

Advertising

In *A Hope for Poetry* (1934), the poet Cecil Day Lewis lists “advertisement and cheap publicity” among the “gross and violent stimulants’ that are reducing the modern mind ‘to a state of almost savage torpor.’” Likening advertising to numbing intoxicants, Day Lewis quotes William Wordsworth’s attacks, in his Preface to the 1802 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, on the numerous forces in *his* society serving “to blunt the discriminating powers of the mind.” The irony, however, is that, in the first edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), Wordsworth’s introductory remarks were headed not “Preface,” but “Advertisement.” Day Lewis thus unwittingly signals a significant semantic shift: from its early neutral meaning of notification and information, “advertising” by the modernist period had come to name an industry, a rhetoric of persuasion, and a competing art form.

Citizens of modernity were exposed to advertising in a dazzling variety of forms. Skywriting, neon signs, billboards, posters, newspaper ads, window displays, sandwich boards, throwaways (flyers), and jingles had become elements of daily life. The ubiquity of advertising led French journalist Louis Chéronnet to remark in 1927, “The composition of the air has changed. To the oxygen and nitrogen we breathe we have to add Advertising. [. . .] It surrounds us, envelops us, it is intimately mingled with our every step, in our activities, in our relaxation, and its ‘atmospheric pressure’ is so necessary to us that we no longer feel it.” Indeed, as early as 1913, *Maclean’s Magazine* declared, “We live in the Advertising Age.”

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

As might be expected, many modernist works exhibit strong antipathy to advertising, often contrasting dishonest, sensational, hoax-prone advertising with disinterested “pure” art. H. G. Wells’s *Tono-Bungay* (1908) satirically depicts the aggressive marketing of a “slightly injurious” bogus tonic (loosely based on Coca-Cola), in contrast to the serious but nonlucrative art of the narrator’s alter-ego Bob Ewart. The advertisements (illustrated in the first edition) temporarily make the family’s fortune, but the narrator retrospectively describes the process as “the giving of nothing coated in advertisements for money.” In George Orwell’s *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (1936), Gordon Comstock – recognizing the “bestly irony in the fact that he, who wanted to be a ‘writer,’ should score his sole success in writing ads for deodorants” – similarly confronts the reality that it is advertising, not pure art, that pays. More threateningly, advertising reflects the reductiveness of totalitarian discourse in Stephen Spender’s *Vienna* (1934): the Executive (the Fascist Dollfuss regime in Austria) say of the Unemployed, “We can read their bodies like advertisements/On hoardings, shouting with common answers.”

Yet such outright attacks were countered by arguments in advertising’s defense. In *Nuntius: Advertising and its Future* (1926), Gilbert Russell sought to convince an “ill-informed or misinformed public” that advertising was not only an economic necessity but an “educative” and “civilising” force as well. Advertising, he argued, helped to maintain manufacturing quality, alerted consumers to safer and healthier products, and increased exposure to culture, prompting people to read more widely. In its most positive guise, advertising connoted creativity. According to André Billy, the French poet Guillaume Apollinaire “found a source of inspiration in prospectuses, [. . .] catalogues, posters, advertisements of all sorts,” and named advertising “the poetry of our epoch” (1912). In a similarly positive vein, the Austrian-born philologist and critic Leo Spitzer took the coinage of “sunkist” for “oranges” as typifying advertising’s ability to inject beauty and poetry into an overly rational world, and he argued further that this advertisement’s playfully ironic overtones prompted its audience to reflect critically on the differences between reality and dream (1949). Whether advertising is imaginative art or humbug plays out in the polarized responses to circus entrepreneur P. T. Barnum. In 1910, the trade journal *The Printers’ Ink* marked the 100th anniversary of Barnum’s birth by disclaiming any relation between Barnum’s notorious sensationalism and modern business practices, noting that his “advertising ability,” though “interesting as a starting point of the profession,” was “lamentably gross and misrepresentative of the modern development of it.” Conversely, in 1940, Yale professor William Lyon Phelps linked advertisement positively with the arts by calling Barnum “the Shakespeare of advertising” (Wallace, 1959).

