

SOUND COMMITMENTS

Avant-garde Music
and the Sixties



edited by

ROBERT ADLINGTON

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This volume has been a collaborative project from the start. It originated in meetings with Amy Beal, Eric Drott, and Peter Schmelz at the 2004 annual meeting of the American Musicological Society in Seattle. Over the next year, suggestions for further possible contributors were exchanged, and newly approached contributors in turn made their own suggestions. I am immensely grateful to all the contributors for their enthusiasm, their ideas, and their patience as the volume has taken its final shape. I hope they will be pleased with the outcome.

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Introduction

Avant-garde Music and the Sixties

Robert Adlington

The artistic avant-garde, many of its theorists seem to agree, is a culture of subversion. Conceiving itself as the radical leading edge of creative endeavor, it exists in a state of rebellion against the cultural mainstream, a state expressed in its dedication to provocation, controversy, and shock. This conception of art as “an instrument for social action and reform, a means of revolutionary propaganda and agitation”¹ can be traced back to nineteenth-century France, where art was perceived by utopian and anarchist thinkers as a crucial element of the movement for social progress.² The alliance of political and artistic radicalism was embodied in the bohemianism of *fin de siècle* Paris, whose nonconformism expressed opposition to both the government and artistic institutions of the bourgeoisie.³ The socially critical function of progressive art was intensified in the early decades of the twentieth century, when a number of highly influential movements, including Dada, surrealism, futurism, and the left avant-garde in Russia and Germany, sought to overcome the separation of art from life—the position of critical distance—that had characterized the nineteenth-century avant-garde. Instead of commenting critically on mass culture, artists turned to attack the very institutions of art that continued to “set [art] off from the praxis of life,” and thereby constrained its unsettling power.⁴ This subversive attitude, in turn, entailed a departure from the established formal principle of “organicity,” in which all parts of an artwork were subordinated to the whole; for avant-gardists the effect of such formal integration was to encourage perception as “a ‘mere’

art product," thus detracting from its emancipatory potential.⁵ The truly avant-garde work had to be "nonorganic."⁶ In this way, formal experimentation—including the techniques of montage, quotation, and abrupt dissociation—came to be seen as integral to the avant-gardists' understanding that "art can be crucial to a transformation of society."⁷

Contrast this picture, however, with that given of avant-garde music by recent Anglo-American musicology. This has dwelt precisely upon its *disavowal* of issues of social and political concern. The apparent focus of postwar avant-garde composers upon questions of compositional technique and the creation of novel sound worlds appears to indicate a decided rejection of worldly engagement; Georgina Born, for instance, has referred to avant-garde music's "autarchy."⁸ The pursuit of rarefied compositional or conceptual procedures effectively confines its appeal to an initiated social elite, and implies a rejection of a more democratic musical practice.⁹ Indeed, the "difficulty" of avant-garde music, in the view of one influential commentator, signals an aloof "incorruptibility in one's resistance to the blandishments and debasements of modern life."¹⁰ In place of popular demand, postwar avant-garde music has survived through the support of state institutions such as culture ministries, broadcasters, or educational organizations, and thus acts to offer covert endorsement of the societal status quo.¹¹ In ways such as these, it is argued, the rhetoric of dissidence and subversion that often surrounds avant-garde music is fatally undermined through its failure, in practice, to alter mind-sets and social structures.¹² Instead, for many commentators, it is popular music that has most successfully given voice to radical political views, the plight of the oppressed, and the desire for social change. Nowhere does this appear to be more clearly the case than in the 1960s, when the protest songs of Bob Dylan and Joan Baez gained a large audience, psychedelic rock flaunted alternative lifestyles, soul music emerged as a vehicle for racial commentary, and huge festivals advocated peace, love, and understanding.¹³

This view, however, increasingly risks obscuring the intense involvement of many avant-garde musicians in the tumultuous cultural and political developments of the sixties.¹⁴ This involvement was widespread and took many forms. For instance, avant-garde composers—including figures closely associated with the 1950s' Darmstadt school, seen by many later commentators as epitomizing the postwar avant-garde's preoccupation with matters of compositional technique at the expense of worldly engagement—devised musical responses to the Paris protests of May 1968, to the assassination of Martin Luther King, and to anti-imperialist struggles in Latin America.¹⁵ John Cage's well-established commitment to erasing the boundaries separating life and art—a commitment shared with the early twentieth-century avant-garde¹⁶—inspired new generations of musicians, for whom the values of immediacy and spontaneity offered a point of connection

with youth counterculture, and who viewed performative freedoms, collaborative creative processes, and audience participation as consonant with the antiauthoritarian and democratizing movements of the era.¹⁷ For musicians working under repressive state regimes, avant-garde techniques held a dissident appeal by virtue of being the object of official disapproval, and thus came to act as a symbol of resistance.¹⁸ In jazz, it was frequently the most “progressive” artists who were the most visibly politically engaged, not least because of a growing understanding among African American musicians that “free jazz” signified freedom from “weak Western [meaning European] forms,” and thus was consistent with the imperatives of the Black Arts Movement.¹⁹ Rock musicians of the period were also moved to introduce experimental techniques as a cipher of liberation from convention and the market, in the process creating some of the most fêted avant-garde moments in popular music, precisely as the era of protest reached its height.²⁰

