Luke paints the avant-garde : the prehistory of art-isms

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The prehistory of art-isms

Recent categorizations, such as Neo-Expressionism, or terms referring to historical styles, such as Futurism, are no longer considered innocent art-historical notions or orientation guides altruistically provided by art critics, but are also perceived as labels designated by or for the market. However, the mood has changed: having long been scolded for being split into numerous 'styles, isms, labels' (Jost Hermand), modern art is now admired for the way it succeeded in attracting the public's attention with its spectacular self-styled labels, which have enjoyed a long life as categories applied to the market's range of products.[1]

As is usually the case when allegedly decisive breakthroughs are at stake, the era of this and other examples of art *branding* is considered to be the narcissistic twentieth century, which gladly allocated the thankless role of pre-Modernism to the previous century. Indeed, several factors indicate that the twentieth century saw decisive changes in the way art was marketed and packaged. As early as the first decade, perhaps the most successful recipe for the painting of the twentieth century was given the label Expressionism, incidentally by a gallery-owner, Herwarth Walden; in the same decade, the Futurists managed to land the coup of having their manifesto published on the first page of *Figaro* on 20 February 1909, apparently in the editorial section, which must have made any advertising agent turn green with envy.

The aggressive and consciously effective self-proclamation with which the Futurists wanted to put their historical and living competitors to flight ensured the view, widely held to this day, that the Futurists were the first ever, archetypal, avant-garde movement *par excellence*. This is just one of the many plausible legends that have surrounded the success story of modern art, whose real heyday must be seen as the first decades after the Second World War, the period between 1945 and 1975, after which faith in Modernism began to crumble.

By contrast with the heroic period of 'Classical Modernism', little research has been conducted into the almost thirty years of this *Echo* period; it appears that the relaunch of Modernism due to the Cold War has been better researched on the other side of the Atlantic.[2]

Nevertheless, many of these legends have since been impressively revised. For example, credence should no longer be given to the claim that works of modern art only entered the museums long after their creation due to the delaying tactics of museum directors – what would there have been for the Nazis to confiscate?[3] The role of the Salon, which was considered a museum-like bastion of the nineteenth century against Modernism, has been revised by Andrée Sfeir-Semler's extensive investigation.[4] And anyone who still believes that the scandals of Modernism were due to a narrow-minded and unregenerate public has not yet learnt sufficiently to admire the consummate skill of the artists in staging the scandal.[5] For a long period, one of the foremost of these *modernist myths* was the *Originalität der Avantgarde* (Originality of the Avant-garde) investigated by Rosalind Krauss.[6] Avant-gardism was the collective term for all the other isms that El Lissitzky and Hans Arp assembled in their 1925 book *Die Kunst-Ismen 1914–1924* (Art-isms 1914–1924).[7]

The book catalogued the modern branding of art not only according to the suffix model of the isms, but also included 'Neue Sachlichkeit' (New Objectivity). Although this term was not syntactically related, its concision and effectiveness were certainly on a par with the isms. This is also true of more recent terms such as the 'Neo Geo' of the early 1980s, which was rather short-lived as an instant label for painters such as Gerwald Rockenschaub or Peter Halley. Besides the isms, group names like 'Die Brücke' (The Bridge) or 'Der Blaue Reiter' (The Blue Rider) also asserted themselves at an early stage. Artist groups who labelled themselves with such names – later also the unintentionally comical 'Blauen Vier' (The Blue Four – the German word 'blau' not only means 'blue', but in colloquial speech also 'drunk') – distinguished their original works, which could otherwise easily have been absorbed by the mainstream isms by which they were inspired – in this case, by Expressionism. On the other hand, the isms were handled in a sufficiently vague manner for the subtle and meticulous Feiniger to be assigned to Expressionism, just as was the coarse, hectic brushwork of Kirchner, the versatile and wilful Paul Klee no less than the rough-and-ready Otto Mueller; not to mention Abstract Expressionism.

Whoever has had anything to do with the history of modern art, be their approach hostile or affirmative, will have come into contact with these isms and their equivalents, a situation that in time seemed to illustrate such a failing of modern art that Theodor W. Adorno felt obliged to defend the isms in his aesthetic theory.

However, what may apply to aesthetics does not automatically apply to art research. Instead, the fact that art research uses the terms of its area of investigation as a woolly, specialist language and does not always distinguish between the language of the area under investigation and the terms used in scientific jargon, on which greater

demands must be placed, can be seen as an academic failure. Many a lexicon commits the error of explaining a stylistic term on the basis of the artists who coined or initiated it, but not on the basis of the characteristics that can be generalized and also apply to the imitators who made those characteristics possible. Sometimes the stylistic characteristics are more clearly recognizable in the work of imitators than that of the inventor.

