

Conference Paper

Problem of Social Engagement of the Historical Avant-garde: Social Effectiveness of Art and the Artist's Responsibility

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Abstract

The interwar period (1914-1940) in Europe and the USSR saw dramatic transformations in the art sphere, which involved changes in the status of art and social engagement and responsibility of the artist. Aesthetic and ideological programmes of the historical avant-garde centred around the concept of autonomy of art and strove to make art socially effective. This article analyzes different versions of the historical avant-garde within the framework of Peter Bürger's theory and its central concept – 'sublation of art in the sphere of life-praxis'. The analysis focuses on the logical and historical aspects of how this concept developed in European and Soviet artistic culture.

Keywords: historical avant-garde in Europe; Soviet avant-garde; Peter Bürger's theory of the avant-garde; affirmative culture; autonomous field of art

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1. Introduction

One of the crucial consequences of the events that happened in 1914-1918 was the radical transformation of the relationship between art and life. The autonomy of art was destroyed: it became inconceivable to such a degree that it was no longer possible to justify it. It should be noted that the birth, development and decline of the avant-garde coincided with the period between the two world wars, which saw the revolutions in Russia and Europe, the collapse of empires and emergence of new nation states. The radical character of the aesthetic and ideological avant-garde programs undoubtedly correlates with the radical and dramatic social changes (including mental and anthropological). These social upheavals led to complete revision of artists' professional ethos and mission and brought to the fore the problem of social engagement of art. Various actors of the art field, despite their different views on art, accepted a

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novel vision of art's mission: art was supposed to create new worlds and to reshape the world. Artists, regardless of their subjective intentions and motivations, were expected to take an active political and social stance; high hopes were set on what they did and what they created. In general, the field of artistic culture in this period found itself in great tension, which was caused by the fact that the time distance between a creative act, an object of art, and its effect on the audience was unprecedentedly shortened. In the interwar period, various questions on the social effects of art and the artist's responsibility towards society became the focus of intellectual reflection in Europe and the USSR.

Social effectiveness of art is one of the most enigmatic and marginal problems in philosophy of art, which studies artistic value and the qualities of art objects. As a rule, in classical aesthetics, in theorizing the effect art has on the audience, political and ethical responsibility of the artist, social determination of processes in art, the discourse of 'realization of art in life' were considered to be inadequate to the spiritual nature of art. By the early twentieth century, the question about the essence of art had mainly been addressed by aesthetic theories that were built upon metaphysical foundations (Hegel, Kant, and Schelling). However, if we focus on the historical avant-garde (an established concept to refer to European and Russian art of the 1910s and 1920s), then the question of pragmatism or relationship between art and praxis acquires fundamental importance.

It was manifestations of the historical avant-garde that introduced the concepts of 'implementation', 'erasing the borders between production and art', 'sublation of art in the domain of life-praxis' (A.Gan, A.Gastev, B.Arvatov, and others). These concepts directed the artistic process and intellectual reflection towards pragmatics, utility, and effectiveness. These were the new categories, which were utterly and absolutely alien to the language of classical aesthetics and philosophy of modernist art, adhering to the Kantian principle of 'disinterestedness' and 'purposelessness' of aesthetic judgement. The new purpose of art proclaimed by historical avant-garde naturally led to attempts to analyze how the demand for '*sublation of art in the domain of life-praxis*' was interpreted in European and Soviet contexts.

This demand in its various modifications was found in all programme documents and it presented significant interpretation difficulties, despite the clear style and wording of these manifestos. Moreover, public expectations about the process of artistic creation and its outcomes depended on how this demand was understood by different groups of artists, authorities, cultural institutions, and the audience. To say the least, it means that *new boundaries were defined for the responsibility of the artist to society*.

Artists who put forward aesthetic and ideological programmes for radical renovation and total reconstruction of life incurred certain responsibilities, and thus were criticized or praised by experts, the public, connoisseurs, and the state. Therefore, avant-gardists' ambition to take an active part and even to lead the creation of the new reality engendered the problem of social responsibility and aggravated it. Responsibility is the reverse side of social engagement of art.