For many musicians, engagement with the pressing social issues of the time did not require relinquishing an abiding preoccupation with technical advance and conceptual innovation. Indeed, there was a widespread conviction that aesthetic experiment and social progressiveness made natural bedfellows. At the same time, this stance inevitably threw up some sharp dilemmas; and while some avant-garde musicians were content simply to graft a political element onto their existing musical preoccupations in a manner that could be viewed as essentially self-congratulatory and condescending—“radical chic” was the term coined by the writer Tom Wolfe—others felt compelled to question the very principles of their creative practice.²¹ Thus the point of departure for Hansjörg Pauli’s 1971 volume of interviews with prominent avant-garde composers was Heinz-Klaus Metzger’s grave query as to whether one should compose music at all “while the world burns”; the composers’ responses, Pauli suggests, offer not solutions but “a record of difficulties.”²² The difficulties were many and various. For instance, could the cultural baggage of established performance institutions (such as concert halls, symphony orchestras, and broadcasting organizations) be reconciled with the contemporary critique of bourgeois values? As Hans Werner Henze noted, the composer of orchestral music appeared “to depend for everything on what the system has to offer”²³; and this problem extended to musicians reliant upon institutional support of any kind. Then there was the question of whether novel approaches to musical language and technology could be meaningfully considered “revolutionary” when very real struggles against authoritarian state and economic systems were being visibly waged around the world. For Luigi Nono, to place undue emphasis purely upon the subversion of *musical* systems risked a powerless experimentalism “quite acceptable to the most cultivated bourgeoisie”; and the fetishization of technology signaled “the most logical capitalist or late capitalist ideological position” of all.²⁴ Most

fundamentally, how could avant-garde musicians make a meaningful contribution to social change if their music remained the preserve of a tiny, initiated clique? Experimental ventures intended as a “reaction against elitism,” such as Cornelius Cardew’s Scratch Orchestra, tended to encounter the troubling difficulty that (as Cardew noted) “only a handful of people wanted to hear us play . . . the only section of the public to take us seriously were the very elite we were rebelling against.”²⁵

The essays in this volume examine, from a diversity of perspectives, the encounter of avant-garde music and the “long” sixties, across a range of genres, aesthetic positions, and geographical locations. Rather than providing a comprehensive survey, the intention is to give an indication of the richness of avant-garde musicians’ response to the decade’s cultural and political upheavals, and of the complex and often ambivalent status of their efforts when viewed in the wider social context. The contributors address music intended for the concert hall; tape and electronic music; jazz and improvisation; participatory “events” and performance art; and experimental popular music; and explore developments in the United States, France, West Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, the Soviet Union, Japan, and parts of the so-called Third World. The activities of a number of figures subsequently to gain a substantial public following—including Louis Andriessen, Yoko Ono, Steve Reich, and Archie Shepp—are examined, but the volume also presents groundbreaking work on a number of less well-known individuals and developments. Each chapter draws on new archival research and/or interviews with significant figures of the period.

In his interview with Hansjörg Pauli, Hans Werner Henze observed sardonically that “no one seems to know any more where and how ‘avant-garde’ takes place.”²⁶ The question of what counted as avant-garde in the 1960s is indeed a complex and many-faceted one. Prominent theorists of the avant-garde tend to support the view of recent musicologists that postwar developments betrayed the fundamental radicalism of the early twentieth-century avant-garde.²⁷ As a number of the chapters in this volume testify, the 1960s also saw the consolidation of aesthetic divergences among progressive musicians, divergences that were increasingly interpreted in terms of reaction against the serial avant-garde of the previous decade—a development encapsulated in the influential distinction between an academic avant-garde and a more free-spirited experimentalism.²⁸ At the same time, as Hubert van den Berg notes in the opening chapter of this volume, the term “avant-garde” was gaining increasingly widespread acceptance as a colloquial label, one that paid little heed to the fine distinctions of theorists or artists. The point of departure for van den Berg’s overview of the history of the term in the historiography of art is precisely the lack of shared agreement as to its meaning; his historical reflections thereby serve to contextualize the particular problems attendant upon the idea of the avant-garde in the 1960s. Noting the almost complete

absence of the term in the statements of the early twentieth-century artists more recently viewed as representing the avant-garde's apogee, van den Berg emphasizes instead the role of the 1960s avant-garde in retrospectively constructing a "historical avantgarde" to serve as their legitimating forebears. The nineteenth-century association of the term with the service of political ideology was, van den Berg argues, essential to its appeal in the 1960s, but this putative radicalism was muddled by the later, early twentieth-century understanding that progressive artists should lead, not serve.

