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Scouting the Desert of the Real: Avant-Gardism of the Avant-Pop

Summary

The paper examines the legacy of the European historical Avant-Gardes from the perspective of the shift of paradigms immanent in the formation of the Postmodern epoch. The existing theories generally regard the Avant-Gardes as an unsuccessful attempt to redefine the function of art in the social, cultural and economic environment of the early 20th century.

Examining the productivity and relevance of the historical Avant-Gardes from the perspective of the Avant-Pop, the first thoroughly Postmodern literary movement, I intend to show how the strategies of fragmentation and the breaking of organicity not only quintessentially defined the manner in which Modernity and its art came to an end, but how they also provided the basis for the formation of culture and art that no longer functions according to Cartesian principles.

Key words: historical/ahistorical Avant Gardes, Avant-Pop, Modernity, Postmodernity, institution of art, postindustrial capitalism

Izvidniki v puščavo resničnosti: Avantgardizem Avant-Popa

Povzetek

V članku se ukvarjam s pomenom evropskih historičnih avantgard s stališča menjave paradigem, povezanih z oblikovanjem postmoderne dobe. Obstoječi teoretični pristopi obravnavajo fenomen historičnih avantgard kot neuspešen poskus preoblikovanja funkcije umetnosti v družbenem, kulturnem in ekonomskem okolju začetka 20. stoletja.

S preverjanjem produktivnosti in pomena historičnih avantgard v luči prvega postmodernega literarnega gibanja Avant-Pop nameravam pokazati, da sta avantgardistični strategiji fragmentarnosti in neorganskosti bistveno pripomogli k razkroju novoveške metafizike in umetnosti, hkrati pa zagotovili temelje za oblikovanje kulture in umetnosti postmoderne epohe.

Ključne besede: historične/ahistorične avantgarde, Avant-Pop, novi vek, postmoderna doba, institucija umetnosti, postindustrijski kapitalizem

Scouting the Desert of the Real: Avant-Gardism of the Avant-Pop

1. Introduction: The death of Postmodernism and the changing of paradigms

Mark Amerika declares at the very beginning of his 1992 Avant-Pop manifesto: “Now that Postmodernism is dead and we’re in the process of finally burying it, something else is starting to take hold in the cultural imagination and I propose that we call this new phenomenon Avant-Pop” (Amerika 1992). The implication suggested by the statement is at least twofold: on the one hand its aprioristic tone and the name of the movement take us back to the opening decades of the 20th century when similar declarations abounded in the manifestoes of movements we now associate with the historical Avant-Gardes. On the other hand, a much broader issue is being somewhat casually addressed, namely that of the death of Postmodernism.

Amerika certainly was not the first to have made the claim. More or less substantiated obituaries to Postmodernism appeared in both specialized and general media throughout the second half of the 1980s, along with claims to its succession. If nothing else, the latter signal the increasingly obvious incapacity of Postmodernism to adequately represent and significantly comment upon the existing reality. However, regardless of how urgent the appeals to find a way out of the Postmodernist self-referential feedback loops may have been, only few attempts to steer away from the Postmodernist dictum succeeded in evading at least partially the retrograde revival of the Realist tradition.¹ From the perspective of the *Geistesgeschichte* approach to the transformations of the historical and literary epochs, the problems with finding new modes of expression are understandable. In terms of the *Geistesgeschichte* methodology Postmodernism reveals itself as the ultimate realisation of metaphysical nihilism. As such, it disqualifies the last remaining category defining the Modern Age specific understanding of the world – the immediate reality of the contents of consciousness. The literary period succeeding it should therefore rely upon the paradigms, which would not only separate it from preceding literary movements and periods in the sense of rearranging relations among the basic Modern Age categories,² but would transform the very content of those categories and thus render them obsolete, at the same time signalling the dawning of a new, Postmodern epoch.

The first products of the new literary period would therefore fulfil the function which literary history associates with the Avant-Gardes in the ahistorical sense. At this point, the repeated and more or less explicit Avant-Popsters’ references to their movement as a Postmodern Avant-Garde invite the most serious scrutiny. From the perspective of literary history, both terms require careful inspection, as they are frequently used at random in artistic as well as in pop-cultural contexts. A successful theoretical justification of the first term automatically reveals the nature of the second. In other words, if the entire literary machinery concerning the phenomenon of the

¹ In this respect, the greatest amount of attention was paid to the cyberpunk movement, which introduced a number of innovations, yet nevertheless remained essentially bound to postmodernism as it essentially materialized postmodernist formal techniques on the level of content (cf. McHale 1992, 225–42)

² I am referring to the *Geistesgeschichte* categories of Transcendence, Subject, Truth and Reality.