A similar division of attitudes surrounded the question of advertising’s style. Hostile responses cast its rhetoric as the obverse of the literary, with charges ranging from its goal of coercion to its mode of desperation. Q. D. Leavis and Wyndham Lewis portrayed advertising as an ideological tool productive of

unreflecting conformity. "It is more than difficult, it is next to impossible," wrote Leavis, "for the ordinary uncritical man to resist when, whichever way he looks in the street, from poster and hoarding, and advertisement in bus and tramcar [...] the pressure of the herd is brought to bear on him" (1932). Lewis interpreted advertising as mind control, arguing that the masses had been "hypnotized into a sort of hysterical imbecility by the mesmeric methods of Advertisement" (1927). Evelyn Waugh associated advertising with the fetishization of the new: claiming that "no serious writer has ever been shy of an expression because it has been used before," he accused "the writer of advertisements" of "always straining to find bizarre epithets for commonplace objects" (1946).

Other modernist usages positioned advertising as a literary genre – one from which more traditional genres could learn. While one view, as we have seen, attributed a literary character to advertising due to its poetic creativity, another approach, valuing economy and precision, extolled the rhetoric of advertising as a desirable element in literary form. Aldous Huxley called advertising "one of the most interesting and difficult literary forms" – adding the qualified term "applied literature," however, for those benighted readers "who still believe[d] in the romantic superiority of the pure, the disinterested, over the immediately useful" (1920). Huxley himself praised the "elegance and economical distinction" of advertising prose; reflecting on its "honest man-to-man style" – "lucid and simple enough to be understood by all" – he concluded, "the art of advertisement writing has flowered with democracy." In "The Advertisement is Literature" (1926), Dashiell Hammett called the advertiser a "literary worker" since he "must set his idea on paper in such a form that it will have the effect he desires on those who read it"; like Huxley, Hammett suggested that literature could learn from advertising by replacing "the needlessly involved sentence, the clouded image" with the concision, clarity, and efficiency of good ad copy.

Yet in modernist literature overall, the prevailing treatment of advertising was less clear-cut. In the penultimate chapter of Henry James's *The Ambassadors* ([1903]1909), when Chad Newsome – a Jamesian "American abroad" – announces his discovery that advertising is "the great new force" which is "infinite like all the arts," his words waver between the chilling suggestion that he is reverting to his family's economic materialism and the complicating possibility that a new, dynamic energy is infusing his habitually passive demeanor. In F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925), the faded billboard picturing the pale eyes and gigantic spectacles of the vanished oculist Doctor T. J. Eckleburg initially suggests the disappearance of God in an ethically weak capitalist society: after the catastrophic accident, when George Wilson looks up at the billboard and intones, "God sees everything," "That's an advertisement" is his friend's curt rejoinder. Yet Eckleburg's human counterpart – nicknamed "Owl Eyes" because of his "enormous owl-eyed spectacles" – is the one character other than the narrator who responds to *Gatsby* with perception and compassion, an oddity suggesting that the billboard

can be read as a text about human witnessing as well. In Jean Rhys's *Voyage in the Dark* (1934), advertising is initially a force of social hypnosis. The narrator Anna, transplanted to London from the Caribbean, hears a jingle for Standard Bread which, despite her resistance, plays "over and over again" in her head: "It's the tune that's so awful; it's like blows." Yet in a climactic moment, Anna's childhood memory of "a picture advertising the Biscuits Like Mother Makes" leads to a crucial insight: the depiction of "a little girl in a pink dress" with "a shiny pale-blue sky" near enough to touch exposes the Empire's utopian marketing of England as a "cosy" and happy place where God is always near, while the "high, dark wall" behind her signifies the inaccessibility of this dream for the colonized outsiders.

