Introduction

ALEŠ ERJAVEC

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Three Propositions

In this book we discuss the art, acts, actions, and ideas of those avant-garde movements of the last century that not only offered new artistic representations of the world (i.e., introduced into art radical changes in style and technique) but also demanded that art transforms the world rather than only representing it.

Artists always to some extent transform the world with their art. But it makes a big difference which of these two goals—representation or transformation—an artist regards as art's essence and purpose and thus assigns priority. If the artist's primary goal is to be the transformation of the world,

then this demands a transformation both of life itself and of the community. If the goal instead involves representing the world, then this means supplying meaning and causing the happening of truth—as when Paul Cézanne learns how to paint a "tablecloth white as a layer of fresh-fallen snow."[1] The pleasure involved is—as Aristotle writes in *Poetics* and Ernst Gombrich agrees—"one of recognition."[2]

My central premise in this introduction and in the conclusion will be that throughout the twentieth century there exists a segment of avant-garde art that is sufficiently specific to warrant a determinate designation, namely that of the "aesthetic" avant-garde art. "Aesthetic" here will be used not as a synonym for "artistic," but rather as its complement, extending from specifically artistic experiences to the broad, holistic domain of lived and imagined experiences, including social, political, bodily, and technological dimensions. The meaning of the "aesthetic" is related to that found in Friedrich Schiller (1759–1805), for whom it is linked to politics, not only to pure beauty and autonomous art, as is today often the case.

The aesthetic, *aisthesis*, while referring to the general perception with all the senses, will in the case of aesthetic avant-gardes relate primarily to their demand to move from representation to transformation of a community—whether a nation, a class, or some other social entity. The aesthetic "is the articulation between art, the individual and the community,"[3] bringing together—as Schiller claims in the fifteenth letter in *On the Aesthetic Education of Man, in a Series of Letters*—the art of the beautiful (*der ästhetische Kunst*) and the art of living (*Lebenskunst*).

The studies that follow support the claim that a substantial portion of the so-called early (also called "classical" and "historical") avant-gardes, a few of the later neo-avant-gardes, and finally some of the "postsocialist" avant-gardes necessitate designation as "aesthetic avant-gardes," whereby it will be possible to grasp the specific features of the radical wing of these twentieth-century movements. I will thus suggest that in the twentieth century we can identify three periods of avant-garde movements; the third is constituted by postsocialist avant-gardes, which otherwise exist in conceptual limbo halfway between postmodern art and global modernisms.

Let me repeat these propositions via three partly interrelated claims:

(1) Avant-garde movements constitute a *spectrum*, with the artistic avant-gardes at one end. These are avant-gardes that introduce into art new styles and techniques (such as cubism or abstract expressionism). They engender new representations of the lived world, thereby occasionally causing an artistic revolution. They represent "pure art"—but only as an ideal type. At

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the other end of the same spectrum are avant-gardes that strive to reach beyond art into "life" and aim to transform the world. These latter ones, called interchangeably "extreme," "politicized," "revolutionary," "radical," "artistic-social," "poetico-political," "aesthetic-political," and so on, will be designated as "aesthetic" avant-garde movements and will be the main focus of attention. It is not that the works of an aesthetic avant-garde are devoid of "artistic" features, but simply that their "aesthetic" dominant also shapes the "artistic" elements of such works in a set with an experience-transforming orientation.

If the first kind of avant-gardes (the "artistic" avant-gardes) is predominantly autonomous, then the second is mostly heteronomous. Over time the heteronomous works of avant-garde art become increasingly autonomous: their statements, documentation, and extra-artistic actions are progressively transformed into expanded forms of art.

(2) Aesthetic avant-gardes seek to effect aesthetic revolutions, that is, to substantially affect and transform our ways of experiencing and sensing the world, to change in important ways the manner in which we perceive and experience reality. They aim at a "redistribution of the sensible" (Jacques Rancière) in order to constitute ways in which "the system of divisions . . . assigns parts, supplies meanings, and defines the relationships between things in the common world."[4]

(3) "Postsocialist avant-gardes" (alternatively called "third-generation avant-gardes") are intended to designate movements from present or former socialist countries whose art possessed features common to other avant-garde art of the twentieth century. Due to some similarities with postmodernism, they were sometimes designated as Eastern or postsocialist postmodernism. A part of them once again consisted of "aesthetic avant-gardes."

First Proposition: Aesthetic Avant-Gardes

In 1845 the Fourieriste Gabriel-Désiré Laverdant wrote: "To know . . . whether the artist is truly of the avant-garde, one must know where Humanity is going, know what the destiny of the human race is."[5] Even today such an avant-gardist should be able to tell us where his community is going.

