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The Avant Garde as Exform
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Peter Bürger's critique of the historical avant-garde accounts for its ineffectual nature as a movement because '[a]rt as an institution prevents the contents of works that press for radical change in society [...] from having any practical effect.'¹ Bürger argues for hermeneutics to be employed as a critique of ideology,² as a facet of the understanding of the 'historicity of aesthetic categories'.³ The influence of institutions on music 1968 has served as a central part of its critique: the work concept itself seems to enshrine political ineffectiveness and the bourgeois nature of art practice that ought to be critiqued by an avant-garde. Adorno's claim that 'today the only works which really count are no longer works at all'⁴ also no longer seems to apply when the relationship of work such as that produced by the so-called Neue-Konzeptualismus⁵ with established musical institutions is considered.

In contrast, Bourriaud's concept of the 'exform'⁶ re-conceives the avant-garde as outside of institutions and an idea of 'progress' that is aligned with a dominant capitalist ideology. The *exformal* is 'the site where border negotiations unfold between what is rejected and what is admitted, products and waste', and forms 'an authentically organic link between the aesthetic and the political.'⁷ Progress, as part of a capitalist narrative, both creates and abhors waste. Therefore the task of the avant-garde artist is to give energy to this waste, outside of political and ideological institutions. This type of avant-garde practice functions to 'bring precarity to mind: to keep the notion alive that intervention in the world is possible.'⁸ This paper explores the exform with respect to the music and art work of the

¹ Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. by Michael Shaw, *Theory and History of Literature*, vol. 4 (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, [1984] 2009), p.95.

² *ibid.*, p.6.

³ *ibid.*, pp15-16.

⁴ Theodor Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music*, trans. by Anne G Mitchell and Wesley V Blomster (New York: Continuum, 1973), p.30.

⁵ cf. Johannes Kreidler, 'Das Neue am Neuen Konzeptualismus', published as 'Das Neue and der Konzeptmusik', *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, vol. 175, no. 1 (2014), pp44-49, <http://www.kreidler-net.de/theorie/Kreidler_Das_Neue_am_Neuen_Konzeptualismus.pdf> [accessed 13.05.2017].

⁶ Nicholas Bourriaud, *The Exform*, trans. by Erik Butler, Verso Futures (London: Verso, 2016).

⁷ *ibid.*, p.10.

⁸ *ibid.*, p.47.

British composer Chris Newman, and considers how Bourriaud's approach to re-thinking the avant-garde might apply specifically to contemporary and experimental music in the present.

Short Biography

Lauren Redhead is a composer of experimental music, a performer of music for organ and electronics and a musicologist who writes about the aesthetics and socio-semiotics of contemporary music. She is Senior Lecturer in Music at Canterbury Christ Church University.