subsequently introduced more and more reproducible formats into artistic production, which did not necessarily involve the enigmatic category of the ready-made but more often the production of multiples and limited editions. On the other side, this mutual economization and industrialization of both mass and high culture and their means of production rendered these two branches of cultural production more and more alike, united in their status as commodities and separated only by their unequal social status and reception. In this respect, the 'democratization' argument mentioned earlier might reappear in inverted form. The commodity form, the unitary formal identity of mass and high culture that was implemented subsequently through the standardization of divided labour in a globalised economy, rendered all objects alike 'democratically' electable by the act of purchase.

Within mass-produced culture, art became an economic sub-category of industrial production. As Adorno and Max Horkheimer pointed out in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment* of 1944/47 art had already become a branch of the culture industry, a special brand to cater a specific cultural need and market.<sup>339</sup> In this structure, high culture subsisted as a subdivision

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<sup>337</sup> See Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (New York: Zone Books, 1994).

<sup>338</sup> See Thomas Crow, *The Rise of the 60s: American and European Art in the Era of Dissent* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), p. 84f.

<sup>339</sup> See Adorno, Horkheimer, "Kulturindustrie, Aufklärung als Massenbetrug".

of the culture industry. In the 1950s and 60s, it remained the only frame of cultural practice in which the producers were still in possession of their means of production. As I have discussed in the introduction as well as in the first chapter, devoted to the Productivism of the Russian revolution, *Entkunstung* had, within a revolutionary situation, attempted to signify the overcoming of the division between artistic and cultural production. And as I have just described, this aim complicated itself through the industrialization of culture: this industrialization had been a goal the Productivists had sought for too, but *not* under the premises of further specializations of the labour force and a deepening of the division of labour, but rather the opposite. Productivism had assumed the industrialization of artistic production to culturalise it and thus to make it accessible and performable for all. Artistic production was to become an aspect of each occupation within modern industrial mass societies, in a sense a strategy to counter the division of labour, an attempt to introduce, or rather bring to light, artistic attributes in every kind of labour. The actual industrialization of culture throughout the first half of the 20th century—a development that could be recognised by the 1950s in the West—presented itself as an inversion of that idea. Culture here developed more and more into a highly differentiated and industrialized branch of mass production in which creative or artistic aspects were externalised into specific job descriptions such as consumer research or product design, the *Gestaltung* of the later being used to create brands, identifiable commodities. By no means do I want to argue that this inversion of progressive artistic practices of the first decades of the century, of the VCHUTEMAS's psychological deciphering of *Gestaltung*<sup>340</sup> or the Werkbund's debates around standard and individuation in design<sup>341</sup> was the 'visionary' strategy of individual pioneers, but rather that this reappearance of artistic de-hierarchisations as indistinct commodities was the result of the 'logical', or more precisely functional, development of an expanding economic structure, appropriating the world in all its aspects and forms of life.

The post-war economization of culture imposed the status of commodity onto all cultural products, but in doing so displaced their possibly 'artistic' individual quality from the point of production to that of consumption. Within the industrialization of popular culture lay the separation of design from its production and thus the industrial professionalisation of a field, which could support arguments as those, which were heard in the early Werkbund<sup>342</sup> about the status of design in relation to art. Products became designed to cater, support and

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<sup>340</sup> See Selim O. Chan-Magomedov, *VCHUTEMAS: Moscou 1920-1930*, translated from Russian by Joelle Aubert-Yong, Nikita Krivocheine, Jean-Claude Marcadé, under the direction of the author and of Arlette Barré-Despond in collaboration with Joelle Aubert-Yong (Editions du regard, Paris, 1990).

<sup>341</sup> Frederic J. Schwartz, *Der Werkbund: Ware und Zeichen 1900-1914* (Amsterdam: Verl. der Kunst, 1999).

<sup>342</sup> Frederic J. Schwartz, *The Werkbund -Design Theory and Mass Culture before the First World War*, 1996,

integrate the lifestyle of different social classes. Instead of Arvatov's dream of the productivist *abolition* of the everyday, the 50s envisaged the systematic *decoration* of the everyday, the stylization of life, the individual choreography of mass products. It is this individual deployment of mass commodities, which formed a central interest in many works, debates and documents surrounding both the London-based IG and the Europe-wide SI in the 1950s. And it is the inverted actualization of the productivist *Entkunstung* inherent in this development, which forms the core of my interest in these different versions of mass cultural invention.

As I have written, I want to focus in my search for artistic actualizations of *Entkunstung* in this economically expanded post-war cultural field on the activities of the Independent Group and touch on practices of groups associated with the Situationist International only as an aside. I shall do so for two main reasons: looking at the cultural practices which characterized the projects of the IG as a loose group as well as the individuals coming together in it, it becomes clear that the artistic and scientific media they had been trained in marked a point of departure which they sought to historicise radically. Their research, analysis and praxis was concerned with the social status of the classic artistic media in confrontation with the popular arts and sciences, with a constant praxis of actualization. The situation was different in the orbit of the SI, which rose in the 1950s from different groups, amongst them the International Lettristes and COBRA.<sup>343</sup> These figures, one might say (and this has been argued elsewhere<sup>344</sup>), chose an approach that was in many ways less affirmative of contemporaneous cultural productions. COBRA, the Lettriste International, the International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus and others groups that merged into the SI around 1957<sup>345</sup> had been attempting to drive the avant-gardist approaches to art performed by Dadaists and others to new extremes in confronting the industrialized culture and the war machine it belonged to<sup>346</sup> and refraining categorically from a positive approach to art. Their practices have been discussed widely for the anti-art, as well as for the progressive art, which came out of it<sup>347</sup>; however, few of the practices which became systematically important for the positioning of the SI as a political group organized around a Central Committee<sup>348</sup> went beyond mere negative gestures. As I have tried to argue previously (and as Adorno has

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<sup>343</sup> See Simon Ford, *The Situationist International: A User's Guide* (London: Black Dog, 2005).

<sup>344</sup> See Home, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

<sup>345</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 29f.

<sup>346</sup> See Roberto Ohrt, *Phantom Avantgarde*, p.9ff.

<sup>347</sup> Nina Zimmer, *SPUR und andere Künstlergruppen. Gemeinschaftsarbeit in der Kunst von 1960 zwischen Moskau und New York*, (OPPO: Berlin, 2002)

<sup>348</sup> See Ohrt, *op. cit.*, p. 222f.

described in the case of Neo-Dada<sup>349</sup>), anti-art does in fact represent a phenomenon of *Entkunstung* but only in performing art's categorical inversion. In this the traditional category of art is left fundamentally untouched, and its rejection has no significance for *Entkunstung* as it does not enhance, propose or anticipate a fundamentally altered form of cultural or artistic production but counteracts art in itself. One might argue that anti-art could represent *Entkunstung*, but only on the basis of its social hegemony. As Terry Eagleton has argued convincingly, Dada--and, I argue, also the SI--were based on the claim to cultural hegemony, and both collapsed with the appropriation of their tactics, means and visual signature by that very cultural hegemony.<sup>350</sup> Their *Entkunstung* remained marginal and turned into *Kunst*; it remained identifiable within the traditional terms, even if the prefixes became negative. This is, of course, not categorically true for all Dadaists, nor is it so for all associated of the SI. It simply reveals a tendency within this formation, something to which I will return in the discussion of the Gruppe SPUR in Munich and other, related attempts of artists in the SI to expand on art.

In consequence specifically to Debord's anti-artistic stance, however, artists were frequently expelled from the SI<sup>351</sup> as they were often torn between traditional practices of art (not least in order to support the SI financially<sup>352</sup>) or, as argued, a categorical neglect of art through political engagement, which represented much of Guy Debord's own position towards the field.

As I am trying to discuss *Entkunstung*, like Adorno, as a consequence of art itself, as its actualization, the re-appearance of Productivism within the architectural New Brutalism advocated by the Smithsons<sup>353</sup> or the Futurist design historiography advocated by Banham<sup>354</sup> seems to me to signify a more materially oriented examination of art's *Entkunstung* on the grounds of its historical development than the often merely instrumental approach to art as a political means perpetuated in the SI. In their short history of allowing for artistic practices, most artistically affiliated groups being expelled already between 1960 and 1961<sup>355</sup>, art functioned mostly as a tool of political action and was only rarely discussed, like it was in Productivism, as a political action in itself<sup>356</sup>. In that, the category of art was rejected but at the same time left relatively untouched, quite unlike the practices of the IG around the same

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<sup>349</sup> See Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie*, p. 230.

<sup>350</sup> Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1990), p. 391f.

<sup>351</sup> See Ohrt, *op. cit.*, pp. 249ff.

<sup>352</sup> See Ohrt, *op. cit.*, p. 188.

<sup>353</sup> See *The Independent Group: Post-war Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty*, p. 203ff.

<sup>354</sup> See Banham, *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age*, pp. 99ff.

<sup>355</sup> See Roberto Ohrt, *op. cit.*

<sup>356</sup> Again, it is exactly the exception from this rule, like f.e. the SPUR, which I will come back to later in this chapter.



time, which, even though much less explicitly political in articulation, re-approached art from its increasing importance in the economization of everyday culture. Thus, my introductory assumption--that the IG in many ways turned towards practices much more affirmative of their contemporary culture than the SI—is not meant by any means to be a criticism of their significance with regard to *Entkunstung*. On the contrary: I would want to argue (and will do so in greater depth later in this chapter) that their affirmations treated the world ‘as found’, a stance which arguably proposes an actualization of Productivism’s approximations of the everyday on the one hand, and is fundamentally divided from it by the radically different sociality both adopted their practices to on the other. Both Productivism and the practices surrounding the IG are affirmative in their choice of materials, media, and social positioning, and it is only by this affirmation, by this implication of the world ‘as found’ as the foundation of their practices, that they expand *Entkunstung* as a productive stance, as an artistic production to end art.

As I am discussing it here, *Entkunstung* is not a notion of anti-art, as Dadaism and the SI in many ways were. Even though personal and material affinities closely connected some artists active in Russian Productivism to Dada, the social perspective on art differed radically between the Russian revolutionary artists and their sympathetic peers in the West. Productivism rose from the revolutionary situation in Russia and was, if not in accordance with the party programme of the Bolshevik state, at least enabled by it. The *Entkunstung* it entailed was thinkable only within the general reorganization of labour. And this attempt to dissolve artistic into reproductive work could not be envisaged as a voluntaristic artistic action alone. Adorno wrongly saw Dada as an act of *Entkunstung* because he identified it as a symptom of disintegration, an externalization of art, its *Verfransung*.<sup>357</sup> From the perspective of the Russian debates around art in the early 1920s however, Dadaist Collages were just, as Nikolai Tarabukin famously put it, ‘another stage of painting’<sup>358</sup>.

After the Second World War, the emancipatory perspective of the Russian Revolution had not only long been lost, it had been overshadowed by the experiences of fascism in Europe and Japan, National Socialism in Germany, Stalinism in Russia and the ending of the war through the atomic bomb. The voluntaristic energies of the attempted revolutions in- and outside of art had ceased to exist and art returned as a site of mourning rather than one of construction. I am not presenting this as a general evaluation of post-war artistic production,

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<sup>357</sup> See Adorno, „Die Kunst und die Künste“, in *Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970), p. 450.

<sup>358</sup> See Charlotte Benton, Stephen Bayley. *From Easel to Machine: The Reconstruction of Life Through Art and Technology* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1976) and Maria Gough, *The Artist As Producer: Russian Constructivism in Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005)

but as one of the challenges to the actualizations of models of *Entkunstung* in this particular historic situation, one in which the social basis of *Entkunstung* had vanished because the emancipatory forces with which it had risen in alliance had been defeated, obscured or had turned against themselves. After the Second World War, I want to argue, *Entkunstung* thus did not lie in those artistic practices, which sought the return of an avant-garde, of artistic and social stability. The nostalgia for the avant-gardes and vanguards of the beginning of the century turned into a canonizing tendency, a reinitiation of pre-war cultural history as a form of purposeful amnesia.

### 2.2.1 Assembling the Independent Group

The diverse practices of the Independent Group, which convened around the ICA in London for only a few years after 1952<sup>359</sup>, mark a central position for me in considering the actualizations of *Entkunstung* in the aftermath of the Second World War in their adequation of artistic production to the reconstruction of popular mass culture through the industrial advances of war machinery. As Alison and Peter Smithson argued enigmatically:

We cannot ignore the fact that one of the traditional functions of fine art, the definition of what is fine and desirable for the ruling class, and therefore ultimately that which is desired by all society, has now been taken over by the ad-man.<sup>360</sup>

This stance beyond culture with an upper-case ‘C’<sup>361</sup> turned towards a then only vaguely defined field of popular culture in Britain. Reyner Banham describes how, when he held a talk in the ICA about the relation of Pop and “the fine art cultures”, the hostile reactions from the audience with which he was confronted with, questioned whether Pop actually had an intelligible structure at all.<sup>362</sup> What was thus at stake was the delineation of a field of legitimate artistic and critical debate, one that had become particularly complicated after the war. Banham describes how the distribution of Pop had preceded the war in the UK in, for example, the working-classes’ taste for American pulp literature and magazines and was complicated after it by the developing politics of the Cold War. In the 1950s, when the

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<sup>359</sup> See Massey, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

<sup>360</sup> See Steven H. Madoff, *Pop Art: A Critical History*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997) p. 3.

<sup>361</sup> See Banham, *Design by Choice: Ideas in Architecture*, ed. by Penny Sparke (London: Academy Ed..1981).

<sup>362</sup> See Massey, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

Smithsons, Banham, Lawrence Alloway, Magda Cordell, Nigel Henderson, Richard Hamilton, John McHale, Eduardo Paolozzi, Toni del Renzio, William Turnbull and others formed the changing group of individuals which came to known as the ICA's Independent Group, the affirmation of popular culture as a sophisticated field of production on the one hand, and its implications of 'Americanness' on the other, not only alienated the supporters of the fine art cultures but also posed a political problem. As Banham explained retrospectively, seeing oneself on the Left (as he and others in the Group did) and at the same time advocating pop culture as the basis of this cultural stance, seemed atavistic<sup>363</sup>. But, as the Smithsons make tangible in the statement quoted above, their turn to the popular was a question of material production, not one of cultural taste. It was in fact the relevance of exactly this taste that had vanished and had surrendered to the ad-man and it was their contempt for this taste that alienated the IG even from their benefactors at the ICA.

With their claim for the accountability and intelligibility of popular culture, the IG defined their own approach in opposition not only to contemporaneous European and American theorists and critics of modernity like Adorno or Greenberg, but also, and more importantly, to the very institution they were domiciled in, the ICA in London. This pioneering institution for the contemporary arts in the UK had been called into formation as early as 1946 by Roland Penrose, Herbert Read and E.L.T. Mesens through the publication of a letter inviting those interested in the inception of a Museum of Modern Art in London to a meeting.<sup>364</sup> Their identification of modern and contemporary art was a common, if not even progressively intended gesture. The ICA's founders tried to establish a European avant-gardism, inspired by the Surrealism they were themselves tied to, as the cornerstone of post-war British art against. In that they were countering the rising tide of a more craft-inspired and figurative national culture that was being nurtured by the state<sup>365</sup>. However, this identification came to be the central point of contention between the ICA and the prospective members of the IG. The latter, as expressed in the Smithsons' quote above, argued for a reconsideration of all arts with regards to the economization of culture, its reorganization in the terms of consumerism. In the same text, they drew a distinction between the epigones of high modernist architecture, which preceded them, and themselves:

Gropius wrote a book on grain silos,  
Le Corbusier one on aeroplanes,  
And Charlotte Perriand brought a new  
object to the office every morning;

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<sup>363</sup> Ibid.

<sup>364</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 232.

<sup>365</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 13.

But today we collect ads.<sup>366</sup>  
For Gropius, agriculture still remained the point of reference within society's reproductive architecture; Le Corbusier enacted what the Soviets had termed 'electrification'; Perriand incorporated the 'reism' which Tarabukin and Arvatov had tried to enact in Russian Productivism--but the Smithsons and their collaborators were referred back to a society unified, as they saw it, by relentless processes of self-representation<sup>367</sup>, by the exact opposite of what Tatlin in 1915 had suggested when he argued to "mistrust the eye"<sup>368</sup>. In many of their joint actions, exhibitions and projects, the IG suggested, on the contrary, following the eye and expanding its receptive qualities in relation to contemporary mass media. This, they thought, would, in second step, allow for a view back onto mass media, concentrating on its underlying materialities, non-simultaneities and archaeologies. Nigel Henderson's studies of London East End street life. (figure 2.2./2.3.) And the Smithson's interventions in the CIAM, (figure 2.4.) their contributions to Team10<sup>369</sup>, their plea for an adaptation of mass housing to the everyday needs of existing social lives<sup>370</sup> – all this is directly related to Reyner Banham's argument for the historical relevance of car, bicycle and vacuum cleaner designs. The IG combined a material archaeology of their present with an indiscriminate cultural analysis of it. It is this understanding of the world 'as found', as raw material, which makes them comprehensible within the framework of the *Entkünstung* of art. *Entkünstung* returns here in an actualized form. It signifies no longer the artistic choice of a revolutionary political stance but the attempt to retain contemporaneity within artistic production – at the expense of inherited cultural distinctions in this field.

Having dedicated the first chapter of this text to a period of over ten years in which a vast number of artistic producers, agitators, writers and others engaged in the revolutionary *Entkünstung* of art, it might seem surprising to seek the actualization of those considerably powerful forces in the actions of a group of hardly ten individuals, whose organizational form was that of a loose working group and whose ambitions were hardly in contradiction with their individual stances as artistic producers in a fully developed capitalist economy. The significance of the IG for the question of actualizations of *Entkünstung* is not a matter of their immediate social impact, but, as I will try to establish in this chapter, the fact that, like the Productivismists before them, they considered all culture as raw material from which potential utilities could be reconstructed beyond its social status. In the case of the IG these

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<sup>366</sup> Madoff, *op.cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>367</sup> See Schregenberger, Lichtenstein, *op. cit.*, p. 157.

<sup>368</sup> Tatlin, *op. cit.*, p. 205.

<sup>369</sup> See Team 10, *op. cit.*

<sup>370</sup> *Ibid.*

considerations were embedded in the aftermath of the war, the nationalization of culture resulting from it and the economization prefiguring its structure.

Nevertheless the IG's stance was by no means resigned or fatalistic, even though *Entkünstung* here was not the revolutionary artistic move out of art, as it had been the case in Productivism, but rather the implication of art's social dislocation after the Second World War in their own artistic praxis. *Entkünstung* here became a reconciliation of art with that very structure of everyday life, which the revolutionary artistic producers before the Second World War (at this point part of the past, an historical reference) had failed to dominate. The Russian Productivists, the Dessau Bauhaus, the agitational works of John Heartfield had indeed, introduced subsequently new standards to the visualization of the everyday. Only that the consciousness they had all hoped to raise in this *Gestaltung* had not been achieved. Rather their 'styles' now filtered into the decoration and aesthetization of the everyday.<sup>371</sup> As Lawrence Alloway, another member of the IG, argued, in the late 1950s, even though the popular arts offer sense, a meaningful relation between their products, and even a continuation of traditional values within them, this sense is mostly based on schemes of repetition, of habituation and redundancy<sup>372</sup>, and thus offer lines of affirmation but no individual experience. But rather than rejecting the culture that forms the everyday of the majority of all people, as Greenberg did in his essay 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch'<sup>373</sup>, which Alloway criticized here explicitly, one should, he argues, as many of the practices surrounding the IG suggested, treat this newly universalized popular culture as the basic form with which to enhance contemporary artistic production. As Alloway puts it, the "rejection of the mass produced arts is not, as critics think, a defence of culture but an attack on it."<sup>374</sup> What was faced here was a situation contrary to the one the Russian Productivists were hoping to dominate. This was not a society in turmoil, attempting to reconcile its terms of labour in which art could hope to intervene; instead it was a society, which had consolidated its terms of labour through the war and expanded them into the field of culture.

In contrast to the Russian Productivists whose attempts to *Entkünstung* I discussed in the first chapter, the members of the IG neither intended to put an end to art, nor were they in a social position to do so, but in fact proceeded with their work as artists, art historians, photographers and architects during their mutual practices in the IG and outside of it. For them, the professions were not the battlegrounds, but rather the basis of a deconstruction of

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<sup>371</sup> Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1990), p. 366f.

<sup>372</sup> See Madoff, *op. cit.*, p. 7ff.

<sup>373</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>374</sup> See *ibid.* p. 9.

their implications, assumptions and social self-evaluation<sup>375</sup>. Productivism had meant to desert art because there seemed to be the possibility of an alternative way into artistic production. And even here, one must say that its most prominent proponents, above all Vladimir Tatlin, returned to more traditional artistic forms of practice in the 1930s, when the relative openness of the early revolutionary Soviet Union had vanished under the command of the CPSU. Thus *Entkunstung*, as I have tried to argue, was never a question of anti-art, as the most fundamental characteristic of *Entkunstung* is not the rejection of art but the promotion of its immanent dissolution. *Entkunstung* is a practice out of art, the tracing of its immanent laws of motion, which, as Adorno has convincingly argued, consist in the permanent dissolution of art, in the constant re-invocation of its antagonistic character within capitalist economies. The practices and products of these dissolutions might still figure as art, as in the case of most of the IG's works and projects, but what makes them nevertheless central for an art history of the end of art is their significance for making explicit art's entanglement in social and cultural processes and accounting for the inherent effects those have on the 'possibility' of art in that given situation. The IG was performing art as a state of insignificance, which they lend significance to in their reformulations of the popular (arts) within them.

In 1952 the IG was formed mainly as a discussion group and exhibition committee within the early ICA, and it disbanded already around 1956. As I mentioned above, the ICA saw itself as the heir of the modern, European, non-figurative, Surrealist tradition, and from 1948 onwards, later members of the IG such as Hamilton, Henderson and Paolozzi entered to help with the staging of exhibitions and the design of printed material. Some of them, like Paolozzi and Henderson, had strong ties to the French Surrealist tradition themselves<sup>376</sup>; others, like Banham or the Smithsons, were more engaged in contesting the heritages of Functionalism in architecture (the Smithsons) or Futurism (Banham). The IG was thus not an attempt to collectivize after the model of the pre-war avant-garde. Their affinities and shared interests lay instead in a change of perspective in relation to artistic as well as other cultural products. What had always clearly divided the arts from the popular culture of their times was not only their social distinction by affiliation, but much more pragmatically the terms of production and labour involved in the process of artistic creation. This was still the case after the Second World War, but the members of the IG came to discuss this distinction as a phenomenon of art's social obsolescence. For them, modern art could only be contemporary if

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<sup>375</sup> See *Team 10, op. cit.*

<sup>376</sup> See Massey, *op. cit.*, p. 6f.

it reached over to those branches of production which now dominated the everyday: the natural and mechanical sciences.<sup>377</sup>

From this assumption they created a substantial change of perspective towards the relation of art and popular culture, a perspective that, just as Arvatov's and Tarabukin's approach thirty years earlier, implied the application of scientific methodologies and gestures to art. But in the IG's case this utilization of scientific means of analysis and presentation was not meant to push for art's own scientification, its transformation into a determinable aspect of general labour. After recent history had demonstrated the reduction of human lives to standardized, quantifiable units of war, the strictly utilitarian objectifications, which had been implied in many of Productivism's *Entkunstungen* were no longer desirable projections. They had been realized under opposite signs. The turn towards scientific methodologies by different members of the IG introduced forms of visual and textual scientific standardizations to emphasize the intrinsic affinity of artistic, popular and scientific imagery. In a historical moment in which the terms of production dominated by the national consolidation of Britain after the economic hardship of the war and without a social movement significantly driving towards a general reorganization of society's reproduction, the national demands on art were reinforced: artists in the UK found themselves in a political position in which they were asked for an artistic commitment to the task of national consolidation, for the fulfilment of culture's affirmative and representative function in society.<sup>378</sup> Consequently, in this historical moment art and popular culture were not in fact not sharply distinguished by their social functions, as the representative functions both had to fulfil converged largely, as Anne Massey argues in her discussion of the 1951 Festival of Britain, where she describes the Arts Council of Great Britain and Council of Industrial Design's<sup>379</sup> efforts to coerce contributing artists into an anti-modern and restorative recreation of national cultural traditions in a contemporary style. The discourses and projects around the IG, be it exhibitions they staged at the ICA, like *The Parallel of Art and Life* in 1953,<sup>380</sup> (figure 2.5./2.6./2.7.) the participation of a large group of its members in *This is Tomorrow* at Whitechapel Art Gallery at 1956<sup>381</sup> (figure 2.8./2.9./2.10.) or the ongoing seminar series they organized at the ICA<sup>382</sup> presenting their mutual investigations, affirmed this parallelism of the popular and the fine arts. The recreation of

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<sup>377</sup> David Robbins, "The Independent Group: Forerunners of Postmodernism?", in: id. (Ed.), *The Independent Group: Post-war Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty*. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), pp. 238f.

<sup>378</sup> See Massey, *op. cit.*, pp. 8f.

<sup>379</sup> See Massey, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

<sup>380</sup> See Institute of Contemporary Arts (London, England). *Parallel of Life and Art: Catalogue of the Exhibition* (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1953).

<sup>381</sup> See Whitechapel Art Gallery. *This Is Tomorrow* (London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 1956).

<sup>382</sup> See Massey, *op. cit.*, pp. 139ff.

visual cultures after the Second World War through popular imagery offered to them not only a break with the conventional limitations of the singular arts but also a possible continuation of a practice they cherished, as argued before, in the works of Laszlo Mohly-Nagy's *Visions in Motion* and *The New Vision* (1931) Amedée Ozanfant's *Foundations of Modern Art* (1942) and Sigfried Giedion's *Mechanization Takes Command* (1947).<sup>383</sup> The IG, however, extended their published image collections, which offered archives of the contemporary in its present and archeological forms, into an actual levelling of art works with cultural artefacts in space. In their exhibitions the hierarchies of vision were not maintained, neither by size nor by material or form of display. Examples of this range from Hamilton's scientifically oriented *Growth & Form* (1951)<sup>384</sup> and *Man, Machine and Motion* (1955)<sup>385</sup> (figure 2.11.) to Paolozzi, Henderson and the Smithsons' *Parallel of Art and Life* (1953), which expanded the concept of an all-over visual environment beyond art, science, magazine culture and text, towards the different contributions of Hamilton, McHale and John Voelckers, Theo Crosby, Germano Facetti, Turnbull and Edwards Wright and Henderson, Paolozzi and the Smithsons and Lawrence Alloway, Geoffrey Holroyd and Toni de Renzio to the Whitechapel Gallery's now famous exhibition *This is Tomorrow* in 1956<sup>386</sup>. In each case, though, as I will come back to, the exhibitions radically differed, the installations deprived, as it were, the artworks exhibited of the privilege of being hung as individual artefacts. The members of the IG employed methodologies of advertising, archaeology and most prominently methods of scientific photography, the images, whether artworks or not, thus appearing as visual references put on display to make artistic production face its counterpart, the ad-man and the scientist, represented through the multiple lenses and close-ups of photography.

### 2.2.2 Growth and Form

Richard Hamilton's exhibition project *Growth & Form*, staged at the ICA in 1951, (figure 2.12.) was the earliest of this kind, and in many ways the most consistent aesthetic scientific example of such a practice within the context of the ICA and/or the IG. It translated

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<sup>383</sup> See Brian Wallis, *op. cit.*

<sup>384</sup> See Massey, *op. cit.*, and Isabelle Moffat, "'A Horror of Abstract Thought': Postwar Britain and Hamilton's 1951 'Growth and Form' Exhibition" October, Vol. 94, The Independent Group (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2000), pp. 89-112

<sup>385</sup> See *The Independent Group: Post-war Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty*, p. 123.

<sup>386</sup> See *The Independent Group: Post-war Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty*. P. 135ff. I am not interested in „An Exhibit“ because it touches more upon Hamilton's, Alloway's and Victor Pasmore's immanent discouragements of painting than on the practices I am concentrating on in my project.



D'Arcy Wentworth-Thompson's book of the same name, published in 1917,<sup>387</sup> into an exhibition and, as I will come back to later, explicitly used Wentworth-Thompson's fundamental contestations of developmental theories of biology to present a grid of rooms in which the spectator had to accustom his visual perception to a neither narrative nor classically figurative or abstract structure of monstrous x-rays, photographs of all kinds (figure 2.13.) and, in their midst, artworks, hung just as all others objects of the show within a grid and represented, just as all the objects of the show, mostly as photographic reproductions.

When Richard Hamilton in 1949 first proposed an exhibition for the 1951 Festival of Britain to the ICA's board, he proposed a project that was entirely based on challenging the standards and presuppositions of the contemporary characteristics of photographic self-recognition present in popular magazine culture.<sup>388</sup> Like other exhibitions organized by members of the IG afterwards, *Growth & Form*, clearly negated artistic production and labour as a limited branch of reproduction and instead re-introduced the visual character of a much more general human experience, staging interiors which put habits of perception under attack. In Hamilton's *Growth & Form* what was at stake was not the staging of art's contemporary powers but a test to the visual perception of its viewers. The three-dimensional grid that segmented the ICA's space was as much an exhibit itself as the images mounted in its frames.

*Growth & Form* was, as mentioned, based on D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson's book of the same title, first published in 1917.<sup>389</sup> In it, Thompson had attempted to criticise scientific biology for underestimating the role of physics and mechanics as determining factors of form and structure of living organisms. Thompson, himself a mathematician, described his 1,116-page, extensively illustrated compendium as "all preface"<sup>390</sup>. He did not propose any central discovery or thesis, but elaborated on numerous analogies between and repetitions of biological forms and physicists' constructions. He sought to question the assumption of any kind of teleological cause of evolution in nature and to suggest the dependency of evolution on accidental and ephemeral factors, on leaps in construction. In the seventh chapter of *Growth & Form*, entitled 'The Comparison of Related Forms', Thompson translated the alterations between related animal species into mathematical transformations and thus sought to demonstrate the arbitrariness and concurrent power of construction as its dependency on the interest by which it is employed.

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<sup>387</sup> See D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson, *On Growth and Form* (Cambridge: University press, 1942).

<sup>388</sup> See Isabelle Moffat, "A Horror of Abstract Thought": Post-war Britain and Hamilton's 1951 Growth and Form Exhibition". *October*. no. 94, pp. 90f.

<sup>389</sup> See Thompson, *op. cit.*

<sup>390</sup> Thompson, *op.cit.* p.7.

Hamilton's exhibition closely followed Wentworth Thompson's book. It was staged in seventeen different compartments, each dedicated to one of Thompson's chapters, and, like the book, it offered no linear narrative as a guide through the environment. In the dense exhibition space, a three-dimensional grid of frames was mounted, which both structured the room into separated 'chapters' and at the same time was expanded by the actual exhibits. All images were presented in photographs, whether x-ray exposures of a man's hand or paintings by, for example, Hamilton himself or by later IG member Eduardo Paolozzi. (figure 2.14.) Micro-organisms were expanded into a multiple of their actual size and mounted on either the ceiling or the walls, while others were fit into the grid at the size of actual paintings.<sup>391</sup> There was no concession to a contemplative form of reception. No captions helped to reinstall the safeguarding hierarchies of art's conventional stylized perception. The viewer was caught between micro-organisms and 'genuinely' artistic productions.