And was the twentieth century really the century of the isms? And did it also produce the all-encompassing Avant-gardism proclaimed by Kandinsky – a talented branding technician like his teacher at the Munich Academy, Franz von Stuck?[8] Even if the nineteenth century still tends to be considered as the forerunner of modern art – this is also a long-obsolete legend – one would have to concede that it has influenced the conceptual models to which the branding of the twentieth century resorted, and that is true not only of appropriation of the military term 'avant-garde' for branding purposes – at a time, incidentally, when the term was declining in importance in military usage.[9]

It is more worthwhile to consider the question of whether the nineteenth century did not create the model for the branding of modern art even before Impressionism. To begin with, the development of the study of art-historical styles encouraged in the nineteenth century could serve as evidence. Until the end of the eighteenth century, *antique* and *modern* were considered to be pivotal antitheses. It may not have been possible to fragment the noun Modernism derived from the latter adjective into its many isms if the nineteenth century had not already done the groundwork by retrospectively categorizing art history according to stylistic periods.[10]

The terms baroque and rococo were adopted from the periods in question; Gothic, the erstwhile battle cry, was neutralized, and the concept of the Renaissance was reinterpreted so drastically that it amounted to coining a new term. Romanticism – a veritable neologism – was then set apart from the still imperfectly understood, but soon also more precisely defined tradition of Classicism, and labelled as a stylistic period in its own right.

The willingness to create art-historical neologisms also already applied to modern art, for even before Impressionism – which is otherwise consistently used as an example of the first branding – contemporaries were concerned with the problem of Realism. This was not a matter of a group of artists that had appeared with a manifesto, but a new option of the art business, open to all, as it were, which was still positioned in the field of conflict between Classicism and Modernism. For example, this is still true of the Barbizon School around the middle of the century, which should be seen as a campaign-related colony rather than a programmatically homogeneous formation.

The fact that, in 1874, a name such as Impressionism could be applied to a style, a programme and a *group of painters* is the novelty of the modern ism, which can be considered as the prototype of a *corporate identity* in art history.[11] If, from that point, stylistic options corresponded with precisely definable and identifiable group names, the central law of movement of the modern art market had thus been formulated.

However, this law did not come into effect only with the advent of Impressionism, which is popularly seen as the point at which the nineteenth century can be divided, as it were, into a retrospective and a progressive half. The programmatic artists' group – which was soon to become an almost classic organizational unit in modern art – is identifiable as early as the beginning of the nineteenth century, with the German-Roman 'Lukas-Bund' (Brotherhood of St. Luke) (1809) followed by the British 'Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood' (1848). However, the work of these groups was so backward-looking that their astonishingly modern aesthetic programme, social formation and economically skilful distribution – as we shall see, the latter is crucial in this context – could easily be forgotten.

In any case, the Nazarenes, like the Pre-Raphaelites, do not feature particularly prominently in art-historical research; this is also true of the nineteenth century as a whole. Decisions concerning research are also made on the basis of conscious or unconscious decisions relating to taste, and hence implicit value judgements; these are not compatible with the social history of art. For the individual taste of the researcher is out of place in the social history of art to the same extent as its subject is general taste.

It was thus no coincidence that a public, scientific exploration of the two artist groups mentioned above began in Germany only with the popular exhibitions in Baden-Baden in 1973 (Pre-Raphaelites) and Frankfurt am Main in 1977 (Nazarenes), which from today's perspective appear to have been intended to compensate for the omissions of the other large-scale campaign to rehabilitate the nineteenth century launched at the same time – Werner Hofmann's influential Hamburg exhibition cycle entitled 'Um 1800' (Around 1800).[12]

When assessing the importance of the Nazarenes and the Pre-Raphaelites for modern art, it is not so much a question of taste as of their *structural* contribution to the organization of the art business, as it were. For this type of programmatic, elitist and exclusive artists' association did not exist before the early nineteenth century. The painters of the Brotherhood of St. Luke thus committed a revolutionary act when they left the Vienna Academy of Art in 1809 to join forces under a *nom de guerre* and, a little later, to settle in Rome, where Asmus Jakob Carstens already lived as the first German academy 'dissident'.[13] Apparently, the Nazarenes considered the

city, with its enormous art collections, as an academy free of the irritating intervention of teachers, and believed that mutual correction would preserve them from the reputation of amateurishness.

This was probably the first example of an anti-academic 'school'. However, unlike Keith Andrews, one hesitates to call it the first *Secession*: for the sake of clarity, this term was to remain reserved for the separation of artist groups – for aesthetic reasons – from the artists' associations that were to become decisively influential as interest groups, mainly free of stylistic dictates, only later in the nineteenth century. In the German Reich, for example, this was only to happen in 1856, with the establishment of the 'Allgemeine Deutschen Künstlergenossenschaft' (General German Artists' Confraternity).[14] The Brotherhood of St. Luke, on the other hand, was a rejection of the Academy for artistic and ethical reasons. Nor should this be confused with the notoriously vague, anti-academic polemics of the twentieth century, because the rejection on the part of the Brotherhood of St. Luke did not apply so much to the Academy as an institution as to the syllabus taught in Vienna; in other words, a precisely definable academic programme that was considered outdated and inappropriate.

However, the formation of an anti-academic group was an eminently modern decision, even if the formal proximity to historical models was sought – in this case not only early-Renaissance, classical models, but also mediaeval models of the late Gothic period. And the entire destiny of the Brothers of St. Luke was to be determined by the *contradiction between avant-garde and the academy* that was also to characterize the whole twentieth century.

In order to understand the radical nature of the members of the Brotherhood of St. Luke, one must be aware of the situation from which they sought to liberate themselves. Before the nineteenth century, social organizations among artists were only conceivable in the guilds, and later at the academies. Both these organizational forms were occupied not only with the ability to learn and to teach art, but also, and not least, with marketing it; they certainly regarded each other as competitors. If one considers the history of the art academies merely as that of training institutions, one loses sight of the central marketing aspect, which was initially reflected in various privileges granted by the court.

