

## The Concept of Play as Politics in the Context of Art and Life Praxis

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## **Abstract**

This article focuses on the concept of play, which has been the subject of debate within various academic disciplines and theoretical frameworks. In particular, it examines the role of play in the context of art and the political aspects of art. It analyses play as a concept in the praxis of art and life. In this context, this paper posits that the concept of politics is not limited to the domain of state administration and affairs. Rather, it is considered to be pervasive, extending beyond these realms into the realm of everyday life. The primary focus of this paper is on historical avant-garde art movements, specifically Dadaism and Surrealism. This study, which considers the concepts of art, life, and politics together, indicates that the movements in question do play a determining role.

**Keywords:** Art life praxis; artistic expression; historical avant-garde; play; politics.

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## INTRODUCTION

Art and life praxis<sup>1</sup>, in its broadest sense, is the idea of art as an integral element of social practice, in conjunction with everyday life and politics. Accordingly, artistic activity is not considered in isolation from social dynamics and politics. Furthermore, the praxis of art and life aims to melt and integrate the opposites that separate art and life (technical production-aesthetic production, artistic expression-political action). In this respect, it indicates a utopian ideal in which art encompasses life, as adopted by historical avant-garde movements against the autonomy of aesthetics. Accordingly, everyday routines, actions and environments can qualify as art. Moreover, art is not limited to spaces designated and reserved for art, such as galleries and museums, but rather permeates everyday experiences and activities. In this way, the boundaries between art and life are, in a positive sense, blurred. Although the expression “art-life praxis” has been articulated within and against the modern aesthetic regime, it fundamentally emphasises the coexistence of art and life.

This paper has been shaped by the inspiration and curiosity of various questions about the concept of play and the intersection of art and politics. These questions are: what is the effect of art on politics and politics on art? Can art and politics be considered immanent to the concept of play? What kind of transformative effect can play have on art production? Based on these broad questions, this study analyses how the concept of play, which is included in art, has a political quality.

In this paper, the concept of play is characterised by its freedom and liberating nature. Additionally, the capacity of play to be shaped by elements of irony, humour and laughter enables it to serve as a conduit for anti-authoritarian resistance. In this regard, the transformation of art and play is analysed by examining the historical dynamics that constitute modernism. Additionally, the political aspect of play in the praxis of art and life is discussed in relation to Dadaism and Surrealism, historical avant-garde movements.

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<sup>1</sup> The concept of praxis, as elucidated by Karl Marx in his celebrated 11th thesis, underscores the pivotal role of practical action in social transformation and points to the coexistence of theoretical and practical applications. Furthermore, the terms “art and life praxis” and “art life context” are used interchangeably throughout the article. The term “art life” is inspired by the “Sanat Hayat” series published by İletişim Yayınları. For further information on the books published in this series, see: <https://iletisim.com.tr/dizi/sanat-hayat/140>.

This article seeks to illustrate the influence of socio-political shifts in the modern era on the domain of art and its role in this transformation. It employs a critical lens to examine the avant-garde movements of Dadaism and Surrealism and their impact on the art scene of the period. Among the avant-garde, these two art movements, Dadaism and Surrealism, are particularly relevant in understanding the interplay between play and politics.

## **RESULTS**

This article has demonstrated that the political aspect of play is employed in two ways in the praxis of art and life. The first one comprises activist artistic works that make direct political demands. The second one encompasses forms of artistic expression that do not directly express a political demand but carry political criticism by challenging social and aesthetic norms. As a matter of fact, Magritte's surrealist productions constitute an important example of this.

The Dadaists and Surrealists employed artistic production not only as a tool for aesthetic expression but also as a position for the production of social discourse and direct intervention in political issues.

This study has deduced a further classification of the concept of play in relation to the production of artworks. It suggests that the artwork itself may be directly play or/and contain play elements. Alternatively, the production of artwork in terms of method, attitude and approach may create playful situations. It has been demonstrated that play can be employed as an effective instrument for social and political critique.

