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Aleš Erjavec (ed.), *Aesthetic Revolutions and the Twentieth-Century Avant-Garde Movements*, Durham–London, Duke University Press, 2015 (review)

The main theme of the book *Aesthetic Revolutions and the Twentieth-Century Avant-Garde Movements* edited by Aleš Erjavec is the reconsideration of art practices and movements that tended to transform the world instead of just representing it even through new forms, styles and techniques. As Aleš Erjavec writes in the introduction “central premise [...] will be that throughout the twentieth century there exists a segment of avant-garde art that is sufficiently specific to warrant a determinate designation, namely that of the ‘aesthetic’ avant-garde art” (p. 2). Erjavec defines “aesthetic” not as merely “artistic” but as “its complement, extending from specifically artistic experiences to the broad, holistic domain of lived and imagined experiences, including social, political, bodily, and technological dimensions” (p. 2). And furthermore, “aesthetic” in the avant-garde artistic movements relates to “transformation of a community – whether a nation, a class, or some other social entity” (p. 2). Given this definition of the “aesthetic”, Erjavec claims that not all avant-garde movements are “aesthetic avant-gardes” as he calls them, that is, he claims that not all avant-garde movements are revolutionary in the sense that they aim to transform the world instead of just representing it through novel forms. In accordance with this stance, Erjavec classifies avant-gardes as: *artistic avant-gardes* (“these are avant-gardes that introduce into art new styles and techniques... They engender new representations of the lived world, thereby occasionally causing an artistic revolution” /p. 2/), *aesthetic avant-gardes* (“[they] seek to effect aesthetic revolutions, that is, to substantially affect and transform our ways of experiencing and sensing the world, to change in important ways the manner in which we perceive and experience reality” /p. 3/), *postsocialist avant-gardes* (“movements from present or former socialist countries whose art possessed features to other avant-garde art of the twentieth century... A part of them once again consisted of ‘aesthetic avant-gardes’ /p. 3/).

The book includes seven essays dealing with the problem of relations between artistic and aesthetic within the avant-garde movements across the globe. The first essay “Politics as the Art of the Impossible: The Heteronomy of Italian Futurist Art-Action” by Sacha Bru deals with the first aesthetic avant-garde movement – Italian futurism – in all its forms (from painting to propaganda). Bru particularly pays attention to *art-action*, Marinetti’s term for the interventionist nature of futurism. The second essay “5x5=25? The Science of Constructivism” by

John E. Bowlt reconsiders Russian constructivism focusing on the exhibition of Rodchenko's paintings in 1921, and the constructivist notion of a New Man as the basis of its artistic and aesthetic avant-garde practice. Raymond Spiteri, in the third essay entitled "Convulsive Beauty: Surrealism as Aesthetic Revolution", maps the relations of surrealism with the politics and culture of its time. He points out that surrealism functioned between the two contesting their self-imposed limits and complicating both the artistic practice and its Other. The fourth essay "Aesthetic Avant-Gardes and Revolutionary Movements from Modern Latin America" by David Craven offers a reading of Mexican and Nicaraguan muralism concluding that both countries created particular forms of aesthetic avant-garde that deserve special appreciation within the what we call modernism. The fifth essay "All along the Watchtower: Aesthetic Revolution in the United States during the 1960s" by Tyrus Miller analyses neo-avant-garde practices in the United States encompassing the social sphere as well and in doing so, Miller emphasizes the collective aspect of experience of such practices. In the sixth essay "From Unitary Urbanism to the Society of the Spectacle: The Situationist Aesthetic Revolution" Raymond Spiteri analyses the activities of Situationist International, which focused on the everyday life in the "society of the spectacle", in comparison to its artistic (dada, surrealism) and philosophical predecessors (Marx and Young Hegelians), as well as its political contemporaries (group Socialisme ou barbarie, French Communist Party, etc.). The seventh and final essay "NSK: Critical Phenomenology of the State" by Miško Šuvaković offers a glimpse of the postsocialist avant-gardes by offering a historical, political, aesthetic and theoretical reading of Neue Slowenische Kunst, a Slovenian art collective, and particularly their "postmedia" phase with their State in Time work.

In the conclusion, Aleš Erjavec writes that the idea of aesthetic avant-gardes being unsuccessful is unfounded because all the transformations that they have as their aim are temporary and only partial and thus bound to merge with everyday life. The particularity of these avant-gardes "is in this respect in making present and accentuating the 'common' facet of art in foregrounding the heteronomous experience of art" (p. 264), in contradistinction to the art "whose ambition is to research its proper expressive means (or 'language') or one that possesses no function except that of having no function at all" (p. 265). Aesthetic avant-gardes functioned "between art, culture, and especially politics" (p. 278), and for some movements such position was more productive than for the others (surrealism as analyzed by Spiteri, and American neo-avant-gardes in the 1960s), but most if not all of these movements failed to revolutionary unite art and life and merged with art institutions after the World War II. The third-generation avant-gardes coming from socialist and postsocialist societies and states offer some sort of radical avant-garde artistic practices but, admittedly, in "watered-down form" (p. 276), and after the 1980s most of them, like their counterparts from the West, have been swallowed up global art market.

What about the radical art today? What about the future of the aesthetic avant-gardes? Contemporary art practices, as that of Critical Art Ensemble and Critical Mass mentioned by Erjavec, on the one had are framed as "cultural practices", and on the other contemporaneity as such is marked by "atemporality of historical circumstances" (p. 282), which turns out to be an ontological horizon that is yet to be overcome. As for the future, aesthetic avant-garde needs "a viable political avant-garde with which the artistic historical project can converge" (p. 282). The question if that is going to happen, or the avant-garde as such is just a singular twentieth-century phenomenon, remains open of discussion, "or perhaps somewhere on the globe at this very moment a fourth-generation aesthetic avant-garde has just been brought into the world" (p. 282).