One of these privileges was that only members of the academies could be granted commissions from the court and participate in the regular exhibitions. The history of the Paris Academy proves how much this privilege must be seen as a constituent characteristic of an exclusive group, which even succeeded in restricting the exhibi-

tion rights of the guilds and having the opposing academy set up by the guilds closed down.[15]

The Paris Academy consisted of court-appointed teachers who in turn selected the pupils, but did not yet follow the programme of an elitist *group*, but of a courtly *institution*. The privileges enjoyed by the Academy are also apparent in the fact that Academy artists had the right to invite selected artists for the annual exhibition. The Academy artists could thus offer their pictures for sale to an audience to which they would otherwise have had no access.

With the end of the *ancien régime*, court privilege lost its importance in France, but in Germany the aristocracy remained a significant client and supporter of the academy until well into the nineteenth century. This was particularly true of the Munich Academy, in whose royal constitution of 1808 the court features as a kind of general client with what can be described as a political guarantee of purchase.

However, at the same time the number of graduates increased the number of artists excluded from the privilege of being able to exhibit at the academies. In the early decades of the nineteenth century, the latter sought their own forum for marketing their work in the 'Kunstvereine' (artists' associations). They thus developed a model that functioned successfully up until the early twentieth century and was even copied abroad.[16]

These art associations were the scene of bitter debates on art and its quality, which were reflected in constant personal intrigues, as documented at elections for chairmanships, for example. But they were never explicitly programmatic in a stylistic sense. They differ from the academy's exhibitions more in the genres represented than in the styles: while the teachings of the Munich Academy, for example, glorified a classical and romantic style of history painting way past its sell-by date, the 'Fächler' (motif specialists) found their clients in the art associations – the painters of landscapes, portraits, still lifes, animals or genre scenes, which of course also differed in their canvases, compatible with living-rooms, as compared with the monumental formats of the academicians.

However, the academicians could not ignore the arts associations forever, and sought additional potential sales there, ultimately even giving up their own privileged exhibitions at the academies, which soon appeared outdated in the rapidly growing middle-class art market in any case.

If academically trained artists now also established artist groups in growing numbers, such as 'Jung-München' (Young Munich) or 'Allotria', it was not the choice of a common style that was decisive, but that of shared taverns and bowling alleys; in Düsseldorf, for example, the eponymous 'Malkasten' (Paint-box). This is where the

caricatures could be produced and appreciated with which one fuelled the competition, only seemingly out of action under the influence of alcohol for a while; this is where the pranks were planned with which one would publicly expose one's more famous colleagues.

So it was never a question of isms. Only when neutral exhibition spaces were built around the middle of the nineteenth century, which put the academies' and art associations' monopoly of the market to an end – in Munich, for example, with the Ziebland building (1845) and finally the Glaspalast (Glass Palace) of 1853 – did the artists' associations acquire a new, co-operative significance, offering pioneers of the young generation the option of spectacular separation, in other words of a secession. However, it was not necessarily possible to reduce this to the common denominator of a joint, programmatic group style, as was to be typical of the isms.

Besides the market forums of the academies and art associations, and earlier than the artists' associations, which were initially linked to taverns and later also to club-like, autonomous 'Künstlerhäuser' (artists' houses), the Brotherhood of St. Luke would appear to be a first flourish of Modernism right at the beginning of the nineteenth century. This is because its members left the Academy for *artistic* reasons and not only shared places of residence, but also a joint *programme*, which, although it resulted in only few joint works in the sense of authorship, did lead the 'brothers of St. Luke' to produce individual works in a permanent exploration of their programme and profile – like a precursor of the artists' collectives of the early Soviet Union, a germ cell of the Bauhaus or a commune *avant la lettre*. At the same time, the Brothers of St. Luke forewent the privileges of the Academy and risked putting their products on the free market, without having the developed instruments of the arts associations at their disposal, which only attained their commercial importance years later.

In the visual arts, institutional independence and entrepreneurial risk were just as much a new development as the self-chosen group programme. In the world of literature, on the other hand, the growing freedom of the press, the publishing houses and the growing audience for books and the theatre – in a mixture between late-feudal patronage and bourgeois conviviality – had already ensured that poets and philosophers were flocking to write for programmatic publications – such as *Die Horen* (1795–7), *Propyläen* or *Athenäum* (1798–1800) magazines – or developing literary programmes like the anacreontic poets as well as forms of co-operation before the end of the eighteenth century. Yet there was no comparable forum for the visual arts.

On the other hand, the writers and artists in the vanguard of Romanticism were linked by the fact that they saw themselves faced with a new, bourgeois market in

which their products had to assert themselves after the end of commissions granted by the church or by the court for the purposes of display. The Romantic writers in particular, such as E.T.A. Hoffmann, saw themselves at the mercy of a coldly calculating, capitalist market, which is why it is not at all surprising that the restrictive guilds system came to symbolize an allegedly lost economic security. This nostalgia for the guilds system also characterized the first two convinced artist groups, the Nazarenes and the Pre-Raphaelites; they associated the guilds with the social stability of the bourgeois artisan class, to which many artists now wished to belong.[17] By contrast, the Academy, which had disempowered the highly restrictive guilds just over a century earlier, was now perceived as an instrument of suppression.