## **DISCUSSION**

As is well known, the French Revolution had a profound impact on the monarchical order, giving rise to a new world vision in which the principles of democratisation and equality were to become dominant. During the revolutionary period, characterised by a dynamic social and political atmosphere, the concepts of enlightenment and liberty were placed at the forefront of intellectual discourse. The transformation in the interpretation of art during the Renaissance was influenced by a number of factors, including an anthropocentric perspective on the world, scientific discoveries and the prioritisation of the creative abilities

of the artist. As Ali Artun states, the process of questioning the nature of art led to the emergence of art as an autonomous entity, capable of defining its own existence and boundaries. Accordingly, the autonomy of art is based on the idea that art has its own meaning, purpose and value. Among the form-content debates, the form of art has also become its content. Along with its intellectual autonomy, art redefined its place in the social division of labor, and accordingly, it was freed from aristocratic relations and distanced itself from the classical craft tradition. The influence of the palace and the church on art declined over time, allowing art to become less constrained by external factors such as politics, religion and the economy (Artun, 2019, p. 13).

The developments that occurred in the wake of the French Revolution had a profound impact on the modern understanding of aesthetics. The period of Modernism can be considered to have been one in which both a formal aesthetic understanding became evident and a rising opposition against this formal aesthetic tendency. Prior to an examination of these circumstances, it is crucial to bear in mind a significant point. It is important to note that the historical process cannot be considered in a linear manner, with one phase ending and another beginning immediately. It is crucial to recognise that different geographical and cultural contexts experience different changes. Modernism can also be characterised as a conflicted process with numerous radical changes. In a broad sense, modernism is a movement that had a profound impact on various cultural fields throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries, including art, literature, architecture, music and others. Its origins can be traced back to the period of Enlightenment thought and reforms. The political, social and economic developments of the period had a significant impact on both art and philosophy.

### **From Autonomy of Art to Aestheticism**

In the 19th century, formal innovation and creativity in art, which began to become autonomous with the influence of Kant's and Schiller's views, purified aesthetics and elevated it to a central focus. In his article, Ali Artun asserts that art was without boundaries during this period and that two prominent philosophers were instrumental in expanding the boundaries of art. One of these philosophers is Baudelaire, and the other is Nietzsche. Artun asserts that these two philosophers not only differentiate art and reason, as Kant and the

Romantic philosophers did, but also reject reason as a whole. In fact, Nietzsche's assertion that "God is dead" signifies the demise of Western metaphysics and philosophy, which he claims originated with Plato and Christian morality. The only remaining direction for salvation is art (Artun, 2018). Nietzsche claims that the guiding principle of metaphysics since Plato, the "will to truth" should now be replaced by the "will to life", which he defines as "giving form". In other words, it is art and aesthetics. He regards art and philosophy as a unified field and considers himself an artist-philosopher. According to him, in this era of nihilism, the vision of life and the future is the domain of the "great politics", which is to be created by artist-philosophers, rather than that of modern politics, which turns people into "perfect herd animals" (as cited in Artun, 2018). This is a phase in which art gains independence and power over contemporary politics and administration, establishing its authority. In fact, this power is so strong that art is considered to be on par with philosophy and politics. At the same time, the modern period appears as a period in which the context of art, life and politics is discussed from various perspectives. Political and economic transformations have also sparked debates on the social function of art.

As Peter Bürger notes, art has acquired a unique position within the context of the development of bourgeois society. In particular, the autonomy of art, as defined by its special status, points to the function of art as a subsystem. During this period, the separation of economic and political systems from the cultural system was formalised. Art also declared its independence by moving away from the idea that it should serve a social purpose. Art gradually broke away from real-life content and became a field of experience in its own right, and aesthetics crystallised (Bürger, 2019, pp. 61-63). However, the process of crystallisation of aesthetics did not occur in a linear development. Because the autonomous status of art in bourgeois society is not absolute, but the result of the conditions of social development in general. The ruling class thought of putting art back into service for the interests of society when necessary and used art in this way. Bürger cites fascist art propaganda and cases against artists for producing immoral artistic works as examples that violated the autonomy of art (ibid., p. 64).