Avant-Pop evades the metaphysical framework of the *Geistesgeschichte* paradigms specific to the Modern Age, then the Avant-Pop is the first truly Postmodern literary movement, and as such Avant-Garde in the ahistorical sense.

A brief inquiry into how the members of the Avant-Pop movement theorise the “Avant” part of the movement’s name immediately raises questions regarding its Postmodern status. Amerika’s manifesto as well as Olsen’s and McCaffery’s writings on the subject rely heavily upon the vocabulary, strategies and examples of the historical Avant-Gardes.³ As I will show over the next few pages, the emergence of the historical Avant-Gardes was fundamentally connected to the institution of art as conditioned by the metaphysical systems of Modernity. It seems at least suspicious, then, that what was potentially the first movement of the new epoch should be so intimately bound to movements whose main objective was to reinforce and restore the core metaphysical values of the previous age. This paradox certainly demands further investigation, especially as the thorough analysis of the Avant-Pop literary production in relation to its social, economic and cultural environment, which I will briefly introduce in the next section, revealed significant departures from the Cartesian model.

2. Avant-Pop and/in the desert of the real

Hunting for instances of literature which would change the very content of existing metaphysical categories, render them obsolete and at the same time indicate the rise of a new epoch is extremely problematic due to the lack of historical distance and of comparable patterns. However, certain guidelines can be established on the grounds of the processes governing such major transitions in the past, and by application of ascertainable common mechanisms working broader social, cultural and economic changes upon the notion of literature. Leaving aside for the moment the paradoxical references to the historical Avant-Gardes, the Avant-Pop manifesto as well as the theoretical framework established by the movement’s founders correspond to the characteristics of the new epoch exposed by all the major theoreticians of Postmodernity. No previous attempt to transcend Postmodernism and offer a more adequate literary reflection of reality had been so thoroughly in synch with the mechanisms governing the social, economic and cultural processes commonly associated with the epochal shift of paradigms. For that reason, the Avant-Pop seemed the obvious candidate to consider as the first representative of literature no longer defined by Modern Age metaphysical models.

The Avant-Pop movement emerged at the beginning of the 1990s within the reorganized Fiction Collective writers’ co-op. The founding members Mark Amerika, Ronald Sukenick and Larry McCaffery borrowed the name from the 1985 Lester Bowie album, on which the trumpeter submitted evergreens and pop tunes to jazz improvisational play.⁴ The movement’s main

³ Cf. Amerika 1992, articles 2, 3, 4, 6, 7; Amerika, Olsen 1995, 5–6, 13–14; McCaffery 1993, xviii, xix.

⁴ Bowie’s intention was to show that materials, the structure and meaning of which seem fixed, can offer and provide myriads of hidden meanings, alternative contexts and fresh combinations. Transferring unquestioned and unquestionable socio-cultural artefacts to the level of raw materials that can be arbitrarily shifted, combined and transformed corresponds to the basic tendencies of the Avant-Pop movement.

objective was the production of independent, innovative literary and literary-theoretical works criticising and undermining the ubiquity of corporations and consumerism in general. Their strategy, emphasised both in Amerika's manifesto and McCaffery's introductions to the two Avant-Pop anthologies,⁵ could be summarised as the (ab)use of pop-cultural segments, which we are no longer aware of due to their ubiquity and which represent the *sine qua non* of our social memory, with the tactics articulated by the historical avant-gardes. Just as popular culture absorbs everything that is new, fresh and interesting, exposing merely the qualities which suit its growth and development in the service of the third phase of capitalism, so does the Avant-Pop employ everything that is innovative and exciting; however, it foregrounds and uses the characteristics which reveal popular culture in all of its artificiality and subservience to the mechanisms capital uses to control the masses. This requires intimate knowledge of popular culture, and an efficient means to accumulate, transform and spread information faster than the pop-cultural media. Internet is, of course, the medium best suited to such aspirations, enabling both rapid accumulation and exchange of information, as well as easier access to like-minded individuals, who with their active participation further accelerate information production, manipulation and transfer. The medium also drastically intervenes with the established distribution formula, reducing it to a network relation "authors – interactive participants" (Amerika, Olsen 1995, 21), in which the two roles are in constant flux.