By relating the aesthetic realm to all areas of human activity, Friedrich Schiller was the first to explicitly connect the domains of aesthetics and politics: "If man is ever to solve the problem of politics in practice he will have to approach it through the problem of the aesthetic, because it is only through Beauty that man makes his way to Freedom."[6]

Similarly, Jacques Rancière has recently argued that "social revolution is

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the daughter of aesthetic revolution."[7] His opinion is shared by Slavoj Žižek, who has proclaimed Rancière's "assertion of the aesthetic dimension as INHERENT in any radical emancipatory politics" to be one of his great breakthroughs.[8] In this way, obviously, two central tenets of twentieth-century classical "humanist" Marxist theory—the importance of emancipation and the view of art as the transformation of thought into sensory experience—are slowly being resuscitated.

One of the authors who reminded us of the possible connection between the artistic and the political avant-gardes was Hungarian literary historian Miklós Szabolcsi, who pointed out in 1978 that "a revolution without an avant-garde [in art] is really a pseudo-revolution."[9]

Among the neo-avant-gardes, their contemporaries, and the postsocialist avant-gardes, we encounter paradigmatic cases of avant-garde movements, including aesthetic ones. Perhaps the paramount cases among the postwar avant-gardes were those from the 1960s, which conceived of and practiced alternative lifestyles—including communal living, the "sexual revolution," and so on—thereby substantially changing their life experiences.

Their predecessors in the 1950s and the early 1960s existed in a period not of revolution but of revolt, for they found no political avant-garde on which to rely and which would support their aesthetic actions. Nonetheless, this did not prevent them from envisioning and taking part in political and social projects, even if their actual activity remained limited to art, fiction, and imagination.

Avant-garde movements that I call "aesthetic" have programmatically demanded "that art move from representing to transforming the world."[10] A variation of this demand was their frequent call for the conflation of art and "life," or—expressed in Peter Bürger's Hegelian terms—to "sublate" art: "Art was not to be simply destroyed, but transferred to the praxis of life where it would be preserved, albeit in a changed form."[11] The early aesthetic avant-gardes—the main cases being Italian futurism, constructivism, early surrealism—at the same time belonged to the broader constellation of the "early" avant-gardes and constituted a substantial part thereof.[12]

Other authors have occasionally employed the notion of the aesthetic avant-garde. Thus one of Rancière's commentators distinguishes between the strategic and the aesthetic conception of the avant-garde: "The aesthetic conception of the avant-garde . . . is oriented towards the future and founded on the artistic anticipation of a world in which politics would be transformed into a total life program. . . . The avant-garde is here understood as the attempt to invent tangible forms and material figures for a life to come."[13]

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Second Proposition: Aesthetic Revolutions

"Aesthetic revolution" is a term in use from German romanticism (in Friedrich Schlegel, for example) into the twentieth century (as in André Malraux and, of course, more recently in Rancière). In Rancière it denotes a singular historic event (in his case, located approximately two centuries ago, thus following the rather standard interpretation of the birth of modern art) that brings about what he calls the "aesthetic regime of art." He claims that an "aesthetic revolution" is of equal or greater proportions to that of the French Revolution, for it replaces the idea of human nature with the notion of humanity to come. In this volume aesthetic revolutions will be regarded as repeated events caused by aesthetic avant-garde movements in the course of their historical unfolding. We thus speak of futurist, surrealist, and Situationist revolutions.

A closely related event—somewhat dissociated from aesthetic avant-garde movements—would be cultural revolution.

Early artistic avant-gardes, such as expressionism and cubism, may have realized predominantly artistic revolutions—decisive changes in artistic expression and its means (in style and technique)—but the aesthetic avant-gardes engendered profound changes through the ways in which they impacted our sense perception and extended their actions and effects beyond the autonomy of art into other spheres of life. They also affected movements such as Bauhaus and De Stijl, which, along with the Arts and Crafts movement, introduced new expressive potentialities and questioned old ones, thereby starting new timelines in the history of art.

