

AVANT-GARDE IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

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ABSTRACTS

TANIA ØRUM

From Marginal to Horizontal Art History?

The Case of the Avant-Garde in the Nordic Countries

Peter Bürger famously pronounced the death of the avant-garde after World War II. In the Nordic countries, however, the chronology looks different. While individual artists and groups of artists joined the prewar avant-garde movements in central Europe, native avant-garde movements mainly sprang up during the postwar period. The Cobra group (1949-1951), initiated by Asger Jorn, was the first transnational avant-garde group to emerge from Denmark. From the perspective of what Piotr Piotrowski described as Vertical Art History, regional movements outside Paris and Berlin in the prewar period and New York in the postwar period have generally been regarded as belated, watered-down versions of the “real” avant-garde. More recent avant-garde studies tend to modify the centralist views of both Bürger and traditional art and cultural history, arguing that the monolinear aesthetic development of art assumed in such accounts cannot be upheld in the light of empirical studies of avant-garde networks, transnational and comparative research of historical and political contexts and recent poststructuralist theory. Drawing on examples from the four volumes of the Cultural History of the Avant-Garde in the Nordic Countries, my presentation will discuss these contrary views of “marginal” countries and art.

Tania Ørum is associate professor emerita, Department of Arts and Cultural Studies, University of Copenhagen. She was the coordinator of the Danish research network “The Return and Actuality of the Avant-Gardes” supported by the Danish Research Council for the Humanities 2002-2004. Director of the Nordic Network of Avant-Garde Studies supported by the Nordic Research Council, Nordforsk 2005-2009. Chairman of the European Network for Avant-Garde and Modernism Studies (EAM) (www.eam-europe.ugent.be) 2007-2008. Member of the Steering Committee of EAM from 2007. Main editor of the 4 volumes of *A Cultural History of the Avant-Garde in the Nordic Countries* published in the series of Avant-Garde Critical Studies at Rodopi/Brill (Leiden/Boston 2012-2022). Tania Ørum has written widely on Modernism and the Avant-Garde in literature and the arts.

JOHANNA DRUCKER

Afterlife of the Avant-garde

The historical avant-garde had an international presence in the first decades of the 20th century. Futurism, Dada, Vorticism, Surrealism and other movements produced vibrant work at the intersection of art and politics. Or so they believed. As the course of 20th century arts unfolded, the relationships among formal innovation, political activism, ideological belief and the role of aesthetics as a critical instrument became the foundation of artistic practice. By the 1990s, when Paul Mann announced “the theory death of the avant-garde,” critical questions were being raised about the continued viability of these beliefs as a basis for contemporary activity. This talk asks whether the avant-garde is merely a historical reference or whether its foundational principles have any currency in these times. Has the avant-garde ossified into an academic trope that simply provides justification for careerism and commercialization, or does its legacy have a vital role to play?

Johanna Drucker is a Distinguished Professor and Breslauer Professor in the Department of Information Studies at UCLA. She is internationally known for her work in the history of graphic design, typography, experimental poetry, fine art, and digital humanities. Recent work includes *Inventing the Alphabet* (University of Chicago Press, 2022), *Visualization and Interpretation* (MIT Press, 2020), and *Iliadz: Meta-Biography of a Modernist* (Johns Hopkins University Press 2020), *Digital Humanities 101: An introduction to Digital Methods* (Routledge, 2021). Drucker’s artist’s books are widely represented in museum and library collections and were the subject of a travelling retrospective, *Druckworks: 40 years of books and projects*, in 2012-2014. Other recent work includes *Diagrammatic Writing* (Onomatopée, 2014), *The General Theory of Social Relativity*, (The Elephants, 2018), and *Downdrift: An Eco-fiction* (Three Rooms Press, 2018). In 2014 she was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and in 2021 was the recipient of the AIGA’s Steven Heller Award for Cultural Criticism. She is currently working on ChronoVis, a platform for humanistic time modeling, as well as various other projects.

MARTIN GLAZ SERUP

Conceptual Writing and Avant-Garde Legacies in Contemporary Nordic Poetry

From the outset of the historical avant-gardes more than a century ago, what we term avant-garde can be perceived as a kind of 'tradition of ruptures' as Tania Ørum and Marianne Ping-Huang have it. This – or these, rather – tradition(s) employs various but somewhat recognizable strategies throughout time, resulting, amongst other things, in different -isms. I consider Conceptual Writing or Conceptual Poetry (2003-2015) to be such a historical -ism that is now over. In my presentation I will take a closer look on what Conceptual Writing was, its avant-garde legacies and not least how it manifested itself in the Nordic countries. I will include examples of Conceptual Witness Literature in the shape of Åke Hodell's two concrete poetry works *Orderbuch* (1965) and *CA36715 (J)* (1966), and Ida Börjels documentary poetry book *Ringa hem – avlyssnat vid ryska frontlinjen* (2022). As already suggested by the conflicting years mentioned in this abstract, *conceptualism* is not the same as conceptual strategies – that are, I suppose, very avant-garde.

Martin Glaz Serup is the author of a wide variety of children's books, chapbooks, criticism and prose, as well as nine collections of poetry, most recently *Endless Summer* (2020). His latest prose book, *Reading Places* (2018), is a hybrid Life-Writing investigation of memory, place and reading. The monograph *Relational Poetry* (2013) is focusing on conceptual literature and political poetry. Amongst other subjects, he has written articles on conceptual literature, the poetry reading and contemporary experimenting (sound)poetry. Currently Serup is involved in a project on participatory creative writing groups led by authors in collaboration with mental health care professionals for people experiencing severe mental illness. Serup is external lecturer in Comparative Literature at the University of Copenhagen, wherefrom he also received his PhD on the dissertation *Cultural Memory and Conceptual Witness Literature*.