The exhibition converted Wentworth Thompson's exemplary anthology of living form into an exhibition environment. (figure 2.15./2.16.) Here, the viewer's sense of orientation was under attack. Hamilton's dense grid of enlarged microscopic images and photographically reproduced art works were, as Isabell Moffat argues, modelled after the numerous science exhibitions of its time.<sup>392</sup> It was not only the strategies of artistic self-representation but also those of scientific truthfulness, which came under attack here. Hamilton practically erased distinctions: not only those between high art and popular culture but, in leaving the sphere of art altogether, those which separated artistic and scientific approaches to the world. The specialization of professions, which had been a major factor of the shift from mass culture to culture industry and which had been 'naturalized' through the Second World War, was presented here as a mere construction of authority which existed in no essential relation to its material. Hamilton utilized Wentworth Thompson's undermining of logical sense in natural evolution to open a cleavage within the history of natural development. He questioned the sensibility of any form of hierarchical order. In *Growth & Form*, the historical narrative of evolution and with it the legitimacy of its contemporary status was fundamentally challenged. Hamilton installed a perceptual tabula rasa. The book published with the exhibition was, logically, a textbook: *Aspects of Form – a symposium on form in nature and art*<sup>393</sup>, edited by Lancelot Law Whyte. It brought together essays by physicists, biologists, a crystallographer, an embryologist, a zoologist, a psychologist and one

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<sup>391</sup> See Moffat, *op.cit.* pp. 102f.

<sup>392</sup> See Moffat, *op.cit.* pp. 94f.

<sup>393</sup> Lancelot Law Whyte (Ed.), *Aspects of Form. A Symposium on Form in Nature and Art.* (London: Lund Humphries, 1951).

art historian, Ernst Gombrich. In *Growth & Form* art was not chosen as a social sphere that offered a new form of production, but one which offered a lever to put the construction of the post-war society as such into question. The *Entkunstung* emanating from *Growth & Form* lay in refusing to make sense, because there was no sense to be affirmed, apart from that which popular culture had on offer. In staging the distortion of scientific appropriations of nature in *Growth & Form*, Hamilton cleared the way for introducing those means, the sense of which was strictly earthly: those of visual production from the standpoint of its reproductive medium, photography. From this science to that of popular culture, what was mainly under attack was a sense of hierarchy of visual as well as intellectual provenance. *Growth & Form* was, so to say, the first step. It represented an emancipation from historical evolution, the only way to flee what Adorno had named the “negative teleology”<sup>394</sup> of the new arts, in a historical moment in which voluntarist actions were not at stake. *Growth & Form*, like many subsequent productions from within the IG, sought to clear the ground for an “expendable aesthetic” (Richard Hamilton), which defined the rise of Pop. The IG’s affirmation of it lies in their rejection of historical knowledge as a determining factor and its replacement by material studies which do not discriminate between historical and contemporary materials but set them all in line to reinvent a culture of specificity, as Alison and Peter Smithson have put it<sup>395</sup>, a culture that reinvestigates each step, giving up on all presupposed continuities. Cutting and pasting historical and contemporary cultural productions alike, this group of architects, designers, artists, critics and historians opened up a new perspective on the production of culture, founding it, like Arvatov and Tarabukin had in their promotions of Productivism, on art’s, or more specifically aesthetics’ foundation in the sciences. From this scrutinizing of the materials of post-war culture, they explored projections of a new understanding of artistic production. *Entkunstung* here was more a lever more to approach art anew than an attempt to exile it. Art’s end was presupposed, it seems.

What the IG practiced in their early attempts could be called a ‘productivism of second nature’, an *Entkunstung* of art which no longer is driven by the urge to industrialize nature, but which absurdly picks up the results of industrialized nature to construct from there, to assemble future worlds in the absurd recombination of what industrialized mass culture offers in images and structure, not reaching for the escapism of an imagined lost purity, but for art’s literacy in consumer culture, seeking for an anthropological core in commodity culture, a place from which to start production anew.

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<sup>394</sup> Adorno, “Die Kunst und die Künste”, p. 449.

<sup>395</sup> See *As found: the discovery of the ordinary*, p. 41.

### 2.2.3 The Parallel of Life and Art

To map out in a bit more detail the traces of *Entkunstung* within the IG's practice in relation to their constant confluences of popular and other imagery, I want to discuss another, later exhibition realised by members of the IG: *Parallel of Life and Art*, held at the ICA in the autumn of 1953 and jointly planned and staged by Edoardo Paolozzi, Nigel Henderson and Alison and Peter Smithson. The exhibition emerged from the discussions in the group around their first series of nine members' seminars at the ICA entitled *Aesthetic Problems of Contemporary Art* which started in October with a presentation by Reyner Banham entitled "The Impact of Technology"<sup>396</sup>. Here, as in *Growth and Form*, the subject was the possible and factual influences on recent scientific developments on contemporary art and the possibility of a post-war aesthetic. In the course of this lecture series, Hamilton spoke on form, Alloway on the human image, Turnbull and Fello Atkinson on new concepts of space, and Banham closed the series with a talk on 'art in the fifties', which was announced to defy the idea of a 'period style'.<sup>397</sup> However, none of the exhibition's initiators gave a talk here. Their aim had been to stage the convergences between scientific developments and narrations in the different arts on the basis of visual affinities and material overlappings. The list of exhibited works expanded over a vast number of fields, bringing together scientific imagery, anthropological sources, technological documentations and artistic and cultural artefacts of the last 2000 years.<sup>398</sup> Though staged together in one space (the ICA's members' room, which also hosted the lecture series of the IG later that same year), the exhibition itself consisted of 122 pieces, subdivided into 18 categories, namely anatomy, architecture, art, calligraphy, date 1901, landscape, movement, nature, primitive, scale of man, stress, stress structure, football, science fiction, medicine, geology, metal and ceramic.<sup>399</sup> All exhibits were grainy photographic reproductions of the original visual sources mounted on cardboard and formed into a spatial installation, a room of images hanging from the ceiling, fixed to it, leaned against the walls, fixed to them and subdividing the room into hanging cabinets of imagery. In this the staging in structure was not unlike *Growth & Form*, however Hamilton's earlier exhibition resembled the science fairs of its times much more in its spatially formed grid of diffuse organic forms, whereas the *Parallel of Life and Art* show mounted its imagery

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<sup>396</sup> See Massey, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

<sup>397</sup> Ibid.

<sup>398</sup> See *As found: the discovery of the ordinary*. List of exhibited works, p. 11ff.

<sup>399</sup> See *The Independent Group: Post-war Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty*, p. 124ff.

unpretentiously on the wall, hung it from the ceilings and positioned it on the ground. Its grid was informal and not fully symmetrical, forming rather a confusion of impressions than a cabinet of science.

The eighteen categories did not determine the groupings of the images but rather their listing on the exhibition leaflet, which guided visitors through the show by the numbers, which attached to each board on the picture surface. *Parallel of Life and Art* was by no means an art exhibition, neither was it one of science: life came first in every respect. Not only was the format of the exhibition, the cardboard-mounted visualizations, not indebted to any appropriate representation of the artistic qualities of the imagery—to begin with, the photographs were all in black and white—but the artistic relevance of the pieces was not the criteria of their inclusion. The sources, non-homogeneous, or as Reyner Banham later called it “largely inclusive”<sup>400</sup>, were brought together by the four initiators (as Alison and Peter Smithson described it in notes on the editing process) in order to confront a crisis in signification, which, after the aftermaths of high modernism, had left artistic producers in a wasteland of ruins.<sup>401</sup> Even though the exhibition was staged as a “manifesto”<sup>402</sup>, it did not propose a grand thesis or gesture but an archeological reconstruction of the present from its prehistory. The exhibition catalogue’s cover was an x-ray image of a man shaving with an electronic razor, taken from Laszlo Moholy-Nagy’s posthumously published *Vision in Motion* (1947), (figure 2.17.) and the leaflet for the exhibition opened with, amongst other quotes, one from Charles Baudelaire announcing that “One must be willing to dream and one must know how”<sup>403</sup>. *Parallel of Life and Art* quoted modernism as well as prehistory in the context of modern technologies and sciences. Art here was rethought as a possibly scientific practice emanating from all kinds of imagery, and the exhibition did not anticipate this assumption but assembled its visual sources. As the Smithson’s argued later, *Parallel of Life and Art* rejected the simulated, such as the new plastics of the period, and instead argued for the reinitiation of the materials through technology<sup>404</sup>. In that, *Parallel of Life and Art* came close to Tatlin’s attempted infiltration of *Art into Life* but only in accounting for the fact that now, life came first and art had to revise itself in accordance to it. Surely Tatlin would have subscribed to the latter, but for his constructions the capacity of artistic production to expand had not been caricatured by the industrialized, mass cultural realisation of this expansion as consumerism. *Entkunstung* here is no longer the voluntaristic initiative of the artist who tries to push art

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<sup>400</sup> Julian Cooper, and Reyner Banham. *Fathers of Pop*. (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1979).

<sup>401</sup> See „Documents 53“ in *As found: the discovery of the ordinary*, p. 38f.

<sup>402</sup> Ibid.

<sup>403</sup> *The Independent Group: Post-war Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty*, p. 124.

<sup>404</sup> See *As found: the discovery of the ordinary*, pp. 40f.

beyond its confined realms of distinguished culture into that of reproduction and seriality, but rather a process, which had already happened. The result of this unrecognised process was investigated by the IG. *Parallel of Life and Art* dealt with this contested state of art after the war not in exhibiting its most advanced examples, but in performing the cornerstones of its revised activity. *Parallel of Life and Art* performed within a situation, which its organisers perceived as the factual *Entkunstung* of art, art's search for a new function and significance within the post-war ruins. *Entkunstung* was the status of production which the IG confronted as a productive starting point for an expandable understanding of culture. (figure 2.18.)

The 122 exhibits of *Parallel of Life and Art* did not lay out any field in depth but rather presented loose groupings of visual impressions which had gained significance for their initiators, or, as the Smithsons more accurately called them, editors<sup>405</sup>, in browsing through scientific magazines and other publications of their time. Accounts of Paolozzi's role in it, like that of Reyner Banham, stressed the familiarity of the show to *art brut*, to which Paolozzi's artistic work was indebted, but neither was any other than Paolozzi's work of that kind integrated in the show, nor was *art brut*'s usage of paint as material, as gestural means reflected here. The photographic core of the exhibition instead turned *art brut*'s devastating account of the status of man into the profoundly non-figurative collection of source materials for a new status of man.<sup>406</sup> The question of figuration is worth mentioning in this respect, not so much because of the artistic debates around its opposition to abstraction which were raging in Britain and elsewhere in Europe at that time,<sup>407</sup> but because in *Parallel of Life and Art* abstraction no longer seemed to be the counterpart of figuration. The imagery displayed here demonstrated the profoundly non-figurative core of all figuration, the inherent abstraction of the social relations it prefigured. For this, the over-representation of Paul Klee's work in the exhibition is quite significant.<sup>408</sup> There were four of his drawings included as photographic reprints in the show, and their childlike and stripped-down qualities, which were in one case eventually combined with a child's drawing, mirrored the assumption of the exhibition that the x-rays of insects, plants, the archaeological accounts of antecedent cultures were all aligning in a diverse image of man, an anthropomorphic and pre-historic structure which was not idealized or desired but rather re-assembled within the territory of technology. In that, heroic figures of high art such Jackson Pollock, who was also represented in the show,

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<sup>405</sup> Ibid. p. 41f.

<sup>406</sup> Foster, *Art Since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism*, p. 339.

<sup>407</sup> See Massey, *op. cit.*, p. 20, and *Das Menschenbild in unserer Zeit*.

<sup>408</sup> See *The Independent Group: Post-war Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty*, p. 127.

became incorporated into a horizon of meaning alien to that of their critical, art historical acclaim at the time. Here, Pollock was a performer of material culture. (figure 2.18)

Pollock had been exhibited in the ICA already in an exhibition in early 1953, and Paolozzi as well as Hamilton and Alloway were all convinced of his ideological importance, understanding his drip paintings as a profoundly sinister outlook on painting at the time<sup>409</sup>. However in *Parallel of Life and Art* Pollock was represented by one of Hans Namuth's famous photographs of the artist in his studio, producing one of his drip paintings.<sup>410</sup> This was more a representation of Pollock's status (the photo had been taken from an issue of *Life* magazine) than an appreciation of his artistic qualities. This photo was shown alongside a utterly un-homogeneous group of other artists, such as Paolozzi and Henderson themselves, or Paul Klee, all of them represented in photographic reproductions of their works, all represented by the image structures, the visual idioms they had initiated. *Parallel of Life and Art* was not concerned with the authorship of creative acts but with the emergence of visual significance. *Entkünstung* here was not a trope of art but one, which rose from within its visual narrations. *Entkünstung* reappeared as art's overarching parallelism to that life which lent significance to it, the scientific micrologies and macrologies of late modernity.

The exhibition had developed as an offshoot of the IG, as its four initiators formed a discussion group in which they discussed images of all kinds – from magazines, books, scientific publications or art – in order to build an archive of significant visual material which was to become the exhibition.<sup>411</sup> Like *Growth & Form*, *Parallel of Life and Art* was conceived as a total environment to assure the destabilization of the conventional hierarchical order in which those vastly different visual materials would be perceived if presented conventionally in their ancestral forms, sizes and qualities. As Massey describes, “although the images derived from a vast array of sources, their apparent incongruity was overcome by presenting all the images as photographs, printed on a coarse, grainy paper and mounted on cardboard.”<sup>412</sup> Pollock's work, as all others', served simply as visual material, not as art; and this marks, I want to argue, a central paradigm of *Entkünstung* in this specific historical moment. Today, the reproduction of visual materials in different forms seems fairly banal, as discussions around what came to be named “Visual Studies” have, since the beginning of the 1990s, entered the History of Art from different directions. In the early 1950s, however, when the contemporary debate around art and visibility was much more centred around the question

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<sup>409</sup> See Massey, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

<sup>410</sup> See Massey, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

<sup>411</sup> Claude Lichtenstein, Thomas Schreggenberger, „As Found“ in: *As found: the discovery of the ordinary*, pp. 8-10.

<sup>412</sup> Massey, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

of abstraction or figuration and traditions of modernity, this methodology carried with it a significantly more radical meaning. Rather than anticipating the indiscriminate proceedings of visual studies, this levelling of image sources served to make aware the themes shared by material traditionally separated by a significant social distance. *Parallel of Life and Art* staged the implications of the everyday in artistic culture; and, as its title indicates, it demonstrated the contemporary inversion of revolutionary attempts to bring, as Tatlin had famously put it, “art into life”. *Parallel of Life and Art* did not perform the reinstatement of a past, historical utopian hope for art or for society, but rather an installation of materials which forced its viewer to perceive art and life as paralleled fields divided by cultural distinction. What the exhibition implied was a question: could this distinction of different cultural status be located in the actual material? *Parallel of Life and Art* restaged the visual politics of American magazine culture, its oversupply of images, and located it within the realms of art, science and archaeologies of culture, but divested all those materials of their aesthetic allure. The grainy black-and-white images on cardboard were simply hung from the walls and ceilings, confronting the viewer with coarse surfaces; and the chosen imagery did not evoke a beautifying visual narration of scientific visibility but, on the contrary, enlarged unrecognizable structures of unfamiliar forms. Their beauty was drawn from repulsion: oversized pictures of rats, of cancer cells, of machinery and human bone structures<sup>413</sup> forced the viewer into a reorganization of his or her aesthetic perception, which started, quite literally, from the core. *Parallel of Life and Art* presented a crude materialism, devoid of any idealist ancestry. It attempted a recreation of the world ‘as found’ and in this the distinguished category of art was relativised as one archeological phenomenon amongst others. What was staged here was not anti-art but a record of art’s contemporary state of disintegration, and the exhibition welcomed this dispersion as the possibility of lively reconstructions.

#### 2.2.4 Towards a New Brutalism

For Reyner Banham this exhibition, with its disregard of aesthetic conventions and formal distinctions of art and non-art, marked the rise of a New Brutalism<sup>414</sup>, which he attributed not only to the exhibition itself, but saw as the defining characteristic of a new architecture put forward by the Smithsons. I will return to the Smithsons’ architectural

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<sup>413</sup> See Massey, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

<sup>414</sup> See *As found: the discovery of the ordinary*, and Reyner Banham, *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic*. Reyner Banham (London: Architectural press, 1966), pp. 128ff.



Brutalism later in this chapter when I discuss the social impacts of the IG's models of *Entkunstung*. With regards to the exhibition, however, Banham saw the New Brutalism in exactly the unmediated confrontations of materialities. The commodification of culture, its economization and subsequent aestheticization through the aestheticization of everyday life (which Banham thematized in his numerous articles on designed commodities such as mini-bikes or automobiles)<sup>415</sup> took another form in *Parallel of Life and Art*. All surfaces, whether designed by nature or by industrial fabrication, reappeared here as raw material. The exhibition put forward what, in Benjamin's words, could be called a "positive barbarism"<sup>416</sup>, another affinity to the strategies of Russian Productivism and its disrespect for bourgeois culture enigmatically formulated by Bogdanov. It implied here the visual suggestion to treat the social surroundings and industrial landscapes, the ruins of war and its overarching national makeover, as the raw materials of a world to come. Here utopianism, the idea to start from scratch, or even constructivism, to turn back to the underlying abstractions of production and perception, were rejected in favour of an aesthetics of the given. As Owen Hatherley has pointed out, this desecration of Modernism was the only truly Modernist attempt to pursue it.<sup>417</sup> The affinity between Benjamin's positive barbarism and what Banham termed New Brutalism, is, I want to argue, in no way accidental but points towards the latter as the actualization of an approach to culture which I am trying to map out as that of *Entkunstung*. Benjamin's perspective in *Experience and Poverty* of 1933<sup>418</sup> was much more that of an intellectual within a late bourgeois setting between the wars, in which industrialization had taken brutal command over the people's lives but had not yet already succeeded in rebuilding all cultural life in accordance to its perpetual reproduction, as was the case after the Second World War.<sup>419</sup> The members of the IG grew up in a situation in which not only the war itself had shown that the persistence of traditional structures of family life or cultural heritages of all sort accounted for nothing in the face of an industrialized war machinery, but also the only way of reconstructing social communitarianism after the war had – within the economic model of capitalist production--been to employ its ability to economize whole sectors of human life in its subsequent aestheticisation. New Brutalism performed a 'positive barbarism' which no longer entertained the illusion of being able to afford what Benjamin describes as

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<sup>415</sup> Banham, *Design by Choice*, p. 73, p. 84ff, p. 97ff.

<sup>416</sup> Walter Benjamin, "Erfahrung und Armut", in: *Gesammelte Schriften II.1* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991), pp. 215f.

<sup>417</sup> Owen Hatherley, *Militant Modernism* (Winchester/Washington: Zero Books, 2008) p. 5.

<sup>418</sup> Benjamin, "Erfahrung und Armut", in: *Gesammelte Schriften II.1* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991), p. 216.

<sup>419</sup> F.e. Benjamin, "Haschisch in Marseille", in *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. I.2, pp. 664f, describes the non-simultaneity of different sectors at that time.

‘giving it all away’<sup>420</sup>: there was nothing to give away any more, only the drastic problem of finding any material to hold on to at all.<sup>421</sup>

Benjamin’s positive barbarism recalled the Proletkul’t rejection of bourgeois culture altogether, Bogdanov’s and Brik’s radical calls for the introduction of a selective heritage only. The New Brutalism of the Smithsons perceived no heritage other than that of materials and forms. The landscapes of earlier functionalism, which after the war lay in ruins, did not offer any coherent inheritance of sense, of meaning. The ICA’s desire to employ the history of Surrealism in French and British art as a cultural narration of artefacts was a compensation for the lack of that optimistic, or at least diverse and yet undecided, voluntaristic social situation from which it had arisen in the 1920s, combined with the assertion of more general human histories within it, its undercurrents and asides, and thus hopes for an overarching and transcendent (if hidden) sense or meaning to perpetuate. And even though *Parallel of Life and Art*, as well Paolozzi’s or Henderson’s work in a more general sense, bore intrinsic relations to this Surrealist tradition (performing, specifically in Paolozzi’s sculptures, a form of *art brut* not substantially alien to such an assumption of underlying historical sense) – this sense was no longer exclusively located in art. For Paolozzi, Henderson and the Smithsons, art as an exclusive field of cultural distinction had ceased to exist with the culturalisation of every aspect of life; and unlike art historians like Greenberg or philosophers like Adorno, this was for them no site of mourning but one of immediate interrogation. Where the former saw art’s function in displacements of social actions into a projected realm of artistic autonomy, the New Brutalists instead welcomed the intrusion of the culture’s omnipresent consumerist manifestations as a possible lever to immediacy within the artistic productions themselves. They did not bid farewell to the projective character of culture, or, more specifically art, altogether but reinstalled it within a fundamentally altered temporality. For them, Pollock was a significant figure because he performed painting in a state of disintegration. In exhibits like Namuth’s photographs of Pollock dripping, *Parallel of Life and Art* showed not, as for Greenberg, a painter of painting, a desperate practitioner of painting’s preservation, but instead a performer of an agitated understanding of how to ‘re-materialize’ art’s media. This was equally true for the side of art’s perception.

What Werckmeister had argued for the changing relation of art’s perception from Cézanne to post-war art<sup>422</sup> – that there was no longer any delay between the production of art

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<sup>420</sup> Benjamin, “Erfahrung und Armut”, p. 219.

<sup>421</sup> See Lichtenstein, Schrengenberger, „As Found“.

<sup>422</sup> Otto Karl Werckmeister, „Das Kunstwerk als Negation. Zur geschichtlichen Bestimmung

and its perception, which had shielded the artists of the earlier bourgeois period from any direct relation to the effects of industrialization in other branches of production--was an analysis which, in the case of the practices of the IG, resulted in the equation of art with those industrializing effects which had meanwhile intruded into the realm of art. The simultaneity Werckmeister ascribed to the perception of art, I would argue, had not genuinely risen from the change within the field of art itself, but rather from the commodification of culture in other sectors and the resulting culturalization of life in all its aspects. This development rendered art as just another cultural commodity on a factual level, but its social distinction persisted despite this economic change. Art's exclusivity was no longer intrinsically founded on its being exempt from the terms of production within general culture but in its now openly visible lack of utilitarian functions. The *Entkünstung* had, so to speak, no longer the air of a decisive voluntary defiance of the heritage of cultural artefacts: it had taken place already and presented the present with an endless landscape of ruins and pin-ups. As quoted previously, culture had been passed on from the utopian projections of high cultural hopes to the indiscriminate assemblages of the ad-man. But this closeness to popular culture in the IG's practice turned into the foundational grounds of a relocation of art's utilitarian potentials. As argued previously, art's utilitarian aspects within the narratives of modern art lay within its social utopianism, whether the avant-gardisms of Expressionist escapism, the spaces of de Stijl's clairvoyance or Suprematist promises of sense beyond figuration. These projective sides of art served a social purpose barely recoverable after the end of the Second World War. Adorno's aesthetics of promises unkept or Greenberg's attempts to retreat to subjective repetitions of vanishing ideals offered no contemporary perspectives, only perspectives which rejected their own contemporaneity. Like other projects around the IG, *Parallel of Life and Art* recovered utilitarian functions in the realms of art. But unlike the Productivist attempt to turn all art into a utilitarian production, the IG uncovered subsisting utilitarianisms, implications of art's contemporary status. Their scientific reductions of distinctive cultural practices to their shared visual surfaces enabled a new perspective, new affinities and a relocation of art's responsibility from the unbearable burden of vanishing utopianism to the material grounds of relocated means, of immediate projections, of instant gratifications, which did not defer their own fulfilment but produced it within constant series of trials and errors. This approach, the privileging of *Entkünstung* at the centre of art as an enabling and expanding force was, as the case of *Parallel of Life and Art* shows, not welcomed by the

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der Kunsttheorie Theodor W. Adornos“ in: id., *Ende der Ästhetik: Essays über Adorno, Bloch, Das gelbe Unterseeboot und Der eindimensionale Mensch* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1971), p. 9.

visitors of the exhibition at large. Not only did it remain relatively unseen, but criticism arose which targeted precisely the indiscriminate use of visual material. Given that the research for the exhibition involved browsing through magazines and publications of the time, war and scarcity on the one hand and scientific and industrial innovation on the other very much dominated the visual imprint the exhibition left. In it a visual narrative was staged that was focused on materials and technical physicalities, both of which exceeded by far the traditional aesthetic representations of material life in art at that time. As Reyner Banham quotes in his article "The New Brutalism" published in the *Architectural Review* in December 1955, "students of the Architectural Association complained of the deliberate flouting of the traditional concepts of photographic beauty, of the cult of ugliness and 'denying the spiritual in Man'."<sup>423</sup>

This was Banham's recollection of a restaging of the exhibition's panels at the Architectural Association's space for discussion. What he registers here is that the idea of beauty might have been transferred to new media in the 1950s already, but its general measures were still strictly deduced from those of classical beauty. The exhibition, just as the lecture course called 'Aesthetic Problems of Contemporary Art' which commenced after its closure at the ICA, collapsed traditions of art and science into one another<sup>424</sup>, approaching what Toni del Renzio in the announcement for his talk on "Non-Formal Painting" termed the "crisis of signification"<sup>425</sup>, the imperative for art to get involved in the specificities of the field of production surrounding it. *Parallel of Life and Art* had taken this crisis into consideration in staging a sense of immediacy, a systematic rejection of the aesthetic terms of representation, of its criteria of beauty and form, re-introducing form and beauty as characteristics of found materials, of ideals down to earth. Initially named *Sources*, then renamed *Documents 53* and finally obtaining the title<sup>426</sup> *Parallel of Life and Art*, the exhibition was, since one of its earliest conceptions in the notes of Alison and Peter Smithson<sup>427</sup> planned as the staging of a new era. For the Smithsons, much like for Henderson and Paolozzi, modernism had reached its peak at the end of the 1920s<sup>428</sup> and what they perceived as their current task was to "make obvious the existence of a new attitude."<sup>429</sup> The exhibition was a "manifesto" which pulled the underlying currents of the contemporary

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<sup>423</sup> Banham, *The New Brutalism*, p. 59.

<sup>424</sup> Massey, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

<sup>425</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 140.

<sup>426</sup> See *As found: the discovery of the ordinary*, p. 30.

<sup>427</sup> *As found: the discovery of the ordinary*, p. 39.

<sup>428</sup> See *The Independent Group: Post-war Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty*, p. 76ff (Paolozzi), p. 93ff (Henderson), p. 109ff (Smithson).

<sup>429</sup> *As found: the discovery of the ordinary*, p. 38.

everyday into the foreground in their visual, more specifically in their photographic, form, in that way actualizing the publications of Giedion, Ozenfant and Moholy-Nagy from the preceding period, but taking them into the third dimension, creating a sense of space which had moved on from modernist mechanized urbanization to something which might be termed an archaeological interest in the future, as they call it, a “Rosetta Stone”<sup>430</sup> of their time.

It was not until thirty years later that the Smithsons formulated the principle of their work explicitly as a persistent engagement with the facticities of the everyday, “the picking up, turning over and putting-with”.<sup>431</sup> Facing the ruins of the post-war landscapes of Britain, what their practice concentrated on was the specificity of the remains, the “woodness of wood, the sandiness of the sand”<sup>432</sup> the refusal to simulate “in a society that had nothing”<sup>433</sup>.

In 1966 Banham published the book *The New Brutalism – Ethic or Aesthetic?*<sup>434</sup>. In this extensively illustrated volume, he formulated a New Brutalism, in the terms of “The end of an old urbanism”<sup>435</sup>, rendering Le Corbusier’s architectural modernism as a diminutive, a historically as well as artistically worshipped but historically dislocated architectural style, “The Brutalist style”.<sup>436</sup> New Brutalism in contrast to this is presented by Banham as a phenomenon well perceived and acknowledged even before its actual historisation, which rises from the appreciation – but at the same time complete reversal – of Le Corbusier’s *Unité d’Habitation*, and the ideas implicated in it, to which I will return in a minute. In his largely essayistic account, in which the Smithsons figure as wholehearted personifications of the architectural phenomenon described, Banham follows the development of New Brutalism through the exhibitions of the Independent Group which I have discussed previously and their intrinsic indebtedness to *art brut*, arguing convincingly that the Smithsons realized a *brut* without *art*.<sup>437</sup> Banham’s account is interesting for its material as well as for its format. Having been trained as an art historian at the Courtauld Institute in London, he here despises academic standards of writing and presentation and instead presents a demonstration of commitment, in which historical as well as contemporary references reoccur within a new narration. The standards of architectural history are here exchanged with those of an *Entkunstung* one could say – *The New Brutalism* presents itself in the same shape as *Parallel of Life and Art* did: as the visual and here also textual account of a new narration, in which the

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<sup>430</sup> Ibid. p.39.

<sup>431</sup> *The Independent Group: Post-war Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty*, p. 201.

<sup>432</sup> Ibid.

<sup>433</sup> Ibid. P. 200.

<sup>434</sup> See Banham, *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic*.

<sup>435</sup> See *ibid.* 70ff.

<sup>436</sup> Ibid. 89ff.

<sup>437</sup> See *ibid.* 61.

visual arts, architecture and ethics build the base of a new sociality. Banham closes: “I make no pretense that I was not seduced by the aesthetic of Brutalism, but the lingering of its ethical stand, the persistence of an idea that the relationships of the parts and materials of a building are a working morality – this, for me, is the continuing validity of the New Brutalism.”<sup>438</sup>

### 2.2.5 Building a New Brutalism

Setting ourselves the task of rethinking architecture in the early 1950s, we meant by the “as found” not only adjacent buildings but all those marks that constitute remembrances in a place and that are to be read through finding out how the existing built fabric of the place had come to be as it was. (...) As soon as architecture begins to be thought about its ideogram should be so touched by the “as found” as to make it specific-to-place. (...) this impressed forcibly (...) how the new could re-energise the existing fabric.<sup>439</sup>

In 1949, Le Corbusier published his treatise *Le Modulor*,<sup>440</sup> (figure 2.19.) an anthropometric scale system meant to serve as a new, ‘humanistic’ foundation of architectural planning – arguably at the same time the model of man as an aspect of standardized architecture. The Modulor, on the basis of which Le Corbusier built, amongst other projects, the *Unités d’habitation* in Marseille (1947-52) (figure 2.20.) and Firminy (1965-67), (figure 2.21.) was based on the assumption of a standardized medium size of man (175 centimetres) from which a standardized height and width of rooms was deduced. This deduction, which executed the renaissance ideal of the golden ratio on the assumed ideal proportions of man, led to a ceiling height of 226 centimetres, fixed a spectrum of space and movement for all men, women, children in all situations of reproductive and productive life.

In the same year, Alison and Peter Smithson won the competition for the secondary school in Hunstanton (Norfolk) (figure 2.22./2.23./2.24./2.25./2.26.) and took part in the seventh CIAM, which Le Corbusier also attended. Hunstanton was Alison and Peter Smithson’s first larger project. Born in 1928 and 1923 respectively, they were just 21 and 26 when given the commission.<sup>441</sup> Both had studied architecture in Newcastle previously and moved to London together that same year. The building was not realised until 1953, but what they built here was seemingly a classically modernist, rectangularly shaped structure which

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<sup>438</sup> Ibid., p. 135.

<sup>439</sup> *The Independent Group: Post-war Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty*, p. 200.

<sup>440</sup> Le Corbusier, “Le Modulor, essai sur une mesure harmonique à l’échelle humaine applicable universellement à l’Architecture et à la mécanique” (Éditions de l’Architecture d’Aujourd’hui, 1949). Passim.

