Tandem Developments: The Historical Avant-Garde and Critiques of Capitalism

This month the well-known American art magazine Artforum has a whole issue dedicated to the Art Market, and the October 2007 issue—"The Art of Production"—was entirely devoted to the mass production of art and artists' corporate-style studio practices.¹ There have also been several symposiums on the subject recently.² Why this interest in the relatively mundane fact that art is sold? In general it seems that to the art community, who are the people patronizing Artforum and these colloquia, the existence of the art market is a bit like an annoying splinter in the side the largely unpaid occupation they are deeply committed to. On the one hand art it is one of the few realms within capitalism that seems segregated from the market because of the mystical aura of artistic "freedom" that society accords artists, on the other hand artists continue to make things that can and are frequently mass produced and sold.

² A quick Google search will reveal a plethora of such events. Here are a couple of notable ones hosted in New York recently: Feb. 15th 2007, A Faustian Bargain: Emerging Artists, Critics and the Market, a panel discussion in the 2007 College Art Association Annual conference that included Mira and Ira Rubell (Miami art collectors), Jerry Saltz and Peter Plagens (New York art critics), and Amei Wallach (independent critic/filmmaker). Also on March 28, 2008, the Art Dealers Association of America hosted a panel discussion at the Museum of Modern Art titled Is the Killer Art Market Killing Art? This panel included: moderator Allan Schwartzman (art adviser and writer), Connie Butler (curator of drawings at MoMA), Gordon VeneKlasen (from Michael Werner Gallery) Amanda Sharp (co-director of the Frieze Fair), Gavin Brown (gallerist), Roberta Smith (New York Times art critic), Paul Schimmel (chief curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles).
The fact that art occupies an uncomfortable role as a commodity in the twenty-first century public imagination has several roots associated with people's understanding and expectations of art's meaning and purpose, conceptions of art that have grown in prominence along with the development of the historical avant-garde.³ It is important to stress that the emergence, existence, and conceptual understanding of the avant-garde artist has evolved in tandem with the development of capitalism in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century and it has always been recognized as an artistic response towards changes in Western social life brought about through rapid industrialization. As such, art occupies a central role in critiques of capitalism because its existence and reception have served as gauges for assessing the quality of social life, and/or the balance between the social, economic and political spheres. Art can be identified explicitly in the key writings of Adorno, Benjamin, Lukács, Harvey, and Boltanski and Chiapello and implicitly by its association with free will, creativity and human labor in Marx, Polanyi, Zaretsky and Habermas. This essay will discuss these connections and their significance beginning with an outline of who and what the avant-garde has been imagined and theorized as.

The avant-garde artist is a kind of artist inextricably linked to modernity and the rejection of the past, although just how rejecting the past was expressed vacillated between public political actions and private subjective gestures. In this regard it is an artistic response akin to many of the scholarly critiques of capitalism that have appeared regularly since Marx's classic texts in the mid nineteenth century.⁴ Since then, capitalism

³ Significantly, this is also the beginning of a history of art in which private galleries began to appear in France, and individual's created works and exhibited them outside of the dominant state academies and the religious patronage of the past.

⁴ Specifically those texts that deal with human alienation resulting from the commodification of man's labor, and the fetishization of commodities. See Karl Marx "The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844," "Wage Labour and Capital," "Capital, Volume One" (part
has slowly and surely become ensconced as a worldwide economic system, recently mutating into the extreme version now called neo-liberalism. Through this long evolution the artistic avant-garde has continued to exist, levying its criticisms at the dominant culture through provocative objects and actions, but in recent years the effort seems more stage managed than real. Suspicion and ambivalence towards the contemporary function of the avant-garde may be the subtext of all the recent attention paid to the art market.