A pronounced interdependence and extreme developments in art, politics, and society precondition the emergence of aesthetic avant-gardes and their evolution as processes in which radical artistic movements and revolutionary segments of society form unions and temporary fusions, welding together the discursive and the pragmatic, and art and life. The main protagonist of the Situationist International (SI), Guy Debord, thus refers to a "unified vision of art and politics," while in the 1980s the Slovenian Laibach group proclaims: "Politics is the highest and all-embracing art, and we who create contemporary Slovenian art consider ourselves to be politicians."[14] Both statements bear witness to the fact that, despite the changed time and circumstances, the ambition to fuse art and politics not only is present among the postwar avant-gardes but also represents one of their permanent characteristics. Nonetheless, in SI and in Russian constructivism there also exists the demand (as in "The Realistic Manifesto" of August 5, 1920) to do away with art altogether.

Miklós Szabolcsi's observation that "a revolution without an avant-garde

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[in art] is really a pseudo-revolution" thus cuts both ways: "We can speak of a true avant-garde only if it overlaps with a political revolution, realizes it or prepares it."[15] A related view is expressed by Herbert Marcuse, who claims that although art is not in the domain of radical praxis, it is nonetheless an essential component of revolution, for it expresses a truth, an experience, or a necessity.[16] Without some kind of connection with a political avant-garde, any aesthetic avant-garde agenda—the demand "that art move from representing to transforming the world"—is usually hindered or even made impossible. What is needed in the last resort is not an actual political avant-garde (movement, organization) but involvement in pursuing a persuasive answer to Laverdant's question: where is a certain "community of sense" (class, nation) going, or where should it be going? Some of the third-generation avant-gardes are decisively concerned with the answer to such a question—namely, that of their project, which in recent decades is most often their national agenda or a substantial part thereof. This, then, is but the most recent way of articulating the transformative demand.

The early avant-gardes did not yet encounter this difficult issue. The radical political worldviews they were connected with, or with which they sympathized, or which they sometimes cocreated (the most outstanding case here was Italian futurism) were either pronouncedly society- and class-based (such as Marxism) or fundamentally nationalistic. For the Bolsheviks and their artistic sympathizers, whether in Russia or among Dadaists and surrealists, class obviously played the central role, while the agenda of Italian futurism included an aesthetic revolution that Marinetti conceived as nationalistic—as an "Italian Revolution." He argued that every nation has its own form of *passatismo* to overthrow and therefore that the futurists, just like the Bolsheviks, had their own revolution to make. In Marinetti's opinion, such a revolution in the Italian case concerned not the proletariat but the nation and its artists (who articulated and expressed the spirit of the nation).[17] "The Futurist revolution . . . will bring artists to power," announced Marinetti in 1919.[18] He also made an insightful observation regarding the *equivalence* of national and class interpellations, as the latter were about to be extirpated in Italy and replaced by the former: "The Nation is nothing other than a vast political party."[19] It took Mussolini only a few years to eradicate this class interpellation and make the national one into the cement that held the country together.

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Third Proposition: Postsocialist Avant-Gardes, or, The Third-Generation Avant-Gardes

Peter Bürger has divided the avant-gardes into the historical and the neo-avant-gardes. It is mostly agreed that after World War II in the United States and in Europe there emerged neo-avant-gardes and related individuals and groups. I wish to suggest that a couple of decades later these were followed by the "postsocialist avant-gardes" from former or present socialist countries—first from the Soviet Union, East Europe, and Cuba, and more recently from China—a trend that still continues.[20]

It would be difficult to dispute Gao Minglu's claim that Chinese artists from the 1980s—many of whom called themselves "avant-garde"—operated in many respects as the early avant-gardes have: forming movements, perceiving themselves as possessing a historic mission, and so on. In short, they closely resembled their Western predecessors.[21] Contrary to these precursors, however, the postsocialist avant-gardes didn't possess a political avant-garde with which to share an agenda. Instead, they embarked on group avant-garde journeys, and their major projects tended to be national ones. The third-generation avant-gardes somewhat resembled the neo-avant-gardes, who existed in a similar relationship to an unresponsive world.

When in the 1970s and 1980s postmodernism questioned the legitimacy of modernism and pronounced the end of the ideology of progress, it simultaneously questioned the continued relevance of avant-garde movements. Viewed previously as the spearhead of modernity, these were now regarded as an index of departing modernism. Artistic phenomena that resembled creations of avant-garde movements but at the same time lacked essential features of their authentic predecessors acquired names like "post-avant-gardes" and "trans-avant-gardes." It was in the context of specific postsocialist politicized art that the "avant-gardes" reemerged, soon to be reinscribed with the loose meaning they possessed in the early twentieth century. Another term employed by the Slovenian Neue Slowenische Kunst (NSK) movement in the 1980s was "retro-garde" and its variation "retro-avant-garde," which revealed NSK's ambivalent stance toward the past and the future, limiting its vision to the simulated "State in Time."