In keeping both with van den Berg's image of the avant-garde as a fundamentally heterogeneous, "rhizomatic" entity, and with the varied usage of the time, the term is employed flexibly by the contributors to this volume, referring variously to music shaped by a sense of radical departure from tradition, by opposition to both established canons and contemporary commercial production, and by appeal (intended or unintended) to various kinds of specialized audience. The headings under which the remaining chapters have been grouped are intended to draw attention to shared concerns among the contributions, rather than indicating mutually exclusive areas of focus (many chapters could have been differently placed). Chapters 2 to 4 comprise three studies of avant-garde musicians particularly deeply affected by leftist ideology. Benjamin Piekut's discussion of the maverick composer, philosopher, and activist Henry Flynt traces the path taken by his career in the early 1960s, from a position at the heart of New York's downtown avant-garde community, to his radical repudiation of the avant-garde under the influence of the Marxist-Leninist Workers World Party (WWP). Piekut shows how the WWP both shaped the rhetoric of his attacks on the avant-garde, and (through its militant advocacy of civil rights) encouraged Flynt's growing interest in black popular music. Paradoxically, this was to lead to tension with the WWP itself, which shared the culturally conservative outlook of Soviet communism. Flynt, by contrast, viewed "street-Negro music" as representing (in Piekut's words) "the vanguard of musical evolution" through its resourceful use of electric instruments and recording and broadcasting technology.

My chapter focuses on a singular event in the musical life of late-1960s Amsterdam: a "political-demonstrative experimental concert" that brought together many of the leading lights of the Dutch musical avant-garde. At the time of the concert, its organizers—like many other avant-garde musicians of the period—were newly in thrall to the social and cultural model of Castro's Cuba.²⁹ Yet coexistent with this commitment was an equally strongly held belief in the apolitical nature of music itself. Closer investigation of the works performed at the concert reveals, however, that their musical processes were significantly shaped by the composers' earlier interest in anarchism. The resulting "forms of opposition" were not easily reconciled with their creators'

new passion for communism. The West German composers examined in Beate Kutschke's chapter were far less reticent about attaching political meanings to their work. Kutschke's finely nuanced discussion revolves around a public controversy over the commissioning of a piece by the composer Nikolaus A. Huber, a controversy that illustrates the shift of avant-gardists away from the imperatives of Adorno's highly influential aesthetic theory and toward the New Left's emphasis upon praxis. This inevitably raised the awkward question of how avant-garde composers might be able to contribute to "praxis," when their music had such limited public appeal.

Chapters 5 to 7 highlight the desire on the part of many avant-garde musicians to connect with the popular, whether by seeking to establish new relationships with wider, less specialized audiences, or by engaging directly with popular activism. Amy Beal offers an evocative account, based largely on previously unexplored archive material, of the early years of the American-Italian improvisation group Musica Elettronica Viva (MEV). Central to their practice was a radical democratizing of music making, an expression of their belief that music was a "universal human right." In a series of public events in Rome, MEV invited anyone and everyone to participate in their musical "research," and sought to make overt connections with the spirit of protest gripping Italy at the time. At the same time, as Beal shows, the attempt at an unfettered implementation of "freedom" gave rise to tension between the musicians, and moreover did not always sit happily with the aspiration of contributing concretely to the social struggle.

There follow two studies of groundbreaking "documentary" tape pieces. Sumanth Gopinath gives a detailed account of the historical circumstances of the creation of Steve Reich's well-known tape piece *Come Out* (1966), which takes as its sole source material a declaration by a black youth (Daniel Hamm, one of the so-called Harlem Six) wrongly accused of murder. The civil rights struggle naturally features as the primary backdrop to this discussion, but Gopinath also draws on broader contexts relevant to the period, including contemporary discourses on paranoia and on the violence wrought upon and against language. Gopinath is not blind to the problematic aspects of Reich's creation, which arise in no small part from the experimental compositional processes to which Hamm's voice is subjected, but he closes by suggesting it nonetheless contains a powerful contemporary relevance. Luc Ferrari's *Presque Rien* (1970), which presents an apparently unembellished soundscape of a fishing village by the Black Sea, exemplifies the avant-gardist desire to dismantle the boundaries between art and life. Eric Drott's account explores the local social and political context for Ferrari's approach, a context that includes state endeavors to promote cultural democratization in the wake of May 1968, contemporaneous theories of musical listening by Pierre Bourdieu, and the situationist critique of the reifying effect of reproductive technology.

Drott questions the extent to which the piece succeeded in its attempt to escape “the sphere of cultivated apprehension,” but proposes that it nonetheless offered a model for a type of avant-garde composition that anyone armed with a tape recorder could emulate.