Above all, the idea of brotherhood expressed the romantic desire for a return to non-materialistic, pre-capitalist, or at least early-bourgeois, ordered circumstances in both genres, and to the remarkable cult of friendship also aimed at niches apparently alien to the market, which, however, were soon to be invested with a Biedermeier rather than Romantic style. Seen overall, the world view of the aesthetic religion previously developed in literature, particularly in the work of Wilhelm Wackenroder and Ludwig Tieck, seems to have served as the initial inspiration for that of the Brothers of St. Luke, who thus imitated early-Romantic fiction, as it were: 'The lifestyle of the little group in Rome was a conscious imitation of Wackenroder's friar' (Andrews).

While men of letters were already grouping themselves in aesthetic and social terms around independent magazines, which later were also to be of decisive importance for the change of canon from Classicism to Romanticism, there were no comparable forums for artists outside the academies, which is why the Brothers of St. Luke are particularly significant as the first programmatic artists' alliance.

Beyond this, the painters of the Brotherhood of St. Luke are the first example of a nickname being transformed into an art-historical label, although this was based on a fundamental misunderstanding. For we do not talk about them as the 'Brothers of St. Luke' – as they referred to themselves – but as Nazarenes, as they were called because of their long hair: 'What was most conspicuous about them was their hairstyle, which the Romans, who are quick to mock, called 'alla nazarena', because it reminded them of the traditional image of Christ. The objects of this derision, on the other hand, saw their hair more as an Old German hairstyle, such as that worn by Albrecht Dürer in his well-known self-portrait', writes Rudolf Bachleitner in his monograph of 1976. A few pages later he adds the following to his interpretation: 'The name "Nazarenes" in a stylistic sense first emerges in literature in the memoirs of the painter Wilhelm Schadow in 1891: "Because they babbled so much about the holy

sepulchre and the Saviour, and flirted so conspicuously with Catholicism, they were nicknamed the Nazarenes".'[18]

Regardless of what earned them their nickname, the Nazarenes' appearance is probably also the first example of the Bohemianism that was to attract attention throughout the nineteenth century as an urban subculture, through demonstratively unconventional attire and hairstyle, and whose economically risky existence was based on the equally risky aesthetic positions of the isms.[19] However, a specific cross-over between Bohemianism and aristocracy can be found in the Nazarene movement, as exemplified by the Bavarian Crown Prince and later King Ludwig I, whose unconventional presence as the drinking companion of these and other German-Romans was recorded by Franz Catel in his famous 1824 painting of the Spanish *trattoria* (wine bar) in Rome.

In the nineteenth century, the stylization of the poverty of the artist discharged from his contractual relations with the court or church and left at the mercy of the bourgeois market transformed his frugal way of life into a lifestyle collage of clothing and appearance, which the citizens of Paris perceived precisely as Bohemian – in a geographical sense, connected with immigrants and exiles from Bohemia –, gypsy-like and provocative. Artists were prepared to live with the derision of the philistines and the bourgeois, as they provided the contrast that was indispensable to raising their profile. Against this background, the Nazarenes' choice of residence in Rome, an abandoned Franciscan monastery, was not only a significant address in terms of art as a religion, but the precursor of other abandoned monasteries, which provided cheap studios for many artists after being deconsecrated, such as the colony of American painters in Polling, Bavaria.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, such a specific combination between residential form and way of life as well as the social manner and appearance as a *habitus* became an unuttered learning target of the academies, as Wolfgang Ruppert's study entitled *Der moderne Künstler* (The modern artist) suggests.[20]

While the Nazarenes were given the name that was to endure in art history by others – like the Impressionists later – the *Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood* founded forty years later and modelled on the Nazarenes had the avant-garde luck of the Surrealists – the programmatic name they chose for themselves survived. They had previously discussed and rejected an even loftier alternative – *The League of Sincerity* – what a religiously artistic advertising slogan!

Initially, their programme was not very different from that of the Brotherhood of St. Luke, as both groups were oriented towards the style of the early Renaissance and late Gothic periods and fostered religiously inspired ideas for reform and ideals of aes-

thetic purity. In any case, the idea of a brotherhood had arrived with Ford Madox Brown in London after a visit to the Nazarenes in Rome.

However, what was remarkably different from the very beginning was their approach. For although the Pre-Raphaelites did not present themselves to the public with a manifesto, which was to become well-nigh obligatory in the early twentieth century,[21] they ran their own, if short-lived magazine, *The Germ*, managing to produce four issues between 1849 and 1850, and besides painters, their founding members included the critic Frederic George Stephens as well as the chronicler William Michael Rossetti.

This different attitude towards work and public relations was probably also due to the fact that the Pre-Raphaelites had to assert themselves in London, which had a far more modern exhibition and art market than the Nazarenes had to contend with in the academic greenhouse climate of Rome.[22] Furthermore, *The Times* did them the favour of a scathing review and a debate in which Charles Dickens spoke out against the reformers, which gave John Ruskin the opportunity to give a riposte in which he defended the Pre-Raphaelites as a neutral critic – a procedure that was to gain notoriety in the later history of Avant-gardism.