<sup>441</sup> Alison and Peter Smithson. *The Charged Void: Architecture: Alison and Peter Smithson*. (New York: Monacelli Press, 2001), pp. 40ff.

included large sections of windowplanes. On entering the building, however, it becomes clear that high modernism as it was put forward not only by Le Corbusier but even more profoundly by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, was only the form reference of a structure that concentrated more on materials than on design. As the Smithsons put it much later, at that time their architectural formation was concerned, as quoted before, with the woodness of wood, the sandyness of sand; and in this reappropriation of the most basic materials from a post-war landscape of ruins, discarded mesh and war machinery, “underdetailing”<sup>442</sup> became a powerful means of introducing modernism to its disintegration. Unlike others, I would not want to argue<sup>443</sup> that their strategies prefigured postmodernism. Instead, as they arguably did later in their project for the exhibition *This is Tomorrow* (where they again collaborated with Paolozzi and Henderson), what they were proposing here was an excavation of modernism which allowed for its precise location within the post-war present. Where Le Corbusier attempted to reinstall high modernist architecture in the 1950 as a brutalism of standardized welfare, in systematic ignorance of the individuation of life in the 1950s, which the war on the one hand and the introduction of consumerism on a fundamental basis on the other side had led to, the Smithsons proposed a re-examination of the materials of architecture in the discarded state they were in. High Modernism in architecture in the 1950s had, arguably, lost touch and its utopias of communal living and sustained standardized sociality uncannily turned from a promise to a threat.<sup>444</sup> Where standardization, as in the case of the Russian Productivists’ attempts to form the basis of a new and empowered individual perception of the everyday, had promised equality against the remains of a feudal or Tsarist society based on the radical factual inequality of lives, subjects and objects alike, this equation of subjects and objects, had, in Fascist Europe, Stalinist Russia and the raging war machines of the Second World War, become an omnipresent procedure, which, in its most excruciating form in the mechanized elimination of the Jews of Europe as well as of Communists, Sinti and Roma, Homosexuals and others in the concentration camps of national socialism, proven that standardization had taken command. It was no longer a positive reference as its formal characteristics had been reinitiated as a barbarization of social relations. What the architecture of the Smithsons proposed, confronting the aftermath of this catastrophe, was an ideological struggle for individualism, or even a political argument against the moribund pseudo-socialism of someone like Le Corbusier. Much more, it was, as they wrote later, the defeat of

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<sup>442</sup> See *As found: the discovery of the ordinary*.

<sup>443</sup> See *The Independent Group: Post-war Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty*.

<sup>444</sup> See Owen Hatherley, *Militant Modernism* (Winchester: O Books, 2009), p. 8.

politics, the averting of politics as administration in favour of making transparent the world “as found”.

“As Found [as they wrote in retrospect] is a small affair; it’s about being careful.”<sup>445</sup> This carefulness had in the case of the Hunstanton secondary school led to the accurate stripping down of the architectural structure to its core forms and materials, leaving, for example aqueducts open, letting water become visible where it was running out of the sink, and introducing grids of metal sheets and window framings instead of polished surfaces and mediated fronts. Mediation here was not one of materials but one between them, just as in *Parallel of Life and Art* ‘being careful’ signified an indiscriminate handling of materials, the concentration on dissociating them from their traditional cultural value and the assigning them not to a specified new value within a hypothetical new cultural context of distinction, but rather to an attempt to loosen the threads of construction for a fundamental affirmation of material qualities. In their report, which was submitted with their competition entry, the Smithsons wrote: “This school is an attempt to carry the diagrammatic stage into a work of architecture, and its form is dictated by a close study of educational needs and purely formal requirements rather than by precedent.”<sup>446</sup> Again, the approach is that of a giving structure to raw material, to the layering of simplified structures, which, as one can see in the result, presented their functionality not only in the result but also in the laying open of its materials. They themselves called the Hunstanton school an “obvious statement and (...) a didactic building”<sup>447</sup>: they strove for an educational purpose, that of laying open structures and materials. As I have mentioned before, the parallel between their strategies and those of Productivism in Russia is their ‘materialism’, their approach to open up architecture in laying bare its construction and materials and to make obvious buildings in which a ‘material’ culture is supported, one which gives away conventions for a re-specification of the field of architecture through a contemporary reassessment of its functions. In their report, the Smithsons discuss prefabrication in architecture as a problem, which they aimed to counteract in their project by using existing elements from other industries, be they bricks or steel sections as finite elements of their building. They practically countered specialization in expanding the material characteristics of their elements. In contrast to the Productivists, however, the communality for which they built was not one of an emerging collective but one of a nation of individuals, to which they refer in their architecture. The whole school is centred around its communal spaces. But it is their dealings with materials, which makes the

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<sup>445</sup> *The Independent Group: Post-war Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty*, p. 201.

<sup>446</sup> Alison and Peter Smithson. *The Charged Void*, p. 40.

<sup>447</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.



Smithsons' architectural approach significant in discussing strategies of *Entkünstung*, their own contextualization of their work with the IG and also with Team 10. It is their report on Hunstanton in which they describe their own measures of architecture as those of a "New Brutalism".<sup>448</sup>

I want to briefly mention three other related projects, all of the starting with the period in which the Smithsons were affiliated with the IG. Firstly, their submission to "Golden Lane"<sup>449</sup>, a Housing Competition allocated in East London (where also Henderson's *Bethnal Green* series was shot), destined to repopulate a vast, bombed area with high density and low cost living spaces. This project, submitted in 1952, stages the principle of working 'as found' within the urban area of a post-war site in an exemplary way. In the construction plans and plates the remains of the bombings are still present: the area is not cleared-out but rather build on. (figure 2.27./2.28./2.29./2.30./2.31.) Here the contemporaneity of the architecture is defined by its mimesis, its mimetic response to the contemporaneous settings, not by the radical clearing out of all predefined structures, which they criticized harshly in Le Corbusier's architecture, work that neglected environmental as well as social givens completely.<sup>450</sup> In their 1965 publication *The Heroic Period in Modern Architecture*, Alison and Peter Smithson present, as they formulate it, "a collection of negative foils"<sup>451</sup>, buildings, all erected between 1915 and 1929, fully illustrated with comments dismissing the 'heroic period', amongst other things, for its aestheticist approach to architecture, its idolization the 'the building' and its arbitrary relation to its function.<sup>452</sup>

Buildings should be thought of from the beginning as fragments; as containing within themselves a capacity to act with other buildings: they should be themselves links in the system. The only viable mode of city-structuring is for all to develop a sense of structure, for when feeling of responsibility for the emergence of a structure is not there, an imposed structure cannot help.<sup>453</sup>

Here, the relation of New Brutalism to what I have tried to delineate as a history of *Entkünstung* becomes fairly clear: even though New Brutalism, in its Smithson variation, constructs vastly aesthetic architectures, its core is the de-aestheticisation of the idea of 'the building' and its reconstruction according to the elaboration of the materials and their arrangement according to their supposed social function. This is neither an avant-gardist, nor an utopian approach, but one which constructs social relations from their actuality. In

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<sup>448</sup> Ibid.

<sup>449</sup> Ibid., pp. 86ff.

<sup>450</sup> Alison and Peter Smithson, *Die heroische Periode der modernen Architektur* (Tübingen: Wasmuth, 1981) (the original English version was published in 1965 already).

<sup>451</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>452</sup> See for example, their comments on Mies van der Rohe, (ibid., p. 13), on Le Corbusier (ibid., p. 26).

<sup>453</sup> Smithson, „Golden Lane Housing“, in *As found: the discovery of the ordinary*, p. 142.

discussing Le Corbusier's housing projects, Peter Smithson asks "What was Le Corbusier's vision?" And answers "A humane, poetic, disciplined machine environment for a machine society (probably a society of technicians with quite a strict hierarchy)."<sup>454</sup> The *Entkünstung* of architecture attacks its modern status as an autonomous machine, buildings that form their inhabitants, in order to give way for a formation of architecture with the contemporaneities of living. I do not want to argue that this task was fulfilled in all or any of the architectural structures of the Smithsons to a full extent, just as I would not have argued that any Productivist or Pop approach to the *Entkünstung* of art has ever fully succeeded in dismantling its domain. What I want to stress here is the fundamentally different idea of construction that guides New Brutalism in architecture as well as in texts and exhibitions and which contested modernism after its historic defeat in order to relocate potentialities of *Gestaltung* in a post-war scenario.

The submission for the *Golden Lane* project, which was never realized, has been prominently referred to<sup>455</sup> for its affinity to mass culture: in one of the mock-ups you see a press photography of Marilyn Monroe and Joe DiMaggio as residents, (figure 2.32.) and another one presents the structure of the project as a see-through grid through which one can see the actual site and surrounding housings.<sup>456</sup> This affinity is a part of what I have attempted to describe as the *Entkünstung* intended, a relocation of architectural sites in the pulp culture of the 1950s, but it also sets the frame of the 'Brutalism' of New Brutalism. If one looks at the technical drawing of the actual building block in an areal photograph of the devastated town of Coventry,<sup>457</sup> one sees that the structure disproportionately dominates its terrain. (figure 2.33.) *Golden Lane* constructs a liveable monument to the ruins of the Second World War, in which a clear cut is imagined but where the popular is built on the debris itself. Again, the communal spaces are far more prominent than the private or enclosed spaces: in the *Golden Lane* project, the structure is intersected by whole decks devoted to communal space only, "street-in-the air" as the Smithsons called them. This lifting up of sociality above the shredded ground has led to comparisons of their architecture to that of Constant's *New Babylon*,<sup>458</sup> (figure 2.34.) and thus to Situationist efforts to which I will return later. However, I think that this comparison is mostly a formal one, since Constant's architectural structures were destined to accommodate a 'homo ludens', a new man, and thus bore no strict similarity to the

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<sup>454</sup> Smithson, Smithson, *Die heroische Periode der modernen Architektur* p. 26.

<sup>455</sup> Ben Highmore, "Between Modernity and the Everyday: Team 10", <http://www.team10online.org/research/papers/delft2/highmore.pdf>

<sup>456</sup> See Smithson, Smithson. *The Charged Void*, p. 87.

<sup>457</sup> See Alison + Peter Smithson, *Obras y proyectos, Works and Projects*, (Barcelona: Editorial Gustavo Gili, 1997), p. 35.

<sup>458</sup> See Ohrt, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

Smithsons' attempts to accommodate social life in its actual and deprived forms. The flats in *Golden Lane*, for example, which varied in size between one and four bedrooms, were secluded and private spaces, mostly endowed with a garden to accommodate an individual, contemplative life, much opposed to Constant's idea of series of open rooms in flux.<sup>459</sup> Even though the project was required to allow for a housing capacity of 500 inhabitants per hectare, meaning here 90 families per deck, and was severely restricted in budget, the Smithsons' proposal did not offer a low standard of living but again ignored conventional mass architecture in favour of its reflection through the functionalities for different models of life.<sup>460</sup> Just as Tatlin, they had based its construction on a technical means unavailable at the time – a tower-crane<sup>461</sup> – but unlike Tatlin this means had already been realized, it had just never been considered before for British public housing – and was not for this project.<sup>462</sup> The *Golden Lane* Project demonstrated a reconsideration of architecture as a communal structure rising from ruins but striving to make possible a communal life that would overcome the restricted housing conditions of pre-war Britain. It aimed to defy heroic modernist aestheticism and replaced it, one might argue, with one of the 'Jet Age', a monumental reconstruction of modernism as liveable pulp, an *Entkunstung* of architecture towards urban structuring. They presented the project at CIAM IX in Aix-en-Provence in 1953 as the example of *Urban Re-Identification*,<sup>463</sup> (figure 2.35.) alongside photographs of Nigel Henderson and a theoretical text introducing what they and others proposed as a renewed thinking of urban architecture based on the four categories of "house – street – district – city".<sup>464</sup> Much housing politics in Europe, and later, as I shall discuss in the third chapter, also in the US, had been based on the Charter of Athens of 1933, based on principles advocated by the *Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM)*, whose masterminds included Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius and Sigfried Giedion, Banham's PhD supervisor. After the Second World War their ideals of a separation of "living, working, moving, relaxing"<sup>465</sup> in the cities were subjected to harsh critique and were attacked in Aix-en-Provence and than again at Dubrovnik 1956 at the CIAM meetings. It is here that Team 10 formed, of which the Smithsons were the British faction. The grid they presented in 1953 aimed to reconstruct urban life on the basis of the street, the house, the district and the city, no longer dividing different life functions, but rather different communally shared aspects of life.

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<sup>459</sup> See *ibid.* p. 124f.

<sup>460</sup> See Smithson, *Changing the art of inhabitation*, (London : Artemis, 1994).

<sup>461</sup> See Smithson, *The Charged Void*, p. 86.

<sup>462</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 86.

<sup>463</sup> See, *Alison and Peter Smithson, Obras y proyector, Works and Projects*, p. 34.

<sup>464</sup> See „*Golden Lane Housing*“, in *As found: the discovery of the ordinary*, p. 139.

<sup>465</sup> *Ibid.* p. 138.

The objective of architecture is works of art that are lived in. The city is the largest, and at present the worst of such works of art.

Functionalism (to speak roughly of the heroic period of modern architecture) was a new dream exploiting a new source of geometric and organisational procedures, not a change of objective....

That the architecture of the next step is in pursuit of the ordinary and the banal does not mean that it has lost sight of its objective. Ordinarity and banality are the art-source for the new situation.<sup>466</sup>

Here again, *Entkünstung* becomes apparent in the alignment of architecture with art and the simultaneous definition of art as a structure, which finds itself in flux in accordance to the social situation it is conceived in. New Brutalism performs an *Entkünstung* through extending the understanding of art into liveable structures, a strategy that can be equally argued for being at stake in Nigel Henderson's photographic work, Edoardo Paolozzi's *Bunk* collages, the lecture series the group devised, and the exhibition sets the IG suggested. More than a decade later, between 1966 and 1972, the Smithsons realized the much discussed *Robin Hood Gardens*, (figure 2.36./2.37./2.38./2.39) which demonstrated a further elaboration of their 'deck' system, but at the same time attempted to accommodate the specificities of the area in which it was built. As they put it in their report: "The theme of Robin Hood Gardens is protection."<sup>467</sup> I am referring to this project here because even though the structural patterns are similar to those of *Golden Lane*, the end of the 1960s and the housing politics of the London area in which it was allocated provided a completely different setting. Here, the building no longer encountered a site filled with the past and exposed to late modernist hopes of redemption through construction, but confronted instead the context of post-war social politics, issues of migration, urban poverty and traffic management. Ways out of art, historical instances of *Entkünstung* are *specific* instances, in which artistic production attempted to leave the standards of its profession and propose a more generally cultural approach to cultural productions. In the *Golden Lane* project this is envisioned in the confrontation of the bombed urban landscape and the material attack against the heroism of modernist architecture; in *Robin Hood Gardens* the social aspects of this architecture still determine its function, but this function has become one of housing politics in contemporary Britain.

Another project of the Smithsons, realized in 1956, needs to be mentioned in this context, because it bridges the seclusion of *Robin Hood Gardens* with the extravagant approaches to new technologies and sciences which characterized the starting points of New Brutalism in the IG. In 1956 Alison and Peter Smithson constructed a *House of the Future* for

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<sup>466</sup> Smithson, Smithson, "The Ordinary and the Banal", in: *As found: the discovery of the ordinary*, p. 141.

<sup>467</sup> Smithson, Smithson. *The Charged Void*, p. 296.

the Ideal Home Exhibition, at the Olympia in London<sup>468</sup> (figure 2.40./ 2.41./ 2.42./ 2.43./ 2.44.) The exhibition had been organized by *The Daily Mail* and for it the Smithsons designed an 1:1 model of a housing unit, a “town house”,<sup>469</sup> fabricated completely out of “plastic-impregnated fibrous plaster”<sup>470</sup> forming a totally integrated structure, completely shielded off from the outside and opened only towards a courtyard in the centre of the unit. I want to briefly allude to this project, which I mentioned only briefly earlier, because it seems substantially to counteract the material aesthetics that *Hunstanton* was based on, but at the same time transfers it in every consequential detail into what Beatriz Colomina has tellingly described as “paranoia architecture”.<sup>471</sup> In the 1970s documentary *Fathers of Pop*<sup>472</sup> Richard Hamilon describes the project as the 1:1 transferral of consumerism to architecture. The *House of the Future* is a throwaway object. It is constructed from that plastic which Roland Barthes mentioned in the beginning of this chapter as the ‘lowest’ material. Again, the architecture is derived from its material, and all characteristics of the living-space are brought into accordance to it. The table and bed, for example, lower into the floor when not being used and all details of the kitchen and the other spaces, including the clothes of its inhabitants, were designed for the occasion.<sup>473</sup> The *House of the Future* demonstrated expendable architecture, a throwaway item destined for young couples without children, who, once their life changed, would dispose the house in favour of another unit.<sup>474</sup> It did not demonstrate a positive fictitious and modernized life, I would argue, but a fully elaborated the idea of pulp, of plastic and of a plasticized functionalism. If one reads the Smithsons’ retrospective account of their strategy ‘as found’, this becomes quite apparent: “With this came a distaste of the simulated, such as the new plastics of the period—printed, coloured to imitate a previous product in ‘natural’ materials. Dislike for certain mixes, particularly with technology, such as the walnut dashboard in a car.”<sup>475</sup> (figure 2.44.) This gives a precise description of the use of materials in the *House of the Future*, the kitchen of which combined fake wood panels with modern technologies and the details of which were catered to imitate the ‘glamour’ of plastic. The *House of the Future*, one might say, was an architectonic joke on plastic.

The relation of this architectural precision, termed New Brutalism by Reyner Banham in his 1955 article on the show *Parallel of Life and Art* in the *Architectural Review*, where he

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<sup>468</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 162ff.

<sup>469</sup> See *Alison + Peter Smithson, Obras y proyector, Works and Projects*, p. 60.

<sup>470</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>471</sup> Beatriz Colomina, “Unbreathed Air”, in *Grey Room*, No. 15 (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2004), pp. 28-59.

<sup>472</sup> See *Fathers of Pop* <http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/428357/Fathers-of-Pop/overview>

<sup>473</sup> See Beatriz Colomina, “Unbreathed Air”.

<sup>474</sup> See *Ibid.*

<sup>475</sup> *As found: the discovery of the ordinary*, p. 40f.

had been editor since 1952, to what I have tried to frame as *Entkünstung* in the visual arts becomes apparent if one relates the Smithsons' practices back to their approach to architecture as a field. They did not develop their architectural structures from a step by step detachment from the International Style, which Reyner Banham described in his PhD thesis *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age* (1960) but, just as Banham based his own observations of architecture on the artistic programme of Italian Futurism in relation to the 'Jet Age' he lived in, Alison and Peter Smithson rendered their architectural approaches from visual impressions, from confrontations of the real with classical models of Modernism. *Entkünstung* becomes a productive term in this equation, because, even though, in the case of the IG, art is the frame within which these practices came to be debated, it was not the field from which they emerged.

#### 2.2.6 Pop, Spectacle and Situations

Within this setting of British post-war culture on the one hand and the ICA's affiliations to the pre-war avant-garde on the other, the IG prefigured Pop Culture. Their texts appear in anthologies and essay collections and their strategies are quoted as the rise of Pop Art, even though their artistic productions hardly lived up to this dictum – or even attempted to do so.<sup>476</sup> As mentioned before, the minority of the IG's members were visual artists, and with the exception of Lawrence Alloway, who enhanced its perception significantly through his own agenda-setting in the US from the late 1950s onwards<sup>477</sup> and Richard Hamilton, whose self-representation as one of the *Fathers of Pop*<sup>478</sup> enabled his acknowledgment as an important Pop artist, none of them came to be predominantly signified under the label. Their affirmation of American popular culture and their rejection of assuming a linearity of development of the members of the IG, whether in art or in other social spheres, proved capable of expanding the capacities of artistic labour beyond the confined barriers of tradition, and thus also those of the perception of their actions as art proper. Where Dada had attempted to introduce fragments of the culture industry into high art and Marcel Duchamp had released its products into the realm of high culture, the early IG chose the realm of popular culture before it was even fully established in Great Britain in order to *recommence* artistic

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<sup>476</sup> See Steven H. Madoff, *Pop Art: A Critical History*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), *Pop*, ed. by Mark Francis (London, New York; Phaidon Press, 2005) and *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*,

<sup>477</sup> See Madoff, *Pop Art: A Critical History*.

<sup>478</sup> See *Fathers of Pop*.

production in it. Like the Productivists of the 1920s, they did not choose an existing field of production but aimed to establish it anew, this time from the scraps which were given. In situating their own praxis within the antagonistic realm of Pop Culture, they chose the popular, the contemporary reformulation of the mass culture of the 20s, as the determining factor of cultural production, to expand artistic production and rid it from its hierarchical separation from other fields. As Richard Hamilton famously defined Pop in a letter to Alison and Peter Smithson in 1957:

Pop Art is:  
Popular (designed for a mass audience)  
Transient (short-term solution)  
Expendable (easily-forgotten)  
Low Cost  
Mass produced  
Young (aimed at youth)  
Witty  
Sexy  
Gimmicky  
Glamorous  
Big business<sup>479</sup>

Leaving aside Hamilton's wish to institutionalize himself with that letter, as well as the fact that the Smithsons always denied ever having received it,<sup>480</sup> one can again bring this collection of characteristics of a not-so-high art in relation to what Benjamin in 1933 had demanded from a revolutionary take on culture: "A total absence of illusion about the age and at the same time an unlimited commitment to it (...) Holding on to things has become the monopoly of a few people, (...) Everyone else has to adapt – beginning anew and with few resources."<sup>481</sup>

Again I quote Benjamin's concept of positive barbarism, because it figures his historiographic concept of actualization as a material practice: the dismantling of contemporaneous culture in accordance to its historically blurred undercurrents, an affirmation of the material of history without the affirmation of its outcome. As a practice, this is wonderfully captured in Anne Massey's description of the IG's first official meeting in 1952, which consisted in Paolozzi's "feeding a series of coloured images taken from American magazine advertising through an epidiascope."<sup>482</sup> During the course of the nine seminars on "Aesthetic problems in Contemporary Art" which the IG held between 1953 and

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<sup>479</sup> Richard Hamilton, "Letter to Peter and Alison Smithson", in Madoff, *Pop Art: A Critical History*, pp.5f.

<sup>480</sup> Beatriz Colomina, "Peter Smithson, Friends of the Future: A Conversation with Peter Smithson", p. 11, in: October, Vol. 94, The Independent Group (Cambridge: University Press, 2000), pp. 3-30.

<sup>481</sup> Walter Benjamin, "Experience and Poverty", in *Walter Benjamin, Selected Writings*, Vol. 2, 1927-1943, ed. by Michael W.Jennings, Howard Eiland, Gary Smith (Cambridge/Mass., London: 1999), pp. 933, 735.

<sup>482</sup> Anne Massey, *The Independent Group*, p. 46.

1954 at the ICA, members of the group and invited guests gave presentation relating to mass culture's transformations through and after the Second World War. Reyner Banham's course description read as follows: „the technological approach – the application of scientific discoveries to practical ends – as a characteristic mental attitude of the mid-century, its effect on the subject matter of art through the mechanisation of the environment, and on the status of the work of art itself; through the growth of techniques of mass reproduction.“<sup>483</sup> Where Benjamin's perspective had been much informed by the experiences of the First World War, the IG's were largely indebted to that of the Second World War. Peter Smithson explained in an interview that his wife Alison, when she was little, could tell the different types of warplanes from the ground or identify them by the pitch of their bombs.<sup>484</sup> What determined her approach to the experience of war as a child was an expertise in its 'ingredients', and even though war was by no means a distant event, its experience was very much an aesthetic one. The war imagery of the everyday information in the press associated the subjective everyday of warfare's threats with a general account of its normality, of its commonality. The collectivizing effect of the medium of photography on the experience of war turned the photographic image into the agent of a seemingly universal perception. Magazine photography, large-scale illustrated photo-reports on wartime's daily events, all proposed the generality of the exceptional: the daily killing of thousands of people in the struggle over national sovereignties. Photography had gained the upper hand over other forms of visual production in its reproductiveness and consumptive structure. It is this cultural status of photography that is re-represented in the IG's treatment of mass culture as the site of possible enthusiasm, which brought them in confrontation with the SI. As mentioned above, the relations of the IG and the SI were given rise to by the convergence in their ideas of architecture, through people like Aldo van Eyck, who was associated to the SI as well as a member of Team 10, but also directly through the New Brutalism championed by the Smithsons and articulated by Reyner Banham. Banham himself was fond of the connection and mentions the SI and their journals and actions in essay of the time,<sup>485</sup> but Debord and Jorn, though intrigued by New Brutalism, were at the same time distrustful of a group which tackled the same subjects as they did but neither openly displayed political engagement nor distrust of mass culture.<sup>486</sup> The Situationist Conference at the ICA took place only in 1960, when of the IG only Lawrence Alloway was present as a visitor; indeed, it was the last event

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<sup>483</sup> Ibid., p. 139.

<sup>484</sup> Beatriz Colomina, "Peter Smithson, Friends of the Future", p. 11.

<sup>485</sup> See Ohrt, *op. cit.*, pp. 128f.

<sup>486</sup> See Ibid. p. 129.



he staged at the ICA. Toni del Renzio, another former member of the IG, had organized the evening and gave an introductory speech, which was opposed by the Situationist contingent that had travelled to London from Paris, Munich and other cities, a group of more than ten people who mostly spoke no English but frenetically applauded whenever they recognized a word. Their evening lecture, though well documented in images, could not be documented in any other form because it consisted only of problems of translation and group in-fighting. This incident brought together the IG and the SI, but since the flamboyant gestures and actions of the latter did not specifically counteract any given structure, be it that of the ICA or that of their own presentation, I would argue that this particular event did not exceed any traditional Dadaistic format of anti-art. In his book *The Assault on Culture: Utopian Currents from Lettrisme to Class War*<sup>487</sup> Stewart Home presents a fundamental and at the same time very precise critique of the SI's often sloppy and repetitive forms of action, which were mostly not based on a radical critique and inversion of the cultural spectrum they intervened in, but rather on a series of grand gestures of revolutionary habitus. Many writers have looked at the strategies, politics and arts of the SI in considerable depth,<sup>488</sup> but, as argued before, I do not see their orientation towards cultural practices as those of *Entkunstung*, as their understanding of art was mostly either insulting or pragmatic, but not investigated in an inversion of its social and cultural role in post-war European society.<sup>489</sup> I want, however, to briefly allude to one short-lived faction within the SI, the Gruppe SPUR, based in Munich, who attempted to reinstitute art as what they called a "*Gaudi*"<sup>490</sup>, a Bavarian word for fun, to turn art into action, rather than representing one, using painting as the medium of its origin (which brings them into close proximity to the rise of action art, which I will allude to in the next and final chapter).

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<sup>487</sup> Stewart Home, *op. cit.*

<sup>488</sup> Reyner Banham, *Megastructure: Urban Futures of the Recent Past*. (New York: Harper and Row, 1976). Iwona Blazwick, in consultation with Mark Francis, Peter Wollen and Malcolm Imrie. *An Endless Adventure, An Endless Passion, An Endless Banquet: A Situationist Scrapbook*. (London: I.C.A. and Verso, 1989). Jonathan Crary, "Spectacle, Attention, Counter-Memory." *October* 50 (1989) pp. 96-107. Simon Ford, *The Realization and Suppression of the Situationist International: An Annotated Bibliography, 1972-1992*. (San Francisco: AK Press, 1995). Hilde Heynen, "Architecture under the regime of the spectacle," *Forum International*, 3(14), 1992, pp. 50-55. Stewart Home, *What is Situationism? A Reader*. (Edinburgh: AK Press, 1993). Anselm Jappe, *Guy Debord*. (Marseilles: Via Valeriano, 1995). Translated into English by Donald Nicholson-Smith as *Guy Debord*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999). Thomas F. McDonough, *Guy Debord and the Situationist International*. (Boston: MIT Press, 2002). Simon Sadler, *The Situationist City*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1998). *On the Passage of a Few People Through a Rather Brief Moment in Time: The Situationist International, 1957-1972* ed. by Elisabeth Sussman (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1989).

<sup>489</sup> One could look at the early films of Isidore Isou in this respect, as they were attempting to negate their medium beyond a pure gesture, but an in depth discussion of their cinematic significance would go beyond the possibilities of this thesis.

<sup>490</sup> *Gruppe Spur*, ed. by Jo-Anne Birnie Danzker, Pia Dornacher (Ostfildern: Villa Stuck, Hatje Cantz, 2006).

In 1958 the Gruppe SPUR published a manifesto. Having formed in 1957, they were at this point already part of the Situationist International<sup>491</sup> (from which Debord expelled them already in 1960 or 1961<sup>492</sup>). (figure 2.45.) The manifesto brought together outcries for the freedom (not autonomy) of art, for its forces that could potentially oppose the sciences and political powers, outcries against the truth-value of art and in favour of “kitsch, dirt, pre-historic mud, desert”.<sup>493</sup> The manifest closed with more concrete abuse directed against abstract painting, which they here identify with Constructivism. This identification is central for my short excursus on the SPUR because this invective opened a new site of discursive attack at the time in Germany. As in other European countries, the debate over figuration and abstraction had dominated the 1950s.<sup>494</sup> In not only dismissing abstraction, the acclaimed expression of artistic freedom within this cold-war debate, but at the same time opposing *the* standard reference of a historical example of politically progressive art on the left, namely Constructivism, SPUR was turning, as the IG did, towards the debris of the everyday, the boredom and the disharmony of the present. Their manifesto confronts art’s truth claim, the idea of composition, of harmony, of progress and aesthetics: “Abstract painting has turned into an empty aestheticism, a romping place for those too lazy to think, who are searching for excuses to ruminate long departed pasts.”<sup>495</sup> What they suggested as an appropriate form of action to counter this constellation was – painting. In the closing remarks of their manifesto, they write that they are the “painters of the future who are the only ones who can proceed with the task of “*enttrümmern*”, a word which does not exist but forms an impossible negative verb from the substantive ‘*Trümmer*’, or debris: de-debrification. *Trümmer* is a word used in Germany excessively in the post-war period, of just because of the actual *Trümmer* on the streets, but also because of the romantisation of the post-war hardship of the German people, in their vast majority former Nazis. The German word for war widows of that time, for example is *Trümmerfrauen*. *Enttrümmern* thus formulates a specific attack against Germany’s nostalgia for its National Socialist past and turns it into a *Gaudi*.

The reason I refer to their manifesto here is twofold: on the one side they refused to confine themselves with art and its media alone and to exile from it in anti-art gestures, like most of their comrades at the SI did; on the other they proposed to battle on the field of painting, to use art’s social status to raise an action from there which exceeded the confinements of the field fundamentally. Apart from producing paintings, sculptures,

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<sup>491</sup> Ibid. p.8

<sup>492</sup> Ohrt, *op. cit.*, p. 219f.

<sup>493</sup> *Gruppe Spur*, p. 17.

<sup>494</sup> See *Das Menschenbild in unserer Zeit*. ed. by Hans Gerhard Evers.

