

# Karin M. HOFER

## AVANT-GARDE GROUPS AND THEIR INVARIANT DEVELOPMENT-STRUCTURES EXAMPLE: DIE BRÜCKE GROUP (SHORT VERSION IN PLAIN ENGLISH)\*

### Introduction

The Modern Era might be seen to have occurred between the French Revolution 1789 and the turn of 1989. These 200 years differ from the centuries before by a special kind of cultural self-image. The citizen had been empowered by the idea of enlightenment, therefore he/she was able to overcome feudalism and absolutism and the power of the Church. This process went on slowly in an evolutionary way, but in most cases with rapid movements by revolutionary outbursts. The people of the era believed fundamentally in a linear progress, caused by increasing rationality and individuality. They also believed (since Hegel and Darwin) in a historic grown determination of the development of mankind.

### Progress as program

Ernst Gombrich<sup>1</sup> examined in his lectures *The Ideas of Progress and their Impact on Art* the effects and changes of this idea within this time. All these changes are to be seen in the development of art, as an important part of culture. This appears almost self-evident, but the tightness of this

coincidence is often surprising: avant-gardes as exponents of art revolutions are a phenomenon in times when the artist tries to get autonomy and not to be submitted by the aims of the Church and nobility. The term avant-garde is a military expression that denotes a group transcending the borderline into enemy's territories to explore conditions for further attacks. As a small group, they had to work very quietly and by subversive strategies. This term was used metaphorically first in the early nineteenth century also for groups of artists who tried to undermine the power of the established art scene. The utopian socialist Henri de Saint-Simon used the term avant-garde in 1825 in his book *Opinions Litteraires, Philosophique et Industriell*, where he used it for different social and art contexts. Proclaiming philosophers, workers and artists as being of dominant importance for a society to come, he wrote: "We artists will be the avant-garde of intellectual revolution. The power of art is indeed the most effective and fastest. At our service are all kinds of weapons. If we want to bring through new ideas, we sculpt them out of marble or paint them on canvas."<sup>2</sup>

Almost throughout the whole nineteenth and twentieth century, we can observe self-organized avant-garde groups acting as a driving

force of revolution in art. Seen that way, artists do not only create artworks, but also revolutionary, performative<sup>3</sup> situations. In this aspect, art history (or perhaps ArtStudies) can begin to look upon those processes through which a new point of view and creation is instilled. This process is as important as creation itself, otherwise the piece will not exist within art and art history. The history of reception and provenience research, caused by the art market is of little relevance in this case.

## Theory of avant-gardes

In theory, the term 'avant-garde' has different meanings used by different theoreticians: Adorno (also an avantgardistic composer) looks upon the avant-garde (he used mostly the singular) in his *Aesthetic Theory* as the only defence against the brainwashing methods of the 'culture industry' (*Kulturindustrie*), that he described in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (he lived at that time near Hollywood). The basic idea of this book is, that Enlightenment (with the belief that rationality itself will be able to create a better world), could not recognize that rationality can also be used to improve egoistic, economic and even criminal methods. This dystopia, written in 1944, seemed exaggerated at that time. But turned out to describe the situation of the twenty-first century quite well. Adorno sees the art of avant-gardes not so much in formal aspects, and more as the ability to resist all seductions of entertainment and escape from the 'context of delusion' (*Verblendungs-zusammenhang*) of mass culture. This is an extreme elitist position near to Nietzsche's.

Only few publications about the structure of avant-gardes appeared in art theory in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but in sociology this topic was of interest in the nineteen-sixties and nineteen-seventies. Peter Bürger published a *Theory of Avantgarde*, seen with the political eyes of a 68-revolutionist, that sounds obsolete nowadays. But Pierre Bourdieu<sup>4</sup> developed - influenced by methods of physics - a field-theory of art, where every participant of the art-field interacts with others by means of his *habitus*, collecting and using his 'cultural capital'

to get more of it. Bourdieu's *Rules of Art* are based on these terms. To exemplify the thesis, he held an interesting lecture series about the avant-garde of impressionism, and Manet's important role as grey eminence in this group to overcome the power of academism and of the jury of the Salon. The theories of Bourdieu, Gehlen, Bürger and Luhman were precisely compared in the book of Christine Magerski,<sup>5</sup> in which she found a lot of differences but only few and too simple accordances.

## Enquiries about invariant structures of avant-gardes

After having read a lot of considerations about this theme, no one could really answer the question: what are the evident structural invariants of avant-gardes? Thus new enquiries and comparative studies of avant-garde groups became necessary and produced results that make this fundamental phenomenon of the Modern Era perhaps more understandable.

## First result

**The seven steps:** there is a constant, always repeating, sequence of phases that determine the dynamics of development of an avant-garde group. This sequence repeats a similar structure of seven steps, though sometimes with great differences in their specific shapes. The terms used to denote these seven steps are based on the metaphorical use of words that can be found in a dictionary, here put in chronological order:

**1. Prefiguration:** a starting point to the configuration of art, society and the personal abilities of avant-garde members.

**2. Conspiracy:** the way artists with similar intentions find themselves working together to help each other against ignorant society and the established art scene that refuses to accept them. Often the values of the group are declared in a manifesto.