The phenomenon of the Avant-Pop would very probably have remained a marginal literary curiosity in the context of Postmodernism were its rise not simultaneous with the spreading of the World Wide Web and the irruption of the logic conditioning the functioning of the computer into the social sphere by means of the technological sociality it enables. Considered in the context of broader social, economic and cultural transformations taking place after the Second World War, hypertext reveals itself as the embodiment of the principles all major theoreticians of Postmodernity⁶ agree to be the defining mechanisms of contemporary society and culture (Krevel 2005, 152–4). However, the electronic medium most conspicuously coincides with Jean Baudrillard's notions of hyperreality and fractal subject, as they are fundamentally network systems of differential signs that can be combined, disassembled and shifted at random in accordance with one's preferences (Baudrillard 1981, 66). Artistic works produced within the environment of hyperreality correspond to his concept of the third order simulacra, copies without an original, patterns which anticipate and accelerate the (hyper)real world of Postmodernity. As such, they function like media, providing the information for structuring the systems of our everyday hyperreality.

In my analysis of the Avant-Pop literary production from the perspective of the electronic medium, simultaneously applying the results to the categories proposed by Jean Baudrillard, I observed significant departures from the established models. First of all, the environment of the electronic medium finally provides an effective means for a thorough restructuring of the

⁵ *Avant-Pop: Fiction for a Day Dream Nation*, published in 1993, and *After Yesterday's Crash* from 1995.

⁶ I am referring to Baudrillard's notion of hyperreality, Jameson's concept of culturalisation of all the aspects of social life within post-modern situation (cf. Krevel 2003, 45–6), Lyotard's model of the self as a node in an information network, Debord's theory of society of spectacle, Deleuze's and Guattari's concept of rhizome and above all the famous McLuhan statement in his *The Medium is the Message* that "[s]ocieties have always been shaped more by the nature of the media by which men communicate than by the content of the communication" (McLuhan 2001, 8).

categories of author and reader, which was unsuccessfully attempted by the Postmodernists already. The phenomenon of the Internet “wreader”, the reader who “creates the story apart from authorial control in choosing links” (Landow 1994, 14), is essentially enabled by a medium built upon such links; however, it is not restricted to it. The fact that in the 1990s hypertext spreads into the social sphere and becomes the chief means of human interaction allows us to consider the possibilities of “wreading” in other media as well,⁷ most pressingly, perhaps, in the context of the printed book. Applying the logic of Internet link-choosing to Baudrillard’s selection of information to create (non-electronic) systems of hyperreality, wreading in print would involve the presence of media transferred information which has already become part of our every-day hyperrealities. In other words, wreading print would depend on the density of the third order simulacra, which the readers verify and manipulate in accordance to their own hyperreal systems, thus shaping/co-writing the printed information into new, personified hyperrealities.⁸

The Avant-Pop achieves just that with a consistent application of media realities and media archetypes to the very core of their character and environment creation, as well as to their intrinsic stylistic features. Regardless of whether appearing in hypertext or print, the Avant-Pop characters and environments are constructed in a way that they prevent traditional reading and analytical approaches. They can be best described as arbitrary and unstable systems of signs, most of which have already been incorporated into the existing hyperreal systems, offered to the receiver to accept and manipulate them into new hyperrealities according to his/her preferences. Similarly, the defining feature of the Avant-Pop style would be the absence of a system of familiar references. Its abundant neologisms have no symbolic correspondents; they are yet to be actualised in the manner of the third order simulacra in the hyperrealities of individual receivers. As such, they decisively define the direction of the possibilities for a story and its meaning. The Avant-Pop metaphors are probably the best example of how a third order simulacrum attracts and incorporates raw data within its hyperreality. Fulfilling the traditional function of describing the unknown with the familiar, the Avant-Pop metaphors rely exclusively upon the artefacts of the mediagenic society – those which has already become part of our every day hyperreality.⁹ These function much as the hypertext links, since the receiver’s familiarity with them conditions the creation of the story. The governing principle of the Avant-Pop’s activity and production, then, predominantly corresponds to Baudrillard’s notion of simulacra of simulation, forming hyperreal systems foreign to the Cartesian dialectics and principles of organicity, hierarchisation and linearity.