<sup>495</sup> *Gruppe Spur*, p. 17.

installations and other artistic objects, SPUR also performed lectures, writings and other actions, all subsumed under the heading of ‘painting’. In 1959, SPUR organized a talk by the “philosopher, mathematician and militant non-conformist”<sup>496</sup> Dr. Max Bense. This well attended event, which afterwards was positively commented on in one of Germany’s largest daily newspapers, took place in the absence of the speaker, who, as a leaflet announced, had to travel surprisingly and left an audiotape instead. The event was not only a huge success, but, more importantly, a fake: the talk had been assembled by the Gruppe SPUR from various recordings of earlier speeches by Bense. Bense, who heard of it only through the press, threatened to sue them for ‘detourning’ his speech acts. However, this speech was not intended to mock sense completely, but instead apparently produced sense, was widely cited and discussed. SPUR had performed an artistic action which estranged sense from the authority it was spoken through, an action which they pursued further with the successful positioning of a fake artist identity in the very exhibition Bense’s talk was said to open: *Extremisten-Realisten* at the Berufsverband Bildender Künstler in Munich, which had announced to stage ‘new and young German talent’. The artist they had succeeded to place in that exhibition was called Bolus Krim, and the Gruppe SPUR dedicated him a solo exhibition in parallel to the group show in which they announced his tragic and premature death.<sup>497</sup>

In the end of the 1950s and early 1960s SPUR realised a series of such actions and exhibitions, and I invoke them here because they bring another form of *Entkunstung* into play: that of turning art into an action, of using one arts’ media to perform from it, leaving its defined sectors and producing artistic interventions outside of the realms of art. In SPUR, this was, however, only an early phenomenon. It is this turn from art into action, however, which I want to concentrate on more specifically in the last chapter of my thesis, discussing *Entkunstung* of a leap of art into action.

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<sup>496</sup> *Gruppe Spur*, p. 14.

<sup>497</sup> Ohrt, *op. cit.*, p. 210.

### 3 *Conceptualism in Actualisation: Entkunstung as Art*

#### 3.1.1 Art and *Entkunstung*: Ideas and Actions

The objective, alien forces, which have ruled history so far (...) come under the control of the people themselves. It is not until then that mankind will make its own history in full consciousness, only then will the social causes which they put into effect more and more have the intended outcome. This is the leap of mankind from the realm of necessity into the realm of freedom.<sup>498</sup>

As in all other fields of human action, when one looks back at voluntaristic moves in artistic production, artistic self-images and their afterlives, the lineages of lost threads, of shifts, of reconceptualisations and dispositions push to the fore. Following up Engels' distinction between the ever-present realm of necessity and the only ever projected realm of freedom, the significance of these lineages lies in the differences between their voluntaristic social causes and their often unintended outcomes. Within the realm of necessity, nothing ever is fully realized. And even though Engels in 1852 was speaking more generally about the cause of human emancipation, one might transfer his observations to the more specific realm of art. In art the voluntaristic causes seem to be more limited, more self-enclosed, and in that, more secured from diversion, but still Engels' dictum becomes relevant when we look to art's materials, its producers, their techniques, representations, social surroundings and structural givens. And as Engels' modern hope for the leap of mankind into a realm of freedom remained unfulfilled, the realm of freedom seems to have relocated through time. Engels hoped for the emancipation of mankind in 1852, but since then this emancipation did not just remain unseen. It surfaced in exactly the modus described by Engels: in misguided revolutionary test sites, in expanded thoughts and actions which could never remain responsible for their own life but lost their authorship, their means and their ends in their very realization.

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<sup>498</sup> Friedrich Engels, „Herrn Eugen Dührings Umwälzung der Wissenschaft“, *Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels: [Werke]. Vol. 20, [Anti-Dühring, Dialektik der Natur]*. (Berlin: Dietz, 1990), p. 264f.

This is true for the steps taken towards *Entkunstung* which I have attempted to map historically in the first two parts of this thesis, concentrating on the moments in which becoming real seemed to become real--the Russian Revolution--and in the moment of historical expropriation, the moment in which the forces of progress were established in inverted form, in which a collective sociability was established in the national reconciliations of the industrial popular cultures—British Pop.

This third and final chapter of my historical diagram of artistic strategies of *Entkunstung* deals with a historical moment of duration, one in which no singular event or constellation opened up a radically new artistic or social situation, but in which the endurance of these unrealized, inhibited and arrested realizations materialized as an artistic reconfiguration that still haunts contemporary artistic practices. I want to try to narrate anew what has been art historically as well as artistically canonized as the rise of Conceptual art in the 1960s, but now as the actualization of *Entkunstung* within a structure of immanence. This thought of immanence, of the implication of *Entkunstung* into art as an explicit artistic practice, takes up in many ways Conceptual art's early theorisations as “dematerialization” or idea art. I am not, however, intending to consider this reappearance of *Entkunstung* as immanence in Conceptual art as a form of inescapable cerebrality in art or the presumptuous re-impersonation of the artistic genius as artist-philosopher. Instead, I want to explore a direction, which writer, curator and critic Lucy Lippard laid out in her early writings on the subject, but which did not end up in the focus of her conceptual historicisation. In her famous 1968 text “The Dematerialization of Art”, which she co-authored with John Chandler<sup>499</sup>, as well as in her recollection of it in the introduction of her influential book *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* of 1973,<sup>500</sup> Lippard distinguishes between “art as idea and art as action”,<sup>501</sup> the latter being characterized as the breakdown of traditional media since 1958. While Lippard as well as many who have reconstructed the historical appearance of Conceptual art after her have followed up primarily the narrations of “art as idea” as they were impersonated by Joseph Kosuth, Art & Language and others, I want to concentrate on the moment which Lippard noted for 1958, the emergence of ‘art as action’. The reason is this: thinking of art's *Entkunstung* in a modus of actualisation, of the repetition and differentiation of recurring themes within the function and materialisation of art in

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<sup>499</sup> See Lucy R. Lippard and John Chandler, “The Dematerialization of Art”, in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. By Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), p. 46.

<sup>500</sup> See Lippard, “Postface, in *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object 1966 to 1972*”, in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. By Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), pp. 294-295.

<sup>501</sup> See Lippard, *ibid.*

modern, industrialized nation-states, art as action takes up the thread of art's possible shift into a more general social practice, and thus a disruption of the fields outside of it. What Lippard signifies as 'art as idea' and what has been historicised as Conceptual art also performs modes of *Entkunstung* (and sometimes, as in the case of Art & Language, even with explicit reference to Adorno's terms).<sup>502</sup> However, this unambivalent consent to the identification of art with its conceptualisation affirms Adorno's classification of art as intellectual in contrast to manual labour (which I have tried to criticize in relation to Bürger's understanding of the concept of the avant-garde previously) and thus holds on to one of art's most central characteristics within the bourgeois canon – its separation from manual labour, from the reproduction of society on a material level. In the coming chapter, I shall return to the problematic role of art in this process, discussing why it is that I argue that this Conceptual moment, which took off as an undercurrent of American art only years after the IG dissolved in 1956, still dominates the terms of *Entkunstung* in art today. If one sees Lippard's distinction between the emergence of action in art in 1958 and that of its turn towards idea art in 1966 in relation to the first two chapters, which thematise the moments of *Entkunstung* as the productivist introduction of art into general industrial sites of production in the early nineteenth century and its actualisation in the IG's identification of art within the images and recollections of the industrialised culture industry after the Second World War, one can see why the so-called action break of art performs a much more active thread of this actualisation than its later inversion, so-called idea art. Both stand in direct relationship, I want to argue, to the idea of *Entkunstung*, and what I want to describe as their ongoing actualities mark in many ways the starting point of my project. Interestingly Lippard had, in 1966, published an anthology dedicated to Pop Art,<sup>503</sup> in which she debates Pop Art through the figure of what she calls "Duchamp's conceptualism".<sup>504</sup> Her introduction to this volume closes with her arguing that in Pop "Commercial images, photographs, and signs are not used specifically but are left in poetic suspension."<sup>505</sup> This suspension marks a bridge from the IG's amassing of popular imagery and the amassing of its actual objects by action artists, like Allan Kaprow or Claes Oldenburg.

We can identify the three steps of *Entkunstung*: 1) the revolutionary actions of productivist *Entkunstungen* within a society at the verge of its industrialization; 2) the IG's

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<sup>502</sup> See Peter Osborne, "Art Beyond Aesthetics: Philosophical Criticism, Art History and Contemporary Art" in *Art History*. 27, no. 4 (2004), pp. 651-670.

<sup>503</sup> See Lippard, *Pop Art*, with contributions by Lawrence Alloway, Nancy Marmer, Nicolas Calas (London: Thames and Hudson, 1966).

<sup>504</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>505</sup> *Ibid.*

apprehension of an *Entkunstung* through modes and motifs seemingly arbitrary to art in their productive affirmations of the traits of an economized culture industry, and finally 3) the expansion of *Entkunstung* into the safe-haven of artistic distinction in the rise of conceptual practices in art in the consumerist societies of North America. These steps do not so much suggest a linear progression of any kind as a sort of steady diffusion. In the rise of conceptual practices, which retrospectively have not only come to be seen as a distinct medium and modality of art but moreover have, as many have argued, led to the reconsideration of all of art's other media,<sup>506</sup> *Entkunstung* expanded to a significantly new social and artistic function. Whereas Productivism had been overtly concentrated on the production of provisional objects and the IG had reassembled these objects' representations, conceptual artists attempted to divest their practices of their materialisations either by substituting it by performance or by the institutionalisation of its intellectual distinctions. As both of these strategies of *Entkunstung* quite distinctly redistribute art's labour to emancipate it from the confines of 'mere' art, conceptualisms are characterised by the extreme culmination of two inverse processes of acting out this theme. This opposition is the reason for my reference to Lippard's delineation of a two-fold history of Conceptual art and also the basis of my hypothesis that this moment of *Entkunstung* arising in the late 50s and mid 60s has not yet passed. For whereas the previous moments of *Entkunstung* had instituted themselves in antagonistic terms—whether by affirming art's roots in craft while stressing its conceptual expansion, or by affirming its representational appearance while reconstructing its scientific underpinnings—the rise of the two conceptualisms together instituted something that might be called a *positivation* of *Entkunstung*. What I shall discuss in greater detail in this final chapter is the question of the implications of the turns toward action and ideas and their conscious annulment of the object characters of artistic labour, which in all moments of *Entkunstung* before them had figured as the central vehicle into that everyday into which *Entkunstung* sought to move.

It is in this regard no coincidence that Art & Language explicitly referred to Adorno's concept, because in many ways 'idea art' materialized Adorno's negative teleology of art as a self-emptying process he calls *Entkunstung*.<sup>507</sup> Where the artistic strategies of *Entkunstung* which I attempted to sketch out in the first two chapters are models of affirming that which Adorno makes responsible for the degradation of art in the course of modernity from outside the category of art—its increasing proximity to the culture industry, its closeness to the crafts,

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<sup>506</sup> See Thomas Crow, "Ungeschriebene Geschichten der Konzeptkunst", in *Art After Conceptual Art*, ed. by Alexander Alberro, Sabeth Buchmann (Wien: Generali Foundation, 2006), pp. 59-72.

<sup>507</sup> See Theodor W. Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970), p. 123.

its popularization in form and in its reproductive character—the conceptualisation of art from art’s status as idea instead affirmed those categories which Adorno highlights as the marks of *Entkünstung* inside of the field of art itself: the disintegration of media specificities, the becoming permeable of the integrity of the work of art. Here it is no longer the rejected physicality and worldliness of art which is expanded but, on the contrary, its self-depletion is affirmed and positivised into art proper. Where the Productivists and the IG aimed to force art closer to the realm of popular culture and its industrial complexes, Conceptual idea art in tendency sought to re-distinguish artistic production by sharply cutting it off from any form of seemingly external materiality. It thereby aggressively reaffirms, confirms and expands the division of manual and intellectual labour and the role that art holds within this division, its status as a phantasm, which replaces politics rather than enacting a politics from the field of art. Thus, I shall refer to what Lippard called the idea break in art in my last chapter as both an example of and a corrective to Adorno’s concept of *Entkünstung* itself in its actualised, and now materialised form in art. My major focus, however, lies on the counterpart of this intellectualisation, the action break in art, to again utilise Lippard’s terminology. She dates this as early as 1958, the year in which Kaprow wrote his famous essay “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock”.<sup>508</sup> Here Kaprow argues for Pollock as a performer, a dissociator of painting in whose practice this traditional medium was no longer a contemplative matter of formal composition but rather one of performance and environment. In that, his reading of Pollock and the IG’s representations of him in *Parallel of Life and Art* focus on the same aspect, on Pollock’s turning of painting into an action the signs of which are no longer strictly bound to its producer’s intentions. Kaprow sees the dissolution of painting in Pollock himself, in that artistic figure which Greenberg had elected as the icon of painting’s medium specificity.<sup>509</sup> This is the strand of a conceptual break as action art that I want to trace, the second strand of *Entkünstung*, which rose in relation to art’s conceptualisations. In Kaprow’s view of Pollock, as in Claes Oldenburg’s performances of the same time, the affirmation of what *is* precedes the re-initiations of it. Unlike idea art, action art affirms the physicalities of art and refuses to distinguish them from those of the everyday. Here art becomes an actualisation of the everyday, the culturalised routines of which are in this case not identified with its objects, but more with its movements, its habitual or even vegetative processes. As Kaprow suggested in

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<sup>508</sup> See Allan Kaprow, “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock”, in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, Lannan series of contemporary art criticism, 3, ed. by Jeffrey Kelley (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 1-9.

<sup>509</sup> Clement Greenberg, „American Type Painting“ (1955), in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism. Volume 3, Affirmations and Refusals, 1950-1956*, ed. by John O'Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 236ff.



his 1958 “Notes on the Creation of a Total Art”<sup>510</sup>: “But if we ‘bypass’ art and take nature itself as a model or point of departure, we may be able to devise a different kind of art by first putting together a molecule out of the sensory stuff of ordinary life: the green of a leaf, the sound of a bird (...)”<sup>511</sup> Again, *Entkunstung* here performs art’s implication in life, not in order to distance itself from it, but rather in a co-opting move, that, just like in Bertolt Brecht’s theatrical idea of alienation,<sup>512</sup> repeats the ordinary in order to make its specificities become more visible and thus here more penetrable. The difference is that here, it is not alienation which is suggested, but rather actualisation. And even so Kaprow references ‘nature’ as that to which he turns, one can argue that this reoccurrence was rather ‘second nature’ (Georg Lukacs). *Entkunstung* is thus again enacted as a series of actualisations of inherent meanings of reality, realisations of the world in artistic actions. This might be argued equally for Productivist practices as well as for those of the IG, only that the focus shifted with the social surroundings in which those realisations took place – it is the real efficacy of the projected realisations, which collapsed. Where Tatlin had projected a future industry to realize his *Monument*, where the Smithsons hoped for the transfer of machinery from one branch of the existing industry to another to make possible their mass habitation, the Conceptual art approaches which I am looking at in this chapter attempted to turn art into action but eliminated the future perspective from their projections: their projections are thoroughly committed to present tense. Here, Adorno’s sense of art as a domain of knowledge is in many ways refigured. In his sense it lay in the contemplative reflection of and the mimetic impulse towards the artwork, its intelligible and self-absorbed unity.<sup>513</sup> In the strand of Conceptual art that rose from an activating impulse towards the traditional artistic media and their representation, this mimetic impulse is turned towards the crystallisation of life in moments of art, towards the happening of the work, its active experience. Its mimesis is directed from art towards everyday lives, towards the artist’s body.<sup>514</sup> Kaprow’s pre-conceptual actionism<sup>515</sup> and Oldenburg’s pre-pop performances<sup>516</sup> lay the ground of what I am

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<sup>510</sup> See Kaprow, “Notes on the Creation of a Total Art” (1958), in: *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, Lannan series of contemporary art criticism, 3, ed. by Jeffrey Kelley (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 10.

<sup>511</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>512</sup> See Bertolt Brecht, “Short Description of a New Technique of Acting Which Produces An Alienation Effect” in *The Twentieth-Century Performance Reader*, ed. by Michael Huxley, Noel Witts (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 99-111.

<sup>513</sup> See Theodor W. Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie*, p. 235.

<sup>514</sup> See Barbara Rose, “The Street: A Metaphoric Mural”, in *Claes Oldenburg: the Museum of Modern Art, New York, [September 25 - November 23, 1969]* (Stuttgart, London, Reykjavik: Edition Hansjörg Mayer, 1970), pp. 37-51.

<sup>515</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>516</sup> See Kaprow, *Allan Kaprow: Art As Life*. (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2008).

interested in investigating in art's *Entkunstung* through its realisation of art as action. This is an interest which on the one side was shared by many artists of the first generation of enhanced conceptuality in art in the 1960s and 70s: Adrian Piper, Lee Lozano, Allan Sekula, Mary Kelly or Robert Smithson. At the same time this activation of art was more an intermediate moment of their artistic proceedings than it was necessarily the focus of what is discussed as their 'works'. Many artists of this generation had a background in traditional artistic media and did not necessarily abandon these practices; instead they wove them into a new structure of artistic 'working'. Kaprow's appraisal of Pollock as a performer of art is in this sense exemplary. It opens up a conceptual understanding of art that does not propose itself in the form of artistic innovation, but as an affirmation of lives in art an art in life.

As Lippard pointed out in their pairing, the two strands of Conceptual art towards action and idea rose from the same introduction of an expanded conceptuality in art. In relation to the question of *Entkunstung*, however, they form counter-positions to one another. Where the idea-focused approaches of Conceptual art positivise, as I have argued, the identification of art with intellectual labour, the more action-oriented conceptualisations of artistic practices perform the positivisation of art's corporeal aspects. Thus, their dissimilarity in relation to *Entkunstung* lies not only in each of their stances towards the everyday, but also in the concretion of their proceedings. Lee Lozano's decision to boycott women, an 'experiment', as she called it, that she started in August 1971 after ceasing to produce painting and shortly before leaving New York and the art scene altogether (which, though not initially intended that way, carried through almost for the rest of her life),<sup>517</sup> and Robert Smithson's view of Passaic as the breakthrough of prehistory in history, where "on the edge of this prehistoric Machine Age were pre- and post-World War II suburban houses", re-representing suburban life as an alignment of monument, of discarded remains of a life<sup>518</sup> – are significant not as integrated 'works' of art but as stances, as expanding artistic proceedings into everyday gazes, experiences and actions. The stances taken reappear in different forms in their artistic 'works', which become in that sense documents of stances taken. It is for this reason that the last chapter of this thesis, which deals with moments of *Entkunstung* since Conceptual art, does not so exclusively concentrate on one identifiable group or school of artists, but aims to characterise a broader tendency in artistic productions in the US in that time. This is a

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<sup>517</sup> See Iris Müller-Westermann, "Making Art Is the Greatest Act of All", in *Lee Lozano [Lee Lozano, Moderna Museet, Stockholm, 13. Februar - 25. April 2010]* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2010).

<sup>518</sup> Robert Smithson, "A Tour of Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey" (1967), in: *Robert Smithson, the Collected Writings*, ed. by Jack D. Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), p.10.

tendency to propose art as a behaviour pattern, which has relocated the confinements of art within a range of different fields in society.

What I want to introduce here as a preliminary proposition is that what Adorno called *Entkünstung* to characterise art in modernism, has, with the disintegration of this modernism (and more specifically with the rise of Conceptual art), resulted in the spectacularisation of art on the one hand, and its scientification on the other. As I argued in relation to action art, I am more interested in this tendency towards spectacularisation, because it opens up, as I want to argue, reorganisations of behaviour patterns in and outside of art where scientification in fact safeguards the field of art through introducing scientific forms of distinctions into it.<sup>519</sup> Both tendencies, I want to argue, are implicit in Adorno's description of *Entkünstung* as well as in antecedent artistic articulations throughout the first half of the twentieth century. But in the second half of the century, after the immediate post-war era, these notions have led to the realisation of *Entkünstung* in art on a different level.

In the rise of Conceptualism, *Entkünstung* became art, and its implications of exteriorities and diasporic productions in other social realms were integrated into the sector of art. Through the thorough negation of media specificity in Conceptual artistic practices, the reorganisation of its production under the general commodity form was disbanded, creating a situation in which any action could be identified as art, as art became in that sense a question of attribution. Conceptual art, has, I want to suggest, made possible the professionalisation of artistic production within the terms of that capitalist division of labour, which already characterised the production of mass culture since the Second World War. *Entkünstung* here becomes a matter not so much of art as an individual practice but much more as a field of commodification.<sup>520</sup>

I want to look at this conquest from two sides, as an artistic politics of *Entkünstung* which is characterized by the two conjoined discourses of immanence, affirmation and difference.<sup>521</sup> These concepts are central to the work of French philosopher Gilles Deleuze, which developed simultaneously with the practices of art's conceptualisation. Despite the lack of any direct references between the one and the other, this contemporaneity enables me to use Deleuze's writings as an entryway to those artistic moves of disintegration in primarily American art of the 1960s and 70s and the subsequent distribution of those models across the West. In many ways, Deleuze's philosophy maps out an actualization of that thought which

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<sup>519</sup> This is most true for Institutional Critique: See *Institutional Critique: An Anthology of Artists' Writings*, ed. by Alexander Alberro, Blake Stimson (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009).

<sup>520</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie*, p. 351.

<sup>521</sup> See Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* (London: Continuum, 1994).

was systematically spelled out by Adorno some decades before. Both constructed highly systematic philosophies, which are fundamentally related to one another, mostly in the inversions of their tropes. Just as I argue that Conceptual art inverts *Entkunstung* to become synonymous with art, I use Deleuze as my methodological guide, his philosophy being the inversion of Adorno's modernist thought. Where, in the first chapter, I have attempted to discuss Adorno's understanding of artworks as a priori negations of the world they are produced in (and from),<sup>522</sup> I am attempting here to follow up Deleuze's understanding of affirmation as the only currently performable purchase on 'a life'.<sup>523</sup> Both Adorno and Deleuze are concerned with enacting fundamentally political interventions, but whereas Adorno centred these on the negative capacities of the individual act, Deleuze identifies them in the permeability of structures and the resistances of performative acts.<sup>524</sup> As I have tried to argue here, the *Entkunstung* of revolutionary Russia and that of the IG were both articulated as antagonistic stances, while the conceptual break in art resulted in many ways in the differentiation of those antagonistic stances. One can very easily parallel this with the fate of the formulations of antagonisms, not only in the philosophies of Adorno and Deleuze, but more generally in the assumption that the precise negation of the world as it is implies the only radical possibility of its change.<sup>525</sup> Far from criticizing this as a false assumption, I would argue that its perspectives of realisation underwent a fundamental challenge. In 1973, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari formulated the moment of politics in the present in the following way: "It may be that to believe in this world, in this life, has become our most difficult task, the task of a mode of existence to be discovered on our plane of immanence today."<sup>526</sup> This plane of immanence affirms this world in order to testify to the emergence of 'a life'<sup>527</sup> from it. In Deleuze's philosophy as in the artistic practices of his period, it is not indifference that sets in but rather relentless differentiations that do not confine themselves in negations, because there is no longer the projection of a coming insurrection that might politically contain this negativity. After the Second World War, negativity became the imposition that redrew the collective failure of emancipation as an incommensurable individual task. Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialism speaks of precisely this.<sup>528</sup> I want to argue that even as Adorno and Deleuze seem to position themselves at opposed sides – that of dialectic negativity and

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<sup>522</sup> See my first chapter.

<sup>523</sup> See Deleuze, "Immanence: A Life", in *Pure Immanence: Essays on a Life*. (New York: Zone Books, 2001).

<sup>524</sup> See Deleuze, „On Nietzsche and the Image of Thought“ in *Desert islands and other texts, 1953-1974*. Semiotext(e) foreign agents series (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2004).

<sup>525</sup> See Adorno, *Negative Dialektik ; Jargon der Eigentlichkeit*, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2003), p. 161.

<sup>526</sup> Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari. *What Is Philosophy?* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p.72f.

<sup>527</sup> See *ibid*.

<sup>528</sup> See Jean Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism*. (London: Methuen, 1980).

that of empiricist affirmation – they share common grounds in both interrogating the reason for art and the possibility of action. These engaged thinkers confronted opposed times. Where for Adorno the rise of European Fascism left no consequence but to trace the negation which was built in modernity's antagonisms, Deleuze and others could no longer share his quest to retrieve modernity's emancipation but, after the post-war period, came to perceive 1968 as a moment in which traces of sense could be gained from the non-sense of historical persistences of sense.<sup>529</sup> Thus the methodological approaches to *Entkunstung* in this thesis, as I argued in the introduction, have altered in relation to the specific episodes in which they were attempted.

At the verge of the country's leap into industrialized modernity, the Russian Productivist attempts to negate art strove for a fundamental alternative to both the feudalism of Tsarist Russia and its capitalized equivalent in the West. *Entkunstung* for them meant the end of art and the beginning of artistic production--the end of a specialized sector of unproductive labour in favour of its dissemination into a general productive reinsertion of creativity on a collective level. The systematic and uncompromised negation of artistic tradition, which led to the affirmation of a new Proletkul't, of an agitated culture of collectively free producers. Even though Adorno's appreciation of bourgeois culture stands in sharp contrast to the cultural politics the Proletkul't and other Productivist organizations of the time, the argumentations are nonetheless parallel. Adorno argues from within a developed capitalist system in which the division of labour is not at any moment in question. And so his theoretical approach for me bridges the negation set up in the Productivist categorical implications of *Entkunstung* and the IG's artistic analysis of the culture industry. Again, I would argue that here Adorno's analysis is paralleled in the artistic practices: again, his analysis is shared, but again the valorisation it implies is rejected. In looking at the often consciously anti-artistic praxis of the IG, which migrated to the field of popular representation to find contemporaneously significant visual formations, the historical limitations of Adorno's theory of the aesthetic become historically precise. The two models of *Entkunstung* on the edges of modernity, Productivism and the Popular, define the boundaries in which *Kunst* resides and at which *Entkunstung* takes place.

The third model of *Entkunstung*, which I want to propose in this chapter, no longer places *Entkunstung* at the fringes of art but rather at its centre. Thus it has to be understood from the narrative standpoint of a methodology that can claim this centre as its own starting point. As mentioned before, the turning point that concatenates Conceptual practices and the

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<sup>529</sup> See Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990).

rise of structuralist and poststructuralist theory in France is the rise of the 60s, which culminated, in Europe as in the US, with the student protests in 1968. And it is this historical moment, which gave rise to retrospective affinities and new bonds. Thus the relation of the conceptual turn in art and the emergence of structuralism and post-structuralism is not at all accidental but is marked by major publications which acknowledged the abandonment of the mode of dialectic negation within critical French thought in that same period—think, for example, of Brian O’Doherty’s commissioning of Roland Barthes’ now famous essay *The Death of the Author* (1968)<sup>530</sup> for the Minimalist Issue of *Aspen* magazine in 1969,<sup>531</sup> or the publishing of Michel Foucault’s essay *Ceci n’est pas une Pipe* (1968) in the first issue of *October* magazine in 1976.<sup>532</sup> I want to argue that despite recent returns towards modernist aesthetics, such as Jacques Rancière’s publications on the topic,<sup>533</sup> these poststructuralist positions still mark a central relation of contemporary artistic production and the social relations that inhere in it. Where, for example, Rancière’s aesthetics attempt to transfigure an aesthetic politics, in referring to Friedrich Schiller’s work, what is at stake is no more than a mere aestheticisation of political thought, in which political thought is substituted by the figure of aesthetic unity (as I will return to in the Conclusion).<sup>534</sup> The negating character ascribed to art in the wake of the modernist debate over the avant-garde is no longer present in its returns, as it no longer coincides with contemporary artistic productions and their embeddedness in social relations – but its representational traits, which are, in Rancière’s case, attributed to contemporary art through the invocation of classical idealist aesthetics. They are based on a social projection towards art and thus can be invoked as an external interest. For my project, these theories hold little significance, as my attempts to put together moments of an art history of *Entkunstung* very much rely on the understanding of art as a material praxis of differentiation in which art is understood as a social realm amongst and in distinction to others. The invocation of aesthetic unity appears in my project only as a contested scheme. Deleuze’s approach specifically enables a close reading of those artistic practices, for which the themes of modernity no longer function as an indicator of their own artistic positioning but much more as a revenant from within their artistic materials and actions. In *Difference and Repetition* of 1969,<sup>535</sup> Deleuze argues, that “the work of art leaves the domain of representation to become ‘experience’, transcendental empiricism or science of

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<sup>530</sup> See <http://ubu.com> (Aspen Magazine)

<sup>531</sup> See <http://ubu.com> (Aspen Magazine)

<sup>532</sup> See *October* magazine, Vol. 1 (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1976).

<sup>533</sup> Jacques Rancière, *The future of the image* (London: Verso, 2007).

<sup>534</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>535</sup> See Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*.

the sensible”.<sup>536</sup> It is this opposition to representation that Deleuze expands on in *Difference and Repetition* and which is central to my attempt to formulate an actualisation of *Entkunstung*, which widens the conceptual break of art into the present. In Deleuze’s concept of actualisation, the historical recurrences are no longer identified by their origin but rather by their disintegration, by a repetition, which sets into being a praxis of differentiation, a mode rather than a method of reflection.<sup>537</sup>

### 3.1.2 Damaged Grounds

The third and final chapter of my project is dedicated to establishing the present tense of *Entkunstung* and the question of where this present ‘ends’, when looking back from today. Where did the present of *Entkunstung* begin? Formulating *Entkunstung* as a metaquestion, as I have done in the precedent chapters (and even in the preceding paragraphs), a question of art’s social function and potential, this problematic arises only subsequently. As in the previous chapters, I have attempted to formulate a historical understanding of a specific moment in the history of artistic production and thought differing from the present, predicated on social, artistic and political assumptions no longer valid--here the rise of Conceptual art. But this rise of art’s conceptualisation has, I want to argue, an ambivalent role within the history of contemporary art. It marks at the same time the rise of a classifiable branch, a historically specific trend in art in the 1960s and 70s and thus a completed history, and the advent of new artistic modes of production which have defined art and its *Entkunstung* since and which fundamentally characterize the present.

The question of the social functions and potentials of *Entkunstung*, which has structured the first two chapters of my project, pursues the actualisations of its earliest, modernist appearance through a fragmentary history of its changing historical causes. In my perspective, the *Entkunstung* of modern art, as Adorno has characterized it *ex negativo*, originates in Productivism’s hope for art’s *Entkunstung* into a utilitarian artistic production, in art’s potential distribution over all fields of labour. I have attempted to follow this into the IG’s understanding of post-war industrial mass culture as the raw material for a reconstruction of the present. Consequently, I have attempted to introduce this chapter, dedicated to the rise of Conceptual art and its present tense, with sketching an understanding of the present out of its past. This understanding takes up the artistic, aesthetic and finally the philosophical

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<sup>536</sup> Ibid. p. 79.

<sup>537</sup> See *ibid.* pp. 13f.

programme, which has informed my interest in *Entkunstung* as a historical trope of modernism, brought up by one of its most militant defenders, Theodor W. Adorno, and traces its historical and structural disintegration. I have discussed what *Entkunstung* might be, once it is ‘liberated’ from its negative stigmata. Once we reject Adorno’s fundamental assumption-- that modernism is a desirable historical momentum which still, after 1945, serves as the imperative of any critical thought – and, more importantly, see it falsified in artistic objects and actions, we have a way to reformulate modernism’s disintegrating paradigms in search of the figures and forms conflicting within it. As I hope to have made clear in the previous chapters, I want to argue, like others have done,<sup>538</sup> that modernity was never artistically uncontested. I have introduced *Entkunstung* as an artistic intention and practical analysis, a concept that precisely marks the artistic stances, which understood modern art’s disintegration as its most significant productive potential. But, however critical of modern art’s pretence to autonomy, my interest, and that of those positions I have concentrated on up to the historical moment at which this chapter sets in, have held on to those voluntaristic hopes which characterized the modernist model of artistic authorship and authenticity of production under attack by *Entkunstung*. As I have tried to demonstrate in the Productivists’ attempts to de-signify individual authorship, or in the IG’s deliberate imposition of means of reproduction into the representation of their own artistic productions, voluntarism was by no means left uncontested, neither individually, nor in structure, in the context of *Entkunstung*. It remained, however, the historically presupposed artistic stance and thus could be deserted only on its own grounds.