For many creative musicians, the decade’s spirit of activism gave new significance to the public act of musical performance. In the case of the ONCE group of musicians and artists—so-named after the festival they organised in Ann Arbor, Michigan, which showcased their work—performance was an arena both for addressing the hard political issues of the time and for enacting the liberation of the group’s composer-performers. Ralf Dietrich’s chapter emphasizes the importance of electronics and multimedia theatrics to both of these aims. The adventurous use of technology in many ONCE pieces was at once a reflection of the cold war investment by the United States in technological innovation (for a period, ONCE founder Gordon Mumma worked in a military-funded science laboratory), and an attempt to comment critically upon it. Dietrich also examines the tensions that arose at later ONCE performances with younger musicians and audiences set on their own radical paths, and thus reminds us that the sixties were witness to several generations of avant-gardists. Yayoi Uno Everett places the distinctive avant-garde scene in Japan in the context of anti-U.S. protests early in the decade, in which many musicians took part. John Cage was a crucial influence on avant-garde musicians associated with the Sôgetsu Arts Center in Tokyo, but indeterminacy and Dadaesque performance were here turned to distinctive ends that related to Japan’s troubled past and present. Everett draws on rare primary sources to throw new light on the controversial performances of musicians including Toshi Ichiyanagi, Yûji Takahashi, and Yoko Ono. She argues that avant-garde techniques continued to be important in later Japanese music that, by incorporating traditional musics and instruments from across Asia, was more obviously focused on “embracing the premodern Japan.”

By definition the avant-garde has a marginal positional in relation to mainstream culture. But this marginality is also a potential source of prestige for patrons and institutions wishing to demonstrate their discerning and progressive taste. Such parties can offer valuable enabling resources to the avant-garde artist, but by serving the interests of powerful patrons the socially subversive function of avant-garde art is also threatened. Musicians’ negotiation of these competing aesthetic, social, and economic imperatives looms large in Bernard Gendron’s analysis of the resurgence of the jazz avant-garde in New York in 1964–65. Through a detailed investigation of shifting patterns of reception in the jazz press, Gendron traces a complex set of factors that lifted the jazz avant-garde from near obscurity in the early years of the decade, to a canonized status by 1965. Prominent among these factors was the politically radical discourse promoted by figures associated with the

Black Arts Movement such as Amiri Baraka and Larry Neal, which conceived black avant-garde musicians as “shaping the spiritual foundation for revolutionary change.”³⁰ The articulation of a radical social purpose thus assisted the process of canonization, although as Gendron notes, this canonization brought no parallel economic success.

Danielle Fosler-Lussier’s chapter assesses the role of avant-garde music in the U.S. State Department’s Cultural Presentations program, through which American musicians were funded to tour overseas as part of the cold war propaganda effort. By the sixties, avant-garde musicians from classical and jazz worlds formed a regular part of this program. Fosler-Lussier shows that the reasons for this inclusion differed according to the destination country concerned, and assesses the sometimes compromising impact of the institutional context upon the perceived meaning of avant-garde music, both in the visited nation and with the musicians’ home audience. Peter Schmelz’s discussion of the ANS synthesizer and the Moscow studio that housed it transplants us to the other side of the cultural cold war. In the early years of the decade, the ANS synthesizer was toured overseas as a symbol of the Soviet Union’s technological prowess, but official interest soon waned and both the synthesizer and its studio, although continuing to be supported by official subsidies, fell into the hands of the musical underground. The studio thereby became a center for unofficial concerts that, in Schmelz’s words, “undercut the dominant Soviet Realist aesthetic codes.” It also witnessed a generational shift within the underground, from the older academic avant-gardists to a younger generation fascinated by progressive rock. The multimedia happenings staged at the studio in the early seventies finally precipitated the studio’s closure, although it was the synthesizer’s brief association with avant-garde composers such as Schnittke, Denisov, and Gubaidulina that figured most prominently in the official justification.

In his introductory chapter, Hubert van den Berg notes that the much-reported death of the avant-garde during the 1980s and 1990s was in part to be explained by its association during the sixties and earlier with radical political movements, whose failings seemed to be epitomized by the collapse of socialist states. The long-term legacy of the sixties is as widely disputed as that of the musical avant-garde. Conservative commentators, especially in America, have taken a disparaging view ever since the decade drew to a close—a view epitomized by Roger Kimball’s 2000 book *The Long March*, which argues that “we owe to the 1960s the ultimate institutionalization of immoralist radicalism: the institutionalization of drugs, pseudo-spirituality, promiscuous sex, virulent anti-Americanism, naïve anti-capitalism, and the precipitous decline of artistic and intellectual standards.”³¹ Even historians sympathetic to the profound cultural shifts—racial, sexual, generational—wrought by the sixties have typically pointed to the era’s paradoxes: the confinement of the decade’s more radical

behavior to a tiny and often socially privileged minority; the entrepreneurialism underlying putatively anticapitalist countercultural initiatives; the tendencies to hubris and individualistic indulgence.³² A number of the chapters in this volume identify precisely these traits in the era's avant-garde music, which, as we have already observed, hardly unproblematically reflected the prevailing concerns of democratizing and participation. The volume's title similarly seeks to evoke the tension that frequently arose between tenaciously held political or social beliefs on the one hand, and a (sometimes frankly solipsistic) commitment to the possibilities of "sound" itself—with its potential to distract from broader cultural engagement—on the other. All of the volume's contributors are sensitive to the fault lines affecting particular musicians' activities, but they reach differing conclusions, pointing to a striking degree of success in the endeavors of some musicians, outright failure in others. Rather than striking a single position in the debate about sixties' radicalism, then, the book aims to contribute to a more finely nuanced history of avant-garde music, upon which such polemical debates might be more securely founded. As such, it is hoped it will make a contribution to the ongoing reassessment of the significance and cultural place of the postwar musical avant-garde, as well as to our understanding of the decade that saw some of its most singular and provocative manifestations.