Most such art appeared between the early 1970s and the early 1990s, intuitively announcing the disintegration of socialism and its passage into postsocialism. This also signifies that, in most cases today, the "third-generation avant-gardes" are already a past phenomenon. The "State in Time" project being undertaken by the NSK movement, discussed in this volume in the

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essay by Miško Šuvaković, is an exception in this regard, for although it was begun in 1992 it still continues. Thus in 2012 and 2013, hundreds of jumbo posters promoting the State in Time as if it were a country attracting new immigrants were displayed along highways and in urban centers in Slovenia, exhibiting the slogan "Time for a new state. Some say you can find happiness there."

Accordingly, the third proposition in this volume is that some of the recent ("third-generation") avant-garde movements from the former socialist countries constitute postsocialist aesthetic avant-gardes. They lack the demand to "sublate art" but retain the totalizing viewpoint on art and history and the belief in the special role of art and artists in a national community. Far from striving to attain a fusion of art and life in the strong sense as envisaged in the 1905–30 period, they instead perceive themselves as the discrete and unobtrusive but nonetheless sole agents who can create and promote art that supports and aids the idea of a possible transformation of an obsolete political, cultural, or national community into a future "community of sense" that is to overcome the past aporias of collectivity and community.[22] Again, the NSK movement would be just such a case, as would postsocialist politicized art from Hungary and the Chinese and Cuban art of the 1980 and early 1990s.[23]

Let me take China as an example. There the avant-garde of the 1980s (especially the '85 Movement) attempted "to effect an aesthetic and ethical transformation of Chinese society and to redefine Chinese identity. Most of the artists saw themselves as representatives of a movement of cultural enlightenment, . . . through their quest for the establishment of a new order for a new man and a new society, they [saw themselves as] accomplices of the official modernization movement."[24]

With the slow but continuous diminution of the relevance of postmodernism as a temporal marker in recent decades, these third-generation avant-gardes are being progressively dissociated from postmodernism, thereby acquiring the capacity to be gauged independently of their postmodern contemporaries and an assumed postmodern context.

Some of the postsocialist avant-garde movements (or segments thereof) should be called "aesthetic," for they followed a political and an artistic agenda, the latter often visibly and forcefully expressing or sympathizing with the former. Such political agendas may be nationalistic, but the aesthetic avant-gardes have been adamant, single-minded, and devoted to their task and project.

According to social sciences informed by Marxism, in the past the national agenda was highly suspect, for it purportedly signaled a historical re-

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gression. But what if the nations in question "needed" such a national detour on their way from state socialism to neoliberal capitalism in so far as doing so enabled them to historically "catch up" with their Western counterparts? In the 1980s the need for a nationally imagined community superseding the previous inoperative socialist one was complemented by the need for a viable expression of such a demand. Postsocialist avant-garde art was a response to such a need.

Aesthetic Avant-Garde Movements and the Revolutions They Engendered

Avant-garde movements extend not only into the period after the neo-avant-gardes but also beyond Europe and the United States into Mexico, Nicaragua, Brazil, South Africa, and elsewhere.

A unified vision of art and life—even if it may have sometimes been, in Renato Poggioli's words, only "a sentimental illusion"[25]—and the aesthetic experience implied by it usually denoted a vision of a more authentic future for a community (class or nation) or even for humanity as a whole. Aesthetic avant-gardes linked their artistic projects to political avant-gardes and sometimes even transformed the former into the latter or—when no political agent for their ideas was to be found—limited the political project which they supported to its articulation in manifestos. Every so often—in Italian futurism, Russian constructivism, surrealism, Mexican and Nicaraguan muralism, or in the NSK State in Time—at least a temporary link was not only sought but was also established between the avant-garde artists and movements on the one hand and a political entity on the other, thereby overcoming the usual autonomy-driven separation of art and politics. The vehicle of the latter was a political party or sometimes even a state, but of course only when these two shared a related or similar vision of the future.

IN THE FIRST ESSAY in this book, Sascha Bru discusses Italian futurism, which represents the initial (and hitherto the paradigmatic and most versatile) early aesthetic avant-garde movement. It brought about an aesthetic revolution as well as an artistic one, with its "works" ranging from easel painting, stage design, and political propaganda to cuisine and photography. As Bru points out, the aesthetic revolution realized by futurism so far still has not been sufficiently recognized, given that it went in so many different directions and occurred on so many different terrains.

