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### ARTICLE

# SELF-REGULATION AND ANTI-SELF-REGULATION IN MODERN ART UNDER THE LOSS OF SUBJECTIVITY--AESTHETICISM AND AVANT-GARDE ART

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### ARTICLE DETAILS

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### ABSTRACT

Self-discipline and anti-self-discipline in art is a recurring topic in history, and between the 19th and 20th centuries, this pair of concepts manifested itself in the opposition between aestheticism and avant-gardism. Taking the theory of the Frankfurt School as a perspective, this article analyzes the art of aestheticism and avant-garde, and argues that the self-discipline and anti-self-discipline of art in this period actually reflect the artists' criticism of reality: aestheticism and Décadentisme expressed their criticism by escaping from it, while avant-garde art, which emerged later, struck at the alienated reality head-on. From aestheticism to avant-garde art, art was constantly breaking down the alienation in bourgeois society, and the deepening of self-criticism in art embodied the transcendental goal and revolutionary spirit of art.

#### KEYWORDS

Subjectivity; Avant-gardism; Aestheticism; Frankfurt; Self-Regulation; Anti-Self-Regulation

From the late 19th century to the mid-20th century, two opposite views of art emerged - "art for art's sake" and "art for life's sake", i.e., aestheticism and avant-garde, one before and one after the other. The former rejected reality and turned to fiction, reflecting the self-discipline of art, while the latter violently rejected the practice of distancing from reality, and turned to stuff art back into the real world, reflecting a strong "rebellion" against self-discipline.

Western Marxists have manifested unprecedented interest in this phenomenon, and Lukács, Ortega Sert, Adorno, Marcuse, and Biegel have successively made discussions on self-discipline and anti-discipline of art. It can be said that the abandonment of reality by the aestheticists was due to their keen and deep insight into the social alienation that is beyond the control of human beings, and the self-discipline of art is to abandon all the factors related to society, and to purify art into art itself, which is the desperate cry of the artists for the loss of subjectivity in the alienation of human beings due to the rapid development of capitalism, but they are powerless to recognize, master, and change the reality, and the self-discipline of art in that time is a kind of escape from being held hostage by the turning gears of the machine. At that time, artistic self-discipline was a kind of romantic escape from being wrapped up in the gears of large-scale production, and it was a euphemistic resistance to and negation of alienation. This "isolated" character was due to the fact that the artists at that time excluded themselves from the revolution,

but unconsciously showed their revolutionary nature due to their sensitive vision. Half a century later, the anti-self-regulation seems to be standing in complete opposition to the self-regulation of art, but in fact it is a step forward in the revolt of the aestheticists who advocated the self-regulation of art - the Dadaists and Popists seem to be like a mob that desperately deconstructs the system of art with a vengeance after art has gone to extreme forms, but in fact it is a direct and violent reaction to the relentless alienation of art. The vanguardists madly destroyed the humanity in art, and used the dehumanized art to fight against the dehumanized reality, which was a pessimistic expression of powerlessness against the alienation, and turned into an absurd "resistance" to the active intervention of the alienation - art cannot be completely detached from the reality. It is impossible for art to be completely detached from reality and self-discipline, and this is even more so in the modern society wrapped in mechanical gears. The transformation from aestheticism to avant-garde is not only a simple reversal of art's self-discipline to anti-self-discipline, but also a more profound deepening of the artists' revolutionary degree of recognizing and applying art; however, just as Marcuse's comment, anti-art can only be "the destruction of the illusion of alienation, the overcoming of the illusion". However, as Marcuse commented, anti-art can only be "the destruction of the illusion of alienation, the overcoming of the illusion [1]", and it should be recognized that the greatness of the avant-garde lies not in the mockery of alienation, but in the reaffirmation of the

critical power of art. ....

## 1. AESTHETICISM'S ROMANTIC RECLUSE "SELF-HELP"

### 1.1 coherence between the framework and content of self-regulatory regimes

The artistic self-discipline of aestheticism is set against the backdrop of the period when capitalism regained its dominance and reached its heyday after the crisis, when the institutional tradition of self-discipline in art was fully developed, and where, in the case of aestheticism, the separation from the practice of life that used to constitute the institutional position in bourgeois society [2] is directly reflected in the content of the works. The constant and increasingly frequent replacement of old objects by new ones, the weakening of attachment to material and soon also to spiritual possessions, the constant renewal and instability of standards and values in step with technological development, the overstrain of the spirit and the excessive vitality of the art of life lead to an abyssal tragedy, in which people lose their knowledge and control of society and life. People lose their knowledge and control of society and life, and thus move towards idealism and fiction [4]. In this sense, aestheticism develops from the self-regulatory system in the past to the work of art itself, emphasizing "art for the sake of art", making the demarcation of art and reality become the boundary of this makes the demarcation of the boundary between art and reality the content of "aesthetics" at the same time.