**3. Skandalon:** every member of the avant-garde articulates (often implicitly) a taboo, that

itself points to an unsolved problem of art/society.

**4. Bataille:** this is the point of open battle and climax of a fight that in most cases is fought in a subversive way.

**5. Iconostasis:** in Orthodox churches this is a wall where the icons are displayed. In the case of the emergence of an avant-garde group, this is the context of an important exhibition, where the avant-garde is presented with an iconic picture, that makes the visitors speechless.

**6. Epigony:** it is the end of the revolutionary phase of an avant-garde movement. It also often represents the end of the cohesion of the group. The artists very often get caught up in the maelstrom of the art market that, because only these are good to sell, wants more of the typical *sujets*. So artists sometimes become epigones of themselves.

**7. Mythification:** the stories about artists have to be in coherence with the work. So some facts fit the plot and have to be amplified, other facts have to vanish, because they disturb the composition of the picture. This is not a question of lies, but of selective reception and economy of attention, like in art as a whole.

## Second result

### Homology to the seven steps of a story arc:

the seven steps of the development of an avant-garde group show a surprising homology to the seven steps of the plot and story arc of a classic drama. Based on the dramaturgy of Aristotle, Horaz and later the Humanists, called this model *Regeldrama* (regular drama), and it is until today the basis of modern dramaturgy. Indeed, the fights of avant-gardes against tradition, their victories and defeats, the struggle not to give up their own values and to find a way to express them in a singularly advanced manner, while living in uncertain circumstances, all these struggles really have a dramatic-performative dimension and the surprising homology of the seven steps is perhaps an archetypic pattern:

**1. Protasis:** the protagonists are introduced, the conflict becomes visible.

**2. Epitasis:** the situation leads to a grouping of intentions.

**3. Katastase:** an exiting tendency of the story appears.

**4. Peripetie:** the climax of the story and movement in positive (or in negative) direction.

**5. Retardation:** a slowdown of the story with some glory.

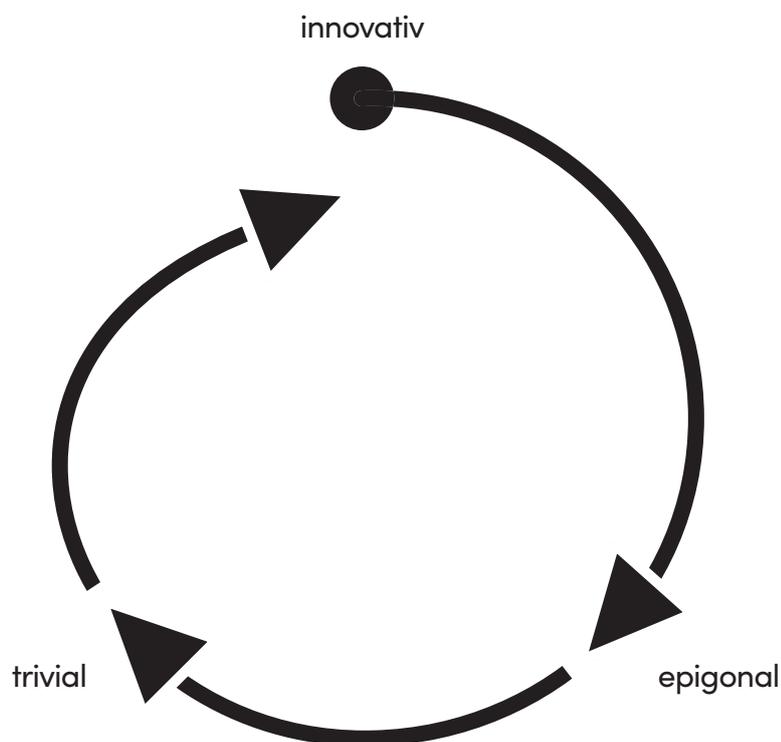
**6. Lysis:** the solution of all confusions and common acceptance.

**7. Katharsis:** a retrospective consensual happy end or apotheosis.

## Third result

### Revolutionary art becomes strong in years of a collective revolutionary atmosphere:

avant-gardes appear as sensible indicators of the constantly changing configuration of the 'discontents with civilization' and 'revolutionary climates,' connected with them. This circumstances seem to be caused by a lot of parameters and not only by the suppression of sexuality, as Freud suggested. They form a diffuse feeling of discomfort, the origins of which it is too complex to explain in a monocausal way. But rationality can only work with one reason, therefore this feeling is expressed philosophically or by art, etc., but mainly ideologically in a way that even man the on street can believe in and fight for. For instance the *fin de siècle* gave people the feeling of the 'quietness before the storm' and created a diffuse collective revolutionary willingness, that culminated in the years around First World War; and these also were the years of the most revolutionary art. The coincidence between revolutions and the peaks of revolutionary (but not so often ideological) art is also to be seen looking upon the avant-gardes in the nineteenth century in France. In the late twentieth century, avant-gardes lost their function together with their foundation: the belief in progress. This was explained with the 'end of history,' the end of the Modern Era and the beginning of posthistory. Thinking in a postmodern way, art has to appear polymorphic (because the world and consciousness are polymorphic) and every fight for the predominance of values is ridiculous and can only be understood as an economic fight. This indeed is the end of avant-gardes in our definition.