Besides the indispensable, negative criticism from the newspapers and the public, the typical independent journalist thus emerges as a champion in the process of publicity and establishment, until he ultimately even becomes a godfather for movements that owe him their name – such as the movement that for want of a better name was briefly known as Neo-Dada, to which Lawrence Alloway gave the considerably punchier label Pop Art. Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg had previously made themselves so indispensable for the Abstract Expressionists that Leo Steinberg had to prove the legitimacy of Pop Art above all to them. Later, this variant of modern art's need to be commented upon *in the implementation phase* was to prompt Tom Wolfe to write his elegantly polemical book *The Painted Word*.[23]

Lastly, the founding members of the Pre-Raphaelites also ensured that their products were recognizable by not only signing and dating their paintings, but also adding the mnemonic PRB for a certain period, while the Brotherhood of St. Luke used an imprint to label their official documents.[24] Even before this, the signature of the artist as proof of authenticity had assumed the status of a trademark, and as such had its own brand design, a pictographic combination of letters – as in Albrecht Dürer's D placed inside a letter A. By contrast, the mnemonic of the capitals PRB can be considered the first logo of the modern isms that already resembles corporate design.

Like the Brothers of St. Luke, ultimately the Pre-Raphaelites were also to move away from their early impulses. In any case, both the original programmes were diluted by later additions, which was also to become a typical progression in the establishment of stylistic isms. The list of names of those artists who joined the Brothers of St. Luke more or less permanently in Rome – Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld, Peter Cornelius, the sculptor Rudolf and the painter Wilhelm Schadow – is short, but that of the imitators and long-distance pupils is long. In any case, the Brotherhood of St. Luke overlapped with a circle of artists and poets, including Berthel Thorvaldsen or Gottlieb Schick, whom the Prussian envoy Wilhelm von Humboldt had gathered about him in Rome between 1802 and 1808, and was part of the larger German-Roman colony, which, however, also appears to have eyed the long-haired artists with suspicion.

While the ambivalent brand name 'Nazarene' could not be trademarked, when it came to being officially accepted by the Brotherhood of St. Luke there was, however, a selective boundary that even Cornelius could only pass by making a formal declaration – the later demarcation conflicts among the Surrealists, dominated by Breton, can already be predicted here. Paradoxically, it was to be Cornelius who, only later, in March 1812, was to afford the Nazarenes' ideas and painterly programme the greatest prominence as an adopted brother of St. Luke.

The Pre-Raphaelites also remained a homogeneous circle of founding members for only about four years; of the eight founding members, William Holman Hunt, John Everett Millais and Dante Gabriel Rossetti are still prominent today, while John Madox Brown remained independent as a kind of mentor for the group. Edward Burne-Jones, who was to have such a strong influence on the later life of this ism, was not a founding member; nor was Cornelius a founding member of the Nazarenes; and besides Ford Madox Brown, John Ruskin or William Morris should be seen as rather peripheral figures in the Pre-Raphaelites' circle.

The *establishment* of an ism can perhaps be determined precisely at the moment when the founding members of a self-proclaimed group, or the protagonists of a style attributed to them for the first time, attract the interest of sympathizers and imitators, who no longer have to belong to the founding group to be able to practise the style and to claim it for themselves. Breton's later failure to ensure his supremacy among the Surrealists marked this transitional zone in its own way.

It is therefore remarkable that the Brotherhood of St. Luke is practically never taken into account in the historical and critical theory of avant-gardism, and that historians of the movement either merely touch on its pioneering role or misinterpret it as a secessionist group. One exception is Manfred Jauslin's Basle University dissertation

of 1987, which discusses the Nazarenes as a 'religiously romantic art movement before the background of the avant-garde' and describes it as a 'failed cultural revolution'. However, Jauslin gambles away the greatest benefits of his refreshing approach by tending to analyse the Nazarenes in terms of the history of ideas and by projecting modernist ideas onto them, which is not always convincing. Despite his at times materialistic vocabulary, Jauslin's analysis neglects the specific, socio-historical changes taking place in the artist's profession around 1800; incidentally, so too does Peter Bürger's *Theorie der Avantgarde* (Theory of the avant-garde), with which Jauslin believes himself to be at odds.[25]

Ultimately, what probably cost the Nazarenes and the Pre-Raphaelites their recognition as proto-avant-garde movements was the fact that they did not celebrate the new and did not orient themselves towards the future, but, like the Classicists, sought their Utopia in history; as Romantics, however, in the history of the German Middle Ages. The radical modernists of the twentieth century could no longer understand so backward-looking a Utopia; when Walter Gropius passed off his Bauhaus as the revival of the mediaeval stonemason's lodge, this backward reference was structural rather than stylistic. The Nazarenes and the Pre-Raphaelites, by contrast, sought precisely the stylistic link to the Middle Ages; this obscured their structural modernity in the eyes of posterity.

Thus 'Winckelmann's lost grandchildren' (Jauslin) remained in a layer of sediment of art history, as it were, although their artistic after-effects can be discerned in the art of the New Objectivity and their stimulus is still apparent in the early painting of Otto Dix and the late work of Christian Schad, while the elegantly grandiloquent Burne-Jones could certainly be placed between Classicism and Art Nouveau, the triumph of which he only just missed, having died in 1898, as well as the later Art Deco style, which some believe to be already apparent in the sleekness of many of his pictures.

The second reason for the sociological underestimation of the two artists' groups is an embarrassing aspect that is difficult to explain but impossible to ignore, and has left a stain on the lives and work of these artists. This does not apply merely to the intentionally sentimental religiosity and stiff classicism of some Nazarenes, nor – in the case of the Pre-Raphaelites – to the balancing act between theatrically modern presentation on the one hand and traditional subjects on the other. It applies not only to the work of these artists in which the idyllic and the nostalgic, the mawkish and the sentimental (Nazarenes) or the stilted and posed, the sultry and the turgid (Pre-Raphaelites) prevail and to which the observer is involuntarily exposed. It also applies to the initiators, who are recorded in many reciprocal portraits.