I am grateful to a number of the contributors to this volume for their comments on earlier drafts of this introduction.

Notes

1. Gabriel-Désiré Laverdant, cited in Renato Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Gerald Fitzgerald (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968), 9.

2. See Donald D. Egbert, *Social Radicalism and the Arts: Western Europe* (London: Duckworth, 1970); and Egbert, "The Idea of the 'Avant-garde' in Art and Politics," *American Historical Review* 73 (1967): 339–66.

3. Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 11.

4. Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 83.

5. *Ibid.*, 90.

6. *Ibid.*, 84.

7. Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), 7.

8. Georgina Born (with David Hesmondhalgh), "Introduction: On Difference, Representation, and Appropriation in Music," in *Western Music and Its Others: Difference, Representation, and Appropriation in Music*, ed. Born and Hesmondhalgh (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), 1–58. See also Born's *Rationalizing Culture: IRCAM, Boulez, and the Institutionalization of the Musical Avant-Garde* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995).

9. Richard Taruskin, for instance, alludes to the Darmstadt school's "use of a wilfully difficult style to create a social elite that excluded the noninitiated" in *The Oxford History of Western Music*, vol. 5 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 37.

10. Lawrence Kramer, cited in Björn Heile, "Darmstadt as Other: British and American Responses to Musical Modernism," *Twentieth-Century Music* 1, no. 2 (September 2004): 161–78, esp. 165. For a more recent attack by Kramer on the musical avant-garde's "fiction of transgression," see "'Au-delà d'une musique informelle': Nostalgia, Obsolence, and the Avant-garde," in Lawrence Kramer, *Critical Musicology and the Responsibility of Response: Selected Essays* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 303–16.

11. See Susan McClary, "Terminal Prestige: The Case of Avant-garde Music Composition," *Cultural Critique* 12 (1989): 57–81.

12. For related arguments, see Dai Griffiths, "Grammar Schoolboy Music" [1995], in *Music, Culture, and Society: A Reader*, ed. Derek B. Scott (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 143–45; Christopher Small, *Music of the Common Tongue: Survival and Celebration in Afro-American Music* (London: Calder, 1987); Rose Rosengard Subotnik, "Toward a Deconstruction of Structural Listening: A Critique of Schoenberg, Adorno, and Stravinsky" [1988], in *Deconstructive Variations: Music and Reason in Western Society* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 148–76. For a summary and critique of the negative stance of such writers toward the musical avant-garde, see Heile, "Darmstadt as Other," and Martin Scherzinger, "In Memory of a Receding Dialectic: The Political Relevance of Autonomy and Formalism in Modernist Musical Aesthetics," in *The Pleasure of Modernist Music: Listening, Meaning, Intention, Ideology*, ed. Arved Ashby (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2004), 68–100.

13. See Ian MacDonald, *The People's Music* (London: Pimlico, 2003); and James E. Perone, *Music of the Counterculture Era* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 2004); also Ian Peddie, ed., *The Resisting Muse: Popular Music and Social Protest* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006).

14. At least in the English-language musicological world. In German musicology the countercultural status of the musical avant-garde is more widely accepted. Two recent volumes published in Germany appraise a wide range of music—including avant-garde—that engages with the upheavals of the sixties: Arnold Jacobshagen and Markus Leniger, eds., *Rebellische Musik: Gesellschaftlicher Protest und kultureller Wandel um 1968* (Cologne: Verlag Dohr, 2007); Beate Kutschke, ed., *Musikkulturen in der Revolte* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2008). See also Richard Toop, "Expanding Horizons: The International Avant-garde, 1962–75," in *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century Music*, ed. Nicholas Cook and Anthony Pople (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 453–77.

15. For a brief survey (one not limited to French music, despite the title), see Pierre Albert Castanet, "1968: A Cultural and Social Survey of Its Influences on French Music," *Contemporary Music Review* 8, no. 1 (1993): 19–43. A detailed examination of the impact of the emerging "New Left" on avant-garde composers in Europe and the United States is given in Beate Kutschke, *Neue Linke/ Neue Musik: Kulturtheorien und künstlerische Avantgarde in den 1960er und 70er Jahren* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2007).