Model of the cultural circle.

#### Fourth result

**Subversion as a basic habit of avant-gardes:** avant-gardes are here defined by their revolutionary innovations, they can oppose the position of the established group of artists. The latter had also once been avant-garde, but after years of self epigony only tries to defend the positions of power they once fought for. They often have a widespread network of combatants so that an open battle seems to be an effective means of achieving change. Therefore avant-gardes in their beginning have to use subversive strategies, which have also to be designed in a new, unexpected and also artistic way, thereby using rather means of seduction than means of visible revolution. One of the most effective strategies is to ignore authorities, not to fight against them, because to fight means an acceptance of the given structure. Another strategy is to act as if the desired state is already realized. The phases of avant-gardes are therefore dominated by subversive strategies, often in a very subliminal way.

#### Fifth result

**Cultural circle:** this was the first result in the search for the invariables of avant-gardes (already 20 years old and published several times). It is related to the seven steps that only describe the revolutionary time of an avant-garde. The cultural circle is seen from greater distance, in a larger time scale and as circular process of uncertain duration.

Innovation begins with an (avantgardistic) jump (steps 2, 3, 4, 5) of a few years, is followed by a longer phase of epigone repeating and reproducing until the art work becomes popular and loses all meaning and innovation (in the mind of viewers). This state of triviality can last for centuries, where the meaningless art is not totally forgotten but has been composted to function as humus for a generation that (in most cases by creative misunderstanding<sup>6</sup>) uses old forms to express partial new feelings. This is the story of all kind of renaissances as sub-structures of the seemingly linear development of art in the Modern Era (but also amplified in the Postmodern period).

## THE STRUCTURE OF SUBVERSION IN THE SEVEN STEPS OF AVANT- GARDES, USING DIE BRÜCKE GROUP AS AN EXAMPLE

### 1. PREFIGURATION

**(1) Protasis:** the protagonists are introduced, the conflict becomes visible.

Each time has its own configuration of unsolved problems and contradictions with evolutionary hopes and revolutionary energies. This permanently changing atmosphere is the climate in which the protagonists of an avant-garde grow up and find themselves working together to change the world by means of art. The time horizon in the Modern Era is structured by the belief in progress and the example of the French Revolution proves that this progress is possible by revolutionary means. The three ideals of liberty, fraternity and equality (very difficult to get in a balance) led to three complementary secular ideological beliefs, that soon showed their reverse side. Liberalism degenerated to the free market doctrine of capitalism, fraternity (but only within one's own nation), led to a perception of a need to defeat the other that then became the basis of fascism, and the forced equality in communism led to the suppression of individualism and to common lethargy. Adolescents that want to become artists very often find themselves in opposition to their parents' ideology and develop their own worldview that in most cases transcends ideologies, with the hope that art can help them and others to change the world. In the phase of prefiguration, the specific structure of tensions and revolutionary tendencies in society is the nucleus of revolutionary art.

#### Prefiguration. The example of Die Brücke in the Wilhelmine Era

After Germany had won the 1870 war against France, Bismarck unified the dozens of German principalities (and kingdoms) into an empire. Wilhelm II became in 1888 an emperor with ambitious nationalistic aims, supported more

by the rigid bourgeoisie than by the suppressed growing proletariat. In this field of tensions, the proponents of later Die Brücke group grew up in the atmosphere of the upper middle class and developed interests in literature, philosophy and art. The humanistic educated bourgeoisie held those interests in high regard, but very often only as means of distinction: parents wanted their children to make an honest career to earn enough money to found a family. Those kinds of double standards were the rule in the *fin de siècle* period and were the reason why young people developed revolutionary (often hidden) motives. Therefore, Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* appeared to the educated youth as a kind of holy book: it first deconstructs all the lies of society, to then praise in a hymnal language the possibility of a new, elitist and spiritual mankind, far above the lowlands of degenerated civilization. The future members of Die Brücke were electrified by this book, they read it as students of architecture in Dresden. The study was a compromise between their own interests to become artists and the pragmatic wishes of their parents. And quite soon, they were rather painting than drawing technical lines. So they were united during their high school studies by very similar interests and decided to stay and work together, living the low budget life of bohemian artists and sabotaging their parent's expectations.

### 2. CONSPIRATION

**(2) Epitasis:** the situation leads to a grouping of intentions.

Young artists with similar new world views, values, but also formal conceptions congregate to help each other to defend their position against old fashioned academic rules, or influential groups, to organize exhibitions, or even to survive. The desire for unity of art and life is another motivation that brings artists together. If a willingness to work together appears, the phase of conspiracy with regularly meetings begins. Preparing an exhibition involves a verbalization of a common aim, a manifesto written and a name for the group/exhibition discussed. If the avant-garde group meets regularly and often after an

exhibition, this can be looked at as an **echo chamber**. This term from the audio technique denotes a small room that gives sound more echo and is often used in a negative, but here in a positive way. The artists need each other to have a positive echo about their artwork to get more courage to do better and better work etc. This is the type of conspiracy with the highest degree of group cohesion and subversive potentiality. This characteristic was common to the early Surrealists, the early Nazarene group or also the early Die Brücke. Another form can be called the Bohemian Café avant-garde (with a lower degree of cohesion): a group of artists meeting by chance in a café of a bohemian district in a city (for instance Montmartre) drinking and discussing – examples of these include for instance the Impressionists in the Café Guerbois, or the Realists in the Brasserie Andler. A third variation is the form of artists' colonies in the countryside far from the cities: artists come together here in a more relaxed and contemplative way and have the possibility to keep a necessary distance. An example is the artist's colony in the quiet village of Murnau/Bavaria where Kandinsky was the centre of the circle of Der Blaue Reiter, and where his first abstract paintings emerged. Group cohesion is of course one of the important parameters of conspirators.