Thus the Nazarenes are not the virile, unflinching Hemingway types – from Cézanne to Picasso and Pollock – who stood up for the innovations of Modernism; the Nazarenes are the irritatingly sensitive line of a romantic cult of friendship. In view of the Nazarenes' demonstrative cult of friendship, perhaps it is the question of their sexual orientation, which has remained *unasked*, that has nurtured this embarrassment for so long, as the specialist literature has ignored the topic almost entirely. While the Surrealists made the issue of sexual orientation the permanent subject of their group discourse and thus also lived up to their radical avant-garde claims, art historians are a long way from confidently involving this obvious theme in their research, as Heinrich Detering, for example, demonstrated in his literary and historical investigation some time ago.[26]

From a socio-psychological perspective, the Nazarenes' apparently celibate cult of the Virgin, their asexual image of women – against the background of sensitively drawn nudes of boys and men – their affected pose as the high priests of art as a religion, and their recourse to ethical phantasms such as purity and innocence emit quite explicit signals. The established German-Romans clearly found these signals unsettling, as they were offended by the fact that the Nazarenes had boys from Roman families brought to the monastery for their evening sessions of drawing from the nude.[27] However, the exclusive, male club-like character of all avant-garde movements since the brotherhoods of the Romantic period also renders the theme of sexual orientation relevant in situations that are not obviously concerned with homoeroticism. For the modern observer finds the erotic themes that the Victorian Pre-Raphaelites suppressed only with difficulty, or barely camouflaged by classicism, rather embarrassing, because the sexuality they imply appears to be *coquettish*, as exemplified by the lascivious pose of the figure of Christ in Holman Hunt's 'Shadow of Death' (1873) or in Rossetti's masculine women. But at least in this case the other side of male fame has been researched – the *Pre-Raphaelite Sisterhood* of models, girlfriends and wives.[28]

Irrespective of these reasons, which could be responsible for the low standing of both groups in the eyes of posterity, there is another important reason for their significance as a proto-avant-garde movement: they had a political Utopia, even if it was a backward-looking one. A political aspect of this kind was to become obligatory only for the avant-garde movements of radical Modernism; from the Futurists to the Dadaists and Surrealists, political and aesthetic Utopia and criticism in the interwar years between 1918 and 1939 were sometimes almost indissolubly linked.

This is not merely about the polarities between the three totalitarian movements from which politically committed artists had to choose – Fascism, to which the

Futurists affiliated themselves, Communism, with which the Surrealists, for example, sympathized and to which the Russian Constructivists associated themselves, or National Socialism, which was to divide the artists of the New Objectivity movement into two camps. The main focus here is on the fact that, after the formalisms of Impressionism, Pointillism, Cubism or Expressionism, the appearance and basis of avant-garde programmes was so strongly politicized that the Nazarenes and Pre-Raphaelites can still be regarded as distant precursors of these movements, even if the political Utopia of the Nazarenes was formed against the background of another war – Napoleon's conquest of Europe.

Precisely in their intention to assert political ambitions in art and to exemplify their social ideals through their own lives, both the Nazarenes and the Pre-Raphaelites prove themselves to be genuinely avant-garde movements, even in the sense of the radical Modernism of the twentieth century – even if their Utopia was as equally unrealizable as that of the Surrealists or the Situationists, who continued this symbiosis during the post-war period, while the leftist motivation of the representatives of Abstract Expressionism obviously waned when they were involuntarily exploited for the purposes of American foreign policy.

Furthermore, the political Utopia of the Nazarenes also included their own work as a tool of this political attitude, particularly through the revival of the fresco. The road from the German-inspired, nationalistic, courtly and public frescoes of the Nazarenes to the murals of the Mexican revolution or those of the New Deal in the United States of the 1930s is long, both in formal and historical terms, but not in the political sense of painting perceived as a strategy.

However, the foreseeable failure of the political Utopia of the Nazarenes and the Pre-Raphaelites did not mean that they were not extremely successful in political terms, which brings us to the last paradox that marks their unmistakable position in the (pre)history of Avant-gardism: they conquered the academies. The Pre-Raphaelite William Dyce, for example, was commissioned by the British government to conceive drawing schools that challenged the Royal Academy's monopoly.[29] The Nazarenes, meanwhile, became the most influential group in the formation of new academies in Germany; formerly dependent on the courts, the Düsseldorf, Berlin, Stuttgart and Munich academies had often had to fight for survival towards the end of the eighteeenth century, or were even on the verge of disappearing.

With the wave of newly created establishments, which gave the courtly institutions new, at times even well-nigh liberal charters in the early nineteenth century, although they were granted by kings (Prussia, Württemberg, Bavaria), members of and

sympathizers with the Roman circle of the Nazarenes moved into the leading positions. The key figure in this triumphant procession is Peter Cornelius, who first ran the academy in Düsseldorf and then – ennobled – the Munich academy and ensured that his artist friends and their friends were granted professorships, before moving to Berlin, where he also exercised his influence. But Wilhelm Schadow also held sway over staff appointments at Düsseldorf's academy for a long period, as did Schnorr von Carolsfeld in Dresden or Philipp Veit at Frankfurt's Städel Museum.