According to Bürger, it is necessary to distinguish between the attacks of social authorities against the autonomy of art and the force that arises from the content of individual works.

This force emerges in the unity of form-content and, aims to remove the distance between the work of art and life (ibid., p. 64). In bourgeois society, where there is no obligation to serve a social purpose, art is driven by the interplay between the institutional framework of art and the political content of individual works. However, this tension is not a stable one and has been eliminated as a result of the historical dynamic. Nevertheless, Bürger emphasises that the tension between individual works of art and the autonomous art institution provides the opportunity for art to engage in self-criticism. On the other hand, Bürger does not think that the institutional autonomy of art and the self-criticism of art took place in the same period. He maintains that while the institution of autonomous art has fully developed, individual works of a political nature still exist within it, thereby contravening the principle of art autonomy. According to Bürger, the self-criticism of art as a social subsystem was only possible at the end of the 19th century, not during the process of its autonomy. Consequently, the self-criticism of art was achieved to the extent that works of art were distanced from their political content and art did not express anything other than itself. That is aestheticism. Following the ascendance of the bourgeoisie, the tension between the institutional form of art and the content of singular art works began to recede in the second half of the 19th century. Accordingly, the distance of art from the practice of life not only remained in the institutional status of art, but also became the content of artworks. Art became problematic in its own terms when it separated itself from everything that was not art, and only then was its self-criticism possible. Thus, art has become ineffective and dysfunctional in bourgeois society, institutionally and with the overlap of the works in terms of content. Bürger states that criticism against this status of art was only realised by historical avant-garde movements (ibid., pp. 65-67).

Bürger did not interpret the emergence of *l'art pour l'art* theory as a reaction to a new means of reproduction. According to him, *l'art pour l'art* is a response to the tendency for works of art to lose their social function in bourgeois society. From this point onward, art completed its development as a discrete subsystem, reaching an aestheticism. Bürger elucidates this phenomenon in terms of the general social tendency in bourgeois society to increase the division of labour brought about by functional specialisation. With this development, the artist has also become an expert. While Bürger considers the existence of art as a separate entity, which reaches its peak in aestheticism, to be a positive aspect of

this process, he considers the loss of the social function of the artist to be a negative aspect of the process (ibid., 74-76).

While the traditional conception of beauty and aesthetics has historically been dominated by rationality, harmony, order and mathematics, the traditional conception of beauty underwent a transformation with the emergence of autonomy of art, which commenced with Romanticism. The autonomy of art at the end of the 19th century resulted in a complete distancing from the practice of life, and art became a reference only to itself. Bürger examined this period with the aim of elucidating the social conditions of autonomy. He established a connection between the process of institutional autonomy of art, aestheticism and the development of bourgeois society. The functional specialisation and division of labour in bourgeois society led to a transformation of the tendency towards the autonomy of art, not only in terms of the form of the artworks, but also in terms of their content. After analysing the historical conditions in the process of the autonomy of art, Bürger asserted that this process enabled self-criticism in art. However, self-criticism in art was not possible during the period of its autonomy with Romanticism. It was only at the point of complete distancing from the practice of life and the purification of aesthetics that criticism became possible. According to him, “in bourgeois society, it is only with aestheticism that the full unfolding of the phenomenon of art became a fact, and it is to aestheticism that the historical avant-garde movement respond” (Bürger, 1987, p.17).

As can be observed, the debate on the autonomy of art in aestheticism has reached a point of saturation. According to Bürger, the most radical reaction and subversion against the existence of art under the influence of social and economic changes was given by historical avant-garde movements. Having established the social and economic context in which the avant-garde emerged, we will now examine the Dadaism and Surrealism movements in the context of the interaction of art, life and play.