### 1.2 The self-paralysis of aestheticism

When the framework and content of the institution are aligned, the stance of social futility becomes the essence of art in bourgeois society. As a result, the purely static attitude towards life, the ephemeral and evanescent nature of experience, and the hedonistic theory of sensation become the criterion by which all art is measured, and the work of art is regarded as an end in itself, such that the aestheticist world-view sees art as the only and true compensation for the disappointments encountered in life, as the true path of realizing and perfecting an existence that is always incomplete in itself.

The romantic recluse became the new consciousness of life, and in aestheticism the ideological and fantastical forms of existence are always superior to their natural and actual forms, and unfulfilled aspirations are always more perfect than aspirations transformed into ordinary and banal realities. They refuse to give importance to reality and have an unwavering faith in fictional life. This is evident in Villiers de Lille Adam's middle grade novel "Vera" - the protagonist is unwilling to accept the death of his wife, Vera, and live a life of false self-deception; for the protagonist, reality and truth are far less sweet than the glittering sweetness of make-believe, and this sweet reality overcomes the truthfulness of the truth, and thus the fictional life is deeper, truer, and purer than the reality of death, and society becomes invalid in their eyes .....

### 1.3 The Abyss of Décadentisme's Despair

The stance of social ineffectiveness is also reflected in the expression of despair of the Décadentisme. The modern aestheticists of "art for art's sake", while escaping from reality, were also abandoned by reality, and they became tired of the orderly and carefree bourgeois life. But for Décadentisme, the antipathy to the monotony of bourgeois life was expressed as never before. This kind of antipathy is due to their abyssal consciousness. As Baudelaire said, "Everything is full of shadowy horror, and one does not know where it leads one", the abyss of the Décadentisme is all the things that make them unable to find concepts and words to express themselves. The loss of control of reality and the artist's experience of being controlled by society and the despair of not being able to break free made them become jaded and turn to abandon reality towards the depiction of pessimism and darkness. As a result, the Décadentisme despaired of shaping forms, rejected untamed nature and the realistic portrayal of life, and preached pessimistic and depraved sentiments, seeking inspiration from morbid societies and from death, horror, and darkness.

Prostitutes became the favored subjects of the Décadentisme artists, they were the artist's self-reference - the prostitute who stays calm in the storm of passion, who looks on coldly at the carnal desires she has

aroused, and who feels alone and indifferent while others are filled with sensation and are in ecstasy. The portrayal of this subject destroys not only the bourgeoisie's inherent mode of moral organization of feeling, but also the basis of feeling itself. That is to say, while expressing the despair of the abyss, the Décadentisme also show a desire to rebel against it.

### 1.4 The Ambivalence of Artistic Self-Regulation

The deliberate distancing of Aestheticism and Décadentisme from social reality shows the self-discipline of art, but this self-discipline has a paradoxical nature from the beginning - art emphasizes self-discipline on the one hand, and continues to think critically about society on the other, which is especially reflected in the concept of "art for art's sake". This is especially reflected in the concept of "art for art's sake".

In the second half of the nineteenth century, in the face of the total objectification of society brought about by capitalist industrial civilization, art was thought to offer the possibility of a transcendental self-understanding [4]. Adorno also believed that art expressed aesthetic resistance to an alienated society therefore, he advocated that art should be self-disciplined. This self-discipline means that art has an innate social criticality. The extent to which the "art for art's sake" advocates were aware of the ways in which art functioned in bourgeois society clearly did not coincide with this requirement-they were keenly aware of the smell of decay in society, but skillfully avoided it by means of an illusory or decadent approach to social alienation. social alienation. But this is not the only answer; the depth of the artist's awareness of this content shines through in the avant-garde expressions that follow a little later. However, as analyzed above, the aestheticists, on the one hand, flee from reality, and on the other hand, through their escape, they express their rebellion against reality, i.e., a kind of critique, which, however, loses its sharpness in the context of the institutionalization of art, and which thus reveals the paradox of artistic self-discipline: art is This shows the paradox of artistic self-discipline: art is transcendental, to criticize reality, but has lost the ability to do so. This undoubtedly calls for a more radical art, that is, the emergence of "anti-self-discipline" vanguard. It should be clarified that the anti-self-discipline here does not refer to the rebellion against the transcendental critical function of art, but rather to the rebellion against the detachment of art from reality which leads to the loss of the effectiveness of art's critique, which is a kind of self-criticism of art in face of the inability to accomplish the original goals of its original self-discipline system. This is a kind of self-criticism of art in the face of its inability to fulfill its original goals in the original self-regulatory system:

"When art is free from all that is external to it, it is bound to have problems of its own. The position of social ineffectiveness becomes the essence of art in bourgeois society when the system is aligned with the content, thus provoking art's self-criticism. The historical avant-garde movement is to be commended for providing this self-criticism." [2]

## 2. THE "DEHUMANIZATION" OF AVANT-GARDE ART

### 2.1 The Ambivalence of Artistic Self-Regulation

The avant-garde emerged with a strong character to destroy the previous art system, which can be better explained in the context of Marcuse's logic. [1] According to Marcuse, the ontological element in art is the form, which always gives art boundaries, a framework, and a place in the existing world of experience and inspiration, thus giving it a value and making it an object among many others, which means that art (and anti-art) has an exchange value and becomes a commodity. And it is this form of commodity as a form of reality that is the target of the avant-garde revolt.