2. Structure and Methodological Framework of Research

To address the problem of the interconnection that existed between social effectiveness and responsibility in different versions of the historical avant-garde – Soviet and European – we shall pursue the following research tasks. The first task is to describe the historical genesis and dynamics of the concept of the artist's responsibility in European art. The conceptual starting point here is provided by the studies of historical sociology of culture, in particular Pierre Bourdieu's school of critical sociology and his system of categories such as autonomous and heteronomous fields of art and symbolic capital. The second task is to analyze the concept of 'sublation of art in life praxis' inside the antithesis of the bourgeois versus the socialist. In this we are relying on the basic categories of the philosophy of culture and art developed by the Frankfurt School, which interpreted the processes in the art sphere as a representation of bourgeois or anti-bourgeois sociality (Marcuse's concept of 'affirmative culture'; Bürger's theory of the avant-garde).

3. History of the Concept of the Artist's Responsibility in Western-European Context

French cultural sociologists made a major contribution to the development of the concept of the intellectual's responsibility (the category of intellectuals traditionally included creative professionals). *The concept of responsibility was central to the theories focused on the autonomy of art since reflection on the role and responsibility of artists in society emerged at the moment when the field of artistic culture had fully developed and gained its autonomy.*

Let us now briefly summarize the model of authorial responsibility that evolved in the Western-European context throughout the nineteenth century and up until the early twentieth century. The historical framework for the transformations of authorial responsibility is described by Gisèle Sapiro [13] and Boris Gobille [6]. (Cit. ex.:

Nemenko, E.P. 2014. Problema sotsial'noy vovlechnosti/angazhirovannosti khudozhnika v versiyakh frantsuzskoy fotsiologii kul'tury [Problem of Social Engagement of the Artists in French Sociology of Culture]. PhD Diss. Tumen State University.) In their reasoning, these French sociologists focused primarily on the dynamics in the French literary field. They showed that the romantic type of author emerged in the period of industrialization of the book market, which created demand for originality of art works. The status of the author as a free creator and a proprietor relies, on the one hand, on the Kantian idea of subjective freedom and, on the other, on the author's right to their works. Gisèle Sapiro associates authorial responsibility with the new role of writers in the Enlightenment project – they were supposed to contribute to the enlightenment and education of the masses. Artists sought to embody creative freedom, and thus they took on a mission connected with increasing responsibility: since the eighteenth century, speaking the truth and accepting all the risks for doing so was considered a sign of the writer's courage since he or she was thus believed to undertake certain obligations towards the public. As Sapiro has shown, the values of beauty, truth, objectivity and sincerity were universalized as a result of political struggles involving writers and artists in the late nineteenth century. They strove to secure their symbolic power in the moment of professionalization of the political field ([10], 68-69).

In Europe, this process lasted throughout the whole of the nineteenth century. In the same period there evolved *the structure of contradictions in the system of art production*. Thus, we can point out two paths of development of the artist's professional ethos and therefore two different ways of understanding effectiveness and responsibility of art.

By **the first path** we mean that the world of art is seen as separate from the worlds of politics, economy, religion and public morality. The world of art is centred around the freedom of creation, uniqueness and individual subjectivity of the act of creation. Aesthetic activity, the way it was defined by Kant and the romantics, could be described as such only if it consisted in the creation as a free play of imagination. The principle of 'disinterestedness', that is, creation without any external aim, provided access to transcendence, in addition to traditional religious ways. It was this quality of art that turned artists into a special kind of professionals in possession of an exclusive and indispensable competence. Now the artist was only responsible to the world of art – the artistic community which consisted of experts following the logic of the aristocratic economy. In this situation, artists were responsible for moderating individualism of creativity and for making qualified aesthetic judgements. In return, they received public recognition, the power of authority, and symbolic capital.

Thus, in the European version, the artist's responsibility acquired two modes: individualism and criticism. The first mode of the writer's responsibility meant that for other people he became the supreme embodiment of the social representation of personal freedom. The second mode made the writer's position similar to that of the prophet: he speaks on behalf of reason but, as different from a sacred persona, the writer is not entitled to criticize, which in this case justifies the trust society can have in him and his right to dominate. The power on whose behalf the writer speaks is his moral sense and authorial responsibility.