### **The Revolt of the Historical Avant-Garde**

Avant-garde is a term borrowed from the military theory of the Renaissance and used in art and politics. As it is a military expression, it represents the three parts of an army. These are *battaglia*, *retroguard* and *avant-garde*. After Saint Simon, who was the first person to

use this term in the field of art, it entered the use of revolutionary political movements, especially communist movements. In the field of art, 1920-1930 is commonly used for the historical avant-garde period. In addition, many art movements in the second half of the 20th century are defined as neo-avant-garde (Kreft, 2007, p. 37).

In the early 20th century, avant-garde art movements emerged as a part of social processes. In the period following the First World War, a number of changes were observed in the economic balances in the world. These included the emergence of new nation-state structures, the formation of new markets, the establishment of new political regimes and the emergence of social opposition. The emergence of colonial movements in the aftermath of the First World War, the intensification of class disparities, the monopolisation of art by the bourgeoisie and its commodification as a financial instrument led to a critical response from artists of the period (Alver, 2020, p. 13). In accordance with Bürger's theory, the avant-garde represents a rebellion against the institutionalisation of art. This rebellion is, in turn, a struggle for the re-inclusion of art in life. The avant-garde's objective is to obliterate art itself, along with its institutions. This is because the autonomy of art, which has led to aestheticism, has fetishized art and condemned artworks to be objects of pleasure. The goal of the avant-garde is to transform the very fabric of life itself by intervening in the real world. It achieves this by challenging the institution of art in which it is embedded and by engaging with art in a critical manner. This is because the very institution of art itself serves to separate art from life and to commodify the work of art. The avant-garde is not concerned putting art next to politics or politics next to art; it is an attempt to consider art itself as a political act and to radically combine the two domains (Artun, 2019, p. 21). In the avant-garde "*art-politics*" model becomes "*art politics*", and it becomes a field that represents the future *here and now*, and does so in the context of politics, not art (Kreft, 2007, p. 38). As can be understood from this, the historical avant-garde draws a quite different character from the traditional conception of art and politics.

The historical avant-garde criticized modernism and modern aesthetics for being disconnected from life and, in a sense, declared the end of art with radical manifestos. The avant-garde identified itself with anti-art and anti-aesthetics (ibid., p. 38). The Dada Movement, in particular, initiated an anti-art attitude and demonstrated the potential for an

art-life context by inverting the ontological meaning of art. After Dada, the effects of the historical avant-garde were evident at every point where aesthetics and politics intersected.

From this point forward, the objective is to illustrate the role of political form of play in the praxis of art and life. This will be done by examining the contributions of Dadaism and Surrealism.

### **Dadaism And Direct Action**

In the post-First World War political climate, artists joined together to engage with political discourses and ideas, forming various collective art movements. The first reaction against the commodification of the art object and its transformation into objects of pleasure-oriented consumption originated with the Dada Movement, which was founded by a group of poets and artists. Dada's political criticism against war and market conditions was also directed against the content and form of the modern art regime. The objection of the Dadaists is a reaction rising from the field of art and literature against the dematerialization of human beings and human products (Alver, 2020, p. 13). Therefore, it is evident that this issue is a matter of political and activist concern, against the existing reality. Ali Artun also emphasized the activist existence of Dada. According to Artun, Dada's conception and use of art as action distinguishes it from other avant-garde movements. Dada established all art practices such as poems, songs, manifestos, publications, performances and photomontages as actions. At the founding demonstration of Dada at the Caberet Voltaire<sup>2</sup> in Zurich, Hugo Ball said that Dada was only a word in action (Artun, 2018).