It is important to begin by articulating the roots of the avant-garde before moving on to describing how it developed in ways that are easily discussed in tandem with other text-based academic critiques of capitalism. In 1967 D.D. Egbert explained succinctly in his essay "The Idea of the Avant-Garde," that a socialist future would depend on a intellectuals completely breaking with the past. Egbert sources the beginnings of an avant-garde movement to the successful and influential military strategist, philosopher, and educator Henri Saint-Simon, a man Marx and Engels called a "utopian socialist." For Saint-Simon, the founder of the still-operating École Polytechnique in Paris, society was like a well-run machine "operating under natural laws like those of the Newtonian universe," but which needed to be operated within the spiritual guidelines of Christianity in order to create a better world. What is unique about this is the fact that he claimed

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5 For a good concise but critical explanation of neo-liberal economic policy and its consequences, see David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).


artists as one of three groups of specially equipped workers (the other two were scientists and engineers) that would be best able to lead society in a new direction. The obvious hierarchy of this vision of social leadership, in which some are better equipped than others to lead, would be perceived as too bourgeois and contradictory to Socialist ideals, and so would eventually break down. What emerged out of Saint Simon's teachings were two groups of followers; those conceiving of art as propaganda (for explicit socio-political goals), and those who conceived of art as free (classless) expression. Although neither position (propaganda vs. free expression) on its own is true to Saint-Simon's intentions, it would become a lasting divide in the ways later artists and theorists imagined the role of advanced art in society; a conflict most explicitly revealed in the enduring debate about the socio-political relevance of "art-for-arts sake".9

The divided consciousness of the artistic avant-garde interpreted the rejection of tradition in two ways; those who aggressively and publicly rejected the institution of art as a component of bourgeoisie society (i.e. aristocratic, state, church or imperial patronage) in works with radical anti-art content (Courbet, Duchamp, Dada and others come to mind), and those who critiqued society by withdrawing from it and developing their own personal and unique expression (subjectivity) that they depicted in radical formal inventions (Cezanne, Cubists, and Surrealists come to mind). Regardless, in all cases, art became more and more "progressive" the more it echoed the alienation of the individual, and this became most pronounced after the catastrophic consequences of the First World War. The mass killing and maiming of soldiers through new automatic

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9 This is expression developed in France in relation to art and poetry as "L'art pour l'art" in the early nineteenth century. It is largely understood as a provocation to reject the socio-political and/or didactic motivations and uses of art encouraged by such Socialists as Saint-Simon, Ruskin (in England), Fourier and others. It is thought that the French literary critic Théophile Gautier coined the term.
weaponry brought the fearsome reality of technology to the doorstep in the urban centers of Europe and radically altered artists perceptions towards the so-called benefits of science and rationality. War, and its association with power and death, is perhaps the most extreme manifestation of the human beings' feelings of alienation, which remains a central social problem of modernity, and the unifying ground out of which many different moral critiques of capitalism have grown. Human beings' feelings of alienation from themselves and others was a central component of Marx's early theory, and over a hundred years later was featured again in the first real attempt to theorize the avant-garde—Renato Poggioli's 1968 book *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*.10

Poggioli wanted to study avant-garde art as a historical concept; "not so much an aesthetic fact as a sociological one." In his introduction he stresses the point that ideology is a social phenomenon that reveals common psychological conditions that manifest themselves as "formulas of logic"; "in the case of the avant-garde, it is an argument of self assertion or self-defense used by society in the strict sense against society in the larger sense."11 According to Poggioli the artist's self-defense is one activated against society; he/she hopes to destroy past and present society in order to create a new hypothetical future. This corresponds to Egbert's writings from only the year before, and the notion that a progressive future depends on a rejection of the past. For Poggioli however, the avant-garde artist must exist in a temporal limbo of the present, the implication being that each age attains fullness in a state of becoming and not in the terms

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11 Ibid., 4.
of its actual self, thus the present can only be validated in relation to the future, a situation he calls the Dialectic of the Zeitgeist.\textsuperscript{12}