James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), a novel littered with slogans, posters, throw-aways, and sandwich boards, captures the ambiguity of advertising as simultaneously a playful, creative art and an insidiously dominating form. Protagonist Leopold Bloom – himself an ad canvasser and practitioner of what one character calls "the gentle art of advertisement" (with a subtle ironic play on the well-known expression "the gentle art of persuasion") – subverts such coercive intent when he uses "Plumtree's Potted Meat" as a springboard to free associate everything from the sexual act to a buried corpse. Nonetheless, as Bloom goes to sleep at the end of the novel, he fantasizes about "the infinite possibilities hitherto unexploited of the modern art of advertisement" and he dreams of creating a totalizing advertisement with the power "to arrest involuntary attention, to convince, to decide." The tension between regulation and freedom is similarly embodied in the famous skywriting scene in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925). As an airplane flies over central London, skywriting ragged and rapidly dissolving letters in smoke, scattered pedestrians are both uniformly held in a moment of coerced attention and loosely combined in a participatory act of group seeing. The ambiguous skywriting produces a scene of modernist reading, eliciting interpretations ranging from the mystical to the mundane. What Septimus Smith interprets, in aesthetic rapture, as a sign from the beyond, other onlookers collectively decipher as a message about something to eat: "they were advertising toffee."

Advertising thus exhibited a double voicedness, as both a dominating, manipulative rhetoric and a cultural sign to be creatively produced, read, and used. As concerns about standardization and mass marketing grew, however, educators and cultural theorists gravitated to the uniformly negative readings of Lewis and Leavis. Marshall McLuhan, for his part, wavered in his sentiments, expressing concerns that "the business of the advertiser is to see that we go about our business with some magic spell or tune or slogan throbbing quietly in the background of our minds" (1953), yet, only one year later, "blessing" "advertising art" for "its pictorial VITALITY and verbal CREATIVITY" (1954). For Northrop Frye, however, advertising was straightforwardly an "anti-art" – a form of propaganda with a dangerous propensity to "stun and demoralize the critical

consciousness with statements too absurd or extreme to be dealt with seriously" (1967). Such powerful critiques served to entrench modernism and advertising as an oppositional binary; crosscurrents within the modernist period, however, show "advertisement" functioning in plural and controversial ways.

SEE ALSO: *Best Seller; Form; Propaganda; Readers, Reading*

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Atom, Atomic

When Karl Pearson published his third edition of *The Grammar of Science* (1911), he added a Preface warning against assumptions of permanent scientific truth. The contemporary physicist, he admonished, might be in danger of treating the electron, as he did the “old unchangeable atom,” as “a reality of experience,” forgetting “that it is only a construct of his own imagination,” “certain to be replaced by a wider concept as his insight expands.” Atom was truly a powerful imaginative construct in both scientific and general discourse, although subject to rapid change and varying use. The mysteries, multiplicities, and contradictoriness of the atom, however, constituted a large part of its imaginative appeal.

Until almost the end of C19, the atom was considered the smallest unit of the physical universe. The following half-century subjected the atom to two revolutionary turns: the discovery of subatomic particles named electrons and protons, and the construction and detonation, in 1945, of the atomic bomb. Metaphorical uses of atom often lagged, in knowledge, behind scientific research, yet they captured the implications of the new physics in at least three significant ways: (i) the idea or experience of being a minute particle, especially in the expanded scale and heightened speed of the modern world; (ii) an uncertainty and even radical doubt about a knowable, meaningful universe; and (iii) an increased reverence for the new forces unlocked by science, along with a horror at the appalling destruction now possible to inflict upon living bodies and the planet itself.

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For much of the period, literary and popular references to the atom generally assumed the earlier sense of smallest imaginable unit, but now in the context of new dimensions in scale. Overawed by the sky, Virginia Woolf's Miss Anning thinks humbly of herself and her companion as “atoms, motes . . . and their lives . . . as long as an insect's and no more important” ([1925?] 1944); conversely, Tom Sefton's poem “Incarnation” forges a link between the tiny self and cosmic space: a “glimpse” in the “sub-conscious mind” leads him to affirm, “I am a part/Of one vast pulsing heart;/An atom of a comprehensive whole” (1912). Atom could also suggest the minute individual in a vast social scheme. In *Memoirs of a Social Atom* (1903), W. E. Adams – the son of a plasterer and the editor of a local weekly – described himself as “a small speck on the surface of society”; nonetheless, he asserted that a record of “the hopes and aspirations of the common people” would not “lack interest on that account.” Atom indeed conveys a new literary attentiveness to the small, in writers as different as F. T. Marinetti and Virginia Woolf: Marinetti, seeking to overpass what he considered the obsessively human, called upon writers to fuse “the infinite smallness that surrounds us, the imperceptible, the invisible, the agitation of atoms” with the “infinitely great” ([1913]1973). Virginia Woolf's appeal in “Modern Fiction” ([1919]1925) for a new literature that “record[s] the atoms as they fall upon the mind” was a testimony to the value