I want to demonstrate that the measures and means of social and political confrontations had substantially altered already in the 1960s, when Socialism was no longer a revolutionary but also a official state stance and when the revolutions in capitalism’s diasporas, in Africa and South America, brought new strategies of resistance to the fore: questions of political and social reorganization beyond the quest of the communist party. In the middle of the 1960s the Vietnam War proved to be the paradigm of political engagement in the US and Europe alike.<sup>539</sup> With it, political engagement differentiated itself, from party politics to guerrilla tactics<sup>540</sup> and opened discussions that were not tested by their efficacy for future Socialism, but for contemporary resistances to reality. In the 1960s, the political

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<sup>538</sup> See Rosalind E. Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985), passim., or Francis Francina, *Modernity and Modernism: French Painting in the Nineteenth Century*. Modern art--practices and debates. (New Haven: Yale University Press, in association with the Open University, 1993).

<sup>539</sup> See Fredric Jameson, “‘End of Art’ or ‘End of History?’” in *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern, 1983-1998* (London: Verso, 1998), p. 74.

<sup>540</sup> Chris Marker, *Le fond de l’air est rouge*. (Paris: ADAV, 1977).



projection of future causes, which had guided modern avant-gardism, became inverted into political, artistic and social engagements with the present. In the 1960s, the present rose.

And through the rise of the 1960s in art and politics, those *Entkünstungen*, which had conquered art for its future disintegration retrospectively altered their meaning – as they also became re-initiated, became present. Productivism had hoped to realize a future labour form in opposing industrial reproduction, the British affirmations of popular culture ‘as found’ worked towards a non-functionalist understanding of human life, opposed to the national models of capitalist culture. In both cases the artistic producers of *Entkunstung* took a stance, which formulated artistic withdrawals from their contemporary dominant ideological functions of both art and its terms as a branch of cultural production. Trying to understand production art’s contemporary sides, their replacing of art production with artistic production is interesting as much in relation to current discourses of deskilling<sup>541</sup> as in those of labour effectivity prevalent at the time, and the IG’s series of exhibitions and lectures becomes productive for present discussions of a lost media-specificity<sup>542</sup> more than for those of the image culture which in their own time was predominant. The discourses implied in the ideological state apparatus<sup>543</sup> of the first half of the twentieth century and those implied in its more incorporated present forms differ significantly, as do their functions. However, within a world in which the self-assumptions of those political powers that confronted one another in the era of the Cold War were in fact those of antagonizing ideologies, the historical significances of the artistic stances taken at the time succumbed in their visibility to these confrontations. Abstraction, one might say, was taking an anti-communist stance, without ever being unified or identifiable by itself in that way. Today, the self-representation of a world of discourses might still be addressed within the discourses of ideology, but they can strike it only in so far as the structures of that past were never sublated, subsisting in the present – integrated but still sustaining.

### 3.1.3 Past Present Tense

Seeking to actualize an understanding of *Entkunstung* in its present state with regard to the rise of the 60s (which I would, as argued, characterize as the rise of the present), I am

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<sup>39</sup> See Krauss, “A View of Modernism” (1972) in *Art in Theory, 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*. (Malden: Blackwell Pub, 2003).

<sup>542</sup> See Krauss, *A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2000).

<sup>543</sup> Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" (1970) in *Lenin and philosophy and other essays: Transl. from the French by Ben Brewster* (London: NLB, 1971), pp. 121-176.

interested in the reformulation of these classical antagonisms in forms of conflicting and overlapping discourses in art and through art. Of these the concept of ‘ideology’<sup>544</sup> is but one. It is for this reason that in this chapter I want to introduce more specifically models of Gilles Deleuze’s thought into the framework of my analysis, as his texts have registered the folding, diverting and shifting of meanings and functions which characterize more contemporary perspectives since the late 1960s. Inverting the orthodox saying of ideology being the veil that covers the actual truth, he remarks in 1968:

And if there is nothing to see behind the curtain, than because that which is to be seen or rather all possible knowledge is just the surface of that curtain und because it suffices to follow this surface far enough and close enough, superficially enough, to bring its backside to act out, to turn the right into the left and vice versa.<sup>545</sup>

This superficiality, this preciseness applied to the things found and the things presupposed, has lost the radically voluntaristic ability to construct from scratch. Its methods and models were already present in many ways in the practices and forms I have attempted to characterise in relation to early British approaches to Pop in the 1950s. Here also, the subsistence of the everyday within its reformulations in art became apparent in collages, architecture, exhibitions and photographs. However, this artistic position, an *Entkunstung*, which might take off from the centre of any given cultural field, from its appropriation and re-identification, did not openly undermine dominant artistic procedures when it was proposed by New Brutalism and the IG. Instead, it figured its edges. This changes fundamentally one decade later, I would argue, when this mimesis to the ‘curtain’ reappeared as one to the constituencies of art itself. As I have tried to discuss previously, it had already been an aspect of *Entkunstung* in Tatlin’s *Monument to the Third International*, which expanded the idea of sculpture into hybridizations of sculpture and architecture alike, or the IG’s staging of exhibitions, which reassessed multiple image sources, art amongst them, for their capacity to signify as materials for something other than themselves. But where Productivism attempted to *produce* art beyond itself and the IG proposed to *see* art beyond itself, the artistic positions that I want to concentrate on in this last chapter of my project proposed to act art out as a sphere, which had been displaced far beyond itself. This paradigmatic shift in artistic productions arguably still dominates the present, and thus Gilles Deleuze’s dictum that, “whenever an idea is actualised, there is a space and time of actualisation”,<sup>546</sup> complicates itself here. The time and space, which were fundamentally distinct between the Productivist

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<sup>544</sup> See Adorno, “Beitrag zur Ideologienlehre” in *Soziologische Schriften 1*. Suhrkamp-Taschenbuch Wissenschaft, 306. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1972), pp. 457-477.

<sup>545</sup> Deleuze, *Logik des Sinns* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1993), p. 25.

<sup>546</sup> Deleuze, “The Method of Dramatization”, in *Desert islands and other texts, 1953-1974*. Semiotext(e) foreign agents series (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2004), p.111

practices of *Entkunstung* and their actualisations in the works surrounding the IG, have, in their actualisations within the Conceptual artistic practices since the 1960s, exceeded these categories: “what properly belongs to qualities is duration, lasting as long as an intensive system maintains and communicates its constitutive differences.”<sup>547</sup> Conceptual art, which in the 1960s opposed artistic systems of individual gesture and consolidated commodification in favour of a concentration on, so to say, the presuppositions of art developed, as I want to argue in this chapter as well as in the conclusion, developed into an ‘intensive system’ which constantly enables itself to maintain and communicate its constitutive differences. Its ambivalently critical posture, which I have tried to sketch in the introduction of this chapter within the terms of one of its contemporaneous critics, Lucy R. Lippard, and to which I will return at more length in the following, gave rise, I argue, to the present, to the most significant formations of *Entkunstung* to date.

The reason why I refer to Gilles Deleuze’s philosophy as a point of orientation for this chapter lies in his reformulation of temporal developments as relentless but punctual actualizations on the one hand, and on the other his desire to excavate a political understanding of contemporaneity which does not rely on the identification of a clearly defined subject but rather on the intertwinings of subjects and objects within an always given but never finalized or equalized structure. With his writings rising from the same historical moment as Conceptual art, from the political re-orientation of 1968 (albeit in Europe, in Paris, more precisely), his philosophy performed the complication of its own prehistory, defying modernist vanguard- and avant-gardism as an impossible subsumption of a life under the auspices of a linear reason, which retrospectively had failed to integrate its premises. What was asserted in the philosophical debates rising around 1968, in its structuralist and post-structuralist positions, was a philosophical stance which assumed its own position to be completed but through its passage into politics. In dispute with the French tradition of philosophical inclination into the politics of the PCF (Parti Communiste Francais) was a perspective on society which no longer divided itself along the lines of institutions of social power and their confrontation, but attempted to establish threads of structures running through it, traversing epochs set by capital or state power to define lines of flight<sup>548</sup> which span and dismantle different strata of time. In his programmatic text of the early 1970s titled *How do we recognize structuralism?*<sup>549</sup> Deleuze draws a map of life which has gained full

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<sup>547</sup> Ibid.

<sup>548</sup> See Deleuze, Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. (London: Continuum, 2008), p. 133.

<sup>549</sup> See Deleuze, “How Do We Recognize Structuralism?”, in *Desert Islands and other texts, 1953-1974*. Semiotext(e) foreign agents series (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2004), pp. 170-192.

contemporaneity in the activation of the pre-existing: “The true subject is the structure itself: the differential and the singular, the differential relations and the singular points, the reciprocal determination and the complete determination.”<sup>550</sup>

This structure, which replaces no subject but complicates and disintegrates it, animates life and makes it contemporary, lived, enactable. It is this contemporaneity which Deleuze seeks, which I want to make productive for the discussion of the rise of Conceptual artistic practices and their aftermath in the present, because the contemporaneity these artistic practices gave rise to are, seen from the perspective of their capacities of *Entkunstung*, not productively mediated by their discussion in the terms of classical or even modernist terms of an aesthetic of the ‘work’ (*Werkästhetik*). As implied previously I want to discuss a range of different artistic practices of the 1960s and early 1970s with regard not to their artistic formal dignity but much more with respect to their potential for a leap outside of art. In this Deleuze’s sense of a history in relentless actualisation introduces a sense of artistic production which carries not only its own established meaning within itself but with that untaught splinters and fragments of previous cultural documents and artefacts which change their meaning within their every reappearance as – yet again – contemporary.

In his earlier book *Logic of Sense* of 1969, Deleuze had already described the present as a state of historicity which is inherently shot through with lines of the past and the future.<sup>551</sup> The present here is perceived, just as the veins of *Entkunstung* penetrating the attempts of a properly contemporary art in the 1960s, as a highly predetermined field which is yet inconclusive and not offering secure bonds of heritage. As I have tried to argue before in this chapter, contemporaneity rose after the Second World War as an artistic problem of heritage, which first, as in the practices of the IG, offered a mode of disconnection and disassociation of art’s conventional heritages in favour of a expansive engagement with newly recuperated media beyond art, but in the 60s confronted artistic producers with the factual identification of their productions with contemporary cultural value irrespective of the choice of medium.<sup>552</sup> Deleuze’s view onto this present as a prepossessed site, in which to mark a position is bound to complicating its repetitions, re-occurrences and pre-existing structure, for me seems to appropriate a situation in which artistic practices of *Entkunstung* have exceeded the repetitions of the modernist ‘new’. In a discussion in 1967, Deleuze, referring to his dealings with philosophy in its historical stages, asserts that “through dramatization, the idea

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<sup>550</sup> Ibid., p. 178.

<sup>551</sup> Deleuze, *Logik des Sinns*, p. 20.

<sup>552</sup> Also quoted by artists at the time, f.e. Kynaston McShine, “Introduction to *Information*”, in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. By Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), p. 213, or Jack Burnham, “Alice’s Head: Reflections on Conceptual Art”, *ibid.*, p. 217.

is incarnated or actualized, it differentiates itself.”<sup>553</sup> This approach, which aims to recognize not by identification but rather in the exaggeration of a returning element to the point of its fundamental de-identification, can easily be framed as a pivotal entry point for much of the art discussed in this chapter, as dramatization and theatricality is a core strategy of the majority of those practices which rose in the 60s as action art. *Entkunstung* here becomes the defamiliarization of a received idea, a seemingly known position or the systematic complication of any presupposed identification. As Fredric Jameson has remarked, these practices that in the 1960s gained an omnipresent visibility as the “so-called Happenings were discussed by everyone from Marcuse to the Sunday supplements... even those of the most aestheticizing and least political aware performers and directors were always driven by the firm conviction that theatrical performance was also a form of *praxis*, and that changes in the theatre, however minimal, were also contributions to a general change in life itself.”<sup>554</sup> However the range of those practices and their politically sustained effects has altered significantly since their actual appearances. This becomes most apparent in the feminist practices of the time, in which artists like Lynda Benglis established recognitions of gender in artistic practices, through the aggressive re-initiation of male roles of cultural production in their own terms,<sup>555</sup> as well as in performance practices like those of Ukeles, who introduced everyday actions into her artistic procedures as a way of re-inhabiting everyday moves, rendering them again identifiable but not capable of being re-integrated into their ancestral social terrain. In his introduction to Deleuze’s late essay *Immanence. A Life*, John Rajchman calls Deleuze’s approach that of a “radical empiricist”<sup>556</sup>, a classification which I find very instructive in relation to Deleuze’s approach to treating life, literature, philosophy and art alike as structures within a field of reality, as suggestive details. His non-universal perception of the world as a universe in differentiation processes a totalizing thought, that of the principle resistance of finalisation. His engaged observations take off again and again in their own actualisations; empiricism “begins from the moment it defines the subject: a habitus, a habit, nothing more than a habit in a field of immanence, the habit of saying I.”<sup>557</sup> This exemplary casualisation of the I – it might have been any other presupposed entity - as a habitual rather than transcendental character mirrors the proceedings of artistic procedures I want to signify

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<sup>553</sup> Deleuze, “The Method of Dramatization”, in *Desert Islands and other texts, 1953-1974*. Semiotext(e) foreign agents series (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2004), p. 94.

<sup>554</sup> Fredric Jameson, “‘End of Art’ or ‘End of History’?”, p.74f.

<sup>555</sup> See Franck Gautherot, Caroline Hancock, Seungduk Kim (Eds.), *Lynda Benglis*, (Dijon, le presses du réel, 2009), pp. 45-66.

<sup>556</sup> John Rajchman, Introduction to Deleuze, *Pure Immanence: Essays on a Life*. (New York: Zone Books, 2001), p. 11.

<sup>557</sup> Deleuze, Guattari, “What is Philosophy?”, p. 49, quoted from Rajchman, Introduction to Deleuze, *Pure Immanence: Essays on a Life*, p.12.

as potential *Entkünstungen* in the 1960s in the US on different levels, The Artist Placement Group's practical assumption of an accountable social function of art, or, conversely, General Idea's mocking of heterosexual coupling as the only real drag in their early film *God is My Gigolo* of 1969 do not accept the field of politicality in art being that of an open discourse conforming to the administered channels of political debate, but rather use it to exceed that which is debateable at their time through stripping art from its accustomed borders towards political action. Formulated, again, with Deleuze: "The work of art leaves the domain of representation to become 'experience', transcendental empiricism or science of the sensible."<sup>558</sup> But before turning to those artistic practices which I want to discuss as actualisations of *Entkunstung* within the field of art as action, what I want to elaborate more precisely is the sense in which this shift Deleuze has marked in the perception of art at the time is true not only for art as action but also for art as idea, to use Lippard's terms again. The question is: what kind of experience is envisaged within these practices and in what form does their experience exceed the realms of art proper?

Taking up Lippard's division between the conceptual practices of action and those of ideas again, one finds that both strands have laid out new grounds for artistic media and terms of production in many ways. Fundamentally, *Entkunstung* turned from being art's exception, its othering, to being art proper. Conceptual art and *Entkunstung* are, I want to argue, in many ways historically specific identifications of identical problems and potentials. The "dematerialization"<sup>559</sup> which Lippard famously asserted at the core of conceptual, or how she also phrased it, the 'cerebral' practices in art, have, specifically in the case of idea art (but also in that of action art) intensified the antagonizing effects of culture's economisation on the relation of art and other cultural productions, its being partitioned, something that already characterized the post-war situation.<sup>560</sup> On the one hand this intensification of the division of labour distinguished artistic and other cultural productions ever more clearly from one another by specialisation and differentiation within each branch of production, but on the other hand united them more and more in the commodity status by which they were identified. Fredric Jameson has discussed this as the "dedifferentiation of fields, such that the economics has come to overlap with culture: that everything (...) has become cultural",<sup>561</sup> a development he locates in the 1960s; in the sector called art this emerges as a reconstruction of the field in terms of its abstract economic functions. Conceptual artistic practices have, I want to argue,

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<sup>558</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, p. 79.

<sup>559</sup> Lippard, Chandler, *op. cit.*

<sup>560</sup> See my chapter 2.

<sup>561</sup> Frederic Jameson "‘End of Art’ or ‘End of Philosophy’?" p. 73.

developed as ways of dealing with this dedifferentiation, which Jameson asserts in making way for art outside of its specified field of production. Lippard's and Chandler's seminal article of 1968, entitled "The Dematerialization of Art", starts with the assertion that "more and more work is designed in the studio but executed elsewhere by professional craftsmen, (...) the object becomes merely the end product."<sup>562</sup> Read with the incidences of *Entkunstung* that I have discussed previously in mind, this introductory statement hinges on a series of points. The verbs Lippard and Chandler use here, 'design' and 'execute' are, quite consciously, not those traditionally used to describe the processes of art making, but much more those of divided industrial labour and the initiation of commodities through it. Where Productivism had attempted to turn art into a characteristic of industrial labour and thus revolutionise both through it, and where the IG had sought to redevelop artistic significations and work processes from other spheres of cultural production, enabling a newly empowered access to general culture, this 'conceptualisation' of artistic practices adapted existing processes of labour and repeated them in art, and, more consequentially, as art. The actualisation of *Entkunstung* here, one could say, became the fundamental characteristic of art: art was turned from a field of production into a behaviour pattern. Lippard describes those practices situated in a politically highly committed context, which was no longer subscribing to Ad Reinhardt's famously categorical division between art and politics<sup>563</sup> but aimed to perform politics in and through art. Conceptual art in fact suggested art to be politics.<sup>564</sup> It is this inversion of modernist revolutionary politics in art, the relocation of the avant-garde within contemporaneity as a positive starting point, one in which (not despite which) projective actions of *Entkunstung* could be allocated. This actualization of *Entkunstung* defines the point of entry into the rise of contemporaneity in the wake of Conceptual art. On the one hand these newly accentuated terms of political art-making offered, as not only Lippard but also others have claimed, a new form of artistic empowerment within the politics of art itself, situating art in relation to the anti-Vietnam movement, women's liberation and giving rise to a series of attacks on official museum politics and policies.<sup>565</sup> The economic division of cultural labour, which is presupposed in Jameson's idea of 'overlapping' produced different classes of cultural workers, who were politicised through the politics of their

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<sup>562</sup> Lippard, Chandler, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

<sup>563</sup> For an extensive study of the Art Worker's Coalition and its afterlife see Kirsten Forkert's research on it: <http://www.journalofaestheticsandprotest.org/5/articles/forkertlinks1.htm> (20th June 2010)

<sup>564</sup> See Blake Stimson, "The Promise of Conceptual Art", in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), p. xxxiix.

<sup>565</sup> See Kathy Siegel, "Another History is Possible", in *High Times, Hard Times: New York Painting, 1967-1975*. (New York: Independent Curators International, 2006).

fields.<sup>566</sup> The strike of animators at the Disney studios in 1941 and the Art Workers' Coalition's actions in 1969<sup>567</sup> fought at different ends of a field divided by its cultural distinctions and labour politics. Of course, artists had fought the reigning institutions of art before, as Gustave Courbet had done with his Realism Manifesto of 1855, which he issued as a text to accompany an exhibition of his drawings he staged in parallel to and confrontation with the Paris Salon of that year.<sup>568</sup> But in the 1960s in the US it was not the politics of a National Academy, of a central safeguard of high culture, which was attacked, but the contemporaneous politics of art history in the making, which was represented in the institutional formulations of the present through the politics of the Metropolitan Museum in New York and others at the time which was politically attacked by artists<sup>569</sup>. Not only in the US but globally, in the 1960s and 70s,<sup>570</sup> these engagements of artists with the institutional politics of the art world through the direct politicisation of their artistic actions were the result of what I have previously attempted to describe in Werckmeister's terms as the 'simultaneity' of artistic production and reception.

The politics of artists in the 1960s in Europe as well as in the US became more focused on the possible impact of art as a field than they had been when their 'contemporary' status had been predominantly that of workers in a specifically individualized field of production. In the latter case, the entrance points for politics of the field of art had been questions of representation or visibility, where in the former case, as Stimson describes the rise of Conceptual art in the 60s, these politics performed a "critique and transformation of the existing institutions of art."<sup>571</sup> Productivist artists' primary focus had not been their status as artists or the possible reception of their works in the terms of the new revolutionary society, but rather the neglect of their specific status as art workers in favour of a more general concern for the substantial refiguration of all work. And even the IG's receptions of that industrial complex of culture, which they famously integrated in their proceedings and exhibitions, was not focused on their own reception through the channels of high culture, but on the general implications of that mass culture beyond the field of art. The American Conceptual artists-to-be in the 1960s were confronted with a model of industrial production in which the division of labour within cultural production had permeated the everyday in all of its aspects, not only in the spectacular regions which Pop art had tackled – in advertisements

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<sup>566</sup> Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era*. (University of California Press, 2009).

<sup>567</sup> See Kirsten Forkert, *ibid.*

<sup>568</sup> See Linda Nochlin et al., *Courbet Reconsidered* (New York: Brooklyn Museum of Art, 1988).

<sup>569</sup> See Kathy Siegel, *op. cit.*, pp. 24ff.

<sup>570</sup> See Stimson, *op. cit.*, p. xlvi.

<sup>571</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xlii.



and the sexualisation of the commodity form – but also more intimate regions of life such as the design of living spaces, famously restaged by Dan Graham in his *Homes for America* in the Arts Magazine in 1966<sup>572</sup> or, again, by Robert Smithson's perception of Passaic as monumental wasteland. Graham's elimination of "the difference between an exhibition of art objects and the photograph of its installation, the difference between the architectural space of the gallery and the space of the catalogue and the art magazine"<sup>573</sup>, which Benjamin HD Buchloh ascribes to this project had, for good as well as ill, turned the IG's transformation of the gallery space into a site for experimentations in popular image around and returned it as art's inherent self-reflection and its subsequent implication into other contexts. For the IG, popular culture was at stake and art bore the media and social position to reflect it; for many conceptual practices of the 1960s art was at stake and popular and, even more, scientific culture seemed to bear the media and social dignity to reflect it – a point I will return to at greater length when I discuss Buchloh's critique of these tendencies of art in the 1960s.

With the systematic appropriation of the commodity form in Pop Art, the implication of art itself into this system of serial industrial repetitions of cultural appendages as moments of a lifestyle, a social status and standard, was made explicit. The modes of representation, which the IG had employed to bring out classical art's insignificance for the post-war present, had been overrun by the actual re-emergence of these classical formats as significant commodities. Within the fundamental rupture, which the Second World War had forced on art's self-perception, its reception had become drastically more contemporary. The contemporaneity of artistic productions became so drastic after the Second World War because of art's enforced inability to align itself easily with preceding traditions. This was specifically true for those artistic stances that aimed to perform a historically and socially conscious repositioning of art. Antagonistically, the pretence of a new avant-garde became specifically impossible for those who had been aligned with it. This enforced leap of artistic production into contemporaneity brought artistic producers in the situation of confronting their own praxis with art institutions, museums, commercial galleries and, to a lesser extend, art magazines and art academies, and thus to go with the pace of those branches of cultural production to which these institutions were adjacent. With this sudden contemporaneity of art, traditional art genres became a more explicit point of debate, their commodity status

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<sup>572</sup> This subject has been extensively studied in Cultural Studies but I am not so much interested in the "ways of life" but much more in the specific implications this has on artistic production.

<sup>573</sup> Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions", *October Magazine*, Vol. 55 (Winter, 1990), p. 124.

discussed for its effects on these format's potential for substantial renewal.<sup>574</sup> It is this historical moment, which Lucy Lippard describes as that of a drastic change in perspective rather than one of a confrontation of these traditional media of art. Lippard delineates ways in which established painters like Robert Rauschenberg or Ad Reinhardt or, in a younger generation of artists, Lee Lozano or Mel Bochner, with the rise of Conceptual art would no longer be seen as painters proper, but as practitioners of a certain perception a politics of materials. Here, the rise of Conceptual art seemed more than a re-evaluation of art as a field of possible production than one in relentless search for a new avant-garde.<sup>575</sup>

### 3.1.4 *Entkunstung* as *Vergeistigung*

At the same time, there were highly influential attempts to systematically neglect traditional media of art: Joseph Kosuth in the US or Art & Language as his UK-based brothers-in-mind are just two of the most prominent examples.<sup>576</sup> Their turn to Conceptual artistic practices often implied the explicit rejection of what was seen as more traditional forms of artistic production,<sup>577</sup> and, in the case of what Lippard has termed 'idea art', often the a prioritizing of the sublation of artistic into aesthetic practices. Idea art treated *Entkunstung* as a refuge for art. In idea art, *Entkunstung* returns as art's refuge, positivising a problem, which Adorno discussed as the "*Vergeistigung*"<sup>578</sup> of art in his *Aesthetic Theory*. *Vergeistigung* characterizes an undercurrent of modern art quite proximate to *Entkunstung* in his sense, in that it describes art's overwhelming difficulties in integrating matter as an element in disregard or full negation of its everyday function into its contemporary practices and productions. As all objects and forms of the everyday are marked by the dominance of the capitalist commodity culture from which they rose, Adorno argues that their commodity characteristics remain apparent in their re-appearances within the artwork. *Vergeistigung* defines the only possible even if undesired way out of this.<sup>579</sup> Art thus loses its matter, it 'spiritualizes' itself, is taken over by *Vergeistigung* in its attempts not to resemble the

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<sup>574</sup> Joseph Kosuth, "Art After Philosophy" in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. By Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), p. 158.

<sup>575</sup> See Lippard, "Escape Attempts" in *Six Years: the Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972; A Cross-Reference Book of Information on Some Aesthetic Boundaries* (New York: Praeger, 1973).

<sup>576</sup> See Charles Harrison, *Art & Language: Homes from homes II*. (Zurich: Migros-Museum für Gegenwartskunst, 2006).

<sup>577</sup> See Kosuth, *op. cit.*

<sup>578</sup> See Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie*, pp. 122ff.

<sup>579</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 137.

everyday.<sup>580</sup> The increasing impossibility to fundamentally detour the pre-existing materials, echoing their predetermined reception through the looking glass of general capitalist culture, leads for Adorno to the ongoing *Vergeistigung* of art, its dematerialization and mimetic assimilation to philosophical aesthetics.<sup>581</sup>

This perception of art's decreasing potential to traverse the world as its material, which Adorno mourns, shares several characteristics with what Lippard came to call idea art. What Art & Language, amongst many others, formulated in their texts stands in for an artistic attempt to break up this visual relation of art and everyday culture and replace it with one that is re-initiated through and dignified by the authority of language as a medium. What aligns this perspective with Adorno's diagnosis of *Vergeistigung* is a retrospective perception of art's development in the twentieth century as a negative teleology towards commodified culture, a fall from grace into the market and its deviations of artistic materials.<sup>582</sup> *Entkunstung* turns into the burden as well as the prospect of art. In their conceptual attempts to counter this fall through a re-initiation of art in a newly established social function, however, Art & Language referred this function not only to *Entkunstung* as art's contemporary fate, but also, in an interview with Catherine Millet conducted in 1971, to the artistic politics of Productivist times, quoting both Tatlin's and Malevich's practices of the 1910s.<sup>583</sup> Introducing them as their own peer practitioners, they identify their artistic politics with those of Lenin, more specifically with his cultural policies of an affirmative understanding of bourgeois culture, on which he sought to base a coming proletarian one. The shared belief they identify here in their own relation to this period is pinpointed as "models developed in Russia between (approximately) 1917 and 1935",<sup>584</sup> which, as they argue, brings them close to these revolutionary artists and would have made them the first victims of Stalinist purges<sup>585</sup>. But as I have demonstrated in the first chapter, 1917 was not a significant date for artistic revolutions, nor did Malevich and Tatlin ever see eye-to-eye about revolutionary artistic politics, nor did either of them affirm Lenin's appreciation of bourgeois culture. What I want to hint to with this example is that in their desire to render the educative stance of their own approach to art in abstract terms, Art & Language miss out on those material differentiations and political oppositions which would have allowed for a less deterministic perception of art's history. Art's return as language characterizes its diversion

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<sup>580</sup> See Kosuth, *op. cit*

<sup>581</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>582</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 151f.

<sup>583</sup> See Catherine Millet, "Interview with Art and Language", in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, Ed. by Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), p. 262.

<sup>584</sup> *Ibid.* p. 265.

<sup>585</sup> See *ibid.*

into a merely formal concern: in this case Art & Language's justification of their own pedagogical strategies is exhausted in borrowing the historical authority of artistic procedures and debates of the Russian revolution. *Entkünstung* here appears as an eschewing of artistic practices in favour of their discursivisation. An actualisation of those revolutionary politics discursivised here, would, however, imply the material re-evaluation of past artistic strategies within a contemporary setting.

I am discussing the disintegration of modern art's self-sufficiency – a notion I share with Adorno's notion of *Vergeistigung*, as well as with Art & Language's however confused self-alignment with revolutionary artistic politics in Russia after 1917 – as a productive quality within its history. Idea art returns here again as that tendency to which I have tried to allude in relation to Art & Language's elusive references to the Russian Revolution. Art & Language here employ *Entkünstung* in the sense of *Vergeistigung* as a central means of its artistic politics, which returns in many of their artistic procedures and manifestations.

Historically, Conceptual art programmatically suggested, as Alexander Alberro, Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, Lucy Lippard and others I have indicated, art in a state of its own deconstruction.<sup>586</sup> Many of its contemporary discussions were centred around the consciously and programmatically staged rejection of art's romantic undercurrents of creation.<sup>587</sup> Nevertheless these figures prominently reappeared, often programmatically. Asked about the perspective of the art he promoted, Seth Siegelaub, the central gallerist of Conceptual art in the 1960s in New York<sup>588</sup>, remarked, "I tend to think that art is for artists."<sup>589</sup> This tendency – the return of the author as his own reader, the constant reinsertion of the artists into his art, the replacement of art's object by art's subject – marks *Entkünstung* as *Vergeistigung* in contrast to *Entkünstung* as action. As I will argue in the following, this lets the subject of art, the artist, return as a material of art itself. *Entkünstung* as *Vergeistigung*, however, signifies that kind of artistic conceptual approach which turns art back on itself, like Sol LeWitt programmatically described it in his now seminal "Sentences on Conceptual Art" in 1969: "17. All ideas are art if they are concerned with art and fall within the conventions of art."<sup>590</sup> Deprived of its material through the omnipresence of the art object as commodity form since Pop Art, Conceptual art calls for a withdrawal of art into aesthetics. The illogical effects of this

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<sup>586</sup> See Lippard, *op. cit.*, Buchloh, *op. cit.*, Alberro, *op. cit.*

<sup>587</sup> See Jeanne Siegel, "An Interview with Hans Haacke" in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), p. 243.

<sup>588</sup> See Charles Harrison, Seth Siegelaub, "On Exhibitions and the World at Large", in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), p. 198.

<sup>589</sup> See Lippard, *Six Years: the Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (New York: Praeger, 1973), p.124.