16. See Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 55–59.

17. For an indication of the (varied) extent of such connections, see the survey conducted in 1969 by the journal *Source* among a number of leading American experimental musicians, each of whom was asked, "Have you, or has anyone ever used your music for political or social ends?" See *Source: Music of the Avant-Garde* 3, no. 2 (July 1969): 7–9, 90–91. (I am indebted to Virginia Anderson for loaning me a copy of this issue.) Musicians in Europe also saw Cage's "staged anarchy" as calling for "political action"; see Amy C. Beal, *New Music, New Allies: American Experimental Music in West Germany from the Zero Hour to Reunification* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006), 105–30. For more on Cage's own relationship to politics, see David W. Bernstein, "John Cage and the 'Aesthetic of Indifference,'" in *The New York Schools of Music and Visual Arts*, ed. Steven Johnson (New York: Routledge, 2002), 113–33; and William Brooks, "Music and Society," in *The Cambridge Companion to John Cage*, ed. David Nicholls (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 214–26.

18. For two contrasting cases see Christopher Dunn, *Brutality Garden: Tropicalia and the Emergence of a Brazilian Counterculture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); and Peter J. Schmelz, *Such Freedom, if Only Musical: Unofficial Soviet Music and Society in the Thaw* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

19. Amiri Baraka, cited in Peter Townsend, "Free Jazz: Musical Style and Liberationist Ethic, 1956–1965," in *Media, Culture and the Modern African American Struggle*, ed. Brian Ward (Gainesville: Florida University Press, 2001), 145–60, esp. 150. See also Iain Anderson, *This Is Our Music: Free Jazz, the Sixties, and American Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007); and Bernard Gendron's chapter in this volume.

20. See Gianmario Borio, "Avantgarde als pluralistisches Konzept: Musik um 1968," in *Rebellische Musik*, ed. Jacobshagen and Leniger, 15–33. For further reflections upon the politics of avant-garde rock of the late sixties and early seventies, see Bernard Gendron, *Between Montmartre and the Mudd Club: Popular Music and the Avant-Garde* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 161–247; John Platoff, "John Lennon, 'Revolution' and the Politics of Musical Reception," *Journal of Musicology* 22, no. 2 (2005): 241–67; and Peter Wicke, "AvantgardeRock—RockAvantgarde: Crossover als politisches Programm—Ein (pop)historischer Exkurs," *Positionen: Beiträge zur Neuen Musik* 71 (May 2007): 10–14.

21. On avant-garde music and "radical chic," see Taruskin, *The Oxford History of Western Music*, vol. 5, 342–50.

22. Hansjörg Pauli, *Für wen komponieren Sie eigentlich?* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1971), 7. Pauli's interviews originated in a series of radio broadcasts from the preceding two years.

23. Hans Werner Henze, "Does Music Have to Be Political?" [1969], in *Music and Politics: Collected Writings 1953–81*, trans. Peter Labanyi (London: Faber, 1982), 167–71. Henze recounts his extensive involvement with student and Cuban politics during the late 1960s and early 1970s—which resulted in a notable radicalization of his musical style—in a number of essays in *Music and Politics*, and in *Bohemian Fifties: An Autobiography*, trans. Stewart Spencer (London: Faber, 1998). For a recent perspective on the notion of "musica impura," which Henze developed in response to these experiences, see Arnold Jacobshagen, "Musica impura. Der langwierige Weg in die Wohnung der Natascha

Ungeheuer von Hans Werner Henze und die Berliner Studentenbewegung," in *Rebellische Musik*, ed. Jacobshagen and Leniger, 109–24.

24. Luigi Nono, "Musik und Revolution," in *Luigi Nono: Text—Studien zu seiner Musik*, ed. Jürg Stenzl (Zürich: Atlantis, 1975), 107–15. A wide-ranging interview with Nono regarding his political engagement, which had its origins in Italian Marxism of the immediate postwar years, is included in Pauli, *Für wen komponieren Sie eigentlich?* 106–27. For a recent investigation of the impact of Nono's evolving political outlook upon his often esoteric compositional preoccupations, see Bruce Durazzi, "Musical Poetics and Political Ideology in the Work of Luigi Nono" (PhD. diss, Yale University, 2005).

25. Cornelius Cardew, cited in Coriún Aharonián, "Cardew as a Basis for a Discussion on Ethical Options," *Leonardo Music Journal* 11 (2001): 13–15, esp. 14. For more on Cardew's evolving outlook on music and politics, see *Cornelius Cardew: A Reader*, ed. Edwin Prévost (Matching Tye: Copula, 2006); Virginia Anderson, "British Experimental Music: Cornelius Cardew and His Contemporaries" (master's diss., University of Redlands, 1983); Timothy D. Taylor, "Moving in Decency: The Music and Radical Politics of Cornelius Cardew," *Music and Letters* 79, no. 4 (1998): 555–76. Similar problems confronted African American free jazz musicians; see Eric Porter, *What Is This Thing Called Jazz? African American Musicians as Artists, Critics and Activists* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), 191–239.