### Conspiracy. The example of Die Brücke/echo chamber

In 1905, four students of architecture Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Erich Heckel, Karl Schmidt-Rottluff and Fritz Bleyl met and formed the Die Brücke artistic group. Because Bleyl decided that he preferred to work as architect and live a normal life, his place in the group was soon taken by Max Pechstein, later by Otto Mueller. The name Brücke was inspired by a sentence of Nietzsche, who used the word 'bridge' as metaphor for the renewal of mankind: "The greatest human possibility is to be a bridge (Brücke), rather than a purpose." So, a woodcut logo was created, showing a person going over a bridge and with the same technique a program printed with a pathetic proclamation:

"With the belief in the development and in a new generation of creators and recipients, We call all young people together, and as young people, who carry the future inside us, we want to wrest freedom for our actions and our lives from the older, comfortably established forces. Everybody belongs to us, who is able to express spontaneously and purely what pushes him to create."<sup>7</sup>

This text is of course a manifesto of the young against the established forces (of the academy, art market, society etc.) and an urgent appeal to them to express their own motive power. They saw this pure and innocent power realized in tribal cultures and admired the artefacts of the South Seas islanders that they could see in the Ethnological Museum of Dresden (for instance, the carvings from the islands of Palau, one of the German colonies in the Pacific at that time). Pictures and stories (like for instance Gauguin's book *Noa Noa*) about distant islands awoke desires to arrive there and two of the 'active members' (AM) of Die Brücke really did it. Max Pechstein lived in 1913 with his wife one year on a very small island and wanted to stay in this paradise, but with the beginning of the First World War, Japanese soldiers occupied this territory and expelled him. Also in 1913, Emil Nolde joined an expedition to the Pacific islands and came back with a lot of colourful watercolours. But also, the Die Brücke artists in Dresden (especially Kirchner) decorated the ateliers used by the group with South Seas carvings and batik fabric of their own (low cost) production. So the ateliers, located in the working-class district Friedrichstadt, all in the Berlinerstrasse (60, 78, 80), irradiated an exotic, bohemian atmosphere.<sup>8</sup> Here they lived in a symbiotic, brotherly way, sharing paints, food, books, discussions, cigarettes and models. They were living in a kind of echo chamber, where the positive feedback of conspiratorial active members (AM) made it possible to become stronger by creating a new style. But the passive members (PM) also helped the group to survive with their annual membership fee and in return received an annual folder with three woodcuts, and perhaps they even became collectors of the group's paintings. In this way, living a poor but ecstatic life concentrated on impulsive drawing and painting

in the erotic climate caused by the presence of young, nude, natives of the working class district. Here the ritual of the 15 minutes act-drawings developed: in this short time, the expression of the body language of the model had to be fixed on paper, before the next situation appeared. So after two years and hundreds of drawings, the artists were able to tell with a few lines an individual story of body movement. On the other hand, they worked hard to develop a new language of colours. As a students they had seen an exhibition of Van Gogh in the Arnold Gallery in Dresden and reacted enthusiastically (as one of their former professors<sup>9</sup> remembered). So their paintings of the first two years were inspired by this experience and they started to work as artists by taking Van Gogh as admired example.

Magdalena M. Moeller<sup>10</sup> in her essay describes how the artists must have then got information about the Fauves, but it is not easy to determine when and how they acquired it (because artists never wrote about it). The Fauves, a circle of artists around Matisse, were also inspired by the first posthumous exhibitions of Gauguin and van Gogh and developed a keen and expressive new kind of painting and in 1905 shocked the art scene of Paris at the Salon d'Automne. In Dresden, The Fauves were first presented by the Richter Gallery from 1<sup>st</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> of September 1908, at the same time the Die Brücke moved to the capital Berlin and began to express the neurotic atmosphere there and by doing so, becoming more and more alienated by each other, until the artists went their own ways.

### 3. SKANDALON

**(3) Katastase:** an exiting tendency of the story appear.

Every avant-garde articulates (often more implicitly and subliminally than explicitly) a taboo: something that is not wanted to be seen, because it points at an unsolved problem within society or art. Often the skandalon of an artwork reminds the viewer that another life is possible with the question: did you forget it? J.L. David's picture *The Oath of the Horatii* shown in the time of soft Rococo painting, a few years before French

Revolution was a shock, showing such extremely resolute men. But this skandalon is only (and not easy) to understand, comparing the body language of these *Horatii* with the usual un-resolute gesture of men painted in this time. This picture was highly subversive, because it was ordered by the court and showed virtues that could be seen as both royal or republican. Later, it became one of the icons of the revolution. Of course, no skandalon can be repeated and is only to be understood by the dialectic of specific object and specific context (time, space, mentality etc), but can be assessed by the reaction of contemporaries.