On the other hand, art has **the second path** inside the process of autonomization of this sphere: to seek support from a more powerful social institution and, though losing some of its autonomy, gain advantages by being deemed a 'useful' profession. In opposition to the nineteenth-century theories of 'pure art', new concepts of 'social art' occur: 'art as a tribune', 'art as the textbook of life', 'imperial idea', 'Russian style', and so on. The modern age is known to have seen a complex process of formation of the national identity, which in Western Europe and the Russian Empire reached its peak in the nineteenth century. Civic nation or imperial identity of the modern age are phenomena that result from social and ideological engineering since the 'natural' mechanism of identification had proven to be ineffective in this case. The growing need for social harmony, typical of modernizing societies, leads to art being seen as the most effective symbolization of collective values, serving as a means of integration of social groups when religion and other traditional mechanisms fail to provide collective identity. In this respect, art was much counted upon, especially by the government. For artists, this path opens a range of new creative opportunities and resources for their realization. Most significantly, this gives artists not only confidence in the importance of their mission but also in its greatness.

Émile Durkheim saw in the freely exercised aesthetic ability both the ambivalence and potential threat to the evolving social community. 'Imagination, the freest of the faculties and the source *par excellence* of artistic invention, almost irresistibly moves individuals to excessive behaviour, since there are no defined purposes or observable rules to rein in the energy liberated by and for artistic activity' ([9], 166-170) (**Cit.ex.: Nemenko, E.P. 2014. Problema sotsial'noy vovlechnosti/angazhirovannosti khudozhnika v versiyakh frantsuzskoy fotsiologii kul'tury.**). Thus, art is capable of destabilizing and transgressing the existing norms, of producing alterity rather than of ensuring unity.

In terms of the second path, the artist's responsibility is twofold although still based on the same footing - grand ethical systems beyond art, which makes the artist responsible

not to experts of the art community but to society: the public and the power. The power, which the artist seeks to represent, possesses symbolic authority in the eyes of society such as state, people, national idea, and so on. The first mode of responsibility consists in collectivity (unity) and positivity (greatness): for other people, the artist becomes a supreme embodiment of the social representation of the supraindividual identity. The second mode of responsibility means that the artist has the authority to create other worlds and identities by the sheer power of his imagination, which justifies the trust society can have in him and his right to dominate. Power on whose behalf the artist tries to speak up does not originate in society but it is engendered by cosmic energies, collective unconscious, world reason, and so on. For example, such views were found in social realism (first mode) and symbolism (second mode) in the second half of the nineteenth century in the Russian history of culture.

The above-described structure of contradictions became a part of the artist's professional ethos. These contradictions can be said to reflect the fundamental contradictions of modernity itself and its democratic regime in art.

In the most general terms, the model of authorial responsibility continued to exist in the interwar period (1914-1940) but the new circumstances that occurred at that time challenged the former concept of autonomy of art. Politicization of the art field and social engagement of artists reached its peak in the interwar period [12]. Professional ethos, which was fraught with contradictions, found itself under pressure to accept the responsibility of social engagement. Accusations and exonerations within artistic community disclosed the tension between artists' claim to professional autonomy and their claim to universality of their impact on society. In the interwar period, compromises were abundant and there existed an illusion that service to the common good allows the artist to retain professional autonomy while remaining an engaged actor of social processes.

4. Interpretation of the Concept of 'Sublation of Art in Life-praxis'

Let us now focus on the question of how the historical avant-garde reconsidered autonomy of art and the responsibility of artists. In this, we will draw from Peter Bürger's theory of the avant-garde (Peter Bürger, 1974); Richard Wolin's critique of

this theory [14] **(In brackets, we specify the years when these ideas were first published.)**; and the concept of affirmative culture developed by Herbert Marcuse (Marcuse Herbert, 1937). These authors are crucial for our research because *their interpretations of the historical avant-garde are based on the differences in the social context in which art of the interwar period existed*. For our research it is essential to distinguish between the two branches of the historical avant-garde: the European avant-garde, which evolved inside the capitalist society, and the Soviet avant-garde, which existed for a short period at the early stage of the socialist project. This distinction allows us to overcome the boundaries of purely abstract understanding of the thesis of 'sublation of art in life-praxis' and consider the problem of social engagement in more practical terms, which includes the questions about effectiveness of art and responsibility of the artist. It is important to do so because in this case, much hinges on, firstly, how the concept 'life praxis' is interpreted and, secondly, which practices we have in mind – bourgeois or anti-bourgeois.