Dadaism questioned modern art and rejected it and reconstructed art as a form of action. According to Aysel Alver, Dadaism brought a radical innovation to art in terms of form, material, content and language by opposing the rationality of reason. This radical rupture, beyond a critical language from the 1940s onwards, has turned into a natural rhetoric specific to the Postmodern conception of art. Rhetoric, which is part of the use of metaphor

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<sup>2</sup>As Ahu Antmen (2008, p. 121) notes, Caberet Voltaire is a place between the categories of art club and nightclub. It was inaugurated in 1916 by the German poet Hugo Ball in a remote neighbourhood of Zurich. This venue served as the epicentre of the Dada movement, which create solidarity among those who opposed the First World War. Caberet Voltaire, a venue where alternative concerts, performances, exhibitions, poetry readings and various kind of artistic entertainments were held, became popular within a month of its opening and began to reach capacity.

in the field of art, has also played an important role in the construction of the conceptual context by attributing a surreal value to art. The art object is inextricably linked to language and its usage. In Dadaism, this language, which possesses a distinct character from that of ordinary and rational language, is based intersemiotic mediations and relations of identity (Alver, 2020, p. 14). By emphasizing that art had lost its meaning, the Dadaists used a critical and ironic language by presenting an anti-art discourse through poetry readings, exhibitions and performative activities (ibid, p. 15). At the same time, they used various techniques and methods of randomness and improvisation to criticize the social and culturally accepted order and values. For the Dadaists, art is a space of freedom. Dada's space of freedom is not determined by rules. The primary objective of Dadaism is to demonstrate its difference from other art movements and to develop a radical artistic attitude. In 1918, Tristan Tzara wrote the Dada Manifesto, which exemplifies the use of unconventional grammar, syntax, and vocabulary in his writings. This is the new artistic forms and expressions that challenge the conventional rules of language and communication. These features are characteristic of Dada's pursuit of freedom and innovation in art (Antmen, 2008, p. 123).

In addition to Dada's orientation towards direct action, its existence as a space of freedom, and its use of rule-breaking, subversive discourses and techniques, another key element to consider is the importance of collectivism. Collectivism is one of the key factors that sets Dada apart from other movements. Despite the fact that the artistic forms and methods employed by the Dada Movement were already being used by other art movements, how Dada approached these forms and methods in a political context set it apart from other movements. According to Antmen, for example, it is possible to identify the collage technique used by Dada with Cubism, improvisational performances with Futurism, and interest in direct expression with Expressionism. However, none of these movements had Dada's radical anti-art attitude and desire to destroy the boundaries between art and life. Dada expresses a collective consciousness (ibid., p. 124). In the Dada Movement, there is no individual style that asserts the "I"; rather, there is a collective spirit and mode of being that asserts the "We".

Dada's attempt to incorporate art into life, and the most well-known examples of pushing the boundaries between life and art in this conception, is its adoption of the use of readymade objects alongside other techniques and forms of expression. As is well known, Marcel Duchamp's use of readymade objects was one of the most radical examples of art of the period. Duchamp's 1917 work "*Fountain*" is one of the most controversial works of the 20th century and even of this era. According to Antmen, Duchamp did not integrate a part of life into the artwork but presented an ordinary everyday object directly as artwork. In this way, the ordinary object was transformed from a representational framework into a rebellion and action against the production, exhibition and evaluation criteria of art. This also pointed to an act of thinking beyond the visual pleasure of the traditional conception of art (ibid., p. 125).

It can be observed that Dadaism has a politically engaged artistic stance and demonstrated the viability of this approach through the diverse discourses and techniques it employed. Undoubtedly, there is much more to be said about the Dada Movement. One of them is the fact that, over time, although the aesthetic form of Dadaism remained consistent, it gradually took on a nihilistic character. This nihilistic attitude is the suicides of Arthur Cravan, Jacques Vaché, Julien Torma and Jacques Rigaut, which were carried out as acts of art.<sup>3</sup> However, due to the limits of this paper, it is not preferred to address all of Dada's anti-art orientations and to evaluate their specific works. In this study about play, it is preferred to emphasize the aspects of Dadaism that overlap with the characteristics of play.