26. Translated as "Art and the Revolution," in *Music and Politics*, 178–83, esp. 182.

27. See, notably, Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*; and Huyssen, *After the Great Divide*.

28. This distinction was already being promulgated in Germany during the 1950s; see Beal, *New Music, New Allies*, 63–64. A later, influential version of this binarism may be found in Michael Nyman, *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond* (London: Studio Vista, 1974; second edition, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). For a stimulating study that throws light upon the complex relationship between experimental and avant-garde tendencies during the 1960s, see Eric Drott, "Ligeti in Fluxus," *Journal of Musicology* 21, no. 2 (2004): 201–40.

29. Other prominent figures of relevance to this volume to visit Cuba during the sixties included Luc Ferrari, Luigi Nono, Hans Werner Henze, and Amiri Baraka. Castro's famous dictum "Inside the revolution, everything; outside the revolution, nothing" first permitted and then (from the end of the sixties) suppressed musical avant-garde experimentation. See Paul Century, "Leo Brouwer: A Portrait of the Artist in Socialist Cuba," *Latin American Music Review* 8, no. 2 (1987): 151–71; and Neil Leonard, "Juan Blanco: Cuba's Pioneer of Electroacoustic Music," *Computer Music Journal* 21, no. 2 (1997): 10–20.

30. Larry Neal, cited by Bernard Gendron in this volume, p. 225.

31. Roger Kimball, *The Long March: How the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s Changed America* (San Francisco: Encounter, 2000), 41.

32. See for instance Geoff Andrews, ed., *New Left, New Right: Taking the Sixties Seriously* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 1999); Stephen Macedo, ed., *Reassessing the Sixties: Debating the Political and Cultural Legacy* (London: Norton, 1997); Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy and the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

I

Avant-garde

Some Introductory Notes on the Politics of a Label

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I

Since the 1970s the term “avant-garde” has served in certain sections of the historiography of the European arts as a common designation—a more or less fixed name—for a set of divergent, heterogeneous phenomena that together form some sort of a single entity, a historical ensemble or configuration. In other words, “avant-garde” is treated not just as a theoretical construction or interpretative model *ex posteriori*, but as a historical, once real, now past entity, also regarded in its historical time as—to some extent—a historical unity.¹ The term “avant-garde” itself is far older and was already introduced in the cultural field somewhere in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. It first developed into a regularly utilized denomination only in the late 1930s and 1940s, and became a more fashionable designation for innovative and experimental movements in the arts even later, in the 1950s and 1960s. It was later still that the label “avant-garde” became a common term in historiography. It is remarkable that, on the one hand, the existence of “the avant-garde” (sometimes plural: “avant-gardes”) as such a unity is claimed or supposed by many authors, not least as a presupposition for all kind of reflections on “the avant-garde(s),” but, on the other hand, very little consensus seems to exist concerning the question of who or what has to be regarded as “avant-garde(s),” even in a double or triple way.

First, one can notice that quite decisive disagreement exists on the historical extension of the avant-garde. In the historiography of the European arts of the past centuries a number of different sets of phenomena, isms, artists, etc., have been labeled as avant-garde by different authors. One might begin by distinguishing a configuration of isms, which has been labeled by scholars like Peter Bürger and Matei Călinescu not just as avant-garde, but as “historical” avantgarde(s), comprising such movements as futurism, cubism, expressionism, Dada, surrealism, constructivism, poetism, zenitism, and many more.² These are not just historical because they are regarded as the true historical kernel of the avant-garde (as they often are) but also because they received the label “avant-garde” at a point when they were already history and when new avant-garde movements had meanwhile emerged (after the Second World War). Some simply confine the avant-garde to this historical configuration. Others also include later formations, described by Peter Bürger and others as “neo-avant-garde” or “latest” avant-garde,³ including such movements as Cobra, Fluxus, Pop Art, the Situationist International, minimalism, concrete art, and land art. Still other authors, for example the British art historian Francis Frascina and the German historian Corona Hepp, use “avant-garde” rather as a label for developments in the second half of the nineteenth century, with a peak around the previous *fin de siècle*, and the “historical avant-garde” as their tail end.⁴ Whereas Bürger or Wolfgang Asholt and Walter Fähnders⁵ see a clear-cut rupture between the avant-garde and preceding symbolism and *fin-de-siècle* aestheticism, Frascina and Hepp regard symbolism and aestheticism as core elements of the avant-garde. But even wider notions of the avant-garde (or maybe “avant-gardism” instead of “avant-garde”) can be found, in which “avant-garde” serves as an umbrella term for phenomena or concepts accompanying modernity from the Age of Enlightenment right up to the present, as, for example, in publications by Renato Poggioli, Charles Russell, and John Weightman.⁶

There are not only considerable diachronic differences but also many differences in opinion concerning the sets of isms, movements, and groups that should be regarded as part of the avant-garde in a certain period of time. Bürger by and large excludes cubism and expressionism from his historical avant-garde, whereas others, like Dietrich Scheunemann saw these as major movements of the early avant-garde.⁷ The same holds true for fauvism and rayonism, which many regard as precursors rather than formations in the avant-garde complex. Constructivism, which is remarkably absent in both Bürger’s *Theorie der Avantgarde* and in Scheunemann’s opposing views, appears as a core element of the Central European historical avant-garde, according to the panorama presented by Timothy Benson (and what to think of Mondrian or Malevich?).⁸ In a similar way, for the period after the Second World War one can observe that in some accounts Cobra and the Situationist International are virtually absent, with the so-called

neo-avant-garde being confined—for example, in Bürger's *Theorie der Avantgarde*—to abstract expressionism, minimalism, Pop Art, and Fluxus. In this last case the difference might reflect not just a focus on different movements but also a focus on the United States rather than on Europe, rather as Bürger's predilection for Dada and surrealism can be put down to his background in French literary studies.