<sup>590</sup> See Lippard, *ibid.*, p.75.

impossible self-purification, which are expanded in LeWitt's works<sup>591</sup> in mathematical form as well in that of others, like Mel Bochner<sup>592</sup> in the form of language, here rise from the strict pursuit of logic. Through the display of its immanent corrosion this formalized artistic consistency sets up *Entkunstung* as a case of logic gone mad.<sup>593</sup> However, this self-implication of artistic proceedings into scientific fields like linguistics or mathematics in order to cast out art refers art back to nothing but itself. The purely formal character of this approach minimizes material effects of disintegration or diversion of art into other fields, even though in LeWitt's as in Bochner's case the strategies are, unlike Kosuth's or those of Art & Language, not based on an aspiration for philosophical purity. Its re-staging of strictly formal logic and scientific patterns thus in relation to the actualisation of *Entkunstung* lacks the productive expansions which were produced in the case of Productivism as well as early British dealings with popular culture, which registered the same tendencies in art but confronted them in restaging art in neighbouring cultural fields. As Max Kozloff has criticized in this respect in an article he wrote for the magazine *Artforum* in 1972: "In an extremely apparent sense, then, art-as-idea is highly conservative. It exemplifies an almost rote dependence on an art context and does nothing more than reveal passive attitudes towards advancing that context."<sup>594</sup> As much as Kozloff does not wish to extend his argument into a criticism of the art context itself, he is very precise about the inherent tendency of idea art towards a formalism of disenchantment. Thus for me, this strand of *Entkunstung* as *Vergeistigung* plays only a minor role in the question of an actualisation of *Entkunstung* in the 1960s. Its ties to those practices which I have delineated in relation to Russian Production art and British New Brutalism in the IG are purely formal, as what is not actualized in *Vergeistigung* is what I have tried to mark as the potential which the motif of *Entkunstung* bears to allow for artistic productions other than art. *Vergeistigung*, I have tried to argue, restrains art to itself in an enhancing formalisation of its own logic. For this reason, I have given more room in my thesis to the rise of action art, identified by Lippard for 1958.<sup>595</sup> In some of its occurrences, figures of action art have attempted to bring subjects and objects into performance at the boundaries of art, loosening art's relation to its conventional antagonisms in strengthening its relation to its materials, those of the everyday life.

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<sup>591</sup> See Krauss, "LeWitt in Progress", in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, p. 245.

<sup>592</sup> See Mel Bochner, "Excerpts from Speculation (1967-1970)", in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), pp. 192-197.

<sup>593</sup> See Krauss, "LeWitt in Progress".

<sup>594</sup> See Max Kozloff, "The Trouble with Art-as-Idea", in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), p. 272.

<sup>595</sup> See Lippard, *Six Years: the Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*.

In order to grasp this productive quality as one of *Entkunstung*, I thus concentrate mainly on delineating what I perceive as the actualisation of *Entkunstung* within Conceptual art's other branch, that of action art. I am interested in the practical opposition to the insulation of art from its worldly impurities in favour of a purely intellectual aesthetic practice, as predominant in many artistic positions associated with idea art, re-initiations of art as actions in the 1960s have turned this take around, countering the dominance of industrial mass culture in contemporary art in relocating and identifying artistic practices within the banalities of this everyday: in the repetitive actions of labour, the ambiguousness of social identity, the limits of language.<sup>596</sup>

In my search for the potential for *Entkunstung* within those practices, Lippard's distinction between action and idea art, common at the time, serves as an indicator of strands in the formation of the field of Conceptual art. However, it did not and does not signify a strict opposition. Those examples of action art which I discuss here bear relations to other fields of art production, to Pop art, Performance art and to what came to be called Feminist art. These attributions offer points of reference, which position artistic procedures within art's history. I will, however, concentrate those threads in their practices that tie them to *Entkunstung*. In this respect, I will discuss elements of Alan Kaprow's way into Happenings, Claes Oldenburg's early environment *The Street*, The Artist Placement Group's attempts to imply artistic production in the proceedings of state agencies, General Idea's queering of culture and Mierle Landerman Ukele's gendering of this culture in her maintenance pieces. *Entkunstung* here appears in a revision of the possible role of actions in art and as art, in a challenge to the sense invoked by the 'artification' of actions and object. As argued before, Conceptual art emerged coeval to the artistic positions I want to discuss in the following, some of which became implied in its history. As I have tried to argue in the preceding paragraphs, Conceptual art is at its core defined by *Entkunstung*. However, where *Entkunstung* proceeds within *Vergeistigung*, a discussion of those practices would be interesting, more in the sense of its unwanted effects and structures of objecthood than in the terms of *Entkunstung*. There are, of course, artistic proceedings that became art historically associated with idea art but performed the languages and abstract structures they turned to as a problem of misrepresentation, dislocation or repetition rather than as their solution. Among the most important practices in this field are certainly Mel Bochner's representations of

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<sup>596</sup> See *Out of Action: Between Performance and the Object, 1949-1979*, exhibition catalogue, MOCA, (Los Angeles: 1998).

ordering and signification systems<sup>597</sup> as well as Mary Kelly's accounts of experiences not contained in language or Lee Lozano's stratifications of her painterly practices into language as an ordering system of exterior influences<sup>598</sup>. However, I will not have the room to discuss this vast and diverse field of language-related practices at length, as I am focussing on the actualisations of *Entkunstung*, which deserted the fields of art through the materialisation rather than the dematerialisation of art's terms of production and its relation to other spheres of culture.

### 3.1.5 A Historiography of Dematerialisation

Art intended as pure experience doesn't exist until someone experiences it, defying ownership, reproduction, sameness. Intangible art could break down the artificial imposition of 'culture' and provide a broader audience for tangible, object art.<sup>599</sup>

Lippard's introductory text to the exhibition *557,087*, which she staged at the Seattle Art Museum, wickedly brings together starting points of a possible decentralization and dissolution of the boundaries (*Entgrenzung*) of object art beyond the elitist confinements of culture, with a categorical objection to the mass cultural standards of reproduction and sameness. What Lippard was envisaging here, as well as in other texts of the time, was an infiltration of culture through a dissolution of the boundaries (*Entgrenzung*) of art. *Entkunstung* plays no part in this for Lippard, because for her any politically progressive projection of art's social capacities is bound to its sharp distinction from capitalist commodity culture. Retrospectively one might argue--as I have done previously--that this was not a choice open to art and that Pop Art had fundamentally executed this material disposition of post-war art truthfully.<sup>600</sup> At the same time it is precisely in this orientation that Lippard's account of Conceptual art remains central to me, because her perspective on the rise of conceptual practices documents that of a lived history of that art.<sup>601</sup> Lippard's political

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<sup>597</sup>See Ulrich Willmes, "A Theory of A Sculpture", in *Mel Bochner: Thought Made Visible 1866-1973*, ed. by Richard S. Field (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 1996), pp. 261-266.

<sup>598</sup> See Adam Szymczyk, "Infofiction", in *Lee Lozano: Win First Don't Last, Win Last, Don't Care*, ed. by Adam Szymczyk (Basel: Kunsthalle Basel, 2006), p. 144.

<sup>599</sup> Lippard, "Introduction to *557,087*" (1969), in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), p. 178.

<sup>600</sup> Also argued by Thomas E. Crow, *The Rise of the Sixties: American and European Art in the Era of Dissent*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).

<sup>601</sup> Lippard, *Six Years: the Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*, p. vii.

projection onto that art may since have been proven wrong, but they were politically decisive at their time, in art as well as in the politics of art. Briony Fer stresses this in relation to Lippard's 1966 show *Eccentric Abstraction*, staged at the Fischbach Gallery in New York, in which Lippard, as Fer describes it, presented minimalist work of female artists with a hitherto unseen directness.<sup>602</sup> "Lippard's shift of focus to call a breast a breast was made in the name of feminism."<sup>603</sup> In *Six Years*, her seminal anthology on the rise of Conceptual art, which first appeared in 1973, Lippard takes up the practices and statements she documents not only for their artistic but also for their socially progressive potential and sees them in the light of their contemporaneously sustained effects. Her concentration on the dematerialisations of art and in art is presented as a direct result of this claim of art as a social practice. It is the effects of this claim, which mark my own interest in this period. I want to argue, as has been done before,<sup>604</sup> that the conceptual shifts in artistic production between the 1960s and 70s do not signify an epoch of art which from today's perspective can be discussed as a period of the past, but rather have fundamentally changed the field of art since and still carry profound effects on art's contemporaneity today. This is true not only with regard to Conceptual art's implications in recent "retro" fashions,<sup>605</sup> but moreover in two ways: on the one hand, in introducing the field of contemporary art as a global branch of cultural production by offering an abstract perspective on its production;<sup>606</sup> and on the other, through this ultimately changing the terms of production within art, systematizing the use of divided labour in art. I will return more specifically to the second aspect in the conclusion, where I discuss my perspective on the present of *Entkunstung* in art.

As Lippard and others have demonstrated, Conceptual art distributed the figure of the artist-creator over fields alien to art, which offered artistic practices ways of scientific precision of construction detached from those of craft. This exclusion of the craft aspects of artistic production has historically led to effects, which practically countered the desired social significance that Lippard refers to in her recollection of the formative years. What she lists in the postface to *Six Years*<sup>607</sup> as Conceptual art's equalizing and anti-elitist characteristics, the fact that it can be "shown inexpensively and unobtrusively in infinite

<sup>602</sup> See Briony Fer, *The Infinite Line: Re-Making Art After Modernism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), p.101ff.

<sup>603</sup> Ibid., p. 104.

<sup>604</sup> F.e. Sabeth Buchmann, *DuMonts Begriffslexikon zur zeitgenössischen Kunst* (Köln: DuMont, 2002), p. 49, which very programmatically argues this case, or, more extensively, her joined publication with Alexander Alberro, *Art After Conceptual Art*, ed. by Alexander Alberro, Sabeth Buchmann (Wien: Generali Foundation, 2006), attempts to make that point in bringing together a wide range of articles on this subject matter.

<sup>605</sup> See conclusion.

<sup>606</sup> Charles Harrison, Seth Siegelaub, "On Exhibitions and the World at Large", in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999) p. 201f.

<sup>607</sup> See Lippard, *Six Years: the Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*



locations at one time”<sup>608</sup> in its effects has outruled the social appendages of it rising in the middle of the 1960s, in the wake of the student movement in the middle of the anti-Vietnam war protests.<sup>609</sup> As Lippard herself writes in the postface, the non-commerciality of Conceptual art was a short-lived idea and its non-conformity proved not to be inherent in its formation: “Conceptual art has not, however, as yet broken down the real barrier between the art context and those external disciplines – social, scientific, and academic – from which it draws its sustenance.”<sup>610</sup>

Numerous artists and critics have written productively on the question of what led to the end of Conceptual art and caused it to transform into what came to be called Institutional Critique, most prominently Benjamin HD Buchloh in his seminal essay “Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions“,<sup>611</sup> published in *October* magazine in the winter of 1990. This essay sparked a debate between Buchloh, Seth Siegelaub and Joseph Kosuth.<sup>612</sup> I want to refer briefly to Buchloh’s position, as it marks another central historiographical position on Conceptual art today and filters into my own approach to the field.

One of Buchloh’s central points in this essay is that Conceptual art in fact continued Pop Art’s aesthetizations of commodity culture, “replacing an aesthetic of industrial production and consumption with an aesthetic of administrative and legal organization and institutional validation.”<sup>613</sup> He makes clear that many attempted escapes of art were here in fact exposures of gratification. The late modernist battle over abstraction and figuration that had dominated the 1950s had in that sense been resolved in 60s in the affirmation of an abstraction of art itself, by the systematic artistic articulation of its use and exchange value in allegedly scientific formats. As argued previously, what was at stake was art and philosophy, and administrative procedures and sociological methods offered the most universal media of its discursivation. In that sense, Buchloh’s argument – that artists like Daniel Buren did not, as he describes it, indulge themselves in the renunciation of their individual authorship, as this had only abetted the anonymization of art works alongside those of industrial cultural objects, and only refigured strategies of marketing<sup>614</sup> – is extremely valid. Buchloh accounts for the artistic strategies in Conceptual art, which aimed at complicating the relations between

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<sup>608</sup> See Catherine Millet, *op. cit.*, p. 263.

<sup>609</sup> See Forkert, *op. cit.*

<sup>610</sup> Lippard, *Six Years: the Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*, p. 263.

<sup>611</sup> See Buchloh, *op. cit.*

<sup>612</sup> Charles Harrison, Seth Siegelaub, "On Exhibitions and the World at Large", in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999) p. 201f.

<sup>613</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119.

<sup>614</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 140.

commodity form, art production, consumption and cultural access. However where he draws a direct line between the then recent knowledge of the Russian revolutionary artistic strategies through Camilla Gray's book *The Great Experiment: Russian Art 1863-1922*<sup>615</sup> the political commitments or responsibilities such a reference brings with it from the perspective of art's *Entkünstung* are worth a closer look. Following what Buchloh perceives convincingly as an avant-garde tradition in Conceptual art, he closes his text stating that what "Conceptual Art achieved (...) was to subject the last residues of artistic aspiration towards transcendence (...) to the rigorous and relentless order of the vernacular of administration (...) it managed to purge artistic production of the aspiration towards an affirmative collaboration with the forces of industrial production and consumption."<sup>616</sup> Buchloh remains sceptical of the rejection of aesthetic qualities this implied and also of the actual role that Conceptual art has played since its rise played in the formation of the contemporary art market. However, I would want to argue that exactly the notions, which Buchloh stresses as the progressive and avant-garde inspired momentum of Conceptual art, have been the ones which have caused Conceptual art's sustained effects on the terms of artistic production now. Arguing on the one side for a strategic introduction of administrative motifs in art as a quasi anti-holistic model seems at least surprising in relation to what Hannah Arendt, for instance, has argued in relation to the 1961 Eichmann trial in Israel to be "the banality of evil"<sup>617</sup>. The decline of individual experience she registered and criticized here is that of a total expansion of an administrative mentality that defies individual accountability in favour of an objectified reason on the one hand, which the other automatically grants an incontestable metaphysical status to that reason through its administrative abstraction. To stay within this analogy, what disappears as a question in Buchloh's affirmation of administration is of the question: why art now? *Entkünstung* here remains a tactic of art to expand within itself, which arguably, as Buchloh proposes, has been a characteristic tendency also of the avant-gardes. The second part of his assumption remains in that same line of argumentation, judging the artistic potential of Conceptual practices from their ability to distance art from the terms of production, which render it a secluded and privileged branch of cultural production and reception. Buchloh's analysis is significant for me in the understanding of Conceptual art's contemporary impact, because in contrast to Lippard's more historical perspective, Buchloh does not regard Conceptual art from a seemingly naïve retrospective position of envisaged delimitation of art in relation to other fields of human cultural production, but rather for its potential to reform

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<sup>615</sup> See Camilla Gray, *The Great Experiment: Russian Art: 1863-1922* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1962).

<sup>616</sup> Buchloh, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

<sup>617</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem; A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Viking Press, 1963).

art within itself. Where Buchloh alludes to the role of art within industrial capitalist societies, he limits his view to the relation of production and consumption and leaves the radically new formation of artistic production itself undebated. It is, however, this repercussion into the practices of artistic labour which turns the rise of Conceptual art into that of the present and renders it as field of multiple *Entkünstungen*, voluntarily as well as involuntarily.

Trying to frame an art history of *Entkunstung*, my interest in Conceptual art is more specifically directed onto its terms of production and thus to those of its practices whose ties to politicality or, on a much more banal level, to everyday actions were not a choice of content but rather one of format, media and placement. Robert Smithson unsympathetically characterized this as one major influence of Conceptual art in the sense of idea art: that it actually gave rise to a flourishing gallery system, which could build on its low production costs and high cultural distinction.<sup>618</sup> This is a point, which Seth Siegelaub follows and extends in an article contemporary to Smithson's, adding that Conceptual art was in fact the first global art, appearing in different places at a time.<sup>619</sup> Reminding oneself of the generality and formality of the commodity forms of art it made possible with virtually no means of production; this seems only logical. The difference between idea art, which attempted *Entkunstung* by cutting art off from its material realization, and those artists whose action art on the contrary attempted to give art away in implying it in actions again becomes important here. Lippard's disappointment with the short duration of Conceptual art's displacement from its commercialisations has been reformulated twenty years later by Rosalind Krauss from a different perspective. "Conceptual art's further claim was that by purifying art of its material dross, and by producing it as a mode of theory-about-art, its own practice had escaped the commodity form in which paintings and sculptures inevitably participated as they were forced to compete in a market for art that increasingly looked just like any other."<sup>620</sup> The abstraction offered by idea art was in fact that which enabled the equalization of all potential objects and actions; an abstraction, which effectively eroded all potential material difference of media within and beyond the confines of art. I want to argue that even though this is in many ways equally true for action art's disposal of art objects through expanding actions into the everyday, the sustained effects of this *Entkunstung* differed largely from those of idea art, as I hope to demonstrate in the following.

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<sup>618</sup> Robert Smithson, "Production for Production's Sake", in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), p. 284.

<sup>619</sup> Michel Claura, Seth Siegelaub, "L'art onceptuel", in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), p. 287.

<sup>620</sup> Rosalind E. Krauss, *A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2000), pp. 10f.

In Conceptual art, as Lippard discussed in the above quote, art largely migrated to the sciences, a move significantly present also in Productivism's recuperations of art's potential systematic introduction into reproductive social measures, as well as in the IG's conversions of art exhibitions and art's media through the means of science, only that here the shifting of art into science had been based on the idea of a sensual significance of visual surfaces beyond art. The recourses to science Lippard mentions, on the other hand, and which return largely in the actualizations of idea art as Institutional Critique<sup>621</sup> mostly refer to philosophy, sociology or other fields within the humanities which grant a certain dignity, replacing the gestural genius with the educated philosopher of art.<sup>622</sup> It is interesting to note in this context, that in Alexander Alberro's and Blake Stimson's recently published *Institutional Critique – an anthology of artists' writings*<sup>623</sup>, the follow-up to her previous *Conceptual Art – a critical anthology*,<sup>624</sup> Allan Kaprow, Mierle Laderman Ukeles and Robert Smithson amongst others problematically reappear as points of reference, but here, they are no longer represented as practical critics of dematerialization but as performers of an art-institution-oriented approach. Herein, artistic actions, which had originally aimed to move beyond the confinements of the field of art and its dematerializations, are retrospectively identified as that very field's pioneers. In Smithson's case this means that it is exactly the text in which he sharply attacks the borrowed scientific authority of art's dematerialisation, which reappears as its dignification. As Smithson stated in relation to the function of language in idea art: "Reducing representations to writing does not bring one closer to the physical world. Writings should generate ideas into matter, and not the other way around."<sup>625</sup> Again Siegelau functions as the ideal explanatory counterpart. In an interview for *XXe Siècle* in 1973 he closed his remarks by aligning Conceptual art as idea art within the history of the avant-garde: "The principle of the avant-garde is to continue art by modifying its appearance."<sup>626</sup> For my question, that of the actualizations of *Entkunstung*, the focal point in Smithson's statement lies in its first part, in his invective against representation as the inability to become contemporary, to become real. This is exactly where Siegelau is heading with his remark. He understands idea art as the correct representation of its time, a contemporary adaptation, and in this sense he is right.

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<sup>621</sup> Alexander Alberro, Blake Stimson. *Institutional Critique: An Anthology of Artists' Writings*. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009).

<sup>622</sup> See Art & Language, *op. cit.*

<sup>623</sup> See Alberro, Stimson, *op. cit.*

<sup>624</sup> See *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999)

<sup>625</sup> Smithson, "Cultural Confinement", in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), p. 281.

<sup>626</sup> Claura, Siegelau, *op. cit.*, p. 290.

Only that this means that the contemporaneity of both what he would call avant-garde as well as idea art is a merely representative gesture.

It is the social status of this representative function, which has altered drastically since Conceptual art's enthusiastic beginnings. In her introductory text to the exhibition *557,087* in 1969, Lippard asserted, that "when automation frees millions of hours for leisure, art should gain rather than diminish in importance, for while art is not just play, it is the counter position to work."<sup>627</sup> Leaving aside the fact that Lippard is speaking not of work here, as she phrases it, but of labour,<sup>628</sup> work's administered form of reproductive action within industrial societies, her statement recalls the lack of a more than representation-oriented social perspective of much Conceptual art. To be 'freed' from being a function within the reproductive circles of capitalism is a blessing only when either (as in the Russian Revolution) this becomes a general social call, or in the absence of this, when this function is substituted by another. To assign art to that function is merely a euphemism, not only because it lacks a materially reproductive function for society as a whole and for its recipients in person, but also because art's very own production is based on labour, and in the case of Minimalist and Conceptual art practices this has been to a large extent the labour of others, the professionalisation of art production through remittance work. Just one paragraph further on, Lippard quotes Carl André on the subject of sculpture, stating "The engaged position is to run along the earth (...) My ideal piece of sculpture is a road."<sup>629</sup> This piece of sculpture has undoubtedly been produced by labour and not by its opposite, and it would be even if André had it reproduced it as art. It is only the conceptual artist himself, whose labour is rendered as the opposite of work here, as mere thought, a socially very significant but largely uncritical act of contemplation.

With the exception of the educational and unionizing discussions associated with the short-lived Art Worker's Coalition,<sup>630</sup> the changing affiliates of Art & Language<sup>631</sup> and the British Artist Placement Group's<sup>632</sup> attempt to turn art into actual labour, other discourses surrounding the rise of Conceptual art focussed on the identity of art as well as that of the artist without much reference to the terms of labour implied. The notion that art exists as a

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<sup>627</sup> Lippard, "Introduction to 557,087", p. 178.

<sup>628</sup> See Karl Marx, *Das Kapital* Bd. 1 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1993), pp. 192ff.

<sup>629</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 179.

<sup>630</sup> See Forkert, *op. cit.*

<sup>631</sup> Ian Burn, "The Art Market: Affluence and Degradation", in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), pp. 320ff.

<sup>632</sup> John A. Walker, "APG: The Individual and the Organisation – A Decade of Conceptual Engineering", In: *Studio International*, March/April 1976, Volume 191, no. 980, ed. by Richard Cork, pp. 162-164.

secluded and self-referential system of production, which is then co-opted either by the gallery or the museum system has remained significant also in its more recent accounts.<sup>633</sup>

Here, however, I want to focus more precisely on the *Entkünstung* from art, on art's disintegration as a site of productive change. For this reason I want to return to a methodological perspective, which originates from outside the confines of art's history and thus is not concerned with the inherent integration of the field of art, and furthermore one that does not construe society as an ensemble of professional confinements with autonomous historiographies but rather as a field of structures, undercurrents, discourses, incidents and life. As argued previously I would propose that the writings of Gilles Deleuze demonstrate an instructive practice in the attempt to grasp what has dramatically challenged the return to modernism after the Second World War.

### 3.2.1 Acting out Art

“Even the pause gains an aspect of actualisation within the neoteny.”<sup>634</sup>

The relentless actualisations of the very same in diverted forms had led the way into the stabilization of a multifaceted and comprehensive mass culture in the 1950s and 60s and was artistically brought to the foregrounds of art in British as well as North American Pop Art. The procedures of the commodified cultural assets of everyday life which returned in Andy Warhol's object and panel surfaces became the grounds on which the position of the individual in their midst returned as a question. Artists such as Allan Kaprow or Claes Oldenburg, who had themselves started their artistic work in Abstract Expressionist terms in the late 1950s, began to dismantle their own grounds, discerning action from painting and actualizing the formlessness found within such painterly practices as a characteristic of the commodified culture outside of them. Where Deleuze writes about Francis Bacon, he stresses his efforts to de-signify photography, to battle its compulsory figurative character with the painterly proof that within these given figurations, abstraction and formlessness subsists<sup>635</sup> and pushes to the foreground. “It is as if, in the midst of the figurative and probabilistic

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<sup>633</sup> See Alexander Alberro, “Reconsidering Conceptual Art, 1966-77” in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), pp. xxbi-xxxvii, and Blake Stimson, “The Promise of Conceptual Art”, pp. xxxviii-lii.

<sup>634</sup> 273 Deleuze, *Differenz und Wiederholung*, p. 273.

<sup>635</sup> Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, p. 61.

givens, a catastrophe overcame the canvas.”<sup>636</sup> This catastrophe was evident in Abstract Expressionism already. Kaprow’s leap from action to happening and Oldenburg’s performances of the de-figuration of objects took it from newness to actualisation. In his 1958 essay “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock”,<sup>637</sup> Kaprow asks, “Was it not perfectly clear that modern art in general was slipping?”<sup>638</sup> (figure 3.1) He pinpoints this thought to 1956, the year in which Pollock died and at which my second chapter stopped with the implementation of Pop as a life, the abstraction of which had been at stake on Paolozzi’s *Bunk* collages of the early 1950s as well as in the *Patio and Pavilion* of Henderson, Paolozzi and the Smithsons of 1956. Pop was the abstraction of culture into a self-perceptive range of commodification, which uninterruptedly spat out objects whose figurations depended on nothing but their abstraction. In Pollock’s painterly strategies Kaprow discerns acts of disintegration and closes in declaring them the characteristic of art as a measure taken being its traditionally confined genres. *Entkünstung* lies at stake here in its actualisation: the IG’s wholehearted affirmation of North American commodity culture as the sight of possible raw materials had meanwhile eroded the sensualities of the genres which provided an artistic perspective. In Kaprow’s account of Pollock in 1959, the world has closed in on art and its *Entkünstung* rises from itself, dragging artistic practices towards the objects closing in. The projective gaze, which had represented the temporal optics of the Productivism of revolutionary Russia, exemplarily staged in Tatlin’s introduction of the future at present, which had in the 1950s granted the IG as perspective onto the ad-man as a displaced guide towards regained material culture, had in the moment at which Kaprow writes closed in on itself. *Entkünstung* in action art turned into a primary act, an artistic discerning of what art was and what materials would hold it together, a performance of art beyond itself by a figure which Kaprow later named the “un-artist”<sup>639</sup> – the figure of an artistic producer whose actions are *Entkünstung*, as Kaprow demonstrated in Pollock’s disintegration of painting, wanted or unwanted. Here, again, “the true subject is the structure itself.”<sup>640</sup> As Kaprow writes in the closing sentences of his Pollock essay, the young artists of today “will discover out of ordinary things the meaning of ordinariness. They will not try to make them extraordinary but will only state their real meaning. But out of nothing they will devise the extraordinary and then maybe nothingness as well.”<sup>641</sup> In his comprehensive essay on Kaprow’s culture of art and its sustained effects, Alex Potts discusses

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<sup>636</sup> Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* (London: Continuum, 2003), p. 71.

<sup>637</sup> See Kaprow, “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock”, pp. 1ff.

<sup>638</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>639</sup> Kaprow, *op. cit.*, passim.

<sup>640</sup> Deleuze, *Woran erkennt man den Strukturalismus?* Internationaler Merve-Diskurs, 166 (Berlin: Merve-Verlag, 1992), p. 26.

<sup>641</sup> Kaprow, “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock”, p. 9.

Kaprow as a non-artist whose initiatives are nevertheless not to “be seen as entirely disassociated from art.”<sup>642</sup> Potts stresses that Kaprow’s “artworks had to take something categorically non-artistic as their point of departure”,<sup>643</sup> a strategy which I discussed previously as characteristic of the IG’s implications of mass culture into art, but which returns here in a categorically altered actualisation, in the affirmation of a de-figured everyday in which the polished surfaces of commodification and its run down objects and debris are no longer systematically distinguishable. Nothings seems new any more, and thus art itself, with its materials, turns form an entitlement to one of many attributions; and where Kaprow asserts that Pollock himself stepped out of art and where Claes Oldenburg aggressively tried to rage within it, Kaprow attempted to betray it. I am referring to his practices here as a measure of the turn to Conceptual art which he anticipated, because in the lifelikeness of his engagements in art related practices, he demonstrated a defiguration of art, which in its much more formalised forms in idea art has already returned onto safe grounds. Kaprow demonstrated an *Entkunstung* in which projections occur from the everyday. His figures, his assemblages, environments and happenings<sup>644</sup> do not distinguish between figurative forms and abstract natures. *Entkunstung* takes over in that it becomes secondary if these actions are identifiable as art, because it is the act of identification itself, which they repeat and actualize. Kaprow’s affinity for garbage, junkyards and decaying materials describes much less a preference for morbidity or a naturalised perception of mass produced materials, but instead their fundamental indifferenciability from their more shiny, pop art probed counterparts. Citing Kaprow, one finds “beyond this (...) the larger issue of reality understood as constant metamorphosis. This viewpoint (...) is more fundamental than our ‘throwaway’ culture. The latter is the topical vehicle for the former and, while important, should become something else in time.”<sup>645</sup> This flux does not render objects as icons of a new world, nor does it reject their present status. Its politics, which Potts describes as those of a radical anarchist and egalitarian,<sup>646</sup> are those of a projection acted out. Kaprow’s invectives against modernist formalistic approaches to art was, as in his discussion of Pollock, driven not only by a praxis which largely differentiated itself from it in their own physicality and modality but also by a retrospective disassembling of its surfaces, by the recognition of the junkyard within modernism.

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<sup>642</sup> Alex Potts, “Writing the Happening: The Aesthetics of Nonart”, in *Allan Kaprow: Art As Life*, ed. by Eva Meyer-Hermann, Stephanie Rosenthal (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2008), p. 21.

<sup>643</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>644</sup> See Kaprow, *Assemblage, Environments & Happenings* (New York: Abrams, 1966), p.169 (note 1), quoted in Potts, *op. cit.*

<sup>645</sup> Ibid.

<sup>646</sup> See *ibid.* p. 23.



Again, here the contemporaneity, which I have attempted to classify as the new context of experience in artistic production after the Second World War, is at issue. Where Productivism had fought for the disassociation of culture's recently feudal past, they did so in order to define a position from which to take over the future. Their *Entkunstung* was one, which hoped for a future, which they intended to start within the present. In Kaprow's art-related productions, as well as in those of others which I want to discuss here, this temporality has fundamentally changed, as what I would characterize as their constant set of actualisations does not clearly separate past, present and future and thus accesses the past just as much as it discerns the present. The present is not the latest news any more but rather a moment in time which is, as Deleuze puts it, endlessly fragmented by future and past.<sup>647</sup> For Kaprow, the modernist differentiation between form, medium and content no longer applies. He seizes form in the performances of the materiality he processes and directs it not as its creator but rather as its editor.<sup>648</sup> *Entkunstung* here concerns the artist himself; his authorship bears no evidence of mastery but is as fragmented into its environment as the time of duration which he expands his work. In *Assemblage Environment & Happening*, his testimonial to his own practice written around 1959 and revised two years later<sup>649</sup>, Kaprow lists his procedures in words and images in different series, writing his own history of art in which the present functions as an "extension"<sup>650</sup> of the past, the beginning of which lies in the givens and their procedures, which affects the productions, which do not start off as art but as 'assemblages', which develop within their coming together and are in that neither strictly bound to its author nor to any exhibition space. The disintegration which Adorno feared in the rigour of aesthetic form, the *Vergeistigung* which lies at the one pole of his characterisation of *Entkunstung* (countered by its other, the predominance of mass cultural structures and commodity characteristics within art) is here inverted into the reconstruction of art according to the life of mass culture's insignificant objects and their relations. Where Adorno's understanding of art is deductive in the sense that, however inductively formulated, each work answers to the historical truth of art in and of itself, Kaprow's stagings of un-art pursue the disintegration which Adorno had feared for art from an inductive standpoint *in* art. Kaprow assembles objects, visions affirms a formlessness, which characterizes their props and surroundings, and in which abstraction is sought not as an abstraction from something but as an abstraction which lies within the materials and which needs to be spelled out to become figurative again.