Poggioli's Dialectic of the Zeitgeist seems to be a kind of reformulation of Karl Polanyi's economic theory of the double movement,\textsuperscript{13} applied to what he perceived to be the particular psychological and methodological attributes of modern artists. The year Poggioli's text was written (1968) saw the last great wave of anti-capitalist protest, a time when the artistic and literary avant-gardes (Situationist International, etc) would have seemed to have renewed interest in terms of the possibilities of social protest. In this particular historical moment it is not surprising that an intellectual like Poggioli would look back to earlier post World War texts to find sources of explanation for contemporary events. Polanyi's earlier text, \textit{The Great Transformation}, grapples with the trauma of war, the social resistance and political outcomes of it (Fascism), and the economic structures (or lack thereof) that he saw laying problematically at the foundation of the conflicts.\textsuperscript{14} For Polanyi, the world wars were the result of the failure of nineteenth century institutions to continue safeguarding society's self interest from the growing and unprecedented reorganization of economic life into a self-regulating market. Productive growth in such a free market economy depends on the sale of land, labor, and money. These "fictional commodities" reveal the free market as a utopian concept that cannot work in real life. Society will always resist the sale of these "goods" and require the state to intervene and/or monitor their trade, so self-regulation is never really actualized. This dynamic leads to a "double movement:" society moves towards self-protection, which

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid. 73-76.
\textsuperscript{14} See Ibid.
undermines the ability of a free market to regulate itself and this leads to greater discrepancies of income, wealth and trade, which in turn lead to greater social upheaval.

In his accounting, the First World War is the explosive result of this double movement. I know of no evidence that Poggioli was directly influenced by Polanyi's book, but in any case, the relationship of individual social activism against the dominant culture would have been clear to anyone actively engaged in thinking about the culture, society and politics of Europe's post world war period. As parts of what David Harvey recently called the "web of life," the connections between art, capital, society and politics, were becoming clear in the region.¹⁵

Outside of the specific example of Poggioli's work, Polanyi's economic theory finds clear visual articulation in certain European avant-garde groups following the world war. Dadaism stands out as a particularly vehement and clear political protest. Performances by Dada artists at Zurich's now-famous Cabaret Voltaire aimed at assaulting and provoking the audience. These performances ranged from physical actions such as throwing objects at the audience, to poetry readings and plays, but all were consciously designed as social criticism, which the Dada Manifesto, written by Tristan Tzara in 1918 makes clear. In this document Tzara stated that "'the new artist protests: he no longer paints" and "Let each man proclaim: there is a great negative work of deconstruction to be accomplished. . . . after the state of madness."¹⁶ Besides performances, the artists associated with Dada also made a number of visual artworks, the most interesting of which involved montage as a strategic use of form. Montage, the

¹⁵ David Harvey, Spaces of Global Capitalism (London: Verso, 2006) 79.
collaging of photo-based images onto a new ground in satirical or strange relationships to each other, effectively illustrated the deformity of the body politic and the artists' extreme dissociation with the political world around them. In Hannah Höch's *Cut with the Kitchen Knife Dada Through the Last Weimer Beer-Belly Cultural Epoch in Germany* (1919-20) the Kaiser and his generals are found in a floating field along with cogs, wheels and other mechanical parts (symbols of technology) and floating heads divorced from bodies. Here, as in other Dada works, the grotesque aspects of a power-hungry society are depicted in the field of engorged body parts, which seem to form a kind of out-of-control maniacal machine.

Artists like Tzara and Höch exemplify both the creative response to Polanyi's social rejection of disembedded markets and the early utopian socialists' conceptions of artists as workers/political leaders. This history is especially significance in today's debates on whether or not art functions as something beyond ordinary commodities.\(^\text{17}\) The idea of art as an expression of political will and personal creativity is the positive antithesis of the individual stuck inside Weber's iron cage of reified capitalist society.\(^\text{18}\) Marx doesn't often mention art specifically except as a marker of "unripe social conditions" of previous epochs,\(^\text{19}\) and in the context of critiquing Hegel's "thought entities" in *Phenomenology*;\(^\text{20}\) that is Hegel's tendency to theorize concepts such as art as "essences" of the mind, and not from the point of view that art exists as something

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\(^{17}\) Tangentially it does not seem surprising that in the era of neo-liberalism the first major exhibition of Dada work was launched at New York's MoMA in 2006.


materially and conceptually man-made. Still, the emphasis on art as a material fact rather than myth, philosophy or religion, strikes me as startlingly prescient, and the origin of the later privileging of art as a gauge of the state of social conditions.