At first sight, the thesis of 'sublation of art in life praxis' rejects or at least casts doubt on the hard-won autonomy of art. It is in this dimension that Peter Bürger chooses to discuss specificity of avant-garde. Bürger's theory is of particular interest because he was the first to conceptualize the unique character of the avant-garde as distinct from modernism in art, which was its historical counterpart. While modernism adhered to the 'autonomy of art' principle, the avant-garde attacked all bourgeois art institutions – galleries, museums, concert halls, theatres, and the whole bourgeois public structure that was associated with these institutions. Thus, the avant-garde signified the end of the art world. According to Peter Bürger, 'the avant-garde as a whole is said to be interested in bursting the vessels of aesthetic autonomy asunder and redeeming the fragments in the sphere of everyday life itself – so insupportable do the so-called affirmative values of bourgeois aestheticism become for the avant-garde' ([14], 82)

Since Bürger's ideas resonate with a number of important ideas about art in the bourgeois society put forward by the Frankfurt School, in particular *Marcuse's concept of affirmative culture*, let us examine this question in more detail. We shall focus on the two fundamental concepts underpinning the critique of bourgeois art: *individualism of production/consumption* and *fictitious/illusory reality of an art work*. According to Marcuse, affirmative culture emerged as a result of 'the segregation from civilization of the mental and spiritual world as an independent realm of value that is also considered superior to civilization. Its decisive characteristic is the assertion of a universally obligatory, eternally better and more valuable world that must be unconditionally affirmed: a world essentially different from the factual world of the daily struggle for existence,

yet realizable by every individual for himself 'from within', without any transformation of the state of fact' ([8], 327). The pleasure we gain from contemplating a work of art is independent of reality; this feeling of happiness is born within the human soul; this illusion of happiness is the real effect that art has. 'To accusing questions the bourgeoisie gave a decisive answer: the affirmative culture... To the need of the isolated individual it responds with general humanity, to bodily misery with the beauty of the soul, to external bondage with internal freedom, to brutal egoism with the duty of the realm of virtue' ([8], 330).

If we follow this logic, then Marcuse's conclusion about the danger of affirmative art becomes clear: illusion serves to cement the status quo and to inhibit the natural course of historical development since it always defers satisfaction or presents it as yearning for the impossible. Thus, 'the demand for a real transformation of the material conditions of existence, for a new life, for a new form of labor and of enjoyment' is by no means mediated through art, which distances itself from such goals ([8], 332).

While Peter Bürger accepted Marcuse's idea about the connection between the autonomy of art and the illusion that art offers, he turned to the pragmatic aspect of the question, that is, he was interested in who was affected by this state of things and how. According to Bürger, 'production and reception of the self-understanding as articulated in art are no longer tied to the praxis of life....Not only production but reception also are now individual acts. The solitary absorption in the work is the adequate mode of appropriation of creations removed from the life praxis of the bourgeois, even though they still claim to interpret that praxis' [4].

Thus, the paradox of the bourgeois world is that an artist who realizes his right to distance himself (right to freedom) from politics, economy, religion, and morality to the maximum extent, becomes *a prefiguration of any individual*. Both an artist and a consumer can now freely develop the whole range of their abilities and talents but only provided that this sphere – the fictitious world – is strictly separated from life praxis. This statement explains why art became indispensable to an ordinary person – a town citizen (burgher) – at the moment when it refused to serve the public interest directly and proclaimed itself to be the supreme court and the medium of truth. The proclaimed 'purposelessness' of the creative act did not repel art lovers but on the contrary made art extremely attractive for them. Never before in the history of mankind – until modernity – was the cult of the artist so explicit. Starting from the second half of the nineteenth century, artists provoked very strong emotions – they were either admired or execrated; commemorated with monuments and treated as role models or persecuted. This adulation was the price for the unparalleled pleasure of being free

yet being free infinitely and limitlessly was possible only during the time of aesthetic consumption through immersing oneself into the worlds beyond the control of laws and norms of 'life praxis'.