In view of the initially anti-academic position of the Nazarenes this is remarkable, but also because during the second half of the twentieth century a programmatically unfocused but robustly expressed anti-academic attitude in an artist's early work became a career mechanism and could almost be considered a prerequisite for a later appointment as professor at an academy.

However, for the Nazarenes this contradictory relationship to the art academy had not yet assumed the ambivalent form prevalent in fully-fledged Modernism. Instead, they had left the Vienna academy due to its *erroneous teaching methods*, and not because they believed that the handicraft of painting could forego solid instruction and instead follow easily learnable fashions; this practice was to remain the preserve of the further development of modern art in the context of coming isms. Hans-Joachim Ziemke has already pointed out that the departure of the Brothers of St. Luke from the Vienna Academy was by no means as ungracious as the literature would have us believe, and Rome was in any case the aim of many trained academics and hence not a programmatically original alternative site.[30]

Just as the Nazarenes' ambivalent attitude towards the Academy is remarkable, since their activities included painting new museum buildings, the rapid elevation of their work to museum status is an even more remarkable success. In this respect, the proximity of the former German-Roman Bohemians to the Bavarian Crown Prince paid off, since as King the latter obliged his favourite painters to serve him. Besides the notoriously controversial relationship between avant-garde movements and academies, this was the first modern form of the artist's relationship with the museum. Conversely, the inspiration that the Nazarenes drew from art collections and engravings of famous works, and that Peter von Cornelius even experienced from perusing the Wallraf collection and that of the Boisserée brothers, prove the theory of the birth of the avant-garde in the spirit of the museum.

Finally, the history of the *economic* success of the Nazarenes remains to be written, which was not only achieved at the academies and in the form of commissions for murals and panels – and certainly not of its own accord. During his years in Italy, Cornelius had already proposed a concept for a pan-German art association intended

to sell the Nazarenes' works, a plan that proved to be unviable due to the fact that he planned to establish the organization's headquarters in Rome. However, in 1829 the Nazarene professors founded the 'Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen' (Art Association for the Rhineland and Westphalia) in Düsseldorf, which organized a reliable bourgeois clientele for the academy's exhibitions in both provinces.[31] The fact that a 'Verein zur Verbreitung religiöser Bilder' (Society for the dissemination of religious pictures) was also founded in Düsseldorf in 1842 is evidence of a high level of (subliminal) economic intelligence, which later avant-garde movements were to exercise as discreetly as later art historians were to ignore.

The work and later reputation of certain Nazarenes and their pupils in the nineteenth century's *other* market for pictures, for which art researchers have rarely displayed any interest, should certainly be investigated, because popular prints were marketed – and on a grand scale – to the extent that the stimuli provided by the Nazarenes, which were already in danger of descending into the realm of kitsch, were completely absorbed by children's books, and then all the more so by the little images of Catholic saints.

1 Jost Hermand, *Stile, Ismen, Etiketten*, Wiesbaden, 1978; Oskar Bätschmann, *Ausstellungskünstler. Kult und Karriere im modernen Kunstsystem*, Cologne, 1997; Wolfgang Ullrich, *Mit dem Rücken zur Kunst. Die neuen Statussymbole der Macht*, Berlin, 2000, pp. 84–92; Walter Grasskamp, 'Blauer Reiter und lila Kuh. Werbung ist keine Kunst', in *Konsumglück. Die Ware Erlösung*, Munich, 2000, pp. 114–31.

2 Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art. Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War*, Chicago, 1985.

3 Henrike Junge, ed., *Avantgarde und Publikum. Zur Rezeption avantgardistischer Kunst in Deutschland 1905–1933*, Cologne etc., 1992.

4 Andrée Sfeir-Semler, *Die Maler am Pariser Salon 1791–1880*, Frankfurt am Main, 1992.

5 Heinz Peter Schwerfel, *Kunstskandale*, Cologne, 2002.

6 Rosalind Krauss, *Die Originalität der Avantgarde und andere Mythen der Moderne* (1985), Dresden, 2000.

7 El Lissitzky, Hans Arp, eds., *Die Kunstismen 1914–1924*, Erlenbach-Zurich etc., 1925, repr., Baden, 1990.

8 Wassily Kandinsky, *Über das Geistige in der Kunst* (1912), 4th edn, ed. Max Bill, Berne-Bümpliz, 1952.

9 Hannes Böhringer, 'Avantgarde – Geschichte einer Metapher', *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte*, vol. 22, 1978, pp. 90–4.

10 Walter Grasskamp, *Ist die Moderne eine Epoche? Kunst als Modell*, Munich, 2002.

11 On the other hand, the legend that these isms were initially coined as nicknames by spiteful opponents and confidently adopted as *noms de guerre*, has had a very beneficial influence on these artists' reputation with posterity but is less relevant in art-historical terms, although perhaps also worth investigating.

12 *Präraffaeliten*, ed. Klaus Gallwitz and Günter Metken, exh. cat., Staatliche Kunsthalle, Baden-Baden, 1973; *Nazarener*, ed. Klaus Gallwitz, exh. cat., Städel, Frankfurt am Main, 1977; Günter Metken, *Die Präraffaeliten. Ethischer Realismus und Elfenbeinturm im 19. Jahrhundert*, Cologne, 1974; Renato Barilli, *Die Präraffaeliten*, Munich, 1974; Keith Andrews, *Die Nazarener*, Munich, 1974; Rudolf Bachleitner, *Die Nazarener*, Munich, 1976; Herbert

Schindler, *Nazarener. Romantischer Geist und christliche Kunst im 19. Jahrhundert*, Regensburg, 1982.