At the heart of all of these critiques is the moral critique that human beings lead qualitatively better lives if they feel their work is freely exercised, productive and valued by a mutually-supportive communal society. Marx set the tone and parameters for future critiques by his careful analyses of man's self-alienation in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, and his assertion that man becomes estranged from himself and his community when his labor is commodified as surplus value by his employer. Because man is a species being that is cognizant of his own ability to produce the objective world (unlike animals), when his labor is not his own ("working for the man") he becomes simultaneously estranged from himself, others, and the world. In this theory, human life realizes itself in external life through the products of one's labor. Marx's critique claims that capitalism blocks individuals' potential through a process that is naturalized in regular labor relations. The idea of the avant-garde artist is at odds with this. The popular imagination sees the avant-garde artist as an eccentric dandy (e.g. Baudelaire, Warhol) or provocateur (e.g. Picasso, Duchamp) that lives by his/her own rules, and even if poor, is free. The key idea here is that *the avant-garde artist is perceived as being engaged in unalienated labor.*

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21 In fact, it is important to note that from the beginning, how these artists actually worked has itself undergone a process of mystification. In fact, many of the most famous avant-garde artists of western history were independently wealthy and/or were able to live off of incomes unrelated to their artistic production. Baudelaire originally lived off of a family inheritance until he was cut off and forced to write art criticism in order to pay the bills, Matisse did not have to work for a living, and Duchamp lived off of friends and girlfriends financial support. This is too long a tangent to go into here, but it seems that the idea of the avant-garde artist as "free" was economically conditional from the earliest stages.
In fact, Boltanski and Chiapello have shown in the *New Spirit of Capitalism*\(^2\) that the concept of artistic freedom is fundamental to capitalism's ability to appear legitimate as the primary economic organization. Their book uses Max Weber's earlier and compelling theory that sixteenth and seventeenth century Calvinism and Lutherism together formed a Protestant work ethic that provided a foundation for capitalism to legitimate itself in later centuries, as a way of grappling with why and how capitalism now manages to remain legitimate in a very different, and some might say, more transparent historical moment. Their theory is that capitalism can and does consistently and deftly incorporate all critiques levied against it, and by doing so is able to disable them. They describe a number of historical objections to capitalism, which fall into one of two categories: artistic critique or social critique. The former (artists and intellectuals) claims that people live inauthentic and oppressed lives, whereas the latter (political activists) claim that people are impoverished and that competition leads to selfishness within the human community. In this context the ideological role of the artist, or just the idea of an artist, becomes very important. The artist leads an inspired and productive life of his/her own choosing in which his/her primary occupation is not one dictated by an employer, and yet he/she exists within capitalism and is often critical of his/her society. Duchamp's urinal, Picasso's *Guernica*, and Warhol's counter-cultural "factory" are all classic examples of this ideal. According to the theory of Boltanski and Chiapello, one might say that the artist is the poster child for the New Spirit of Capitalism.

The above-mentioned ideal is largely mystification, when one considers artists' real lives. Most artists do not make a living at their art, and like a mother or housewife

who also works a job outside the home, they are engaged in multiple forms of labor, of which they are only paid for some. In the aforementioned *Artforum* issue on the art market, the art historian Olav Velthuis who has done much research on artists salaries and artwork sales, tells us that most artists "earn hardly anything and a small number enjoy superstar incomes." Furthermore, "the income distribution among artists has become even more skewed, parallel the increasing income disparities in the economy at large." In relation to this, record numbers of artists are graduating from private art schools with Masters of Fine Arts degrees that can cost between $30,000.00 and $60,000.00 in tuition fees, and still result in very few job opportunities. Investigating the problem of unpaid labor has precedents in feminist critique: in the 1970s scholars like Eli Zaretsky showed how the subjugation of women aids in the accumulation of capital by keeping the public and private domains of production separate; this way some work will be valued and paid for, and other work will not. The artist's labor is a bit tricky here; much of it is done in private, but with the hope of public display. Of course what is put on display is mostly what can be sold. In this regard art making can be seen as a feminized activity in the sense that the work done that remains uncompensated stays private because it is not as often exhibited, whereas the paid work has entered the public