According to the Frankfurt School, European avant-garde movements were the only alternative to the affirmative culture since they demanded 'sublation of art in life praxis'. *The anti-bourgeois pathos of this demand is that it is not the content of art works that had to be changed but the institution of art as such and the social effect it produced.* How can the demand for 'sublation of art in life praxis' be interpreted? *It is obvious that the Frankfurt School interpreted this expression in the Hegelian sense, which means retaining art's identity, though in a slightly changed form.* Avant-garde artists adopt some aspects of aestheticism, which was the culmination of art's autonomization and which was discussed consistently by theories of pure art. It was aestheticism that thematized the very distance between art and life praxis. It would seem that appropriation of aestheticism runs counter to avant-garde's fundamental claim to bring art into life. Yet, there is an essential similarity between aristocratic aestheticism of the nineteenth century and avant-garde's pragmatics: they both are overtly anti-bourgeois in their attitude. 'The praxis of life to which aestheticism refers and which it negates is the means-ends rationality of the bourgeois everyday' [4]. Avant-gardists do not intend to integrate their art in life praxis, quite the opposite, they concur with the aestheticists in their rejection of the world based on instrumental rationality. In this respect aestheticism turns out to be the necessary pre-requisite for the avant-garde intention. Thus, 'aestheticism turns out to have been the necessary precondition of the avant-gardist intent. Only an art the contents of whose individual works is wholly distinct from the (bad) praxis of the existing society can be the center that can be the starting point for the organization of a new life praxis' [4].

We believe that it is the source of the internal conflict of the avant-garde towards transcending the boundaries between art and real life: art should use and even enhance its autonomy in order to create new, non-bourgeois social practices.

It should be emphasized that in the centre of this radical change in the understanding of autonomy of art was the idea of 'life building' paradoxically 'combined with the formalist idea of the autonomy of the aesthetic order' ([5], 30). The autonomy of art had to be totally modified in order to stop being the central part of the affirmative culture, which means that the new type of art – avant-garde – was not thought of as a supplier of project solutions for new forms of everyday life, engineering and material production (design); politics (mass events and pageants); it was not expected to serve the needs of the social project and ideology, no matter how anti-bourgeois

this ideology was. The new type of art remained within the boundaries, even though they were constantly expanding, of the figurative language: the trope, metaphor, or symbol. Without losing its artistic quality, *the avant-garde art created metaphors of politics but did not turn into a purely political action; metaphors of ideology but did not blend with the ideological work; and metaphors of everyday life but did not identify itself with the field of design* [11].

It should be noted that the above discussion dealt only with *the idea of avant-garde, of its manifestations*. Peter Bürger, who wrote his 'Theory of the Avant-Garde' in the context of the 1968 events, raised the questions of whether the avant-garde had managed to realize what it had striven for; how the real practice of the numerous avant-garde groups during the twenty-year period could be characterized; whether it had been successful; and what criteria were to be applied to answer these questions.

Peter Bürger brought to light the internal contradictions of the historical avant-garde, which inevitably led it to its decline: 'In late capitalist society, intentions of the historical avant-garde are being realized but the result has been a disvalue' [4]. According to Bürger, the intention of the avant-garde – 'the abolition of autonomous art by which it means that art is to be integrated into the praxis of life' – was not achieved. 'This has not occurred, and presumably cannot occur, in bourgeois society unless it be as a *false sublation of autonomous art*' [4]. Bürger understands false sublation in several forms of as avant-garde transformation. He differentiates historical avant-garde movements such as Dadaism, Surrealism, Futurism, and Expressionism, from later 'neo-avant-gardiste attempts' that appeared after World War II.

The evidence for the existence of the *first form* that false sublation assumed can be found in 'pulp fiction and commodity aesthetics. A literature whose primary aim it is to impose a particular kind of consumer behavior on the reader is in fact practical, though not in the sense the avant-gardists intended. Here, literature ceases to be an instrument of emancipation and becomes one of subjection' [4].