Art, as a part of existing culture, is dependent on it, but as an alien to existing reality, it negates it. The prerequisite for art to be art is a thorough penetration of the facts, which in self-regulating art manifests itself as a blindness to reality and a direct reflection of its repression, and in the avant-garde, as a struggle against control and repression --They destroyed the perceptual, habitual, and dominant forms, as well as the habitual ways of appearing objects and things, and pushed art into a non-objective, abstract, and anti-artistic path, trying to reach the liberation of the subject in this way.

## 2.2 Dehumanizing Art Against Dehumanizing Reality

The avant-garde concepts of non-object, abstraction, and anti-art are embodied in the amplification of dehumanizing features in art in order to destroy the existing art system. For example, the revolutionary initiative of asking questions about the concept of art, the abolition of the scope of works is undoubtedly a challenge to the art system. Duchamp put the randomly selected mass-produced objects into the exhibition, attacking the concept itself through the concept of art, and the division between the urinal and the "Fountain" became absurd and thought-provoking, and the readymade objects were selected to enter the hall of art, and the "game" and "ironic" expression of the concepts of life and art were used to destroy the existing art system. The readymade objects are selected to enter the hall of art, destroying the boundary between life and art with "game" and "ironic" expressions, thus destroying the existing art system.



Figure 1: Marcel Duchamp "The Fountain" 1917

Duchamp's practice was only the tip of the iceberg, as Cubism, Dadaism, and the Abstract Expressionists used artistic techniques such as collage, montage, and most of the "anti-practice" artistic techniques to challenge the individuality and creativity of artistic production, the individuality and contemplation of artistic reception, and the self-regulatory principles of the other arts. They reintroduced the isolated experience of everyday life into literature and art, eliminating the inherent boundaries between art and life, art and artifacts, and originator and audience.

Destroying the forms of reality was not the destination of the avant-garde's journey toward dehumanizing art; pursuing the liberation of the subject, resisting alienation, and confronting dehumanizing reality was. In other words, the closeness to life shown by the avant-garde is precisely to achieve the effect of revolting against life, and they fight against the dehumanized (that is, materialized) reality by highlighting the invasion of the objectification of reality through the emphasis on the dehumanized part of art. It can be said that the avant-garde art's move towards dehumanization seems to be a call to life, a compromise with reality, and a rebellion against self-discipline, but in fact it is an unprecedented display of artistic revolution and a sharp exposure of the transcendence of reality.

### 3. THE HOMECOMING OF THE AVANT-GARDE? --DRAMATIC REVOLT OR ILLUSORY OVERCOMING

Where did the avant-garde's destruction of the art system end, and was their revolution truly radical and effective? Has the creation of the formless, the desire for novelty and change, the refusal to communicate with the bourgeois audience and the willingness to shock and confuse, all of these frenzied, absurd, and ironic practices succeeded in becoming

an integral part of the culture industry and museum culture?

Marcuse argues that this "new behavior" is self-defeating [1] because it remains and must remain (in whatever trivial form) distinct from non-art forms of art - Duchamp's signing of randomly-selected readymades is based precisely on the idea that the institution of art, the body of artistic creation, is not a form of art. Knowledge of the institution of art, the subject of artistic creation, otherwise his selection would not justify his work as work.

The avant-garde was opposed to form, but it was also unable to rid itself of it completely. It was the form of art itself that thwarted the intention of art to become "realistic" and "full of life", so that it could never really become reality, could never realize itself. Anti-art is destined to remain art, and the revolt against "form" is powerless to communicate the gulf between art and reality, powerless to get rid of the art-form chain, it can only achieve the loss of the nature of art, and it can only be the destruction and overcoming of the illusion of alienation.

The revolutionary nature of the avant-garde, therefore, lies not in the destruction of form, of the institution of art, but in the reaffirmation of the possibility of transcendental self-understanding in art through its apparent proximity to reality; far from mocking alienation, their greatness is in reinforcing the incompatibility of alienation with existing reality to the extent of rejecting any practical application of it in behavior. In this way they perfected art's transcendental cognitive capacity, which in turn served a radical, political function - "to speak the unspeakable, to make man encounter the dream he has turned his back on and the sin he has forgotten [1]".

## 4. CONCLUSION

From aestheticism to avant-garde, on the surface it seems to be the continuation and rebellion of artistic self-discipline in modern times, but in fact it is the process of self-criticism of art. The subjective status of form and the alienation of art make the self-discipline present contradictory characteristics, and also cause the coupling of aestheticism with reality and the indelible distance between avant-garde and reality. Aestheticism's desperate escape from reality and the avant-garde's brutal destruction of form are at the core of art's transcendence, and the difference between the two manifestations stems fundamentally from the difference in the extent to which art recognizes its own role in bourgeois society, and it is this difference that determines the difference between "art for art's sake" and "art for life's sake". It is this difference that determines the distinction between "art for art's sake" and "art for life's sake", reflecting the increasing revolutionary nature of modern art.

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