of common, everyday experience and every sensation and perception that it involves. A note in her diary records her commitment, too, to the smallest particle of time: "what I want now to do," she wrote, "is to saturate every atom [...] to give the moment whole" ([1928]1977–1984).

If modernist responses to the fragment find expression in the single atom, the idea of multiple fragments – as Marinetti's "agitation" and Woolf's falling atoms suggest – finds embodiment in atomic motion. Just as the individual atom could signify significance or insignificance, so the chaotic speed and incessant motion of numerous atoms could instill fear or wonder. In his memoir of his partly fictional self, Henry Adams represented the cataclysmic break with C19 thought by writing that science had catapulted him into "a new universe which had no common scale of measurement with the old" ([1907]1918). Imagining himself not simply "an isolated atom in a hostile universe, but a sort of herring-fry in a shoal of moving fish," Adams conceived this "ocean of colliding atoms" as demolishing any comforting assumptions of "unity," "direction," and "progress" and ushering in a "supersensual world" powered by "chance collisions of movements." Even more fearfully, a character in a John Buchan novel worries about "the danger of splitting into nebulae of whirling atoms" (1933). Yet for David Lowe, the divisible atom was proof that the earth was "as fluid and fluxible and flexible as thought itself," drawing us "nearer the divine breath" (1909). Similarly, in the self-named "weird fiction" of H. P. Lovecraft, "the feeling that our tangible world is only an atom in a fabric vast and ominous," turns a character into "a searcher for strange realms" seeking something that "would bind him to the stars, and to the infinities and eternities beyond them" ([1927]1938); in another Lovecraft story, the narrator, believing "that human thought consists basically of atomic or molecular motion, convertible into ether waves or radiant energy," sets up telepathic communication with an alternate universe of light (1919). In "Exploring the Atom," Edward Free explained the new scientific vision to a lay audience: "Beneath the visible structure of the universe there exists, we have discovered, another universe almost infinitely finer in grain. Solid objects like a block of lead are not really solid at all; they are mostly space. Motionless objects like a grain of sand lying on the table are not really without motion; the sand grain, for example, is a mass of billions of tiny particles all in the most rapid movement, some of them at speeds exceeding 20,000 miles a second" (1924). The broad dissemination of these ideas, and the sense of wonder they could occasion is reflected in Virginia Woolf's *The Years* (1937) when Eleanor looks at a cup of tea and asks, "What [is] it made of? Atoms? And what [are] atoms, and how [do] they stick together?" considering the matter a "marvelous mystery."

The image of multiple atoms also generated metaphors of society, focusing on relations between individuals and the whole. The socialist A. R. Orage attacked individualism as "presuppos[ing] an atomic structure, an infinite multiplicity,

a congeries of persons without the necessary addition of the unity amid the diversity" (1907). Similarly, combating "capitalist democracy" with "its atomic conception of social life" and emphasis on "the freedom of citizens," socialist Harold Laski made a "plea for variety in unity" and "a new balance between order and freedom" (1933). The liberal and feminist Dorothy Thompson, commenting on "the America of today," decried "a sterility in human relations" resulting from "an atomization, loneliness, frustration," and she urged a return to "the living, the vital, the human," with "the individual and society, the person and humanity, not in contradiction, but in union, organically united, as the family is, or once was" (1938). T. S. Eliot, for his part, welcomed atomic structure, but its meaning for him was more complex. Finding a remedy for war in the "atomic view of society," he urged the need for each individual to belong to multiple overlapping social groups, so that no one group could again seize a dominant, totalitarian position of power ([1946]1948). Atomic structure, for Eliot, meant an interactive formation of multiple patterns, a paradoxical conjunction of "unity and diversity" that embraces the particle in a fluxible whole.