Even if we consider the novelties the Avant-Popsters introduce less a consequence of a conscious effort than an inevitable result of the fact that they were the first generation of writers to have fully adopted and internalised the electronic medium, their insistence on promoting their Avant-Gardism with the strategies, the rhetoric and the examples of the historical Avant-Gardes seems utterly paradoxical. In the light of the Avant-Pop’s purpose to offer a productive alternative to the exhausted institution of Modern Age literature, such close association with the movements

⁷ Cf. McLuhan’s statement quoted in footnote 6.

⁸ For a more detailed treatment see Krevet 2006.

⁹ Some random examples from Coupland’s *Miss Wyoming*: “He felt intact but worthless, like a chocolate rabbit selling for 75 percent off the month after Easter” (Coupland 2000, 53), “I look like a used Pampers” (82), “Staring at the pavement, like prince William behind his mother’s coffin [...]” (12).

from the first half of the 20th century seems nothing short of naive. As it is hard to believe that the founding members of the movement, many of whom are professionally involved in literary criticism, would have overlooked the paradox of attempting to obliterate and transcend a given state with the very tools of its creation, let us examine whether a significant connection with the historical Avant-Gardes can be made at all.

3. Into the paradox: Avant-Pop and the historical Avant-Gardes

From the existing theoretical approaches to the historical Avant-Gardes, which establish the impact and the characteristics of the latter according to their authors' respective ideological standpoints, I will focus upon those general findings which appear common and undisputed, and which seem to be in accord with the economic, cultural and social processes of the first half of the 20th century. For that reason I will primarily concentrate upon the findings of the theoreticians who explore the essence of the Avant-Gardes in connection to the *Zeitgeist*, relying upon the *Geistesgeschichte* methodology and philosophical analysis.¹⁰ In this respect, there are two authors whose studies summarize the two major views on the reasons why the Avant-Gardes failed to bring art back to life within the historical environment in which they emerged. The works of both Peter Bürger and Janko Kos are founded upon Renato Poggioli's seminal *Teoria dell'arte d'avanguardia* from 1962, but each explains the destiny of the historical Avant-Gardes according to his own ideological provenance.

Considering the original meaning of the term Avant-Garde – a small group of experienced soldiers exploring the terrain ahead of a large advancing army – which emerged in the 12th century already, it is not surprising that the characteristics implied by the metaphorical usage of the term transcend the historical boundaries of the movements from the first half of the 20th century. Infiltrating the hostile territory of tradition in the sense of introducing new traditions has been a constant practice throughout the history of literature, which is why the term is frequently used ahistorically in both literary and everyday discourses. In this respect, the usage of the term for specific instances of literary production seems primarily a matter of literary history, as it involves evaluation exclusively based on formal and thematic characteristics of such works.

Literary criticism has had much greater difficulties with the self-proclaimed Avant-Gardes from the first half of the 20th century – namely Futurism, Dadaism, Surrealism and partly Expressionism, as well as the movements appearing after the Second World War, the so-called Neo-Avant-Gardes. The main problem faced by literary criticism in its treatment of these movements is that the essence of the Avant-Gardes cannot be deduced from literature alone, since the major part of their production comprises programs, manifestoes and performances, which are semi-literary at best. Since the historical Avant-Gardes were primarily *groups* with a common goal, the essence of the Avant-Gardes is crucially connected with literary sociology. This already implies the importance of the social circumstances and processes which produced the movements for the detection of their common characteristics.

¹⁰ This is one reason why I am leaving out such major names as Adorno, Greenberg, Calinescu or Buchloh; the other is the fact that those of their findings which are relevant to our discussion coincide with one of the two approaches I find the most productive in my discussion of the Avant-Garde status of the Avant-Pop.

From the historical point of view the Avant-Gardes were organised movements with the task of conquering new territories, which anticipated the provocation of conflict, realised as a methodical destruction of the entities pertaining to the bourgeois tradition. The “violence” involved employment of elements which were shocking to the society defined by that tradition. The common goal of these movements was bringing art back to life and the aesthetisation of life in general, which is also the point where the theories on the Avant-Gardes diverge – more specifically, why this aim was never achieved.