### Skandalon. The Example of Die Brücke/youth, exotic, erotic

The specific kind of the 'skandalon' of the Die Brücke group is a composite of different entities. Looking upon the pictures of the great years of Die Brücke in 1909/10, when a kind of group-style can be determined, we can recognize two different  *Sujets*. One is the plain open air situation with bathing nudes at the Moritzburg ponds and the other the transformed atmosphere in the common atelier during painting (drawings) of nude models. In both cases, a 12 year old girl became the symbol of youth and a kind of major motif of the group. "Her name was 'Fränzi' or 'Marcella,' daughter of the widow of a circus artist"<sup>11</sup> This young girl behaved quite differently from the previous models, because she did not pose, but moved quite naturally and so fulfilled the group's dream of native, natural life, together with a slowly awaking feminine erotic radiance. All this they were able to translate into form and colour and here they arrived at a point where an idealistic symbol is near to the taboos. Youth was at the time of *fin de siècle* the hope of society: Jugendbewegung and Jugendstil expressed a looking forward, in contrary to the habit of the old fashioned historicism. Nevertheless the art of the group was a Scandalon at this time, because nudeness was not presented in a metaphorical way in their pictures and it looked poorly done (even for the art scene), compared with academic painting.

But it was also Die Brücke's performatively free minded behaviour in public space that aroused the suspicion of the authorities. Kirchner mentioned the unwelcome visits of local police officers, when they spent some days at the Moritzburger Lakes.<sup>12</sup> About a year later, when Die Brücke started a kind of art school (MOIN institute) in Berlin-Wilmersdorf, they were again the object of suspicion, and police protocols described the observation of their 'perhaps immoral' life and activities.<sup>13</sup>

Concerning his relationship to females, Kirchner used to exaggerate his virility in an exhibitionistic way (as the *Davos Diary* proves again and again). He was a passionate self-promoter, as he demonstrated in the range of photographs that he produced,<sup>14</sup> and this also touched a taboo.

## 4. BATAILLE

**(4) Peripetie:** climax of the story and movement in positive (or in negative) direction. Very often the fight of the avant-garde group against the established art scene has its climax in a battle that is fought with different weapons and strategies and in most cases not so violent as in our example. The famous *Bataille Romantique* was the battle between Classicism and the young Romantic avant-garde in Paris. It began in 1820 and had its great showdown on 25<sup>th</sup> February 1830 with the premiere of Victor Hugo's melodrama *Hernani*. In the noble, old fashioned Theatre-Francais, where the classic drama of Corneille and Racine was appreciated, Hugo's play, written in an unusual romantic language mixing sentimental lyric and ordinary language, was an (intended) shock for the regular audience that reacted impulsively. Because this had been expected, half of the auditorium was occupied by the *Jeune France* (the name by which the young romanticists called each other). They always met in three cenacles (circles) around Hugo, Nodier and the very eccentric Gautier, who always appeared in a red waistcoat. His cenacle in the rue de Doyenne became the prototype of modern bohemianism and was in constant struggle against *parvenu bourgeoisie*. This group was also

the most active in the violent battle in the theatre, where (from both sides) even walking sticks were used. But in the end, the Romantic succeeded. Five month later, the July Revolution articulated the same revolutionary tension (proving our hypothesis of coincidence) with barricades and guns (like Delacroix's icon of liberty shows). The effectiveness of a bataille can be estimated how much it influences further developments.

## Bataille. The example of Die Brücke/ Expressionism contra Impressionism

In 1910, on May 15<sup>th</sup>, only one month after the jury to the *Secession Berlin* (featuring mainly the impressionist style, judged by Lovis Corinth and Max Liebermann) had rejected 27 young artists, the Expressionist painters opened a counter-show called *Neue Secession Berlin*. In the rooms of the Art Salon Maximilian Macht, works of Die Brücke were exhibited on red coloured walls. Newspapers called these (not very large) rooms *Schreckenskammern* (chambers of horror). Visitors became excited, not only by the artwork, but also about the general impression of flickering red (factually and metaphorically). Already the poster (designed by Pechstein, showing a naked woman attacking with bow and arrow) had caused displeasure to some art critics, for example the newspaper *Vossche Zeitung* judged, "never before has somebody dared to present to the public such lousy and scribbly botching of an incompetent." Pechstein remembered years later, that "our paintings had been spat on, on the frames people wrote rude words, and one of my paintings had been pierced through."<sup>15</sup>

On the contrary, there had been art historians who defended the expressionist artists. One of them was Max Raphael who was fond of the new style and wrote about the paintings of the *Neue Secession*: "This primitive is not infantile, naïve, unconscious but it is a synthesis, a simplification (...) indeed rather instinctive."<sup>16</sup> His colleague Oskar Bie put it like this: "In art there has now occurred a movement, that wants to reform from the position of freedom of prejudice, from absolute

nativity, naked instinct, a conscious infantilism, from that what Munch, Gauguin, van Gogh, Matisse and others had in mind.”<sup>17</sup>