Bürger uses the case of Dadaism to illustrate the *second form* of false sublation: mutations of Dadaism lead us to perceiving some neo-avant-gardist works as a type of decorative art. Since 1913, Duchamp started signing mass-produced objects such as an urinal and a bottle drier and sending them to art exhibitions, he therefore negated the category of individual production. 'The signature, whose very purpose it is to mark what is individual in the work, that it owes its existence to this particular artist, is inscribed on an arbitrarily chosen mass product, because all claims to individual creativity are to be mocked. Duchamp's provocation not only unmask the art market where the signature means more than the quality of the work; it radically questions the

very principle of art in bourgeois society according to which the individual is considered the creator of the work of art' [4]. Bürger believes that 'this kind of provocation cannot be repeated indefinitely. The provocation depends on what it turns against: here, it is the idea that the individual is the subject of artistic creation. Once the signed bottle drier has been accepted as an object that deserves a place in a museum, the provocation no longer provokes; it turns into its opposite' [4]. Since the protest of the historical avant-garde against art as an institution has come to be perceived as art, the protest gesture of the neo-avant-garde can be denounced as 'inauthentic'.

The *third form* of false sublation is associated with the elimination of the distance between art and life praxis since it is the distance that underlies the formation of the autonomous sphere of art. Distance is the necessary precondition for free and therefore critical position of the artist towards the social process: 'An art no longer distinct from the praxis of life but wholly absorbed in it will lose the capacity to criticize it, along with its distance. During the time of the historical avant-garde movements, the attempt to do away with the distance between art and life still had all the pathos of historical progressiveness on its side. But in the meantime, the culture industry has brought about the false elimination of the distance between art and life, and this also allows one to recognize the contradictoriness of the avant-gardist undertaking' [4]. Peter Bürger 's theory of the avant-garde and discussions about the failure of the historical avant-garde provoked heated debates within the academic community. For this research the question about the failure of the historical avant-garde is particularly significant since, depending on the answer, we can gain a more in-depth understanding of the problem of social effectiveness and transformation of the modes of the artist's responsibility.

Let us now turn to one of Bürger 's opponents - *Richard Wolin, who challenged Bürger's conclusions*. Wolin points out two aspects of Bürger 's theory: 'one with respect to the theme of aesthetic autonomy; the other with respect to the inadequacies of Bürger's explanatory schema' ([14], 83). Wolin believes that the source of Bürger 's mistake lies in the fact that speaking of 'the sublation of art in life praxis' he refers primarily to 'Dadaism and early surrealism but also and equally to the Russian avant-garde of the October revolution', disregarding the significant differences between them ([14], 83). According to Wolin, Bürger 's framework is 'so well suited to the case of the Russian avant-garde - however poorly suited it may be with reference to other wings of the avant-garde movement' ([14], 83). Neither Dadaism nor Surrealism meet Bürger 's criteria, that is, refection of bourgeois art institutions and transfer of their values to the domain of life praxis. Dadaism is 'the essentially nihilistic attack

on bourgeois aestheticism... There was in sum no positive effort detectable in the movement to transpose the values of high culture to another sphere. Instead, Dada was meant to evaporate in a gesture of provocation' ([14], 84). Furthermore, if we interpret 'sublation' in Hegelian terms, Dadaism is an 'abstract negation' rather than a 'dialectical supersession' ([14], 84).

As for surrealism, it 'retains determinate links with the legacy of bourgeois autonomous art'. What distinguishes it from other movements is the creation of a special type of reality – sur-reality, 'which transcends the prosaic, disenchanting character of everyday life in bourgeois society'. 'In place of dadaist nihilism, surrealism attempts to re-invent parameters of aesthetic value. This is an eminently affirmative act' ([14], 85).

According to Wolin, it is only the Russian avant-garde that provides sufficient evidence to support Bürger's theory. It should also be added at this point that in this context the term 'Soviet avant-garde' seems to be more appropriate since we are talking about the participation of art in Socialist building in the Soviet period. Referring to Boris Arvatov's formula – 'art as an immediate and conscious tool systematically inserted in the organization of life' ([2], 35), Wolin highlights the explanation of the key principle of new art – its organizational potential. It should be emphasized once again that the idea behind the Soviet avant-garde was not simply to dissolve art in organization of labour, to engage art in creating more comfortable or more productive or more ergonomic system of production. What the Soviet avant-garde strove to achieve was to preserve the special status of these practices, that is, their artistic character. This is also what Wolin highlights in his text: 'However, rather than organizing man's physical environment, production-art seeks to organize man as a conscious, psychic entity' ([14], 87-88). Developing this idea further, Wolin quotes Alexandr Bogdanov: 'Art organizes social experiences by means of living images with regard both to cognition and feelings and aspirations. Consequently, art is the most powerful weapon for organizing collective forces in a class society – class forces' ([3], 177).