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23 Olav Velthuis, "Accounting for Taste," *Artforum* XLVI, no.8 (April, 2008), 308.
24 For example the 2007 tuition at the Parsons (New School) MFA program in New York is 31050.00$, and at the California College of the Arts in San Francisco it is 61,020.00$. Neither of these costs include health fees, supplies, and room and board expenses. The only job specific to this advanced degree is a position as a Professor in Fine Arts at the college level. Literally hundreds of students are graduating each year in the large metropolitan areas of the United States and are competing for a handful of jobs.
domain. This is largely supported by the rather gross fact that the majority of solo exhibitions in museums are still given to male artists.25

Why does an artist continue to do work that they will not be compensated for, and often at significant personal sacrifice? In the case of a mother, or other primary caregiver, the answer is fairly obvious and involves their commitment to familial relations. For an artist the territory becomes quite murky, but Zaretsky's theory that personal identity must be found outside of the division of labor may provide a clue here. Making art is an activity of free will, so whether or not it gets paid, it plays an important psychological role in tempering the effects of classic Marxist alienation. The artist, more than the mother/caregiver, hopes for retrospective public recompense; notoriety, reputation, and/or income to justify their prolonged unpaid labor and to validate their identity as something other than that tied to their day job. In this respect, even if advanced artists' labor is not sold as surplus value, it does not mean that the idea of this particular form of labor does not perform an important ideological or economic role. The rising use of "art" or "artistic" as an adjective in advertising to sell a variety of products seems to attest to this fact. Sandwich "artists" and Louis Vuitton's ad slogan "the art of living"26 suggest

25 The fact that males are privileged in solo museum shows has been fairly consistent through the last several decades despite the influence of feminist and post-colonial critiques levied at institutions since that time. Most recently the New York art critic Jerry Saltz has taken up the cause in a series of public reviews that point to the ongoing favoritism of men in museum shows. It should be pointed at that 2/3 of the art students in MFA programs are women, so these museum odds are particularly disturbing. See Jerry Saltz, "Where Are All the Women?" New York Magazine (Nov. 18, 2007), accessed May 9 at http://nymag.com/arts/art/features/40979/ and on the same day see data compiled on six institutions that reveal roughly an average pf 75% to 25% (or worse) of female to male exhibited artists: http://nymag.com/arts/art/features/40980/.

26 The quoted text is exactly as was found on the official Louis Vuitton Moet Hennessy (LVMH) website in May 2008. LVMH is a consortium of luxury brands that also patronizes much contemporary art production. See: http://www.lvmh.com/mecenat/pg_mecenat_home.asp?rub=23&srub=0
that everyday activities like making lunch and buying luggage are elevated beyond the quotidain to be symbolic of purposeful acts not bound by 9-5 work weeks and other constraints on life.

The ideological role of art is nothing new, but it may be taking on increased importance as other avenues for free expression diminish in high capitalism, and as the gap between the rich and the poor increase exponentially within global neo-liberal economic policies. In the late 1930s and early 1940s Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin vigorously debated the role avant-garde artworks played in the creation or resistance of and to reified capitalist ideology. They, like Polanyi and other Jewish European intellectuals, were involved in trying to explain how economic, social and cultural conditions made the rise of Fascism possible. Within this intellectual reckoning, the role of high art was seen as important, but only if art could be imagined as existing outside of what Adorno would soon call the Culture Industry—that is the sort of cultural PR branch of capitalism.\textsuperscript{27} For Adorno, the only art that could resist cultural commodification were avant-garde artworks, in particular high modern painting and music. Adorno believed that through a process of secularization, art had slowly renounced theology and ritual, ironically defining itself as “art” through it's very rejection of a world that it is predisposed to be included in. This is why Adorno said “artworks become artworks only by negating their origin.” \textsuperscript{28} What he meant was that art can only be defined as "art" by maintaining its autonomy from society, but by becoming "art" it

\textsuperscript{27} For a definition and further explication of the culture industry see the following classic essay: Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry, Enlightenment as Mass Deception" in The Dialectic of Enlightenment (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002) 94-136.