This kind of art was created by and addressed to a new kind of human being.<sup>18</sup> That is, someone who perceived the feeling of crisis in the form of civilization of the Wilhelmine Period that had been experienced by anyone that had started to write, paint, or take place in other activities in the years from 1905 to 1914. They felt a discontent towards the surrounding realities, and suffered the consequences of industrialization of German society, were distressed by the breakdown of its moral basis, the disruption of existing relations, the effects of frenetic city-life, and the growth of oppression of any kind.<sup>19</sup>

## 5. ICONOSTASIS

**(5) Retardation:** slowdown of the story with some glory.

This term (metaphorically) denotes the wall in a byzantine church, where all the important icons are presented. Each icon there gets the status of a canonized, sacred object and therefore ‘acts.’<sup>20</sup> This can be compared with artworks: for paintings (etc.), it is very important to be hung on the right wall in the right place (this can also be the place of refused martyrs). Here the degree of sacrifice (now or later) is the important factor.

### Iconostasis. The Example of the Die Brücke/Sonderbund Exhibition

This step was reached in 1912, when they managed to use the opportunity (with the help of the director of the Folkwang Museum Karl Ernst Osthaus) to become well known to the international art-appreciating public: The *Sonderbund Exhibition* in Cologne in 1912, was the first international overview of European contemporary art<sup>21</sup> and the role model for the *Armory Show* in New York a year later. Artists who influenced the contemporary ones, like Van Gogh, Gauguin and Cezanne were presented posthumously. Following

the principles of the organization, which meant that artistic groups could not take part as such, Kirchner, Pechstein and Haeckel entered their paintings separately. The protagonists of Die Brücke succeeded in a clever way to influence the procedure of organization to their advantage at just the right moments, using methods that ranged between diplomacy and subversion.

Haeckel’s first proposal to furnish a room with batik fabrics and sculptures was refused by the Jury. So they took advantage of the option to offer a few unjudged pieces each. More or less by chance, they chose similar motifs, which would turn out to be an advantage for the, as yet undeclared, group; during the show these paintings were hung close to each other.

During the organization procedure, the curators had to solve many problems concerning the optimal sequence of the French, Dutch, German and Austrian artworks and the best possible integration of a chapel-like room into the general room concept. Here the coloured windows, designed (in strong red, blue and green) by artist Johan Thorn Pikker for the church of Neuss, should be presented. Two weeks before the opening, the Brücke took in a clever-subversive way the opportunity to install in this place their own artwork of batik fabrics. They worked day and night to design the room with ornaments and the figure of a large painted Madonna, which – illuminated by the coloured light - looked quite expressive.

In the following room their paintings of landscapes and bathing scenes were presented and fitted so perfectly together (even with the chapel) that it was a perfect example for iconostasis: where the right icons appeared at the ‘sacred walls’ of the most important exhibition of Europe before the first world war. This show was the point in time, where they got well known in the international art scene: The conceptual and topographic context could not have been better to leave a profound impression to the audience and, of course, to the art critics.

## 6. EPIGONY

**(6) Lysis:** the solution of all confusions and common acceptance.

Revolutionary art begins with a sudden and surprising jump of innovation.<sup>22</sup> With growing acceptance of an avant-garde group, epigones appear and the artists repeat themselves until they are their own epigones. Collectors and visitors want to see again what they first rejected and then got accustomed to, what had become a part of their aesthetic development. Therefore, following the psychological rules of optimal personal proportion between redundancy and innovation, they want to get moderate variations often of the canonized highlights. On the one hand, this is the peak of public fame, on the other hand often the end of the revolutionary creativity of the group and of the group itself. If its pictures (perhaps after decades) had become popular icons, their meaning is lowered to the status of triviality. As a number of renaissances show, sometimes this process of 'compostation' generates the humus for a new jump of innovation.

The end of an artistic group very often has also a second reason: young artists that first accept to live under nearly tribal conditions, and often under the influence of a dominant person are on the way to develop their own individuality and therefore group cohesion is getting weak.<sup>23</sup> We see different results of this problem in the avant-gardes of the Modern Era: Breton and the group of Surrealists, Debord and the Situationists. Epigony is a stage of groups when they pass to a retrospective state, related to the degree of influence within, or on other/later, groups and is also related to the history of reception.

### Epigony. The Example of Die Brücke group

Epigony can be seen for the members of Die Brücke group as well: after 1913 (when they quit), their artworks show the strong influences of rising stars like Matisse and Picasso, which lowered their degree of innovation.

Kirchner, after a nervous breakdown in the First World War lived in a mountain hut near Davos/Switzerland, worked there, wrote a diary, but became morphine addicted and committed suicide in 1938.