Thus, here we are dealing with the *anthropological meaning of 'sublation of art in life praxis'* or with *the new sensibility* or, as Igor Chubarov puts it, the 'collective sensibility' that requires a total rebuilding of the whole social sphere [5]. Therefore, it can be concluded that Soviet avant-garde projects did not intend to reject the principle of autonomy of art but instead sought to reject its bourgeois institutional status. In the new system of social relations, art was to occupy its own special and leading place. According to Bürger's theory and not only his, rejection of autonomy would apparently

have taken art backward to the pre-modern condition, when it was a part of a religious cult, monarchical or imperial ideology or a paraphrase for techné (as in the antiquity).

Let us now return to Richard Wolin's arguments. After analyzing the meanings and projects of the Soviet avant-garde, Wolin turns to its results: even though he argues against applying the principle of 'sublation of art in the domain of life praxis' to all kinds of avant-garde, he shares Bürger's view about the ultimate failure of the historical avant-garde, including its Russian variant. As Wolin perspicaciously points out, the Soviet avant-garde projects had much in common with social engineering: 'in this brave new world, consciousness too must be "managed"; "planned", and "organized" ([14], 88). The reason why at a later period, during Stalin's rule, both the culture and the person were instrumentalized is that the aesthetics of Soviet avant-garde artists 'voiced uncritical optimism concerning the inherently uplifting and liberatory powers of Taylorism and the Americanization of culture' ([14], 88). Further Wolin observes that within this concept art is equated to propaganda. Following Kant's 'Critique', Wolin reminds us that 'this right of aesthetic autonomy is a necessary corollary to the claims to moral autonomy' ([14], 90) and thus 'the Russian avant-garde's rejection of this heritage was precipitate and short-sighted. Moreover, in the exclusivity of its stress on the propagandistic use of art, it runs the risk of foreshadowing the Zhdanovite hegemony of the 1930s' ([14], 90).

The idea about the 'mistake' of the Soviet avant-garde which led to its innovations being used by the aesthetic and ideological programme of Stalinism is shared by a number of scholars (for example, the well-known concept of 'Stalin-style' proposed by Boris Groys), who found traces and symptoms of the totalitarian language in avant-garde projects. Without getting too deep into the particulars, we shall point out one thing that all these theories have in common: they all present the social pragmatics of the avant-garde as stemming from the internal contradictions of its semantic core. Bürger, Wolin, and Groys [7] all substantiated the cause-and-effect relationship between the orientation towards convergence between art and socialism (communism) and the fact that ideas and principles of the avant-garde were appropriated by the systems of totalitarian culture. Following this train of thought, the fact that avant-gardists withdrew from building of the new society is irrelevant since this fact can be interpreted as surrender to the enemy or as a symbolical death from the boomerang effect.

This rhetoric of 'mistake', however, has one vulnerable spot: one of the main strengths and key innovations in different programs and artistic manifestations of the historical avant-garde is assertion of the *inherent connection between aesthetics*

and the type of sociality. Projects of the Soviet avant-garde would lose their utopian or totalitarian qualification if its representatives were seen not as victims of this regime or as its spies and agents but as metaphors of another, imagined sociality transposed to the future. Avant-garde works should be associated not with a specific practice of real socialism but 'as if Soviet building was the practical realization of the idea of socialism', with '*as if*' as the key phrase. Through such optics, we can see more clearly what distinguished the Soviet avant-garde and other variants of the leftist European art of the 1920s from other types of Western experimental art of this period. Surrealism, Dadaism and Expressionism were all manifestations of negative aesthetics (and negative dialectics) as Theodor Adorno understood this concept [1]. The goal of anti-bourgeois art, according to Frankfurt School, was on the one hand, to reject positivity that entailed acceptance of this world's imperfections and, on the other hand, to push for negativity that generated critical attitude to the present. There is no doubt that *the Soviet avant-garde chose positivity over negativity*, which meant their acceptance of the vision of future society, resulting from the general consensus between politicians, ideologues, and artists. Conventions of the new status of art were in force as long as this consensus existed. *Sublation of art in the domain of life praxis was no longer seen just as an abstract principle; it engendered specific practices - collective sensibility that was adequate to the new forms of social life:* living in socialist cities; working at large industrial enterprises; being educated within the mass education system; and occupying leisure with experiences offered by the industry of culture. Up until the 1970s, these realities of modernizing societies, regardless of their socio-political character, had formed the backbone of industrial society. Therefore, theoretical justification of 'positive aesthetics' developed by industrial artists in post-revolutionary Soviet culture had a lasting, though little visible, impact.