Nevertheless, both the preference for and neglect of certain movements is mostly related to some theoretical rationale as well. And here, once again, quite profound disagreement can be observed. Much has been written about the aims, the program, intentions, aesthetics, and practice of the avant-garde, but only very little consensus seems to exist regarding its common properties and features. Whereas—to take one of the oldest theoretical reflections on the avant-garde—Clement Greenberg stresses in his essay "Avant-garde and Kitsch," the elitist character of the avant-garde, its self-chosen isolation and detachment from the rest of society, Peter Bürger claims the opposite, namely the pursuit of a return of art in the practice of everyday life.⁹ Whereas some, like Bürger, regard the attempted reunification of "art and life"—the escape from or even demolition of the ivory tower of autonomous high art—as the main purport of the early avant-garde, others, like Scheunemann, neglect this revolutionary intention and focus solely on the aesthetic response to technological innovations, new forms of production, and the development of new media like film and photography as the quintessence of the avant-garde.¹⁰ Whereas some stress the totalitarian purport of "the avant-garde,"¹¹ others stress the antiauthoritarian, libertarian dimension of the avant-garde as a whole.¹² Many other disagreements over the purport of the avant-garde could be added.

2

Observing these different ways of understanding the term "avant-garde," one might ask: are all these different scholars actually referring to the same phenomenon? Probably not. The label "avant-garde" might be used nowadays as a fixed historiographic denomination, be it for different formations and configurations, but one should notice as well that it also serves as a metaphor, not just to situate certain phenomena historically, but also to qualify them. Unlike many other terms in the history of the arts, which are originally metaphors as well—for example, "movement," "current," or "school"—the term "avant-garde" is accompanied or even introduced in most historiographic accounts and theoretical assessments by often quite extensive detours reminding the reader that it was originally a military term: specifically, that part of an army that marches in front of the main army corps, explores the battlefield, and engages as first army unit in battles with the enemy. Aspects of this original military meaning are then frequently mobilized in the description of the aesthetic avant-garde, used as a parameter for

the qualification of certain artistic groups, movements, individual artists, and currents as “avant-garde.” The forward position of the “avant-garde” in a military context, the fact that this avant-garde is in the forefront, preceding the main sections of the army, operating rather isolated as the announcement of something larger still to come, its operations in enemy territory, its function as a reconnaissance unit—all these and other aspects are then related to the emergence of new movements, new currents, new schools heading toward a new art, a new literature, new cultural practices. As well as exploring new territory, these movements and practices have to tackle the resistance of existing, traditional forces in the cultural field, before, when successful, establishing themselves as a new order or paradigm, as part of a linear understanding of history ruled by progress, constant innovation, the continuous replacement of the old by the new and, one might add, by an understanding of cultural history as a theater of war. The question, raised by Charles Baudelaire in the early 1860s, of whether such analogies are appropriate, might be left open. It is important, though, to see that the label “avant-garde” is often used as a rather arbitrary qualification, and not so much as a quasi-neutral historiographic denomination.

There is another important aspect in the common usage of the term “avant-garde.” As mentioned already, one should keep in mind that the label only became fashionable—both as a self-denomination and as a historiographic term—after the Second World War. The term was introduced in the cultural field much earlier by the Saint-Simonist Olinde Rodrigues, who, in an imaginary conversation in 1825, offered artistic support to Saint-Simon with the remark: “It is we, artists, that will serve as your avant-garde. . . .”¹³ Thereafter the term was used (initially only in French and other Romance languages) in the sense of the common military concept of “*servir d’avant-garde*”—serving as avant-garde. It took, however, until the middle of the twentieth century before “avant-garde” became a more common, frequently used term. Even among those groups and individual artists, who are nowadays often referred to as historical avant-garde, the term was anything but fashionable. Occasions where those belonging to the historical avant-garde refer to themselves as “avant-garde” are quite rare. Some of these avant-garde movements certainly had a self-understanding in which they defined themselves in spatial metaphors suggesting that they were holding a position more forward, more advanced than other sections of the artistic and literary field. It was quite common to refer to oneself as creators of a “new art” or “newest art,” or “modern” or “ultra-modern” or “young” or “youngest” art, but seldom as “avant-garde.” There can be no doubt that the spokesmen of these movements preferred as a rule their own labels and brand names, like futurism, expressionism, Dada, constructivism, surrealism, *Zenit* or *De Stijl*. When Clement Greenberg published his essay “Avant-garde and Kitsch” in