\textsuperscript{28} Theodor Adorno, Aesthetic Theory, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997) 3. This quote is also a pointed reference and rejection of Heidegger's theory of \textit{aletheia} in "The Origin of the Work of Art".
necessarily enters the linguistic and material institutions of society. Thus art must negate its origins (autonomy) in order to become itself. Thus art is an intrinsically dialectic combination of both form (objecthood) and content (meaning, autonomy from society). To lose one or the other (form or content) is to lose art. Obviously avant-garde artworks embody this dialectic, but consumer objects do not. His disagreement with Walter Benjamin was over what Benjamin called the aura of art and its relationship to new forms of mechanically produced artworks.

In his *Work of Art in the Age of Reproducibility* Benjamin attempted to reconcile the dangerous "cult value" of art with art's potential to exist as a libratory force. A recognition of Hitler's manipulative use of myth and nostalgia, especially in propagandistic films and newsreels, is what prompted Benjamin to say that it was necessary to develop new theses on the conditions for art production after Marx:

> Theses defining the developmental tendencies of art can therefore contribute to the political struggle in ways that it would be a mistake to underestimate. They neutralize a number of traditional concepts—such as creativity and genius, eternal value and mystery—which, used in an uncontrolled way (and controlling them is difficult today), allow factual material to be manipulated in the interests of fascism.29

The aura is a concept that connotes value in a work of art because it signifies the artworks existence as a unique object. These objects have the ability to control us in some way because we are struck dumb by their beauty, authority and/or presence. It was this authority, or authenticity, that Benjamin sought to undermine in this essay through embracing the technical reproduction of the unique image or object. Without an original, the viewer is liberated of the object's control over them and they have more power.

Because the authority of the object is no longer located in the object itself, and/or in its ritualistic use, the aura shifts to the mediated experience (between the subject and object) of one's perception of it at any given time. He suggests that ritual value is replaced by exhibition value, because context becomes so important in determining ones experience with art. This is why Benjamin can claim that the aura shifts to the political. Art reproduced mechanically leaves its traditional cult value behind and becomes political, but in doing so, the political acquires a new character—the aura that previously resided in the art object's authenticity. The thesis of Benjamin's essay is not that the aura has disappeared but that it has migrated to the political through the vehicle of mechanical reproduction.

Benjamin's theory (the aura as a source of original authenticity or truth) conflicts with Adorno's belief that an artwork by nature rejects its origin. In Adorno's words:

I now find it disquieting . . . that you now casually transfer the concept of the magical aura to the 'autonomous work of art' and flatly assign to the latter a counter-revolutionary function . . . it seems to me that the centre of the autonomous work of art does not itself belong on the side of myth - excuse my topic parlance - but is inherently dialectical; within itself it juxtaposes the magical and the mark of freedom.”

Adorno is stating clearly that the redemptive power of art lies in its autonomy from the world—it's critical stance—which is separate from myth. In different ways, both Adorno and Benjamin agree that the art object itself has the potential to reveal the ideological mask, although they differ in their understanding of just how this works. Adorno's concern, which seems to have been born out retrospectively, is that "aura is not only—as Benjamin claimed—the here and now of the artwork, it is whatever goes

beyond its factual givenness, its content; one cannot abolish it and still want art."\(^{31}\) Still, in general, both positions bracket the core issue which was, and still is, the encroachment of mass culture on older forms of high art.