It would be wrong to say that efforts of the Soviet avant-gardists bore no fruit. These efforts refer us to the controversial theoretical issue of the boundaries between art and life praxis and accentuate the need to take a closer look at the demands that society makes upon artists, to consider the origin of these demands and assess the level of the artist's responsibility in the aesthetic, moral and even criminal aspects.

5. Conclusion

1. Our analysis of Peter Bürger's and Richard Wolin's interpretations of the concept 'sublation of art in the domain of life praxis' has shown significant differences in their understanding of life praxis in European and Soviet historical avant-garde.

The principle of 'sublation of art in the domain of life praxis', transformation of reality through art, which is manifested by the historical avant-garde, has several modes of realization and, therefore, its social effects have different nature. European avant-garde typologically represented by Dadaism and Surrealism was authentically realized in art works (traditional format of autonomous art), manifestos, artistic gestures (this is how Marcel Duchamp's readymades are to be understood), and performative practices. All these formats problematized the boundaries between aesthetic autonomy and spheres outside the domain of art to construct new life practices. This strategy is understood to guide us to the sphere of liberating life practices targeted at an **individual person**, who can use an artistic text to cope with life problems such as the psychological trauma, for example. The bridge connecting art and life praxis was provided by psychoanalysis both in its classical and non-classical variants.

Social effects of the Soviet leftist avant-garde should be understood in the context of **collective life practices** in the public space (primarily urban), industrial production, mass leisure, and political activities. The leftist avant-garde after 1917 saw the project of socialist building and the Soviet organization of society (abolition of the market and private ownership) as the objective foundation for the implementation of the 'sublation of art in life praxis' principle. Seen through such optics, the discourse about the failure of the historical avant-garde's program has lost its credibility. Appropriation of avant-garde principles by the Stalinist cultural policy does not signify that the Soviet avant-garde misinterpreted the social good or distorted the initial idea that underpinned this movement. On the contrary, this pragmatics proves that the avant-garde was able to directly influence the engineering of this or that type of reality, which justifies the interest taken by modern leftist art movements in the heritage of the Soviet avant-garde. Expansion of life practices outside the autonomous domain of art or, as Boris Arvatov puts it, 'socialization of aesthetics', still holds enormous potential and remains the pivotal principle of contemporary art of the late twentieth and the early twenty-first century. However, the critique of contemporary capitalism (negative paradigm) and the development of social interactions such as cooperation and solidarity (positive paradigm) no longer relied on Marxist postulates the way they were interpreted in the nineteenth and the early twentieth century.

2. The principle of autonomy is considered differently in various versions of the historical avant-garde, which creates **different kinds of responsibility**: critical (negative) responsibility of the Western avant-garde, which emerged as a protest

against illusions of the mass bourgeois culture and resulted in '*compulsion critique*' after World War II (Nathalie Heinich), and positive responsibility based on the acceptance of the general social project of socialist building, solidarity with the masses and cooperation with the government. In this context, society stigmatizes as irresponsible those who, instead of engaging in representation of progress and success for the prospects of a bright future, choose to do something else within the autonomous field of art. That is why 'formalism' becomes synonymous to withdrawal from social responsibility. Neutral or distanced attitude towards life praxis was denounced as a sign of irresponsibility, detrimental to the common good.

The Western European avant-garde in the interwar period maintained its continuity with the model of the artist's social responsibility that evolved in the late eighteenth century and functioned until the early twentieth century. Invasion of aesthetics into life practice of a private person, even as provocative as Dadaism, expands the limits of art's autonomy, yet it reshapes key modes of artist's responsibility towards the art critics' community. The Soviet avant-garde adopted a more radical approach to the relation between art and life praxis by making the artist responsible for creation of the new reality.

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