When the Dada Movement is considered in conjunction with the concept of play, certain elements that are analogous to the concept of play become apparent. These can be enumerated as freedom, collectivism, a rule-breaking tendency, particularly in the utilisation of language, which results in the meaning being deconstructed, and an ironic style. In addition, Alver notes that the utilization of the ready-made object is particularly related to play in terms of the relation between the signifier and the signified, that is, rhetorically. The disruption of reality with the image produced by moving the ordinary object to the field of art and the change of context can be considered as the moment when

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<sup>3</sup> For a more detailed article on this subject see "İntihar Sanatçıları ve Dada". Retrieved from: <https://www.e-skop.com/skopbulten/dadanin-100-yili-intihar-sanatcilari-ve-dada/3393>.

play begins in art practice. This also results in the emergence of a novel mode of engagement between the viewer and the artwork. Such artworks, which encourage active intellectual participation on the part of the viewer, facilitate the discovery of the extraordinary, imagination and curiosity, just like in a play. The viewer attempts to interpret an object that is part of everyday life in a different context within the field of art. In this regard, the artist and the audience concur to engage with the object in question in accordance with the role ascribed to it, analogous to the manner of interaction observed in play (Alver, 2020, p. 16).

It can be observed that Dadaism adhered to an anti-art stance. It employed playful elements in art production through the utilisation of randomness, irony, improvisation and rhetoric. In the context of social and political issues, Dadaism established a foundational precedent for the political function of play in the domain of art by integrating both deconstructive techniques and direct action and collectivism into the process of artistic production.

### **The Intersection of Imagination and Political Criticism: Surrealism**

Surrealism originated in Europe during the 1920s, and its works were largely influenced by the ideas espoused by Dada and the anti-art stance. The term ‘surrealism’ was first used by the French poet Guillaume Apollinaire. The Surrealism movement emerged in 1922 with André Breton's proposal for an international congress with the objective of addressing all modern art movements up to that time (Antmen, 2008, p. 133). Breton wrote three manifestos of surrealism, but the third of these was not published. The first manifesto quoted above was published in 1924, the year “La Révolution Surréaliste” was published and the “Bureau de Recherches Surréalistes” (Bureau of Surrealist Research) was established. This manifesto represented a declaration of the Surrealist movement (Artun, 2013, p. 178).

The Surrealists adopted a similar approach to that of Dada in terms of both artistic and political approach. Both movements challenged formal traditional forms of art, social norms and the prevailing bourgeois values of the period. In their pursuit of a new modern interpretation of art, the Surrealists turned to the subconscious and dreams, seeking to transcend reason. As they employed psychoanalysis to challenge the prevailing social

order, they embraced leftist ideologies and identified with Marxism. The Surrealists, who were members of the French Communist Party, sought to extend social opposition beyond the artistic realm to the domain of action, in a manner similar to the Dadaists. The artworks of the Surrealists, who sought social revolution in an art that could enter dreams, fantasies and the unconscious, were based on Breton's proposed form of expression, "*psychic automatism*". Psychic automatism is a form of artistic expression that draws inspiration from the free association method used in psychoanalytic treatment (Antmen, 2008, p. 135). As can be understood from the emphasis on psychic automatism, Surrealists, in a manner similar to Dadaists, attributed a significant role to improvisation in the realm of artistic production. In addition, they employed techniques based on randomness, including the utilisation of found objects, collage and automatic drawing (ibid., p. 136). In this context, in order to provide a clear definition of the Surrealist movement, it would be beneficial to refer to André Breton's definition presented in the First Surrealist Manifesto:

SURREALISM, n. Psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express - verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner - the actual functioning of thought. Dictated by thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern.