Despite being about seventy years old, aspects of this debate still resonate, although it seems clear that mechanical reproduction would not in the end prove liberatory, at least not so far.\(^{32}\) In fact, if we accept Boltanski and Chiapello's analyses, a kind of compromise between Adorno and Benjamin's aura-autonomy argument may have been integrated into the substructure of capitalism. The key is the important recognition that whether or not the traditional aura of avant-garde art exists, it is still assumed to exist, is fetishized through context (art fairs, galleries, art magazines, etc), and is consequently used as a marketing tool in art sales. This disguises the everyday consumer object in the "myth" of the avant-garde artist, and ensures that many new seductive commodities will reach the market while doing double-duty as signifiers of freedom. One only needs to think of Jeff Koons' life-size porcelain figure of Michael Jackson, or his vacuum cleaners displayed in museum vitrines to get the idea. If the artist is the poster child for the New Spirit of Capitalism, his or her artworks are their calling cards.

In recent years, as the art market unabatedly continues to reach monstrous proportions, all those people engaged in art discourses and/or production, who are not making millions, seem to be getting increasingly nervous. At stake is the value of their "unaliented" labor. In a way, this situation serves as an interesting example of Jürgen


\(^{32}\) Outside of the realm of high art, there is a popular belief, or hope, that the Internet may fulfill an emancipatory socio-political role in its ability to educate vast numbers of people globally through free access sources of information still outside the US-dominated culture industry. It remains to be seen whether the Internet will remain relatively free (that is excluding the costs associated with purchasing equipment).
Habermas' claim that a legitimation crisis will inevitably follow in each of three major societal institutions (economic, political, and socio-cultural) when any one is forced to overcompensate for the shortcomings of the other in the maintenance of capitalism. With risk to oversimplifying Habermas' complex argument, it seems that the mythical ideal of avant-garde art has been increasingly called upon to overcompensate for society's desperate and failing need to locate examples of unaliened labor within itself. As capitalism's rules spread out globally through the neo-liberal market economy, high art becomes increasingly important and valuable (literally and figuratively). At the same time, the avant-garde's ability to remain politically avant-garde becomes compromised (because it is ensconced in a for-profit market system and institutional network) and instead the avant-garde becomes located only in the novel form of the art object and its symbolic signification of unaliened labor-production. It looks like the avant-garde, but is no more so than the sandwich artist mentioned earlier. In this regard, following Adorno's argument about art's autonomy, art ceases to exist because the form is separated from its critical content. Radical form without content is just a nifty new object to sell after all. This posing—the art-like object standing in for the critical autonomous avant-garde artwork—creates a legitimation crisis in the cultural sphere of society. What this means to the overall structure of capitalism and its future is still unclear, as art's legitimation is largely only being questioned through those intimately involved with it. Still empty art is empty, and most people feel it, whether they have the education or language to articulate its loss.

This essay has largely been a meditation on what I see as the interweaving of the historical avant-garde with other academic critiques of capitalism. Both forms of critique
evolved in tandem and have been united in the quest to build a better future through full or partial rejection of the past. Although both forms of critique have had merit, they have been so far inadequate in achieving significant change. However the continued existence of true avant-garde artworks are vitally important in the current context of an advanced capitalism because they serve as examples of "spaces of hope" for the continued creative imagining of a more humane and just society.\textsuperscript{33} Without the imagination and will, political action is not likely to follow. It may be that these artworks exist but are lost in the deluge of works promoted through an international art market whose very logic seeks to exclude them. The support of academic institutions and tenure has meant that academics have had more success in getting their critiques to the general public; artists as "freelancers" do not fair so well. It is the role and responsibility of progressive members of the art community to seek out artists who are actively engaged in visual critiques of capitalism, to exhibit their work and to write about it in the few places not yet fully co-opted by the culture industry. This also means political action: protecting freedom of speech and lobbying for state-sponsored arts funding so that places to exhibit artists work and spaces of discourse may once again become available that are not compromised by the market's needs.

\textsuperscript{33} David Harvey, \textit{Spaces of Hope} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).