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Bru's starting point is an analysis of the "ugly" in which he pits Croce's traditionalist defense of the beautiful against Marinetti's preference for the ugly. He shows how from its very beginning futurism fused politics and art. He then presents different ways in which Italian futurists aimed at changing various realms of life by taking for granted that artists would be totally involved in their art—encompassing their own lives too, as when many of them joined the Lombard Volunteer Cyclist Batallion in July 1915. Futurists took their new type of political art into the street, into coffeehouses, and onto the San Marco Square. They expanded the notion of art because they expected art and artists to intervene in society and to actively aid futurism in creating the desired future for the Italian nation. Pointing out the inherently activist nature of futurist art, Marinetti named it *art-action*, thereby opposing it to the contemplative gaze.

While Futurists aimed also at a "Reconstruction of the Universe" (as a manifesto announced in 1915) on earth, they primarily focused on Italy. Bru reconstructs the historical and political situation in Italy at the turn of the century and illuminates the ways in which futurism became such a unique player on the Italian political and artistic stage. Regarding the relationship between futurism and fascism, Bru reminds us that futurism emerged in a democratic political constellation and that the political crises in Europe destabilized the artistic field. With the consolidation of Mussolini's power, the historical period of Italian futurism ended.

Russian constructivism arose out of Russian futurism in 1920–21. It involved new technologies and the replacement of composition with construction, thereby giving material a social dimension. Aleksandr Rodchenko hoped constructivism would become the art of the future. Born in circumstances never experienced before in human history, constructivism raised decisive questions as to the nature of "art" under social and historical conditions of the dictatorship of the proletariat and on the way to a classless society, and it offered itself as their answer.

In his essay on constructivism John E. Bowlt takes as his point of departure the September 1921 exhibition 5 × 5 = 25, where Rodchenko displayed his three monochrome paintings, signaling the end of painting: "It's all over. Basic colours. Every plane is a plane and there is to be no more representation."[26]

Bowlt offers an in-depth analysis of constructivism in its context, presenting it as a central instance of the Russian avant-garde of the 1920s as he goes on to translate its creations and ideas into categories that contextualize constructivism along politico-historical and conceptual axes. He also shows how

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constructivists attempted to contribute ideas to the emergent new society but fell short of this goal because their activities did not touch the masses but instead remained limited to avant-garde circles. Tatlin's *Monument to the III International* remains a good example of this. As Camilla Gray has remarked, such "models came to be a symbol of the Utopian world which these artists had hoped to build. In many ways it is typical for their hopes, so ambitious, so romantic and so utterly impractical."[27] The constructivist aesthetic revolution nevertheless made an impact both abroad and decades after its appearance. In this respect its history was the reverse of that of Italian futurism, the impact of which diminished or almost disappeared due to its linkage with fascism. Benjamin Buchloh offers an interpretation of constructivism that confirms its aesthetic impact: he claims that El Lissitzky's works from the 1920s "introduced a revolution of the perceptual apparatus."[28]

Constructivism implemented an aesthetics of construction, machinery, and even outer space, the latter affinity bringing it in the 1930s into proximity with artistic motifs of Italian futurists (Fillia, Peschi, Nello Voltolina). At the same time it possessed an uncompromising will to create a New Man for the new society in which art would be sublated and integrated into society in the form of objects and devices complemented by industrial design and photography. Bowlt reveals the aesthetic drive of constructivism that resulted not in control over the Bolshevik cultural establishment but rather in the end of its career in the early 1930s.

In his study on surrealism, Raymond Spiteri focuses on case studies of politically involved events in the 1925–32 period that allow him to present some key issues of surrealism in vivid detail. Like Italian futurism, surrealism was an international movement, exerting its influence on life with the help of fellow surrealists and on another reality altogether with the aid of dreams: "I believe in the future resolution of these two states, dream and reality, which are so seemingly contradictory, into a kind of absolute reality, a *surreality*, if one may so speak."[29]

We are accustomed to situations in which the simultaneous existence of a political party and a predominantly artistic avant-garde movement's vying for hegemony over the same political space is not peaceful: instead of finding forms of coexistence in their shared space, they create antagonisms and conflicts. At first glance it would seem that Spiteri makes this claim in his chapter when he argues that surrealism existed in the contested space between culture and politics. At the outset he announces his aim to map this contested space as the terrain of an aesthetic revolution. While attempting to create a common space with the Communist Party, surrealism strove to fuse mind

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with matter and the unconscious with the political. Spiteri shows how this radical intent was repeatedly frustrated, only to be incessantly reawakened. Instead of appropriating the permanent fear of the political avant-garde's instrumentalizing of the artistic one, Spiteri offers a very different reading of this encounter: surrealism, he points out, flourished in the contested terrain between culture and politics, employing the ensuing tension between these social fields as an integral element of its own position. This "contested space" turns into an extremely useful concept not only in regard to surrealism and its political involvement, but also when employed in other instances of the encounter of the artistic with the political.

