Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-garde* [1974]

- Art into life

**What is, for Peter Bürger, the historical avant-garde?**

Dada, Surrealism, Russian avant-garde after October revolution

**What are the common features?**

- Do not reject individual artistic techniques and procedures of earlier art…
  --But rather they reject that art in its entirety…
- Radical break with tradition.
- In their most extreme manifestations, their primary target is art as an institution such as it has developed in bourgeois society

**What about cubism?**

- Part of historical avant-garde because it questions linear perspective that had prevailed since the Renaissance…BUT it doesn’t share basic tendency: sublation of art in the praxis of life

**So, what is the institution against which dada, and the avant-garde, react?**

Important passages:

- 22/ distribution apparatus
  Status of art in bourgeoisie society as defined by the concept of autonomy
- Bürger draws heavily upon Marx, and trains his basic premise along Adam smith’s theory of wealth and Marx’s theory of labor
- Adam smith: it is not specific forms of labor but labor as such that creates wealth.
-Bürger extrapolates his theory of avantgarde from this:
-17/ historical avant-garde movements all react against aestheticism

What is aestheticism?
Important passage:
-22/ detached from the praxis of life.
   development of pure aesthetic

Many art historians would like to marginalized avant-garde…but what is important about avant-garde?
-Certain general categories of the work of art were first made recognizable in their generality by the avant-garde
- Avant-garde sensitizes the recipient

Bürger mentions the writings of Walter Benjamin. What is the ‘aura’ that he talks about?
Important passage:
-27/ unique phenomenon of distance
   uniqueness
   authenticity

How is it lost?
Important passage:
-27/ through changes in techniques of reproduction

Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956)
-Brilliant wit, his outspoken Marxism, and his revolutionary experiments in the theater have made Brecht a vital and controversial force in modern drama.
-In his early plays, Brecht experimented with dada and expressionism, but in his later work, he developed a style more suited his own unique vision.

**The Measures Taken [1930]**

**Who are characters?**
- The vanguard

**What are scenes?**

**What is plot?**
- Narrative recounts the measures taken to deal with an upstart

**What do you think this play is about?**
- Individual (young comrade) vs. collective
- Don’t fall prey to pity, just follow party dictate
- It’s about propaganda

Important passages:
- Machiavellian cynicism
  18/ correcting mistakes
  - “The song of commodity”
  24/ I don’t know what man is. All I know is his price

**But Brecht was a Marxist through and through. What is the purpose of his cynicism?**
- Brecht doesn’t celebrate commodification of man. He is stating that this is a fact, and he wants audience to react to this reality.
- “change the world: it needs it"

Important passage:
  25/ what vileness should you not suffer to annihilate vileness?”
What are the classics?
    -Classics encompass the totality of misery

If the agitators want to protect the classics, are they avant-garde?

**Individual (young comrade) vs. collective**

Important passage:
    26/ comrade: their suffering is unendurable
    Agitators: suffering is not enough

What can the collective do that the individual can’t?
    -Party will outlive the individual (28)
    -‘in praise of the party’ (29)

How does drama conclude?
    -Comrade agrees that he must be thrown into lime pit

What makes him capitulate?