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<sup>647</sup> See Deleuze, *Die Logik des Sinns*, p. 20.

<sup>648</sup> See Allan Kaprow: *Art As Life*.

<sup>649</sup> See Kaprow, *Assemblage, Environments & Happenings*, preface.

<sup>650</sup> *Ibid.* p. 159.

Whether this will then be art is left open. Where Adorno stresses the importance of form as modern art's most significant task,<sup>651</sup> Kaprow follows the formlessness implied in Abstract Expressionist painterly practices, reinitiating art – from beyond it.

Kaprow's *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*<sup>652</sup>, which were realized in relation to the writing of his *Assemblage Environment & Happening*<sup>653</sup>, included artist friends such as Robert Rauschenberg and Dick Higgins, who, at the time, staged events themselves.<sup>654</sup> (figure 3.2) For them as for Kaprow, the format of the Happening gave way to experimentation, to new material approaches within their own artistic procedures. It was art history, along with the gallery and museum system, which later decided which of those artists would be taken on board an art history of performance art or for which this aspect remained an intermediary step on the way to other matters of art. It is also in this respect that I am interested in Kaprow's early approaches to action in art much more than to concentrated movements of performance art like Fluxus, because here the situated practices were much more directly formalized as art, and the aestheticisation of social life inherent in their actions was much more at stake than in Kaprow's intensely participatory and thus artistically much more mutilated events. Kaprow's integrated construction of an art history and present in book form: *Assemblage, Environment & Happening*<sup>655</sup> did not only present its own art history but also attempted to be its own chronicler. The book--350 pages long--comprises extensive illustrations of not only Kaprow's works, assemblages and environments, but also those of the artists from which he builds his history of contemporary art: Robert Rauschenberg, Robert Whitman, Claes Oldenburg, Clarence Schmidt, the Red Grooms and of course Jackson Pollock. His own works and documentations are dispersed amongst those illustrations. In the extensive text, Kaprow goes beyond this network. His text ends with his explanation of "what is a happening", followed by equally extensive documentations of his and other happenings performed worldwide.<sup>656</sup> What I perceive as Kaprow's potential for *Entkunstung* lies not only in the presentation of action as a could-be-art performance, an anti-functional and anti-formal gesture which only became perceivable as art in action, but also Kaprow's indiscriminate treatment of different media. As Potts also stresses, the fact that Kaprow's writings are an integral part of his works<sup>657</sup> (without, I would point out, themselves being works) represents one significant difference to

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<sup>651</sup> See Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie*, pp. 215ff.

<sup>652</sup> See Kaprow, *Assemblage, Environments & Happenings*.

<sup>653</sup> See Kaprow, *ibid.*

<sup>654</sup> See RoseLee Goldberg, *Performance: Live Art Since the 60s* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2004), p. 37.

<sup>655</sup> See Kaprow, *Assemblage, Environments & Happenings*.

<sup>656</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>657</sup> See Potts, *op. cit.*

the rise of idea art in which language came to perform as the work and its criticism at the same time.<sup>658</sup>

Kaprow's writings as well as his actions are characterized by the fundamental affirmation of its materials, objects, combinations and ruptures, which construes *Entkunstung* in the same sense as it had been performed in the would-be sciences of the IG or the would-be mass products of the Russian Production artists. In Kaprow's early happenings, acting out art as an affirmation of the world, but not of its social relations or cultural distinctions, turns art towards the becoming of a life.<sup>659</sup>

My interest thus lies with the *Entkunstung* of art that rises, as Adorno had predicted, from art itself and which at this point in history can no longer rely on artistic gestures of negation, as it did in the negation of art's lack of function in Productivism, or the negation of art's singularity in the IG. It is the deadlock of this negation which Kaprow, Oldenburg and others lift from the history of Abstract Expressionism to bring its dramatisations of life's disintegrated state of the art into action again, leaving open where it might lead, in- or outside of art. My interest lies with the *Entkunstung* such open-ended procedures provoke, and of which action art can perform aspects. I am not dealing with performance art as a medium evolving from an artistic critique of traditional artistic media because in proposing itself as a new medium it attempts to be acknowledged as art proper. With Kaprow and others the instability acted out emanated from a decentred field of materials, which had poured out of art. Through Kaprow, Pollock himself had posthumously become a pivotal figure of performance art.<sup>660</sup> Hans Namuth's documentations of his 'action painting' positioned him as a precursor of the disintegration of his own chosen medium, painting.

Claes Oldenburg, born in 1929 in Stockholm (and thus only two years younger than Kaprow) moved to New York in 1956. Both began to show at Reuben Gallery, where Kaprow held his *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*; and when Oldenburg, in the same winter, held his *Ray-Gun* exhibition with Jim Dine, Kaprow contributed an evening to a series of Happenings in the programme.<sup>661</sup> Like Kaprow, Oldenburg had started off as a painter and, like Kaprow, had tended towards Abstract Expressionist, or, in his case more precisely *art brut*, practices<sup>662</sup> in order to regain an active sense of artistic procedures and of its relation to the discarded

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<sup>658</sup> Ibid.

<sup>659</sup> See Deleuze, "Immanence: A Life".

<sup>660</sup> See Tracey Warr, Amelia Jones. *The Artist's Body. Themes and Movements*. (London: Phaidon, 2000), or RoseLee Goldberg, *Performance: Live Art Since the 60s*.

<sup>661</sup> See Joshua A. Shannon, "Claes Oldenburg's The Street and Urban Renewal in Greenwich Village, 1960" (2004) in *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 86, no. 1, pp. 136-161, p. 144.

<sup>662</sup> See Yve-Alain Bois, Rosalind Krauss, "A User's Guide to Entropy", *October*, Vol. 78 (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), pp. 38-88.

objects, which dominated New York's cityscape in the 1950s. The reason for me to bring Oldenburg in relation to Kaprow is that his early installation *The Street*, (figure 3.3/3.4) which was his contribution to the *Ray Gun* exhibition he organised with Dine, signifies, as Kaprow does, an approach to contemporaneity in artistic practices which leaves the ground of representational means to concert arbitrary scraps of the everyday into environments, assemblages and happenings. It was, as I will come back to, restaged at Reuben Gallery just a few months later in another form. (figure 3.5) Kaprow's approach was one in which, as in *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*, a score which instructed the audience was provided that turned them into props, materials like other materials, aiming to annihilate the representational gallery setting not only in replacing representations of things or actions by those things and actions but also by turning those who perceive the representation into objects within it. Oldenburg instead raged from within his own painting. Installed in the basement rooms of Judson Gallery on Washington Square *The Street* welcomed its viewer with an installation of cardboard, scrap wood, burlap, newspapers and assorted debris from the nearby streets, and all of this was painted over with blotches of black paint. *The Streets*, as Barbara Rose states, was initially conceived as a "metamorphic mural"<sup>663</sup> as it was Oldenburg's first attempt to mix painting, architecture and sculpture. The environment was conceived in the terms of Pablo Picasso's *Guernica*, which, though a painting, was in Oldenburg's eyes constructed along the same lines.<sup>664</sup> The theme under which Oldenburg envisaged the city perceived in *The Street* was thus clear. Oldenburg mixed found objects with those he produced but subjected them in their appearance to a process of mutual assimilation. As in his later *Mouse Museum, Raygun Wing* of 1977,<sup>665</sup> Oldenburg does not so much produce ready-mades as bring to the foreground the intersections between abstraction and figuration within each commodified object, whether the shiny commercial ads he took as models for his soft sculptures a few years later, or the junk on the streets which, in the face of mass cultural entertainment, seemed to prefigure in endless permutations and actualisations the ray-gun of those science fiction novels and films so prevalent throughout the 50s.<sup>666</sup> The Happening he staged at Judson Gallery titled *Snapshots from the City* (figure 3.6/3.7) consisted in Oldenburg and Pat Muschinski performing the environment. Oldenburg was wrapped in white but dirtied bandages, dressed in a white but equally sullied t-shirt and underpants; Muschinski wore darker but also torn clothes as well as a newspaper mask with eyes and mouth brushed on in

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<sup>663</sup> Rose, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

<sup>664</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>665</sup> See Bois, Krauss, *op. cit.*

<sup>666</sup> Julian Meyers, *The Future as Fetish*, in: *October*, Vol. 94, *The Independent Group* (Autumn, 2000) pp. 63-88.

black.<sup>667</sup> Throughout the performance both executed sounds and movements that, which are not clearly identifiable in other than in hectic, miscoordination and aimlessness. Oldenburg, throughout the performance shoots himself several times in the head with one of the many ray-gun impersonations, which Barbara Rose calls his “metaphorical *Doppelgänger*”,<sup>668</sup> but never dies. While many have argued that the installation as well as the Happening both signify the traces of devastation and poverty, of existential suffering,<sup>669</sup> not unlike what Jean Dubuffet had posed as the task of post-war European art, I want to argue that there is a sharp distinction between the situation of central Europe and New York in the turn from the 50s to the 60s.

As I have delineated in the previous chapter, Europe’s architectural plans had been based on the need to overcome the remains of the war: New Brutalism specifically had argued for the need to confront those remains of the past and integrate them in the new materials and buildings and not to wipe away the past with a re-affirmation of that functionalist architecture which had, in their view failed and which they opposed both at the CIAM (Congrès Internationaux d’Architecture Moderne) conference in 1953 and afterwards with Team10.<sup>670</sup> This is worth noting in this context: as Joshua A. Shannon has argued convincingly, the North American town planning of the 1950s and 60s with which *The Street* deals, was based on the Charter of Athens and specifically Le Corbusier’s principles of rigorously restructured urbanism.<sup>671</sup> By the turn from the 1950s to the 1960s this was omnipresent in Manhattan with large-scale demolition of old townhouses and tenements and their replacement with private compounds. Indeed, in the winter of 1959/60, Washington Square, site of the Judson gallery, was marked by the clearing of old apartment blocks and the building of new luxury lofts, a conversion, as in many cases, from low budget or even public housing to private housing to cater a different group of tenants. In one case close to Judson gallery, that meant that an area in which “148 distinct street addresses on seven separate streets were replaced simply by numbers 1 through 4, Washington Square Village.”<sup>672</sup> This setting remains vital to

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<sup>667</sup> See Shannon, *op. cit.*, p. 145f.

<sup>668</sup> Rose, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

<sup>669</sup> Barbara Rose’s chapter on *The Street*, is the most comprehensive overview of the work (Rose, *op. cit.*, pp. 37-50). Robert Haywood’s article analyzes Ray Gun (and especially Oldenburg’s happening staged there), other texts include Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity*. Penguin literary criticism. (New York: Penguin Books, 1988), p. 320; Ellen H. Johnson, Barbara Haskell, Germano Celant, *Claes Oldenburg*. (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1971); Haskell, “The Aesthetics of Junk”, in *Blam! the Explosion of Pop, Minimalism, and Performance, 1958-1964*. (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art in association with W.W. Norton & Co, 1984), pp. 15-29; and Celant, “Claes Oldenburg and the Feeling of Things”, in *Claes Oldenburg: An Anthology*. (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1995), pp. 12-31.

<sup>670</sup> See chapter 2.

<sup>671</sup> See Shannon, *op. cit.*, pp. 136f.

<sup>672</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141.

Oldenburg's stagings in several ways. On the one hand, as he stated in several interviews, it structured his experience of the city as a site of burning wreckage in which pulling down and the sudden opening of new routes through earlier housing turned the cityscape into constantly shifting ruins the reason for which was never clearly discernable. In the case of *The Street* this meant that all the materials Oldenburg had assembled here were actually those of transformation. He offered no nostalgic recollection of New York's previous states--and it was popular at the time to oppose the harsh housing politics with romanticized projections of lost simplicity--but presented a landscape of urban poverty, a poverty, which was not that of its inhabitants, but also that of the cityscape itself. With the radical renewal of housing on Manhattan, the replacement of whole blocks of streets by apartment complexes, the disappearance of the streets, the narrowing down of sidewalks, the introduction of juridical repressions against jaywalking and the enforced collective efforts against littering, New York City was systematically reorganised as a space of life. One could argue that Kaprow's use of materials, junkyards and affirmation of the city from its scraps of debris derives from the same perception of the urban landscape, one which, not unlike the Smithsons', approaches the everyday from its materiality, its underlying constituencies, and in the case of New York its urban trash. But Kaprow's indiscriminate reintroduction of banal actions as performed actions and the initiation of the world as prop in them all suggest in many ways a more substantially re-affirmative approach to the relation between the artist as producer and the produced world from which he constructs. His un-art, in terms of its capacity for *Entkunstung*, offered an expanding mode of *Art as Life*,<sup>673</sup> one, which, as I will come back to when discussing some contemporary inflections of that approach in my conclusion, becomes conflictual in the actual moment of its expansion. Un-art offered art as life to surpass art as art, but in its actualisation was often turned into re-romanticisations of life through art, turning towards life as art.<sup>674</sup>

However, seen as an actualisation of those terms of *Entkunstung* I have tried to sketch in relation to the Productivism of the Russian Revolution and the New Brutalists of post-war Britain—both of which attempted to create less an immanently artistic approach than one which uses art to approach life with it--Kaprow's suggestion of an un-art proposed an inverted form of the functionalism from which my discussion of *Entkunstung* took off. Productivism attempted to turn art over into a functionalist *Gestaltung* of the everyday by everyone; New Brutalism offered a re-initiation of that holistic approach of life through artistic means by insisting on a fundamentally challenged perception; and Kaprow, confronted with an erosion

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<sup>673</sup> See Kaprow, *Allan Kaprow: Art As Life*. (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2008).

<sup>674</sup> Stewart Martin, *Artistic Communism – a sketch*, in: *Third Text Third Text*, Vol. 23, Issue 4, July, 2009, special Issue, *Socialist eastern Europe*, (Routledge, London: 2006) pp. 481-494.

of art's social function, offered un-art, in which art became the name of a specific behaviour, an affirmation of the givens as matters of performance and diversion. It is this suggestion of art as a social behaviour, which was already present in Productivism as well as in New Brutalism but which, with action art, came to the fore as a rejection of the terms of labour and consumption induced by mass culture. Action art proposed circumventions of divided labour and reification in art as well as in life, while idea art proposed retreats from both into language. Kaprow thus stands at the centre of my interest in delineating the rise of the conceptual 1960s, which he preceded, because the line which emanates from him, and which Lippard named as action art, characterizes a strand of conceptual artistic behaviour that continues, as I hope to demonstrate, up into the present. This strand is not identical with what became art historically termed performance art, as my interest lies with the potentials of *Entkunstung* out of actions, not explicit staging of actions within an art context. In the context of Kaprow's actions since the late 1950s; I want to shortly allude to a few other significant performative practices between then and the end of the 1960s, which, like, for example, *The Street* by Oldenburg, staged other approaches to art as the grounds for actions.

For me, Oldenburg here characterizes one approach, which, though emerging from the same scene as Kaprow, represents another understanding of *Entkunstung*, which performs art as life. Where Kaprow chose a fundamentally existential approach to reintroducing life through art, which was in its existentialism largely mediated through his workings with John Cage at the time,<sup>675</sup> his anarchism is what brings him closer to Oldenburg. In *The Street* Oldenburg followed the same lines as Kaprow, initiating a discarded stage of urban life as its point of departure. His understanding of this life, however, was constructed in a much less holistic way, assembling his recollections of the city in the installation as well as in the actual performance from micrological objects and relations, from the abstract, rotten and deadly characteristics of urban life within reconstruction. Oldenburg's visual allusions to Abstract Expressionist forms in *The Street* were modelled into cardboard and burlap objects, which intensified the meaning of the actual junk from the street in which they were positioned and thus build an environment which replicates life in an extreme form. Oldenburg's Ray Guns are the most prominent but also the most expandable example of this. Not only do they mimic real urban violence and hardship, as in Oldenburg's own actions in *Snapshots from the City*, they also allude to the Sci-Fi fashions of the time, in which war was repeated as a colourful and superhuman past-time, a pulp scenario. Both Oldenburg's claims to actions and his later claims to objects deal very precisely with the 'originals' they deform, be they objects or

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<sup>675</sup> See Kaprow, *Assemblage, Environments & Happenings*.

relations, demonstrating that neither was ever original and that their formal completion does not lie in their freshness or consumable surfaces, but in the formlessness they all share by use and origin. The wood scraps in *The Street* at Judson Gallery, the Ray Guns in the Mouse Museum and the tidier version of *The Streets*, which he showed at Reuben Gallery are not distinguished by figuration but by positioning. In Oldenburg's words: "nothing is discarded (...) everything is used."<sup>676</sup> It is this order of usage which Oldenburg, in contrast to Kaprow, employs art for. Art objects and actions perform the usage and the marks and traces of these in the perceivable and utilizable forms of things. What once appeared discarded in Oldenburg replaced the new, as the latter in his early works returned as the ultimate formless figure, the only truly figurative material.

### 3.2.2 Gendering acts of Art

Characteristics of such actions, which rose from the field of art, which re-investigate the contemporaneity of objects, subjects and relations in accordance to their functional and utilizable everyday perception, return in a vast number of artistic approaches in the 1960s and 70s. I want to briefly concentrate on two of those, which did not evolve out of the artist him- or herself as a corporeal entity, as was the case in most explicitly gender-related artistic approaches.<sup>677</sup> This aspect, the making explicit of gender terms and their implications on potentialities, visibilities and articulations of production, gained visibility in art through the rise of the social movements in the 1960s and was articulated in vastly differentiated means and perspectives. I am explicitly not writing about "Feminist art" here, because what I am interested in is the discussion of gender roles and their functions for the *Entkünstung* of art. The formulation of "Feminist Art", as Mary Kelly and others have convincingly argued,<sup>678</sup> presupposes a somewhat coherent style, and turns the interest, which lies at its core into a matter of artistic taste.

In Margaret Harrison, Rachel Hunt and Mary Kelly's 1975 work *Women & Work: A document on the division of labour in industry*, (figure 3.8) black-and-white photographs, charts, tables, photocopied documents, film loops and audio tapes are installed in a quasi-scientific arrangement to document not only the working conditions of women but also the lack of individual experience which these imply, the circumscription of experience that

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<sup>676</sup> Rose, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>677</sup> See Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. (New York: Routledge, 1993), *passim*.

<sup>678</sup> See Helen Molesworth, "Hausarbeit und Kunstwerk", in *Art After Conceptual Art*, ed. by Alexander Alberro, Sabeth Buchmann (Wien: Generali Foundation, 2006), pp. 73ff.



specifically characterizes the lives of women from a working class background. What Harrison, Hunt and Kelly expose here is not so much a ‘history from below’ in traditional Marxist terms,<sup>679</sup> but much more the lack of that history, the lack even of a language which the women they worked with for this project owned and could make use of to express their work-lives. *Women & Work* characterizes the systematic lack of articulate female work experiences, as Kelly argued in a conversation with Douglas Crimp<sup>680</sup>. While men, asked about their labour, would systematically and elaborately narrate the status and structure of their occupation, women would mostly stick with the general classification of ‘a labour’ and than describe their everyday experiences by way of their occupation and function within the reproduction of the family.<sup>681</sup> Even though the form they chose – the documentary – can be framed within a more general trend towards the scientification of art which I discussed in relation to idea art earlier in this chapter, its approach to the re-articulation of sexual difference as a stabilizing social function within and outside of art remains vital also to artistic approximations of the topic which I briefly want to discuss in relation to art as *Entkunstung* through action. Gender here appears as a social, not a biological function, and thus the artistic work which relates to it is not ‘about women’ but about the social and cultural roles of individuals identified as such. I would not, however, see *Woman & Work* as an example of *Entkunstung*, because in the sociological terms it applies, the work still needs the art context to appeal in its educational purpose. Employing sociological means and media to assemble its parts, *Women & Work* does not intend to turn into sociology, but instead employs art as a means to represent social relations in forms which exceed the formats of academic analysis. This marks an important position in the politicisation of conceptual artistic practices in the 1970s through the allusion of their practices to those of the social movements of the late 1970s, a point which I will come back to in discussion another artistic proposition from the UK from the early 1970s, namely the Artist Placement Group. I want to argue that, however politically challenging such practices were at a certain time, they often left the realm of art untouched, using it as a representational platform. My interest, again, lies with those artistic procedures that attempted to transfer the social analysis of the given reality into a refiguration of its terms through art’s institutions in new procedures. Which used art as a base to point to a

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<sup>679</sup> See Edward. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1964), or twenty years later but similar: Jacques Rancière, *La nuit des prolétaires*. L'Espace du politique (Paris: Fayard, 1981).

<sup>680</sup> See *Mary Kelly*. Contemporary artists, ed. by Margaret Iversen, Douglas Crimp, and Homi K. Bhabha (London: Phaidon Press, 1997).

<sup>681</sup> See *ibid*.

practice, which in its results is no longer safely identifiable as art but becomes a social practice beyond the confinements of art.

In 1969, Mierle Laderman Ukeles published the text and programmatic “Maintenance Art Manifesto: Proposal for an Exhibition, ‘CARE’”.<sup>682</sup> In it, she presents maintenance as the central characteristic of all life. “The sourball of every revolution: after the revolution, who’s going to pick up the garbage on Monday morning?”<sup>683</sup> (figure 3.9) Like Oldenburg and Kaprow, Ukeles refers to society from elements that usually escape visibility: its visibilities, its debris, its used forms and here more specifically its maintenance. Where Harrison, Hunt and Kelly repeated the male gaze onto labour and through it demonstrated the absence of its female analogue, Ukeles turns this perspective around and envisages society through its reproduction, through the maintenance of its most basic functions. Ukeles’ manifesto opposes the social and the actual value of these occupations: “housewives = no pay”<sup>684</sup>. In that she enacts a re-evaluation, which does not repeat the social facticity but employs the field of art to enact an absent evaluation. Ukeles’ manifesto, which confronts two models, developmental and maintenance systems, which stand for change and repetition and which are at first opposed to be than inflicted are historically positioned by her in the following way: “Avant-garde art, which claims utter development, is infected by strains of maintenance ideas, maintenance activities, and maintenance materials. Conceptual & Process art, especially, claim pure development and change, yet employ almost purely maintenance processes.”<sup>685</sup> Ukeles employs the idea of maintenance, which she, as part of her exhibition, practically enacts – cleaning the exhibition space – as her artistic labour, thus reformulating social ties within and beyond art through it. She takes an action actualising one specific moment of social life and inflicts its structures into an altered social system. Again, the mode of her procedures is that of an affirmation of a micrological detail which, through its generalisation, evolves as a politically general form which expands the grounds of art from which is set off. She thus renders art *entkunstet*. Ukeles’ maintenance manifesto starts from the field of art, as this field provides a focus on the exploration of *individual* perceptions, which is not granted in the field of political actions, that by contrast is based on the articulations of *many*. But the actions she proposes here are not themselves artistic. Her manifesto mixes sociological analysis with political statements, instructions, polemics and gags and finally demands that it

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<sup>682</sup> Mierle Laderman Ukeles, “Maintenance Art Manifesto, Proposal for an Exhibition, ‘CARE’”, in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), pp. 122ff.

<sup>683</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 122.

<sup>684</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 123.

<sup>685</sup> *Ibid.*

be accepted by a museum as a show entitled *CARE*, one, which would not display any objects but consist in her simply staying there and *maintaining* it. This proposal was never accepted in its entirety by any art institution, but in 1973 the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, Connecticut invited Ukeles to realise a series of maintaining performances.<sup>686</sup> Entitled *Maintenance Art Performances*, the exhibition consisted of four parts: *Hartford Wash: Washing Tracks*; *Maintenance Inside*, (figure 3.10) in which she mopped and scrubbed the museum's floor; *Hartford Wash: Washing Tracks, Maintenance Outside* and in which she mopped and swept the museum's staircase and forecourt. She referred to both of those actions as "floor paintings", re-inscribing art as a function of maintenance rather than the other way around. In *Transfer: The Maintenance of the Art Object*, Ukeles cleaned one of the museum's showcases, labelling her action as "dust painting", systematically expanding the sustained effects of her works on the museum itself in labelling all she touched by maintaining it as art. She completed the cycle in *The Keeping of the Keys*, in which she took over the keys from the museum's guard and opened as well as closed the museum's premises, labelling the closed museum as "maintenance art". Ukeles' actions demonstrate the rituals of establishing a social order. While her establishment of a female authorship dignifying her actions as art has often been discussed<sup>687</sup> I want to stress another point. In indiscriminately distributing the label 'art' to all of her maintaining works, Ukeles' reinitiated the gravitation of all social actions, art amongst them, around the terms of gender, and repeated, or more precisely actualised, them according to the premise of maintenance. One could argue that Lynda Benglis' claim for poses of masculine status in 1974 enacted a similar strategy: Benglis artistically initiated herself as the phallus of which she was socially deprived.<sup>688</sup> (figure 3.10) Her *Centrefold*, which she famously published through Paula Cooper Gallery in Artforum magazine in November 1974, was presenting as structure of sexual empowerment, which detoured the powers it opposed. Richard Meyer quotes her "I was really *studying* pornography and I really wanted something that alluded to it and mocked both sexes...I wanted to be ambiguous enough that it couldn't be said *what* I was."<sup>689</sup> Benglis' powerful gesture was famously greeted by harsh protest from four associate editors, namely Annette Michelson, Joseph Masheck, Rosalind Krauss, Max Kozloff and, the former member of the Independent Group, Lawrence

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<sup>686</sup> I refer in my descriptions of this exhibition to Helen Molesworth's brilliant article entitled „Hausarbeit und Kunstwerk“. See Molesworth, *op. cit.*

<sup>687</sup> Molesworth, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

<sup>688</sup> See Caroline Hancock, "Medusa in Ecstasy", in *Lynda Benglis, Le Presses Du Réel*, (Dijon, 2009). For related strategies see f.e. Mignon Nixon, *Fantastic Reality: Louise Bourgeois and a Story of Modern Art* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005).

<sup>689</sup> Richard Meyer, Bone of Contention, reprinted in *Lynda Benglis, Le Presses Du Réel*, (Dijon, 2009). pp.63-66, here page 65.

Alloway.<sup>690</sup> The four argued, that art criticism should neither be overrun by artistic self-representations, nor by vulgarity and that they thus objected to Benglis' 'work'. What becomes clear in this criticism is the *Entkunstung* contained in Benglis' act. Benglis imposed a work on the magazine through the means of the commodity form which allowed her to present herself as the subject rather than the object of her own art. In that she presented her art as a behaviour pattern of political intervention. As Vito Acconci, Jennifer Bartlett, Germano Celant and Nancy Kitchel put it in their unpublished letter to the editor: "We admire Lynda Benglis ways of bypassing editorial censorship."<sup>691</sup> Neither Ukeles nor Benglis represented a social reality through refiguring it but both established a reality, however micrological, which, though enabled through the means of art, maintains a universality that does not need art as a convention to confirm itself. Ukeles' figuration of the world according to its maintenance presents a fundamentally engaged perspective on art which does not share orthodox assumptions about the politicisation in accordance to the terms of industrial labour central to the actions taken by Productivism, and does not align itself with the binding forces of mass culture's social impact in order to turn it around, as the IG did, but assumes a universality defining itself from the re-articulation of social micrologies. Every detail of society could figure as its principle contradiction. Again, I want to refer to Deleuze's reformulations of orthodox Marxism to underline the significance of those *Entkunstungen* out of micrologies. In his introductory text "How do we recognize Structuralism?" of 1972, he argues:

"There is no total society, but every form of society embodies certain elements, relations of production and values (for example ,Capitalism') [...] It becomes clear, that the process of actualisation always entails an inner temporality, which alters in accordance to what actualises itself. It is not only every type of production which has an extensive inner temporality, but also its organised parts entail specific rhythms."<sup>692</sup>

What Deleuze delineates here is not the fundamental datedness of a Marxist argumentation but rather the necessity of differentiating it by means of the figuration of society's relentless actualisations. These actualisations show points of access to society which are open to change and, I would argue, open up new possibilities of undermining the institution of art and turning *Entkunstung* into a productive position of differentiation *from* art.

The artist Group General Idea (GI) existed from 1968 until 1994.<sup>693</sup> In 1994, sadly, both Felix Partz and Jorge Zontal died. The then only remaining third member, AA Bronson, has since

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<sup>690</sup> Annette Michelson, Joseph Masheck, Rosalind Krauss, Max Kozloff, Lawrence Alloway, Letter to the Editor, in *Lynda Benglis, Le Presses Du Réel*, (Dijon, 2009). p.57.

<sup>691</sup> Benglis, *op.cit.*, 58.

<sup>692</sup> Deleuze, *Woran erkennt man den Strukturalismus*, pp. 29f.

<sup>693</sup> See Fern Bayer, Christina Ritchie. *The Search for the Spirit: General Idea 1968-1975*. (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1997).

taken up the task of documenting and actualizing GI's practices. Specifically in its early actions when still being based in Toronto and when still consisting of multiple members and associates, GI employed art as a field in which gender could be performed in its actual social function: as drag. In the late 1960s General Idea makes appearances in different characters. Already then Bronson, Zontal and Partz make central contributions to the system of GI but with them others appear, first and foremost the Miss General Ideas, Mimi Paige, Granda Gazelle and Miss Honey,<sup>694</sup> (figure 3.11) which were regularly elected and replaced. Since 1968 GI collectively cultivated a scene which was absent in Toronto at the time: an art scene which they established as a grid of cultivated surfaces made of social instructions based on the principle of glamour, drag, commodity, and other fetishisms. In this early phase General Idea presented itself as a concept, an art life, much more than as a group producing series of works. General Idea created a signature look, a world of objects, actions and accessories, which were assembled around regular Miss General Idea Pageants. (figure 3.12) These pageants were performed as "audience rehearsals",<sup>695</sup> leading as an iconic idea towards the eventual emanation of the real Miss General Idea, which was predicted for 1984. The prognostic preparations for the eventual rise of Miss General Idea and the intermediate crowning of Miss General Ideas were accompanied by the building of Miss General Idea pavilions, the 'discovery' of a universal G.I. sign (figure 3.13), the design of a shoe (figure 3.13) and the formalisation of all G.I. actions through the *Showcard Series* (1975-79) (figure 3.14) presenting five categories of actions which had been taken up to that date. General Idea as a collective of changing size and cast systematically invigorated the idea of the artist as genius, which, they figured, was fundamental to the establishing of any virile art scene – but they established it as a collective drag. As part of this G.I. published the magazine *FILE* from 1972 onwards; it was subtitled „transcanadada art organ“, marking the absence of any institutional context in Canada and proposing a mock alternative to it in which they published art criticism, commercials, gossip, cabaret, showcards and coverage of their own art event personalities. General idea initiated themselves as an artistic character, systematically creating the aura of genius, seriously performing art as an action of constant signification. Looking back in *FILE* magazine in 1984, they confirmed, "we knew that if we were famous and glamorous we could say we were artists and we would be. We did and we are."<sup>696</sup>

G.I. used art as a role-playing of life in general and placed their productions and actions in the midst of Toronto's cultural life, where they themselves created institutions of

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<sup>694</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 38f.