Mexican muralism was born out of a political plan: in 1921 Minister of Public Education José Vasconcelos "invited artists to paint monumental works on public walls."[30] Renato Poggioli had reservations concerning the nature of Mexican muralism (or, as he called it, "modern Mexican painting"), admitting that "one might hesitate to call [it] avant-garde without reservation."[31] Despite Poggioli's doubts, what persuades us that muralism belongs to the avant-gardes is that it thrived "in a climate of continuous agitation" that caused the "coinciding of the ideology of a given avant-garde movement and a given political party" to be much more than just fleeting and contingent.[32] In other words, the permanent "agitation" caused by that relationship between the ruling political parties and Mexican or Nicaraguan muralism remained fairly stable and continuous—a development persuasively depicted by David Craven. Craven interprets Mexican and Nicaraguan muralism not as simple official propaganda but rather as two distinct cases of aesthetic revolution, each of which was central to the revolutionary processes in its country.

From the time of the Sandinistas, Nicaraguan muralism has become an art that is appreciated by the general population in Latin America, is influential across the continent, and remains a style and tradition to be referred to when encountering propaganda and expressive needs such as those in Nicaragua of the 1980s. Craven presents the historical background of Mexican muralism and highlights the creative gestures and characteristics of Rivera, Orozco, and Siqueiros—the three main figures of the Mexican aesthetic avant-garde. Into a Mexican environment otherwise devoid of art, muralists introduced phantasmagoric images and even structures that linked the traditional and the mythical with the modern. Mexican public places and spaces have thus been imbued with art that circumvents the usual venues available to it—museums and galleries. The three central figures among Mexican muralists did not develop a uniform style or technique, for each went his own way creatively. Nonetheless, Mexican muralism created a long-lasting aesthetic revolution,

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impacting cultures and nations throughout much of Latin America. Craven argues that Mexico, Cuba, and Nicaragua developed significant politicized art that deserves a special place in modernism and among the aesthetic avant-gardes.

In his essay on the aesthetic revolution of the 1960s in the United States, Tyrus Miller looks at the American neo-avant-gardes, claiming that an insufficiently recognized aesthetic revolution involving a specific redistribution of the sensible took place there at that time. He uses another name for it: cultural revolution. This more familiar concept, related to Lenin's introduction of this term and to its actual practice in China, was meant to represent an overhaul no less radical and thorough than that of the French Revolution. Cultural revolution too is characterized by a redistribution of the sensible. It encompasses "the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations."[33] According to Miller, a crucial characteristic of the American situation in the 1960s was the increased role of experience that had been formed and transformed by collective action, which emerged as a common denominator of various positions within the American aesthetic revolution at that time, the most perturbing period in recent U.S. history.

Miller claims that the neo-avant-gardes did not merely reiterate but also revised the classical avant-garde precisely in the domain of artistic politics. Elsewhere Miller has characterized this revision as the shift from an artistic politics of ideological actualization to that of presenting "singular examples" of a new hegemony, founded in alternative ways of acting and experiencing our collectively shared worlds.[34] American neo-avant-garde artworks, he suggests, are less likely to be assertive instantiations of an ideological position than they are to be specific and singular occasions for members of the audience to experience an individual aesthetic and political awakening, thereby promoting the very sorts of differences that constitute the texture of freedom in society.

In his other chapter in this book, Raymond Spiteri focuses on the Situationist International (SI), a unique international avant-garde movement (1957–72) whose predecessors were Dada and surrealism and whose central theoretical foundation derived from Marx's social philosophy and philosophy of history.

The SI developed original and insightful positions on a number of issues, ranging from global politics, capitalism, and *Realsozialismus* to concerns re-

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garding urban and everyday life. The SI started from art, and at first it consisted of a cluster of artistic avant-garde groups. As in the case of neo-avant-gardes, SI also lacked a political avant-garde that would support its causes and demarginalize it and whose programmatic political demands would coalesce with those of a cultural movement such as SI.

The SI attempted to construct an alternative position to that of the neo-avant-gardes, one that would avoid the recuperation of the strategies of the early avant-gardes, such as Dada, surrealism, and constructivism. The SI was conscious of the challenge posed by the lack of a supporting political avant-garde, hence its focus on transforming everyday life as the medium of political action. This position moreover enabled the brief dialogue with Henri Lefebvre and the group Socialisme ou barbarie, for both groups sought an alternative political position to the French Communist Party.