In his study on the essence of the Avant-Gardes, Janko Kos (1983) identifies the idea of progressivism as the underlying common denominator to the tendencies expressed by the historical Avant-Gardes. In their case the idea of progress is fundamentally attached to the notion of individualism, central to the Modern Age metaphysics from the Renaissance on. As such, the movements in question are indelibly bound to the Modern Age understanding of subjectivity¹¹ by their belief that “the advancement can be accelerated especially by means of poetry and art”¹² (Kos 1983, 228). But since the historical Avant-Gardes articulate Modern Age progressivism as an absolute realisation of subjectivity by demanding to bring art back to life, the actualisation of the subject within art alone is obviously no longer possible, which is also signalled by the demise of high symbolism.¹³ Thus, the Avant-Gardes still retain the Neo-Romantic will to absolute subjectivity, though they no longer attempt to actualise it within works of art. Rather, they promote literature as a distinctive mode of social action and influence, as a way of life which enables the realisation of absolute subjectivity.

According to Kos, this retrograde Neo-Romantic will to re-establish absolute subjectivity was the decisive reason for the demise of the historical Avant-Gardes. The concept of subjectivity they were promoting was no longer suited to the social, cultural and economic environment of the first half of the 20th century. It is not surprising, then, that the primacy in literature was soon taken over by a movement that was formed parallel to the historical Avant-Gardes, namely literary Modernism. Emerging within the same historical environment, the new movement recognised the inadequacy of the metaphysical foundation of the Neo-Romantic subjectivism, and based its literary production upon a type of subjectivity attested by the continuous production of the contents of consciousness.

Peter Bürger’s understanding of the relation between Modernism and the Avant-Gardes is slightly different, and corresponds to the ideological bases of his theory. At this point I would like to emphasise again that it is not my intention to pass judgements regarding which of the theories is more suitable or more correct: what I am interested in are the common features observed in the theoretical handling of the historical Avant-Gardes. Even though Bürger’s *Theory of the Avant-Garde* from 1962 has been severely criticised – primarily in terms of his predictions on the future development of literature – his treatment of the Avant-Garde phenomena from the perspective of the shift of production relations caused by the rise of high capitalism emphasises

¹¹ In case of the historical Avant-Gardes this refers to the absolute Subject of Romanticism.

¹² My translation.

¹³ Kos understands symbolism as an attempt to realise the metaphysics of the Cartesian subject within (autonomised) art after the breakdown of the rational metaphysics.

the relation between art and consumerism, which is crucial to the understanding of the Avant-Pop phenomenon.

Like Kos, Bürger also discusses the Avant-Gardes' fundamental concern to bring art back to life. Such a demand, he observes, only makes sense when art becomes an autonomous institution and loses connection with life. The autonomisation of art as a social subsystem begins with the formation of the bourgeois society; however, its origins have been implicit in the ideas of the Modern Age subjectivity ever since the Renaissance.¹⁴ The process reaches its peak when art becomes the subject-matter of art in the Symbolist absolute aestheticism.

The time-frame Bürger is referring to coincides with the development of the mechanisms *Geistesgeschichte* recognises as instrumental in the formation of the Neo-Romantic will to absolute subjectivity, which is the central notion in Kos' explanation of the historical Avant-Gardes. Bürger, however, explores the period from the perspective of work distribution typical of the developing bourgeois society. The process involved increasing specialisation of artists to the point where their experience within the specialised social subsystem of art could eventually no longer be translated into the praxis of life. For the first time in history, the conditions were set for the criticism of the whole institution of art, and not just its individual styles, which was rendered possible by the specific spiritual and historical context governing the beginning of the previous century.

Historical Avant-Gardes are thus, according to Bürger, an assault on the very status of art in bourgeois society; unlike previous critical movements, they do not negate "an earlier form of art (a style) but art as an institution that is unassociated with the life praxis of men. [...] The demand is not raised at the level of the contents of individual works. Rather, it directs itself to the way art functions in society" (Bürger 2002, 49). Their efforts were, in short, ultimately an attempt to organise a new life praxis founded upon art.