Beyond such metaphoric employments of physical atoms, increasingly rapid developments in scientific research caused the atom to be literally associated with epistemological and ontological uncertainty. In the negative sense, atomic theory could signify destructive instability. C. A. Ward, reporting "the latest decisions in chemistry," wrote, "Atoms are now said to be infinitely divisible, invisible, imponderable," and offered the pessimistic general reflection, "All this makes one ask what need we have of deciding anything" (1890). In its positive use, however, the divisible atom signified a fruitful decentering of knowledge. D. H. Lawrence celebrated "relativity and quantum theories" for their very uncertainty, making him feel "as if the atom were an impulsive thing always changing its mind" (1929), while for Havelock Ellis, "the very structure of the 'atom' [was] melting into a dream" and the "physical world" was becoming "more impalpable and visionary" (1923). Eugene Jolas wrote, "The atom, once the last reality, has given way to new disintegrations which open up possibilities for tremendous evolutions" (1929). Not all new uses of atom focused on uncertainty, however, since scientific discoveries could also betoken progress, stability, and order. An editorial in the London *Times*, reporting on the Edinburgh meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, referenced Sir Edward Thorpe's vision of "the atom as an ordered system," "a macrocosm of energy in microcosmic space," noting how such "evolution of knowledge" promised a "revolution of thought" (1921). Bart Kennedy interpreted the atom as representing "in miniature" the "macrocosm" of cosmic continuity: "Our world is at one with the shining transplendent whole" (1910). In Eugene O'Neill's *Dynamo* (1929), Reuben both acknowledges the mystery of the divisible atom and reads it as requiring a central organizing force: "The sea is only hydrogen and oxygen

and minerals, and they're only atoms, and atoms are only protons and electrons [. . .]. But there must be a center around which all this moves." The narrator of Olaf Stapledon's *Last Men and First* (1930) saw "the tense balance of forces within the atom" as reflecting the "quiescence" of Chinese philosophy, premised on "the perfect balance of mighty forces." For Leo Stein, the divisible atom resolved rather than begat uncertainty: arguing that "the atom was a mystery until it was broken up," he continued, "When we successfully investigate something, it ceases to be mysterious" (1947).

The most controversial usages focused on atomic energy. Before 1945, the potential applications of new atomic knowledge met with mixed speculation. When "atomic energy" entered scientific discourse at the turn of C20, it had positive associations. *The Scientific Monthly* reported that "atomic energy" – "compact and clean," producing "no smoke" and "no dirt" – promised to "greatly ameliorate the conditions of factory life" (1919). The 1921 London *Times* editorial (referenced previously) declared that "the new atomic age" had "opened up a new and inexhaustible source of power for the practical uses of mankind." Writing in *Scientific American*, Haviland Hull Platt protested that "atomic energy is [so thoroughly] the phrase of the hour" that "the possibility of turning to account the vast store of energy contained in the atoms of all matter" was actually obscuring other potential sources for heat (1924). Olaf Stapledon's science fiction *Last Men in London* (1932) envisioned a future in which humans wore "flying-suits [. . .] studded with minute sources of sub-atomic energy on the soles of the feet." Yet H. G. Wells's *The World Set Free* (1914) offered sober reflection on atomic technology: speculating on the "social possibilities of the atomic energy" and the political consequences of the "atomic bomb," he argued that the future would be one of "atomic destruction" unless a "world government" could be formed to "ensure [. . .] universal pacification." While A. E. R. in *The New Age* declared Wells's pessimism "atomic bombast" (1914), fear of the applications of atomic technology was widespread. In Talbot Mundy's *Om* (1924), the Lama says of "the men of the West," "Wait until they have learned how to explode the atom, and then see what they will do to one another." Harold Nicolson warned, "We must now assume that a single atomic bomb is capable of destroying all matter within a circumference of seventy to eighty miles from the point of explosion" (1932). Atomic age, coined in the 1920s at a moment of optimism, came into widespread use only after 1945, with associations of impending disaster. In her "Three Poems for the Atomic Age" (1948), Edith Sitwell described how the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki had "squeezed the stems/Of all that grows on the earth," concluding, "There was no more hating then,/And no more love: Gone is the heart of Man." Leo Stein read the explosion of the atomic bomb as an indictment of Western civilization, arguing that the "atomic bomb" put "thunderous emphasis on the fact that the culture of the past is not good enough" (1947).