Spiteri shows how two main foci of SI activities were engagement with everyday life and the critique of the society of the spectacle. This critique merged with another preoccupation of SI, which was to promote and develop philosophy that would transform the world and effect its realization as conceived by the Young Hegelians and the early Marx. A related goal of SI was the elimination of politics and establishment of a nonhierarchical political structure.

Although the SI initially looked to established movements such as surrealism or new ones such as Cobra, the activities of these groups struggled to escape the limited realms of culture and achieve some form of political engagement. The early SI developed the tactics of constructed situations and unitary urbanism in an effort to resolve the tension between the cultural practice of SI members (the artistic dimension) and the intentions of its more politically oriented segment to transform society (the political dimension). This solution was provisional, however, and would be eclipsed by the critique of the spectacle in the 1960s. In his essay Spiteri therefore points out that while internal antagonisms contributed to the demise of the SI, another factor was the unresolved tension between the cultural and political dimension of the movement.

The SI wanted to realize an aesthetic revolution that would allow for a different world—one that would materialize its freedom through the transformation and the ensuing elimination of art, through the implementation of unitary urbanism and the freedom *from* work. Spiteri depicts the path taken by the SI from an aesthetic avant-garde (one that introduced novel procedures such as *détournement* and *dérive*) permanently searching for an equi-

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librium between the import assigned to art and its sublation, to its becoming an unexpected influence in the May–June 1968 events. As Spiteri shows, this revolution was fleeting and unsatisfactory, for its success was limited to a temporary respite from the advancement of the spectacle. After 1968 the presence of SI's ideas in France slowly grew, turning it into an intellectual force that exceeded the importance of other radical avant-gardes of that time. Some proof of this impact can be discerned from its influence on thinkers such as Jean Baudrillard and Jean-François Lyotard (whose 1973 book was titled *Dérive à partir de Marx et Freud*).

In 1991 Slovenia proclaimed its independence. Since the new state was not recognized internationally, NSK stepped in by creating "embassies" across the globe that represented NSK itself as well as Slovenia. These two entities soon went their separate ways, with the Republic of Slovenia slowly being transformed into an ordinary state and the NSK State in Time increasingly acquiring features of a fictional political entity. Between 1992 and today, this "state" has existed—to use Šuvaković's conceptual apparatus—as a simulacrum of its symptoms, which are said to consist of the symbols of a state (embassies, flags, national guards) and "everyday" state objects (passports, other documents, car stickers, etc.). The State in Time has acquired a life of its own: recently its citizens—the holders of NSK passports—have started to organize political gatherings, NSK folk art is now being created and collected, and so on. In contemporary political and legal circumstances that are fleeting and uncertain, the NSK State in Time doesn't seem any less real than numerous other local, national, and international institutions and organizations.

In his essay on the NSK movement, Miško Šuvaković first focuses on the complex historical and political roots of Slovenian independence and simultaneously on the early (1983–92) history of NSK. He shows how the groups forming the NSK network or movement in 1983 and 1984 went through various phenomenal stages of artistic development before reaching the stage of "postmedia," a developmental stage where they no longer require an actual material work to be made and exhibited, for what they exhibit in the form of a postmedium is a whole fictitious state. This state (the State in Time) exists in the mind, although it also possesses symbolic artifacts that make this artistic entity visible and offer a proof of its temporal existence. Šuvaković links the development of the State in Time to an international political and economic situation, and he points out that NSK realized political acts, most of which were related to the state of Slovenia, at an early stage. He furthermore argues that the acts of NSK made visible the political, aesthetic, and artistic

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revolutions of our contemporaneity by taking the postmedia artistic entity to a new stage of development, thereby transgressing contemporary interpretations of art as such.

Conclusion

In his twenty-seventh "letter on the aesthetic education of man," Schiller answers his own rhetorical question as to where to search for the aesthetic state. His response is: "As a need, it exists in every finely attuned soul; as a realized fact, we are likely to find it . . . only in some few chosen circles."[35] Schiller's aesthetic state exists in the mind only—very much like the NSK State in Time, of which it was said in 1992 that it "confers the status of a state upon the mind and not territory."[36]

In the context of the State in Time, the aesthetic state possesses a fundamental significance for it implies that a contemporary avant-garde vision of the future can exist today, but only in the mind. Through a detour of the early avant-gardes, the world of the avant-garde vision of the future has returned only to be materialized in the world of discourse as opposed to that of actual historical change and transformation. The most recent avant-garde erects its reality in fiction and semblance (Schiller's *Schein*) but not in factual reality—or at least not after the materialization of its finally realized national projects of state-building.