The Avant-Garde practice therefore involves negation of the elements which are crucial for the existence of the autonomous art, that is, the aestheticist gap between art and life, individual production and a separate individual reception. Bürger – like Kos – comes to the conclusion that the Avant-Gardes managed to realise none of the goals they had set out to achieve. His explanation of the failure, however, differs significantly from Kos' explanation, as he understands it as a consequence of the false equalisation of art and life within the consumerist mass aesthetics promoted by the high and late capitalism.¹⁵ In other words, the Avant-Gardes were devoured by the institution of art they were striving to destroy.¹⁶ It is understandable, then, that Bürger

¹⁴ Bürger suggests that the first signs of the emancipation of art can already be traced in the context of courtly art, namely in its detachment from the sacred references of the medieval art. The artists were no longer craftsmen in the service of transcendence, but individuals conscious of the originality of their work. Yet because their creations still served to praise the courtly aristocracy, their function remained representational. (Bürger 2002, 47)

¹⁵ For a more detailed explanation see *idem* 54.

¹⁶ Bürger illustrates this point with the example of the 1950s and 1960s Neo-Avant-Gardes. Although founded upon similar premises and promoting similar tactics as their historical predecessors, within a social environment that had already commodified and aestheticised the principles and the works of the latter, the new movements were received as any other instance of traditional art by the fully developed critical apparatus handling their works, and a favourable general reception.

considers the phenomenon of literary Modernism a retrograde phase in the development of literature, its rise signalling the returning of art into the service of capital.

4. The Avant-Garde virus and/or the cultural logic of late capitalism

One would expect the story of the historical Avant-Gardes to end right there; however, it is difficult not to wonder about the nature and the motives of the apparatus capable of appropriating – falsely or not – the strategies that the Avant-Garde movements developed to pursue their goal of bringing art back to life. The reason is, of course, the *modus operandi* of this apparatus of late capitalism, which, to paraphrase Jameson, relies upon aesthetisation of all the aspects of life for the purpose of their marketing. Regardless of how destructive the rise of late capitalism proved to be for the existence of the historical Avant-Gardes, it is hard to ignore the fact that it was this very logic that established some of the fundamental premises of the historical Avant-Gardes as the defining elements and the aesthetic foundation of the majority of both artistic and mass media production of the 20th century.

I am referring to the Avant-Garde tendency of equalisation of all artistic means of expression, which is a consequence of treating art in its entirety, and not only its individual materialisations. The most emblematic example is the principle of montage. Used frequently as a stylistic device in pre-Avant-Garde art, it is now transferred to the level of the organising life principle. Within this ‘montage logic’ all the elements involved have the same inartistic value, while their collective effect – the inability to produce meaning – equates the aesthetic with the capability to produce shock. The fact that, as Bürger observes, “[n]othing loses its effectiveness more quickly than shock” (Bürger 2002, 81) explains, on the one hand, why the Avant-Gardes primarily promoted novelty, chance and speed. On the other hand, it also explicates the changes instigated by the commodification of the montage principle in the fields of production and reception of the post-Avant-Garde art. At the level of production, we can observe modifications in the very structure of works of art, a transfer from the organic structuring, anticipating an impression of entirety, to the inorganic, where individual elements have a higher level of autonomy than the whole. The inorganic structure of a work of art, as well as its intended task to produce shock, also affects the reception, which is no longer focused on the meaning of the art work but rather to the principles of its construction (*idem*).

To summarize: The basic aim of the historical Avant-Gardes, which the theoreticians recognize in their effort to destroy tradition by bringing art back to life, was not achieved. The reasons seem both the consequence of the fundamental motives of the Avant-Gardists – their tendency of realising the Neo-Romantic ideal of absolute subjectivity – as well as of the social and economic situation in the first half of the 20th century, the functioning of which enabled the inclusion of the historical Avant-Gardes within the institution of art as one of its sub-systems.

5. The principle of inorganicity and Postmodern paradigms

From the current perspective, however, the very elements which functioned as a novelty in the context of the historical Avant-Gardes, that is, the introduction of the elements of reality into

artistic concepts and the commitment to the inorganic structuring of the art-works, are at the core of the new production relations. As such, they are revealed as an appropriate means for the artistic interpretation of reality formed according to the mechanisms, against which the Avant-Garde movements were directed. This ultimately explains why the latter could absorb them.