After the Second World War (when expressive art was officially seen as degenerated and pathological), the art world tried to find again a connection to what had been abandoned. In Eastern Europe, Realism and Expressionism (and all kinds of mixtures of them) were still seen as state of the art. Works of high quality were being created especially in Eastern Germany, in Dresden and Leipzig. During the 1980s, expressive art was appreciated as a status-symbol for the offices of senior management,<sup>24</sup> and this led to the lowering of its significance to triviality. But the museum shop is the place where art really becomes popular by using it as *décor* on daily used things. For instance T-shirts, cups, folders, shawls, clocks, pens, mobile phone covers, puzzles and so on.<sup>25</sup>

After Kirchners death, there had remained a large collection (500 paintings, 10 000 drawings and a lot of photographs) which was the basis of the Kirchner Museum, that opened in 1982 in Davos. According to the needs of the visitors, there is also of course a museum shop with a large collection of merchandising articles that brings the artist into our everyday life. This is the point of triviality, where art is composted into meaningless humus, on which perhaps new plants are growing.

## 7. MYTHIFICATION

**(7) Katharsis:** a retrospective consensual happy end or apotheosis.

In the mythical state of mind, subject and object, ego and world are still in a sympathetic connection and the human being looks upon the world around as if it is related. Cassirer<sup>26</sup> sees in this mode the basic 'symbolic form' of culture that in myth is verbalized and iconized by art. Greek mythology is (seen in this way) a compendium of possible archetypical configurations and the story of the Argonauts appears as the arche-mythos of avant-gardes. Jason and his heroic friends come together/a magic ship is built/it is called Argo/

by rowing, sailing and fighting cunningly, the crew reaches Kolchis and in a dramatic battle against king Aietes got (with help of Medea) the Golden Fleece/coming back to Greece where this Icon of Fame was shown, admired and the heroic deeds praised/ Jason then, sitting and dreaming for years in the shadow of the magic ship, that was drawn on the shore, died by the decay of it/but the Olympic Gods raised the ship and its crew in heaven as a bright star constellation. This legend itself is told in the seven steps of avant-gardes – reflecting the story arc of dramaturgy, and this structure make art histories more comparable and the degree of archetypal background visible.

### Mythification. The Example of Die Brücke/museums, collections, retrospectives, books

Cultural remembrance of this relatively short period of activity after the Die Brücke group broke up, seems to be due largely to Kirchner. He started to record their chronicle, as their fellowship began to end. This way the locations of the Die Brücke ateliers was passed down to later become sights (at least for art historians) much later. It was Kirchner who kept alive these memories during his Davos years, beginning his literary work first with his diary, than publishing texts in journals like *Literarische Gesellschaft*, as well as in *Das Kunstblatt* in 1919 (“Credo of a Painter,” “Book of two people of today”).<sup>27</sup> Being convinced that no one could write about his paintings appropriately, he created an author, as an alter-ego of himself: the French critic ‘L. de Marsalle’ writing about the painter Kirchner.<sup>28</sup> Because of his double talent (as painter and writer), art historians know about the Die Brücke activities from his point of view. By writing this diary, he created a focus of strong imagination and remembrance about Die Brücke, which, compared with the monographs of art historians, shows the inner-personal views of a participant and is an important part of his artistic work.

Through the initiative of two other Die Brücke members, Karl Schmidt-Rottluff and

Erich Heckel, an architectonic echo chamber was constructed in Berlin. Schmitt-Rottluff was the founder of the Die Brücke Museum,<sup>29</sup> starting with a donation he gave to Berlin in 1964. Three years later, on September 15<sup>th</sup> 1967, the Die Brücke Museum was opened in a new building. Schmitt-Rottluff continued to give pieces to the museum until his death in 1976. Erich Haeckel supported the museum’s collection by a large donation of 900 objects in 1966. After he passed away, his widow, Siddi Heckel, continued donations. Further supplements came from friends of the group, like Emy Roeder and Max Kaus. Art historians<sup>30</sup> organized this collection scientifically and opened it for a bigger audience. Since then, a number of books and exhibitions all over the world have cultivated the collective memory of the group.<sup>31</sup>



Tableau d'Art-historienne. The 7 (invariant) steps of avant-garde groups, following the arc of classic dramaturgy (here with the example of Die Brücke, Dresden): - 1) Artists get their PREFIGURATION in a culture, with time and space-specific tensions - 2) they find together in a CONSPIRATION to develop new expression also for - 3) the tabooed wishes of society, its SCANDALON and - 4) put this new kind of view through in a BATAILLE against the established art scene to become - 5) accepted and their artwork shown and sacrificed ICONOSTASIS in important exhibitions - 6) then they were copied, reproduced and further developed by themselves and others in a phase of EPIGONY that culminates in a - 7) retrospective MYTHIFICATION of the passed revolutionary time. The tableau shows (as part of a work-group) the (real or virtual) working table of the author (here during the development of the 7-step-thesis), a self-observing look into the context of discovery (or creation), shown as well in art as in art theory contexts.

## Notes

\* Text developed from an ongoing work, concerning the invariant structures of modern avant-garde art groups.

<sup>1</sup> Gombrich held these lectures in New York in 1971.

<sup>2</sup> Henri de Saint Simon, *Opinions Littéraires. Philosophique et Industriels* (Paris: Galerie de Bossange Pére, 1825), 341.

<sup>3</sup> The Situationists and later Erika Fischer-Lichte relay on that in their publications on performance.

<sup>4</sup> See Pierre Bourdieu, *Kunst und Kultur, Kunst und Künstlerisches Feld, Schriften 1970- 2000* (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> See Christine Magerski, *Theorien der Avantgarde* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> This kind of misunderstanding symbols is the topic of many of Rudolf Wittkower's texts, where he discussed how certain manners of artistic form can be misinterpreted and re-used by other cultures.