Atom, Atomic

Cultural employments of atom were thus motivated by scientific developments, yet went far beyond science. Atom signified a new modernist perception of the fragment, balancing the minuteness of individual monads against the vastness and complexity of the chaotic patterns formed from the motion of the whole. Rising to prominence in public discourse, atom betrayed the tensions between isolation and interconnectedness, between anxiety about the dissolution of secure grounds of knowledge and excitement about new possibilities and freedoms, and between the potential for improving human life and the danger of destroying the planet. But possibly the greatest appeal of the atom was its very nature as an imaginative construct. Writers used atom when they meant minute particle or chaotic motion, not only because the image captured the imagination so much better than abstract terms but also because the atom suggested something partly unknowable, something in excess of normal perception, and something participant in profound and fundamental change. In its uncertainty and instability, atom was a crucial image for the modernist world.

SEE ALSO: *Bigness, Smallness; Common Mind, Group Thinking; International; Unconscious; Personality, Impersonality; Reality, Realism*

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Avant-Garde

In its original sense, an avant-garde was the furthest advanced part of an army, whose role it was to clear territory for other troops. During the French Revolution, the Jacobins departed from the term's strictly military meaning by describing themselves as a political avant-garde. Many C19 socialist groups adopted this usage, often calling on artists to assist in their political work. The artist character in Olinde Rodrigues's dialogue "L'artiste, le savant et l'industriel" (1825) describes socialist artists as representing an "avant-garde" who "spread new ideas among men," "exerting a positive influence on society" by "throwing themselves ahead [*en avant*] of all the intellectual faculties." The modernist notion of

a radical aesthetic avant-garde began with F. T. Marinetti, who called "Futurism, in its overall program, [...] an atmosphere of the avant-garde" ([1913]2006). Registering the term's military and radical inheritance, Marinetti depicted Futurism as "an inexhaustible machine gun pointing at the army of the dead, of the gouty and the opportunists, whom we want to strip of their authority and subject to the bold and creative young."

As a revolutionary term, avant-garde appears rarely, however, in English literary texts of the modernist period. E. Sutton's war poem "The Drum" (1914) employs avant-garde in a military but also patriotic way: the eponymous Drum says admiringly of some passing canons, "Avant-garde am I to these Lords of dreadful revelries." Although Wyndham Lewis's *The Tyro* has been regarded as an exemplary avant-garde magazine, the word avant-garde appears in it only in an advertisement for another journal, *De Stijl*, which promises to gather "all the avant garde activities of Holland" (1922). In "Vital English Art" (1914b), a Futurist document first published in English, Marinetti and C. R. W. Nevinson employed the English rather than the French term, calling for the creation of "a powerful advance guard" to "save English Art." (The Italian and French versions respectively read "*una grande avanguardia futurista*" (1915) and "*une grande avant-garde futuriste*" (1914a).) The Paris-based journal *transition* likewise employed the English term in a preview of contents promising "WORKS OF CONTINENTAL ADVANCE GUARD" (1929), suggesting a primary association of avant-garde with continental European art. Alain Locke used advance-guard as well but with a deliberately nonviolent intent: the American New Negro's ability to resist confronting prejudice with "counter-hate," he argued, was due in part to the inspiring "consciousness of acting as the advance-guard of the African peoples in their contact with Twentieth Century civilization" (1925). Avant-garde *does* appear in reference to film. Writing in the cinema journal *Close Up*, Bryher (Annie Winifred Ellerman) invoked avant-garde's radical associations when she argued that the "New American Cinema" needed to be "more avant-garde," "to attack the formula and not tolerate it" (1931). Describing his film *Borderline*, Kenneth Macpherson emphasized the territorial, military sense: it was "perhaps the only really 'avant-garde' film ever made," he said, adding that critics complained of its "obscurity" only because it "travers[ed] new ground" (1930).