13 Frank Büttner, 'Der autonome Künstler: Asmus Jakob Carstens' Ausstellung in Rom 1795', in *'Die Kunst hat nie ein Mensch allein besessen'. Dreihundert Jahre Akademie der Künste und Hochschule der Künste*, Berlin, 1996, pp. 195–7.

14 Andrews 1974 (see note 12), p. 9. Andrews even goes as far as describing 'Oberbeck, Pforr and their Gesinnungsgenossen' as 'precursors of the "Salon des Refusés" in Paris and the "Vienna Secession"', which mixes the spheres of academic doctrine and exhibition activities excessively. For further details, see Bettina Best, *Secession und Secessionen. Idee und Organisation einer Kunstbewegung um die Jahrhundertwende*, Munich, 2000.

15 Georg Friedrich Koch, *Die Kunstausstellung. Ihre Geschichte von den Anfängen bis zum Ausgang des 18. Jahrhunderts*, Berlin, 1967.

16 For the relationship between art academies and art associations in Munich, see my essay 'Konkurrenten und Partner. Kunstverein und Kunstakademie', in *Spring 2002, Drucksache*, Kunstverein Munich, 2002, pp. 18–32; for a completely different example in Düsseldorf, see 'Kunst – Kommerz – Konsum – Kommunikation', in *175 Jahre Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen*, Düsseldorf, 2004, pp. 22–35.

17 Bernhard Schubert, *Der Künstler als Handwerker. Zur Literaturgeschichte einer romantischen Utopie*, Königstein, 1986.

18 Bachleitner 1976 (see note 12), pp. 7 and 13; see also the example mentioned by Metken 1974 (see note 12), p. 9, of the 'barbus', who broke away from the David School and called for 'a purified, non-republican classicism and, rather like an ancient sect, wore togas and beards.'

19 Helmut Kreuzer, *Die Bohème. Analyse und Dokumentation der intellektuellen Subkultur vom 19. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart*, Stuttgart, 1971.

20 Wolfgang Ruppert, *Der moderne Künstler. Zur Sozial- und Kulturgeschichte der kreativen Individualität in der kulturellen Moderne im 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhundert*, Frankfurt am Main, 1998.

21 Friedrich Wilhelm Malsch, *Künstlermanifeste. Studien zu einem Aspekt moderner Kunst am Beispiel des italienischen Futurismus*, Weimar, 1997.

22 For the structural changes in the London art market at the turn of the nineteenth century, see not only Oskar Bätschmann's publication *Ausstellungskünstler* (see note 1), but above all Maximiliane Drechlser, *Zwischen Kunst und Kommerz. Zur Geschichte des Ausstellungswesens zwischen 1775 und 1905*, Berlin, 1996.

23 Tom Wolfe, *The Painted Word*, New York, 1975.

24 Illustrated in Schindler 1982 (see note 12), p. 213.

25 Manfred Jauslin, *Die gescheiterte Kulturrevolution. Perspektiven religiös-romantischer Kunstbewegung vor der Folie der Avantgarde*, doctorate Basle 1988, Munich, 1989; Peter Bürger, *Theorie der Avantgarde*, Frankfurt am Main, 1974.

26 Jose Pierre, *Recherchen im Reich der Sinne. Die zwölf Gespräche der Surrealisten über Sexualität*, Munich, 1994; Heinrich Detering, *Das offene Geheimnis. Zur literarischen Produktivität eines Tabus von Winckelmann bis Thomas Mann*, Göttingen, 1994.

27 Schindler 1982 (see note 12), p. 25.

28 Jan Marsh, *Pre-Raphaelite Sisterhood*, London etc., 1985.

29 Metken 1974 (see note 12), p. 12.

30 Hans-Joachim Ziemke, 'Die Anfänge in Wien und in Rom', in Gallwitz and Metken 1973 (see note 12), pp. 41–58.

31 Grasskamp, see note 16. The manuscript was completed on 20 March 2005; see also *Religion Macht Kunst. Die Nazarener*, ed. Max Hollein and Christa Steinle, exh. cat., Städel, Frankfurt am Main, Cologne, 2005.

Summary

Avant-garde theories generally start with the beginning of the twentieth century, with Impressionism as the earliest. As the long-standing, authoritative model on which the *branding* of modern art is based, art-'isms' are mandatory for the internal structure of avant-gardism, even when the names do not correspond with the linguistic pattern, such as in *New Objectivity*. As avant-garde theory is generally indebted to a progressive, Utopian ideal, it consistently ignores those early nineteenth-century movements that share numerous characteristics that were later to be typical of avant-gardism – namely of the Nazarenes and the Pre-Raphaelites. A key reason for this omission is the fact that these groups, unlike the later avant-garde movements, focused on historical role models. However, in the light of the later development of modern art, both artist groups deserve to be recognized at least as the prototypes of avant-garde movements of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and on closer inspection also prove to be model cases of artistic self-assertion in bourgeois society and its markets. By characterizing the two forerunners of the Avant-garde movement that was later to be literally canonized, this essay aims to outline the ways in which art programmatically communicates and represents its claim to self-assertion on the market in modern society.