Keeping that in mind, the reason for the Avant-Gardes' failure to achieve their primary goal seems to be the inconsistency of their rejection of organicity. I am referring to the model of subjectivity upon which they centred their activities, the thoroughly organic absolute subjectivity anticipated by Modern Age metaphysics. Although we may agree that it was outright naive to attempt a radical, let alone productive, break with tradition by striving to reinstate the already obsolete segments of that tradition, the social, cultural and political situation at that time did not yet allow for any major interventions within the Modern Age *Geistesgeschichte* models. Modernism did offer a new type of subjectivity, but this was still firmly anchored within the Cartesian metaphysics. Needless to say, Modernism was, from its conception, not only part of the late capitalist institution of art but a major vehicle of its development.¹⁷

The mechanisms governing the economy of that time already implied a radically different concept of subjectivity, one better suited to the demands of high and especially of late capitalism. Its development after the Second World War relied primarily on the expansion of advertising, media and information technology, which, according to Jameson, was reflected in the intrinsically Postmodern culturalisation of all aspects of social life, including economy and finance (Jameson 1998, 111). Culture and society in general, in their turn, approached the economy by observing the laws of the market and by producing cultural objects of consumption. Postmodern cultural and social paradigms as established by the mechanisms of late capitalism are thus based on a *definitive* rejection of organicity, which is rendered possible only when individuals perceive themselves as systems of signs in the sense of Baudrillard's fractal subjects. The formation of the latter is completed with the hypertext becoming the chief medium of communication and with the consequent irruption of its logic onto the level of the individual's experience of the world and of the self.

With that, we return to the phenomenon of the Avant-Pop, the first literary movement to have adequately responded to the new situation, and – it seems – the last chapter of the story initiated by the historical Avant-Gardes. In other words, when the logic of the Avant-Garde strategies becomes the logic of Subject creation with the subjectivisation of the hypertext logic, the historical Avant-Gardes are truly concluded and as such definitely historical, at the same time serving as a foundation of a new *Geistesgeschichte* paradigm setting – a new historical epoch. In this respect, the paradoxicality of the Avant-Pop's attachment to the historical Avant-Gardes, which I mentioned at the beginning of this article, disappears, as the connection is not only unavoidable but essential in the disintegration of the specifics of the Modern Age world-order.

¹⁷ In America, the logic of cultural and media development turned the pre-war modernist elitism into an institutionalized, generally useful and used trendy art form. The situation became so acute that one of the main protagonists of the American Modernist project, Lionel Trilling, refused to lecture on European literary Modernism at Columbia University so not to contribute to its further integration into the general consumer's economy (Debeljak 1988, 220)

6. Conclusion: Life that is Art

Avant-Gardism of the Avant-Pop is then ahistorical in the sense of artistic movements which have paved the way into the unknown territory of epochal changes throughout the history. It has to be emphasised, though, that its advancement relied heavily upon the strategies and the example of the historical Avant-Gardes; these are, in fact, at the very core of what the Avant-Pop implies as an ahistorical Avant-Garde. Most notably, the fact that the Avant-Pop production can no longer be adequately either explained or evaluated by the existing literary-theoretical categories and tools which rely upon clearly defined binarisms (Krevel 2003, 146-9) suggests destruction of the institution of art as developed in Modernity. Furthermore, the fundamental goal of the historical Avant-Gardes – bringing art back to life – is finally realised in the context of reality structured by the third order simulacra, in which literature assumes the role of any other medium. As such it becomes an information generator, providing material for creation of individualised hyperrealities. The demarcation line between art and life is completely blurred, and, what is more, literature – together with other media – ultimately serves as a model for life.

The situation also involves massive changes in terms of the concept of subjectivity, which yet again becomes productive precisely because it is structured from information received and incorporated by individuals within their systems of identity. Formation of the latter relies entirely upon the principles of inorganicity and is as such in constant flux (idem, 99–114). The productivity of such subjectivity is virtually limitless; its ability to randomly adopt and manipulate any piece of information ultimately suggests the inevitability of drastic alterations on the level of production relations as developed by Modernity and realised in the form of capitalism. The current global crisis may have surprised the economists¹⁸ – but it was certainly implicit in the direction the society, economy and culture were taking after the Second World War, and merrily accelerated by the artistic movements such as the Avant-Pop. These recognised the lethal potential of the seed so carelessly devoured by high and late capitalism, and used it to finish the job. With that, the goals of the Avant-Garde movements from the first half of the previous century were finally achieved, and the latter finally over and thus truly historical.

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¹⁸ The predictions of all the major analytical firms regarding the economic growth and market trends for 2009 proved far too optimistic (cf. Koržija 2009, Kenda 2009).

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