Around mC20, avant-garde became a term in literary and art criticism but with a broader scope than its etymological origins. A number of articles by American critics associated with the *Partisan Review* introduced ideas of historical diversity in avant-garde movements and roles. Clement Greenberg located the origins of the C20 avant-garde in the revolutionary "bohemian" culture of the 1840s but distinguished two further phases in which the avant-garde was first threatened by the popularity of kitsch, by which he meant the watering down and commodification of art which became the "culture of the masses" (1939), and then by absorption

into the American middle-class and middlebrow professionalism and academicism (1948). Paul Goodman divided the C20 avant-garde into three historical phases: 1900–1920, “Naturalism”; 1920s, “The Revolution of the Word”; and 1930s, “Social Solidarity” (1951). Richard Chase considered the avant-garde a “permanent movement” in the arts since the breakdown of the aristocracy in C17; his avant-garde included Wordsworth, Coleridge, Melville, and Whitman, and he defined “modernism” as the particular “phase” of the avant-garde between 1912 and 1950 (1957). The move, in all these critics, to identify diverse avant-garde phases reflects a response to the perceived end of the modernist phase with hope for a rebirth of the avant-garde in a new form.

All three critics defined the avant-garde less by a style than by a relation to an audience, conceiving the role of the avant-garde broadly as challenging stultifying norms, provoking change, and promoting life. Chase called the avant-garde artist an “insurgent intellectual” and argued that “far from being merely the isolated band of highbrows and sterile academicians many Americans think it is,” the avant-garde was “a necessary part of the cultural economy.” Goodman saw the avant-garde’s relation to its audience as paradoxically “loving and hostile,” both a reaching out and a “forcing of unwanted attention” for the purpose of reforming the public’s values.

Avant-garde was also associated with alienation, but the latter was understood as a product of the culture and the time, rather than an attitude willfully adopted by the artists. While for Greenberg the C19 avant-garde deliberately alienated itself from the bourgeois in order to “keep culture moving,” he argued that by C20, the masses, in turning to kitsch, had alienated themselves from the avant-garde. Greenberg is also the likely source of the designations of “high” versus “low” cultural forms, but his “low” was not popular culture, but the “predigested” reduction of “genuine” art in kitsch. Yet he placed blame for the ubiquitous acceptance of kitsch not on the masses, but on both capitalist and communist totalitarian systems, which left ordinary people too exhausted to have the time or energy for active engagement with serious art.

Goodman, too, approached alienation as inherent in the overall culture, which he declared to be “‘alienated’ from itself, from its own creative development.” For him, while both artist and audience were alienated, the avant-garde artist was more conscious of alienation and so sought in his work “to disgorge the alien culture.” Acceptance or rejection of the avant-garde was also seen as reflecting the level of anxiety in the audience. Goodman posited a “golden age” in the 1920s, when the avant-garde artist was matched with a buoyancy and hope in the audience, in contrast to the period following WWII, where intense but also unacknowledged anxiety caused the “shell-shocked” audience to withdraw from the avant-garde. Chase in particular argued against polarized and isolated views of the avant-garde artist, agreeing with William Phillips that “any movement to line

him up on one side or another over-simplifies his role and limits his creative function." For Chase, the history of art was a series of alternations between avant-garde and "integrated" artists, each of whom performed crucial roles. He argued further that this dialectic exists *within* the best artists, who "embody the contradictions of their culture" or, in Lionel Trilling's words, "the yes and the no of their culture," in their own work. In like fashion, Chase argued, flexible critics and readers can be open to both forms: why should we not enjoy, he questioned, "both Wallace Stevens and Sherwood Anderson," "both [Ezra] Pound and [Van Wyck] Brooks"?

SEE ALSO: *Coterie, Bloomsbury; Highbrow, Middlebrow, Lowbrow; Manifesto; Modern, Modernism; Readers, Reading*

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