<sup>7</sup> Ulrike Lorenz, *Brücke* (Köln: Taschen Verlag, 2008), 11.

<sup>8</sup> Hanna Strozda described and compared the ateliers of Die Brücke and Der Blaue Reiter in her article for the exhibition catalogue on ateliers in 2012. See Hanna Strozda, „Expressionistische Gegenwelten, Die Ateliers von Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Gabriele Münter und Wassily Kandinsky,“ in Ina Conzen, *Mythos Atelier* (Stuttgart: Hirmer Verlag, 2012), 104.

<sup>9</sup> Fritz Schuhmacher, *Stufen des Lebens, Erinnerungen eines Baumeisters* (Stuttgart, Berlin: Deutsche Verlags Anstalt, 1935), 283.

<sup>10</sup> Magdalena M. Moeller, „Brücke und Fauves,“ in *Expressionismus in Deutschland und Frankreich* (München: Kunsthaus Zürich, 2014), 80-93. Exhib. cat.

<sup>11</sup> Another well known legend around Die Brücke is the identity of their infant model; mentioned for example by Ulrike Lorenz; in everyday life she was from a workers family; in the imagination of the painters they made her a child of circus artists; the relation between the teenager girl and the adult painters is a question that seems to be solved by a little exhibition in Buchheim Museum as mentioned in the text.

<sup>12</sup> Noted in: Norbert Wolf, *Ernst Ludwig Kirchner 1880 – 1938* (Köln: Taschen Verlag, 2016), 38; Leopold Redemeister, *Die Künstler der Brücke an den Moritzburger Seen 1909-1911* (Berlin: Brücke Museum, 1970). Exhib. cat.

<sup>13</sup> Dietmar Elger, *Expressionismus* (Köln: Taschen Verlag, 2018), 87.

<sup>14</sup> While this text was written (2019) an Exhibition in Modern Museum Salzburg took place: *Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, The Painter as Photographer*, which presented his photographic works.

<sup>15</sup> Leopold Redemeister, *Max Pechstein Erinnerungen* (Wiesbaden: List Verlag, 1960), 41.

<sup>16</sup> Max Raphael, „Die Neue Secession,“ in *Das schöpferische Auge*, Patrick Healy, Hans-Jürgen Heinrichs and Ron Manhein, eds. (Wien: Gesellschaft für Kunst und Volksbildung, 1993), 63.

<sup>17</sup> *Neue Rundschau*, no. 21 (1910). See Max Raphael, „Die Neue Secession.“

<sup>18</sup> The *Lexikon des Expressionismus* describes the thinking and feeling of expressionist individuals.

<sup>19</sup> After: Lionel Richard, *Lexikon des Expressionismus* (Köln: Wissenschaft und Politik Verlag, n.d.), 19.

<sup>20</sup> After Horst Bredekamp, *Theorie des Bildakts* [Theory of Image-Acts] (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2010).

<sup>21</sup> Held in the exhibition halls of the City of Cologne, and followed a year later by the Armory Show in the US; the art-and-crafts architecture was a relic of the World Exhibition in 1910.

<sup>22</sup> After Hofer's model of the cultural circle, first published 1996/2002.

<sup>23</sup> A process described by Beyme in his sociology of artists groups. See Klaus von Beyme, *Das Zeitalter der Avantgarden* (München: C.H. Beck Verlag, 2005), 100.

<sup>24</sup> Wolfgang Ullrich wrote about art as a status symbol. See Wolfgang Ullrich, *Mit dem Rücken zur Kunst* (Berlin: Verlag Klaus Wagenbach, 2000).

<sup>25</sup> Bazon Brock curated an exhibition on this topic in Linz in 1997. See Gottfried Fliedel, ed., *Wa(h)re Kunst* (Frankfurt/Main: Anabas Verlag, 1997).

<sup>26</sup> Cassirer, symbolic form as anthropological need of human cultures. See Ernst Cassirer, *Versuch über den Menschen* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1996).

<sup>27</sup> Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, „Glaubensbekenntnis eines Malers; Entwurf zum Buch zweier Menschen von heute,“ in *Davos Diary*. See Lothar Grisebach, *Ernst Ludwig Kirchners Davoser Tagebuch* (Ostfildern: Verlag G. Hatje, 1997), 108.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*, 231.

<sup>29</sup> [www.bruecke-museum.de](http://www.bruecke-museum.de).

<sup>30</sup> Like Leopold Redemeister, Magdalena M. Moeller, Lisa Marei Schmidt and many others.

<sup>31</sup> This article cultivates the ambiguity of memory: On one hand describing the unique development of the Die Brücke group and on the other hand, during Modern Era, a nearly invariant structure that is behind it. The 'Tableau d'Art-historienne' (working table) enables an overview of the pattern that two here interacting tendencies - randomness and regularity – create. An art-historian overview of this, showing the phases of dramatic development and iconic examples, is given by the tableau. Such tableaux had been exhibited in art context, for instance at the exhibition *Alter>Ego* in Maerz gallery, Linz, 2014.

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