With NSK's ongoing State in Time project, Schiller's idea of the aesthetic as the unity of art and politics—of the "art of the beautiful" and the "art of living"—has been brought full circle: "To a humanity rent by the division of labour, occupations and ranks, [the aesthetic state] promises a community to come that no longer has to endure the alterity of aesthetic experience, but in which art forms will again be what they once were—or what they are said to have been: the forms of an unseparated collective life."[37]

I will return to these issues in my conclusion.

NOTES

1. Merleau-Ponty, "Cézanne's Doubt," 66.
2. Gombrich, *The Image and the Eye*, 12.
3. Robson, "Jacques Rancière's Aesthetic Communities," 79.
4. Tanke, *Jacques Rancière*, 75.
5. Quoted in Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 9.
6. Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, 9.
7. Rancière, *Aisthesis*, xvi.

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8. Žižek, "The Lesson of Rancière," in Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 76.

9. Szabolcsi, "Ka nekim pitanjima revolucionarne avangarde," 14.

10. Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism*, 14.

11. Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 49. In his 1974 study, Bürger introduces the concept of "historical" avant-gardes, which encompasses both artistic and aesthetic avant-gardes. He finds the notion applicable "primarily to Dadaism and early Surrealism," to the "Russian avant-garde after the October revolution," and "with certain limitations" also to "Italian Futurism and German Expressionism" (109n4). While he admits that cubism "does not share with historical avant-garde movements . . . their basic tendency (sublation of art in the praxis of life)," he nonetheless considers it to be part of the historical avant-garde movements, supporting this claim by stating that cubism "calls into question the system of representation." This appears to be a weak argument: "basic tendency" is an essential characteristic and not a coincidental feature that can be disregarded at will when absent.

12. I am referring to Italian futurism in the period before the Matteotti crisis (1924) and therefore before it became seriously compromised by fascism. For dilemmas arising from the relation between fascism and totalitarianism on the one hand and the avant-garde and modernism on the other, see, e.g., Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics*; Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism*; and Hewitt, *Fascist Modernism*.

13. Rockhill, "The Silent Revolution," 66.

14. Debord, "The Situationists and the New Forms of Action in Politics and Art," in McDonough, *Guy Debord and the Situationist International: Texts and Documents*, 160; Laibach and Neue Slowenische Kunst, *Problemi*, 24.

15. Szabolcsi, "Ka nekim pitanjima revolucionarne avangarde," 14.

16. See Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension*, 1.

17. "For us, the Nation is tantamount to the greatest possible extension of the generosity of the individual, spreading out in a circle to envelop all human beings with whom he feels an affinity" (Marinetti, "Beyond Communism," in *Critical Writings*, 340).

18. Marinetti, "Beyond Communism," 349.

19. Marinetti, "Beyond Communism," 341.

20. For an excellent presentation and analysis of recent and contemporary Chinese art, see Gladston, *Contemporary Chinese Art*. For the *China/Avant-garde* exhibition, see Gao Minglu, "Post-Utopian Avant-Garde Art in China," in Erjavec, *Postmodernism and the Postsocialist Condition*, 247–83. See also, e.g., Gao Minglu, *Total Modernity and the Avant-Garde in Twentieth-Century Chinese Art*.

21. See Gao Minglu, *Total Modernity and the Avant-Garde in Twentieth-Century Chinese Art*, 137–39.

22. See Hinderliter, *Communities of Sense*, 2.

23. We presented and analyzed the main instances of such art in Erjavec, *Postmodernism and the Postsocialist Condition*.

24. Köppel-Yang, *Semiotic Warfare*, 182.

25. Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 96.

26. Rodchenko, quoted in Milner, *The Exhibition 5 × 5 = 25*, 35.

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27. Gray, *The Russian Experiment*, 226.

28. Buchloh, "From Faktura to Factography, " 93.

29. Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, 14.

30. Coffey, *How a Revolutionary Art Became Official Culture*, 1.

31. See Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 96.

32. Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 96.

33. Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 25.

34. Miller, *Singular Examples*, 3–14.

35. Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, 219.

36. Eda Čufer and IRWIN, "NSK State in Time" (1992), in Hoptman and Pospiszyl, *Primary Documents*, 301.

37. Rancière, *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*, 100.

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