<sup>695</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>696</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

affirmation. Art was acted out here in the most literal sense: whereas Kaprow, Oldenburg and Ukeles in different ways utilized the grounds of art to initiate an action from it, expanding its reign, G.I. acted out art itself as an action other than art. Staging and acting out the representative characteristics of art as art, G.I. performed something, which might be called a ‘social formalism’ of art, an *Entkunstung* of art through the reduction to its social distinction and representation. This re-initiation of art’s social distinction gained some of its strength from the consequent denaturalisation this effectively meant for the identification of all of its characters. What I want to stress as G.I.’s expanding effect of *Entkunstung* through the means of art is that of drag. Drag here does not simply signify a crossing or irritation of conventionalized gender borders, but instead an approach to all actions as drag, a mode of action in which all implicitness becomes questionable and its exaggeration to an extent that its conventionalism becomes absurd. As AA Bronson has stated in a recent interview with Mike Kelley, this principle was continued in each part of their mutual actions, starting from them opening a store for female fashion of 1949 (in 1969) and dating the Miss General Idea Pageants back to 1968, when actually they started only in 1970, because all women in the group should be beauty queens.<sup>697</sup>

In 1969 G.I. realised their only 16mm film, entitled *God is My Gigolo*. (figure 3.15) This film demonstrates enigmatically what I would want to describe as that actualisation of *Entkunstung* which is offered in G.I.’s early practices: the precise irritation of socially accepted gender roles through art. One of the storyboards for the film bears a programmatic slogan, which, in its formulation as well as its references, sets up its point of departure: “A Deeper Shade of Shameless”<sup>698</sup>. This phrase refers to Procol Harum’s hit of 1968, entitled “A Whiter Shade of Pale”, which was accompanied by a video in which the band, all men, contemplatively but earnestly gaze into the camera, romp through a London park and sing about male self-experience. G.I.’s *God is my Gigolo*, a thirty-minutes long, mute, black-and-white film, extends this scenery into its full implications – and far beyond. The viewer observes the mating habits of a heterosexual couple, played by AA Bronson and Mimi Paige, who romp through Toronto, a forest by Toronto, a bedroom and finally the Toronto lakeside (which here figures the South Seas) where they are greeted by the ‘natives’, dressed as the actors of contemporary revue plays, all decorated with garlands of flowers and played by Granda Gazelle and other G.I. members. No text is needed as all action is performed in

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<sup>697</sup> See „Eine eigene Kunstwelt schaffen“, AA Bronson in an interview with Mike Kelley, in Diederich Diederichsen, Christine Frininghelli, Christoph Gurk, Matthias Haase, Juliane Rebentisch, Martin Saar, Ruth Sonderegger (Eds.), *Golden Years – Materialien und Positionen queerer Subkultur und Avantgarde zwischen 1959 und 1974* (Edition Camera Austria, Granz, 2006, pp.355-359. here p.356.

<sup>698</sup> <http://www.kunstaspekte.de/index.php?action=webpages&k=167>

dilettantish impersonations of revue dance, strip shows or hide-and-peek games. The hand-made status of the production on the one hand resembles the porn films of the time in its clumsy and abrupt sexual advances – in the bedrooms scene Mimi Paiges lies on the sofa reading comics, while AA Bronson stands in the room waving a giant dildo - but on the other hand re-enacts the revues of the 1930s and 40s in which Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers performed heterosexual love as a bodiless flow of emotions – in the scenes which are situated in public places in Toronto all joined actions are choreographed and synchronized but utterly amateurish. *God is My Gigolo* presents heterosexuality as drag. Through the recombination of heterosexuality's most prominent stereotypes – the South Seas scene stages the contact with the friendly and half-naked savages, a 'purifying' experience – and its cheap and decontextualized performances, it becomes funny and obscene. The performance of conventional normality as art discontinues social givens and performs life outside of art as prototypes of drag. *Entkunstung* here enters art as its own social antagonism. The social conventions, which secure its status in G.I. are re-performed and thus exposed in their senselessness. What the film stages, concentrated on the sexual conventions of an everyday life within the norm, has systematically been reinforced in other G.I. actions. G.I.'s *Index Cards* (1969-70) summoned affiliates to performances through the system of a chain letter. The more than one hundred cards written by different members of the group give instructions to perform routines, as "Give someone a massage. If you do not know how, take lessons", routines one should integrate into one's everyday.

As in Kaprow's Happenings, everyday actions are taken as the starting point of actions in art; but here, these actions are demonstrated in their cultural function. Just as Kaprow, G.I. does not distinguish social actions by their cultural hierarchies, but unlike Kaprow they do not choose them for their fundamental simplicity, but for their mediated cultural values. Like Oldenburg, G.I. very specifically refers in their actions to the contemporaneous society and its cultural specificities: their actions, their *Entkunstungen* of art through the staged re-representation of its cultural functions addresses their present, within the threads of past and possible futures, which run through it. As in Deleuze's idea of the present as the most contested grounds for establishing a firm position, G.I. defines it through its accumulated cultural stereotypes and distinctions. Here the traditional qualification of the artist as a genius, its projected alignment with nature,<sup>699</sup> is inverted: G.I. is the genius of artificiality. In contrast to the conceptual approaches to art arising in the 1960s in New York and elsewhere and which I have discussed under the heading idea art, G.I. did not try to salvage art in

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<sup>699</sup> Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie*, pp. 120ff.

essentialising the conceptual core of modernist contentions of art into an all-intellectual endeavour. Instead, in their actions they performed art as a dramatization of its inherited potencies and its contemporary surfaces, turning it into an all-over vaudeville which might take over life at any moment and which can be, but must not necessarily be, perceived as art. Just as some prominent artistic figures of idea art attempted to do, *FILE* magazine in many ways managed to take over art as criticism; but this was not staged in order to gain dignity for art but to de-dignify the unquestioned institutional stability of art itself, dragging it into the status of pulp. *Entkunstung* here returns as art's factual superfluity acted out as art, the denial of its social significance in its replacement by gestures of cabaret. *Entkunstung* in the case of G.I.'s early works turns art into action by enacting its social glamour. Here art as a branch of cultural production is fully contemporary, because it is staged by the social extravaganzas of its contemporaneity only – *Entkunstung* is art's objective state of the art and G.I. make it productive in discrediting all social norms which make appearances in it though it.

#### Labouring out art

The last example of conceptual turns towards action in the 1960s and 70s I want to discuss here starts, as G.I. did, from the point of art's superfluosity as a representative means of cultural production as well, but from there tries to re-introduce a social function to art: the London-based The Artist Placement Group (APG). It was founded in 1966 by John Latham and Barbara Stevini, Jeffrey Shaw and Barry Flanagan and soon joined by David Hall and Stuart Brisley. With my short delineation of their practice, I return, so to speak, to the beginning of this thesis. The APG's strategy of "conceptual engineering"<sup>700</sup> as John A. Walker has named it in a contemporary article, attempted to place artists in governmental and industrial institutions and firms, in order to raise art's relevance on the one hand and in order to infiltrate industrial and administrative modes of labour on the other. In structure, and, as I will come back to, also in its failures, their attempts to bring art into labour seems to be almost identical to those of the Russian Productivists. Both attempted to turn art from work into labour and thus make it a part of the reproductive functions of society, be it in industry or in administration, and both directed their strategies towards a future, which they hoped to initiate through their actions. However, as Productivism was set within the formative years of the Russian Revolution and thus in a society which was in fact reconstructing its modes of labour, while the APG worked within the givens of a post-industrial capitalist nation state

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<sup>700</sup> John A. Walker, *op. cit.*



which was, as John Latham has argued, turning from a goods-producing to a service-industry,<sup>701</sup> their goals as well as their claims to art differ fundamentally. I will shortly introduce the artistic political background in reference to an earlier work by John Latham. His educational and conceptual ideas were formative for the group from their start and developed through his teaching at London's St. Martin's College until 1967. In 1966, the year the APG was formed, he notoriously performed on *Art and Culture* together with his students, which led to his suspension from St. Martin's College one year later. *Art and Culture* was, of course, a volume of essays by Clement Greenberg; published in the US in the early 1960, it had been acquired by the College library in 1966 and taken out of it by Latham that very year. Taking seriously the book's fundamental pretence as well as its popularity at the time, Latham initiated a performance at his home entitled *STILL & CHEW* which he staged together with Barry Flanagan, who performed in the role of the obedient student. Additionally Latham invited a large number of artists, students and others to join in. On arrival each of them was asked to choose a page from the book and chew it and then to spit the result into a flask provided. This covered about one-third of the book. "The chewed pages were later immersed in acid – 30% sulphuric – until the solution was converted into a form of sugar, and this was then neutralized by addition of quantities of sodium bicarbonate. The next step was the introduction of Alien Culture, a yeast. After which several months went by with the solution bubbling gently."<sup>702</sup> In May 1967, almost a year after these events, Latham received a postcard which required the urgent return of the book upon a student's request, to which Latham reacted by handing in the distilled (figure 3.16) remains of the publication, with label, at the library of St. Martin's College. Upon the registration of this return Latham was sent a postcard which informed him that his teaching skills were no longer required in the institution.

*Art & Culture* was one of Latham's first book mutilation works; many would follow. This work is worth stressing here, because whether in his artistic works, in his texts or actions, Latham systematically carried through eradications of 'original' material. Again, the world was taken up by Latham as raw material, as it was the case in the IG's practices; and again, the artistic transformations exercised on this raw material left it purposefully recognisable. But in contrast to the IG, Latham's mutilations set up a negative counterpoint to what they mutilated.<sup>703</sup> Latham's educational action in 1966 was the conscious decision to no longer

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<sup>701</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 162.

<sup>702</sup> Lippard, *Six Years: the Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*, p. 16.

<sup>703</sup> Latham had also been part of the *Destruction in Art Symposium* in London in 1966, together with Gustav Metzger, Yoko Ono and others. John A. Walker, John Albert, *John Latham: The Incidental Person-- His Art and*

interfere with the power relations of the art world on its own grounds, those of academic and economic authority. From this artistically destructive approach Latham, together with Barbara Stevini, elaborated theories of an altered approach to production, be it art or other, based on the principles of “Flat Time”<sup>704</sup> and on propositions towards a new accounting system based on this expanded idea of time.<sup>705</sup> The APG was founded to provide the basis for the partial initiation of those theories into praxis, and it attempted to turn art towards a functional body, namely the state, which could, by means of political power, authorise, in the APG’s regard, art’s re-functionalisation for society.

“**Procedure.** The placement of the artists within organisations (industries, business, universities, local authorities, government departments, development corporations, hospital board, new towns). The artist’s function is to serve as a catalyst for change, to form a kind of licenced opposition situated within the system.”<sup>706</sup>

These placements were made in the following years through different bodies, through private companies as well as through the British Arts Council. Latham, who had started his artistic practices as a painter drawn towards Abstract Expressionism, and his fellow APG members clearly situated themselves within the realm of conceptual artistic practices, negating the studio as well as the artist and turning both into a function of “a total context of people”<sup>707</sup>. The placements between 1969 and 1970 alone ranged from the National Coal Board, Esso Petroleum Co. Ltd and educational institutions like Brunel University. With all of those, the terms of the placement were discussed and negotiated individually (after 1975 the APG scaled their direct industry placements down and turned towards direct Governmental Department Placements)<sup>708</sup> but in most cases the outcome was identical. In an Inner Area Study, published by the Department of the Environment with the APG in 1977, entitled *You and Me here We are: Artist Placement Group Project*,<sup>709</sup> the APG was included in a programme for the “improvement of the environment”<sup>710</sup> in six different areas in all of which case studies were realised. The APG tellingly states in their introduction their own function as following: “The artist (...) might show us answers to problems we do not yet know to exist”<sup>711</sup> and concludes

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*Ideas* (London: Middlesex University Press, 1995), a book the publishing of which was actually, after a years long collaboration, met by much resistance by the artist.

<sup>704</sup> See John Latham, “Time-base and Determination in Events” (1972-73), in Walker, Albert, *op. cit.*

<sup>705</sup> See Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 162.

<sup>706</sup> See Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 163.

<sup>707</sup> Howard Slater, “The Art of Governance – on the Artist Placement Group 1966-1989”, <http://www.infopool.org.uk/APG.htm>

<sup>708</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>709</sup> See *Birmingham Inner Area Study: You and Me Here We Are : Artist Placement Group Project*. Inner area studies, B/14, ed. by the Department of the Environment (London: Department of the Environment, 1977).

<sup>710</sup> *Ibid.*, p. i.

<sup>711</sup> *Ibid.*, p. iii.

even more tellingly, "the problem, meanwhile, remains."<sup>712</sup> The published documentation of this placement demonstrates rich analysis of the social settings in multiple media in the given areas as well as extensive textual discussions of the artistic value of these documentations, however, the artists did not carry any finalised function *for* the institution as they had been placed in them as an addition to the programme not as one of its constituencies. They were depending on the development of this function within their placement, which mostly took the form of an artistic field trip with regular working hours, of a research at site, which often resulted in films and other documentary or narrative formats, but all without the infiltration of the artists within the actual labour at the placement. As argued above, this failure to position artistic procedures within other institutions of society aligns the APG's practices with those of the Productivists, and my interest in their tactics as those of *Entkunstung* lies exactly with the epochal variation of this theme. Because not only was the placement itself one which, as executed to perfection in the APG's 1971 Hayward Gallery show *Art & Economics*,<sup>713</sup> did not abolish the artist but opposed him or her as creative mind within a group of other workers the status of which as passive executors of external sense was not challenged – in contrast to the *Proletkul't's* practice of opening collaborative studios in the industrial plants. Also, the placements were approached through Latham's theories of an expanding time rather than through an analysis of their labour in relation to that of art – in contrast to Arvatov's and Tatlin's attempts to repatriate artistic practices to those of craft. The APG, one might say, was the avant-gardist repetition of Productivist *Entkunstung*. Within the frame of Conceptual art they enacted an *Entkunstung* as art: "Artist placement was intended to serve art (...) assuming that art does have a contribution to make to society at the centre."<sup>714</sup> But within the terms of this society their role had to remain fundamentally unclear as they accepted the terms of production they were confronted with and opposed them within an artistic system, which mimicked that society's reproductive functions (namely the temporal organisation of the labour day and the economic structure of capitalist reproduction). Productivism had not mimicked the industries it was implicating itself in but rather attempted to negotiate its terms within its practices with the workers in a time when the modes of labour in Russian society were in flux. As I have argued before, this perception of society in flux returned in the 1960s with the politically revolutionary upheavals of the decade on different levels – but all of those

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<sup>712</sup> Ibid., p. iv.

<sup>713</sup> Catalogue cover for Hayward Gallery exhibition *Art and Economics* held in 1971. APG/Tate Archive *Art & Economics* exhibition opens at the Hayward Gallery and is unofficially curated by the APG who literally moved into the gallery. A selection of documentation from the APG's industrial placements are displayed as works of art. In one gallery, interviews are set up between industrialists and artists to question the new role of the artist in society

<sup>714</sup> Slater, *op. cit.*, quoting Barbara Stevini's retrospective accounts.

levels were based on what one could call a micrological approach, an attempt to start from what I have called an affirmation of the givens in the light of their changeability. *Entkunstung* in this context arose in actions, which proposed these micrologies as the possible new centre of social life – whether maintenance as in Ukeles case or drag in that of G.I., The Artist Placement Group concentrated their micrological approach on that which already represented the centre of social life, industry and administration – and thus felt in its own structures prey to its dominance.

In the concluding paragraphs of my thesis I want to turn to the status of *Entkunstung* in the present, in which the conceptual affirmations of the 1960s have long gained art historical dignity and in which their *Entkunstungen* are art, to ask if *Entkunstung* still has any status beyond art.

## *Conclusion: Entkunstung and the Art of Critique*

Models of artistic *Entkunstung* persist in manifold structures within contemporary artistic practices, actualising those models I have tried to grasp in my attempt to formulate an art history of *Entkunstung*. This history involved the analysis of Productivist attempts to turn art into a utilitarian production, the Independent Group's and others affirmations of the popular as the material ground for all arts and conceptual re-initiations of artistic practices in other fields of society.

The hypothesis with which I want to end my thesis is that the actualisations of *Entkunstung* within the rise of Conceptual artistic practices in art since the 1960s not only still represent the paradigm of what is contemporary in art, but have also retrospectively identified all precedent forms of *Entkunstung* as their parts: *Entkunstung* today represents the status of art as a behaviour pattern of criticality, which expands far beyond the traditional realm of art. This expansion of *Entkunstung* today, I would argue, consists in art's relentless imitations of different fields of contemporary culture and is intrinsically bound to the question of art's current potential for social and political significance.

In the case of Productivist practices in revolutionary Russia in the late 1910s and early 1920s, *Entkunstung* lay in the attack on the opposition of cultural to other labour. Productivist artists took the idea of a mutual modernization of art and industry to an extreme, and in that they countered the very idea of an avant-garde art in favour of art's political and cultural dissolution into a utilitarian and generalised form of creativity.

In the case of the practices of the Independent Group and its New Brutalist associates in Britain in the first half of the 1950s, *Entkunstung* figured as the de-aestheticisation of those modernist models of cultural production of the artistic avant-gardes, which had survived the Second World War without actualizing their social legitimacy. The IG employed the popular in image and media in the project of the *Entkunstung* of art in an attempt to make it popular and liveable. Art's disintegration here was perceived as a given and *Entkunstung* an attempted re-initiation of art as an active part of industrial mass culture.

Rising in the U.S. between the late 1950s and the mid of the 1960s, the Conceptual artistic practices that I have discussed in the final chapter of this thesis identified art as it was represented through its traditional media as only an asset to industrial commodity culture and thus dissected it into ideas and actions, constituencies of artistic actions in search of new

media. *Entkunstung* here was present in art being staged as a behaviour pattern, a stance, neglecting its identification with a limited range of objects.

It is the sustained effects of the latter, I want to argue, which rendered utilitarianisms as well as popularizations in art retrospectively as merely conceptual projects. If one accepts the conceptual assumption that artistic production fundamentally signifies a behaviour pattern towards society, one subsequently named 'art', then all art can be 'conceptual'. This, I want to argue, suggests a model of *Entkunstung* as art which has gained large influence in the realm of contemporary art today, turning *Entkunstung* into *a*, if not into *the*, contemporary artistic genre. To discuss this, I shall shortly return to Adorno's assumptions on *Entkunstung* with which my thesis began.

As I have discussed in chapter one, modern art in Adorno's understanding bore an a priori stance of negativity, and *Entkunstung* entered into it as the invasion of affirmative cultural signature of contemporaneity – in other words, as popular culture. I have tried to gain a positive, or, more specifically, a productive understanding of this affirmative tension within art. I have characterized *Entkunstung* as an indeed *affirmative* model of artistic production, one, which affirms the contemporaneity of artistic procedures in order to expand what might be 'art' by the means given at its own time. In revolutionary Russia this took the form of an industry in construction, in post-war Britain in the deconstruction of artistic creation through popular materials and means, and in Conceptual artistic practices through the reformulation of art as a structural potency, a behavioural pattern of non-reproductive production. I have thus tried to introduce *Entkunstung* as the affirmation of life in art. What *Entkunstung* in that respect does *not* affirm is art itself as it is identified by all those institutions which Adorno had proposed to secure in order to keep art negative in social character and integrated in formal strength: art's canonization through a lineages of progress and innovation, its integrated understanding as a distinct profession executed by a distinct social character, the genius artist and its safeguarding by institutions of valorisation such as museums and the humanities sciences.

Given this presupposition of art's conceptualisation, however, in *Entkunstung* as an affirmation of life in art today, Tatlin's revolutionary slogan 'art into life' returns, I would want to argue, in an inverted form.<sup>715</sup> On the one side, this is due to the institutional establishment of Conceptual artistic practices; and on the other to their ongoing attempts to re-stage their own 'conceptuality' in order not to fall prey to their actual success as art.

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<sup>715</sup> Stewart Martin, „Artistic Communism – A Sketch“, in *Third Text, Vol. 23, Issue 4, July, 2009, special Issue, Socialist eastern Europe* (London: Routledge, 2006) pp. 481-494. Martin argues that capitalism itself was rendered 'artistic' in recent years and that it can thus only be confronted on those grounds.

Conceptuality, and thus in effect *Entkunstung*, figures in this as art's social justification. This sometimes leads to unwittingly comic results, like the spring 2010 edition of German art magazine *Texte zur Kunst*, which was dedicated to the genre of painting and argued that painting was in fact still alive, but only where it presented itself within the terms of Conceptual art.<sup>716</sup> The instances in which conceptuality in contemporary art figures as an inconsequential signature of artistic politicality – guided only by the vague idea of ‘reflecting’ a genre – have sharply increased in recent years.<sup>717</sup> With them, significations of political engagement within contemporary artistic production, its displays and critiques, have gained much in popularity,<sup>718</sup> as have the rhetorics of aesthetic valorisation and artistic autonomism in the field of political discourse and representation.<sup>719</sup> The figure of the artist as a cultural critic who initiates the field of art as the centre of socially critical discourse – which was, as I have argued, initiated through conceptual practices in the 1960s – has been canonized as the hegemonic state of the art in institutionalized global mass exhibitions like the documentas since Catherine David's *documenta x*,<sup>720</sup> in the self-initiations of national art academies as the birthplaces of criticality<sup>721</sup> and its after-effect of “New Institutionalism”<sup>722</sup> throughout some

<sup>716</sup> See *Texte zur Kunst, Painting is not the Issue*, Vol. 77 (Berlin: Texte zur Kunst, 2010).

<sup>717</sup> For example, Kunstwerke Berlin, Exhibition: Political/Minimal November 30, 2008 – January 25, 2009

<sup>718</sup> See for example: *The Manifesta Decade - Debates on Contemporary Art, Exhibitions and Biennials in Post-Wall Europe*, ed. by Barbara Vanderlinden, Elena Filipovic (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006). Or most recently the 6th Berlin Biennale für zeitgenössische Kunst (11.6. – 8.8.2010). Quoting from the introduction: "Do you believe in reality? What a question, you'll reply. Reality isn't something you believe in. It proverbially catches up with you anyway – always. But then what are we talking about here? Maybe we could talk about the fact that you so often hear people saying something was different 'in reality'?" See: [www.berlinbiennale.de/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=blogcategory&id=141&Itemid=99&lang=en](http://www.berlinbiennale.de/index.php?option=com_content&task=blogcategory&id=141&Itemid=99&lang=en)

<sup>719</sup> Most prominently See Jacques Rancière, “The Aesthetic Revolution and Its Outcomes”, *New Left Review*, series 2:14, March/April 2002 (London: New Left Review: 2002); Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: the distribution of the sensible*. (London: Continuum, 2004); Jacques Rancière, *The Future of the Image* (London: Verso, 2007) and most recently Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* (London: Verso, 2010).

<sup>720</sup> *documenta X: Politics - Poetics*, ed. by Catherine David, Jean-Francois Chevrier (Kassel/Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz 1997), *Documenta 11 Platform 5: Ausstellung / Exhibition*, ed. by Okwui Enwesor (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2002) and finally *Documenta 12 magazine. no. 1, 2007, Modernity*, ed. by Georg Schöllhammer (Cologne: Taschen, 2007), *Documenta 12 magazine. no. 2, 2007, life!*, ed. by Georg Schöllhammer (Cologne: Taschen, 2007), *Documenta 12 magazine. no. 3, 2007, Education*, ed. by Georg Schöllhammer (Cologne: Taschen, 2007), and *documenta 12 magazine Catalogue*, ed. by Roger Bürgel, Ruth Noack (Köln: Taschen, 2007).

<sup>721</sup> Most significantly Ute Meta Bauer, *New Institutionalism*, ed. by Jonas Ekeberg, (Oslo: Office for Contemporary Art Norway, 2003), and Irit Rogoff, *TRANSCODING – Cross Cultural Contemporary Arts*, (Cologne: Walter Koenig Verlag, 2010). There is a book forthcoming in 2010 by Irit Rogoff on exactly this subject.

<sup>722</sup> „For example *Institution 2* was a seminar and an exhibition conceived by Jens Hoffmann and organised by NIFCA, Nordic Institute for Contemporary Art in collaboration with KIASMA Museum of Contemporary Art, Helsinki from 3 December 2003 to 5 January 2004. The following institutions were represented: BAK basis voor actuele kunst, Utrecht; Contemporary Art Center, Vilnius; Foksal Gallery Foundation, Warsaw; Index, Stockholm; Kunstverein Frankfurt, Frankfurt; Oslo Kunsthall, Oslo; Palais de Tokyo, Paris; Platform Garanti Contemporary Art Center, Istanbul; Rooseum, Malmö and Witte de With, Rotterdam. *Curating with Light Luggage* was a symposium organised by Kunstverein München from 25 to 26 October 2003, as part of the project *Telling Histories: An Archive and Three Case Studies* (<http://www.kunstverein-muenchen.de>). Jonas Ekeberg (2003), *Verksted Issue # 1*, includes texts by Julia Bryan-Wilson, Eivind Furnesvik and Rebecca

of Europe's major institutions for contemporary art<sup>723</sup> as well as in the expanding numbers of Biennials spanning the globe throughout the last decade. I do not have room to discuss those phenomena here in detail with respect to their actualization of *Entkunstung*, but I do want to allude to them as a signature of our time, in which *Entkunstung*, as I argue, turned from the attempted dissolution of art into a distinction of art: *Entkunstung* has become the role model of a conceptually expanded field of the arts.

I see this expansion as the actualisation of Conceptual artistic strategies of *Entkunstung* today. Each of the historical models of *Entkunstung* I have presented in this thesis aimed to expand art beyond its confined field of production and distinction. Productivism saw its ends in industrialization, the IG in the diffusion of popular culture by this industrialization and Conceptual artistic practices countered the social and economic role of art as one branch of this culture industry with the introduction of micrological re-appropriations of the world surrounding them. Those micrologies have yielded sustained effects, which in the present have rendered these original strategies of re-appropriation different in social function. In the happenings of Allan Kaprow, the performances of Ukeles or the drag of General Idea, the micrological *Entkunstungen*, the transfers of everyday actions into the status of art had countered their appearances outside of art, their hegemonic meaning, their social distinction or poverty. In contemporary art it is this 'outside of art' which seems to have vanished, which seems no longer discernable, as each conceptual reference seems to re-institute art as its own critique, its own context and thus renders its political and social micrologies self-sustained.<sup>724</sup> *Entkunstung* here has at the same time become both a given and an impossibility. Where the conceptual attempts to take action through art staged everyday objects and actions in art to make them more visible as actual political acts (G.I., Ukeles, Lozano *et al.*), these stagings today are effortlessly perceived as art but remain at the same time represented as political acts. Their 'actions' however, remain inconsequential where they perceive themselves as art and not as politics. This subsequent identification of artistic and political acts that has been propagated in much recent political theory<sup>725</sup> signifies *Entkunstung* as the expansion of art as politics. It is the perception of an 'outside of art', the perception of a realm in which art does not encounter itself, which has vanished. Still, art remains a specific and well-defined sector of cultural production, but the systematic introduction of the terms of

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Gordon Nesbitt and is published by The Office for Contemporary Art Norway. See *Contemporary Art: From Studio to Situation*, ed. by Claire Doherty (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2005).

<sup>723</sup> *A.C.A.D.E.M.Y.*, ed. by Angelika Nollert, Irit Rogoff, (Frankfurt am Main: Revolver, 2006).

<sup>724</sup> For a fundamental analysis of the affirmative status of 'critique' in contemporary art see Helmuth Draxler, *Gefährliche Substanzen - Zum Verhältnis von Kritik und Kunst*, (Berlin: b\_books, 2007).

<sup>725</sup> Again Jacques Rancière's writing here are imminent but also the post-workerist approaches of someone like Antonio Negri in collaboration with Michael Hardt.



cultural mass production into art that I have tried to delineate throughout my thesis have been so enduring that art itself has ‘conceptually’ lost the sense of externality. Where Pop Art in the 1950s and early 60s witnessed and celebrated the partial disintegration of the artistic subject, the present is witnessing that of its counterpart, that of a non-cultural producer.

In a sense, culturalisation had been what already the revolutionary Productivists in the early Soviet Union had longed for. A collectivisation of artistic production achieved through the disintegration of art into popular culture, culturalisation was what their post-revolutionary successors in the IG in the 1950s were again confronted with, in the repositioning of artistic production through the transformation of art into one branch of capitalist mass culture. And culturalisation was what characterized the expanding performances of art in the rise of conceptual practices in the 1960s. The present state of *Entkunstung*, however, presents us with an inversion of the Productivist model: the emanation of art *as* popular culture, the institution of the field of contemporary art *as* the field of politics.

This phenomenon – the re-appearance of art as politics through the expansion and habituation of its historic conceptual strategies as citable artistic media – implies a two-fold development. On the one hand it entails a factual de-culturalisation of contemporary artistic practices, most prominently in those derivatives of conceptualisms which have, since the 1990s, become known under the label of Institutional Critique,<sup>726</sup> mostly signifying artistic invocations of sociological and pedagogic models, and on the other hand it entails the subsequent culturalisation of the scientific practices implied in those artistic proceedings. I do not mean to say that the scientific fields of sociology or pedagogy have now migrated into the field of art, but that, the other way around, artistic practices have come to imagine they have integrated those fields into themselves by artistically repeating their questions, models and materials. *Entkunstung* thus seems to have become a given on the one hand, but at the same time seems to be rendered impossible on the other, as within this expansion of art into relocations of other fields within itself, art seems to become inescapable. This inescapability renders practices of *Entkunstung* in their actualization as those of art proper, as forms of artistic gestures of criticality which no longer imply a critique of art itself – at least never one which contests art’s still most basic bourgeois ideology: its autonomy. This figure of

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<sup>726</sup> The recently published *Institutional Critique – an anthology of artist’s writings*, edited by Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2009) gives a highly representative account of the artistic positions subsumed under that label. I, however only refer to it forms within the 1990s, when the label first came up, not to those who have retrospectively been credited for it, as Marcel Duchamp, Marcel Broothaers, Daniel Buren, Hans Haacke, et.al.

autonomy, which was ubiquitous in Adorno's writings as the counter-force to *Entkunstung*,<sup>727</sup> returns in the present, I want to argue, securing the social and political relevance of art's presumed criticality. Autonomy as a figure becomes important here, because the conflation of conceptual practices with methodologies of sociological or pedagogical character can only claim relevance if confined to the field of art. Art's role as a branch of industrial mass culture, which I have traced in this thesis, bears a fundamental influence on the actual impact of this tendency. As Jeff Wall has formulated it recently:

If Warhol could imitate a media firm, others coming after him could imitate a museum department, a research institute, and archive, a community-service organisation and so on – that is, one could develop, a mimesis, still within the institution of art, of any and every one of the potential new domains of creativity suggested by the conceptual reduction, but without thereby having to renounce the making of works and abandon the art world and its patronage.<sup>728</sup>

Even though Jeff Wall's perspective on the development he characterizes so precisely here is surely not that of *Entkunstung*, one could take up his point and argue that *Entkunstung* today, as I have tried to describe it in these last pages, returns as the dignification of art beyond art. The actualization of *Entkunstung* has led to a situation in which Conceptual practices in contemporary art seem no longer to signify a specific approach to artistic procedures but rather a necessary gesture of its contemporaneity. Where the Russian Productivists aimed at *Entkunstung* to turn the art production of some into the potentially artistic production of all, where the Independent Group and their affiliates sought *Entkunstung* to locate art within the realm of popular cultural production, and where historical conceptual practices enacted actions of *Entkunstung* which repositioned cultural habits as artistic stances, the present presents us with the generalization of *Entkunstung* in its actualisation as an artistic gesture of self-dignification: *Entkunstung* has turned the end of art into its endless return.

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<sup>727</sup> See Theodor W. Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1972) pp. 32f, p. 271, and p. 399.

<sup>728</sup> Jeff Wall, *Depiction, Object, Event* (Hermes Lecture, 2006): [http://www.hermeslezing.nl/lezingtekst\\_en.html](http://www.hermeslezing.nl/lezingtekst_en.html)

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