ENCYCLOPEDIA. Philosophy. Surrealism is based on the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of previously neglected associations, in the omnipotence of dream, in the disinterested play of thought. It tends to ruin once and for all other psychic mechanisms and to substitute itself for them in solving all the principal problems of life. [...] (Breton, 2003, p. 452).

As has been observed in the context of Dadaism, when Surrealism is considered in the context of play, the emphasis on imagination, randomness and improvisation stand out as common elements. In addition, just as in Dadaism, the relation between the signifier and the signified points to a different conceptual context. The most notable examples of this can be observed in the artworks of René Magritte. In his productions, Magritte employed a combination of writing and visual imagery to reinforce meaning, examine the relationship between reality and illusion, object and its image, and evaluate similar images in different compositions (Antmen, 2008, p. 138). To illustrate, in Magritte's renowned "*La Trahison*

*des Images*” series, in which he employed a combination of visual signs and textual language, a playful language and a critical attitude emerged with the phrase “*Ceci n'est pas une pipe*” inscribed on a realistic pipe image, thereby creating a tension between the sign itself and its representation (Alver, 2020, 19). Another artwork from Magritte's “*La clef des songes*” is another significant example in this context. In this artwork, Magritte presents a visual representation of four distinct objects accompanied by accompanying textual descriptions. However, the texts employed are incorrect, with the exception of one of the visual images. *The door* is labelled under the image of the horse, *the wind* is under the clock, *the bird* is under the jug, and *the valise* is under the suitcase. In this approach, Magritte has adopted a playful attitude with his oeuvre, which plays with surprise and perception. This sense of art demonstrates that images and their representations can be employed in any manner deemed appropriate within the context of art (ibid., p. 21). Furthermore, in Magritte's artistic productions, which challenge the distinction between the intrinsic nature of objects and their symbolic representation, a sense of mystery is played out. However, this mystery does not stem from the symbolic narrative employed, but from the existential mystery inherent in the image itself. According to Magritte, those who seek to identify symbolic meanings may overlook the poetic and enigmatic qualities inherent in the image itself. It is likely that they can sense a mystery, but they want to eliminate that intuition as soon as possible. Their fear of the unknown drives them to avoid the situation. However, those who perceive the mystery and do not avoid it respond to the painting in a different manner. They pose different questions (as cited in Antmen, 2008, p. 141).

The “exquisite corpse” technique, developed by the Surrealists as a collective method of artistic production, can be considered another context for the play of creativity. In fact, the “exquisite corpse” technique is already considered an experimental form of play. In this method, artists who come together aim to randomly create a joint artwork. According to this technique, a sheet of paper is first folded and divided, and each participant in turn draws a secret drawing without seeing the others. The combination of independent drawings results in an unusual and surprising collective production. This technique allows artists to spontaneously express their creativity. It is the surrealists’ irrational and rule-breaking play in which they challenged traditional artistic norms.

The impact of social and political changes in the modern period on the field of art has been examined in general, with the play included in the transformation process that art has altered. It has been observed that modernism encompasses both an artistic revolution and a critical attitude towards this conception of art. This critical approach was discussed in relation to the avant-garde movements of Dadaism and Surrealism. This is because the formalist art of the period lacks the characteristics inherent to the existence of play. Dadaism and Surrealism are the two main movements that can be directly considered in the context of play and politics among the avant-garde movements. In addition, although the historical avant-garde movements represented by these two movements rebelled against the economic, political and social order of the period with an anti-capitalist critique, there was no revolutionary breakthrough in the end. Consequently, this situation of the avant-garde led to discourses of failure and criticism. However, at this point, as Gavin Grindon points out in his article entitled “Surrealism, Dada and the Refusal of Work: Autonomy, Activism and Social Participation in Radical-Avant-garde”, the historical avant-garde is not approached through this discourse of failure; rather, it is approached through a more positive and *joyful* route, as the author himself puts it (2011, pp. 79-96). This approach emphasises the playful aspect of the play, even if this is not always the case.

### **Anti-Capitalist Organization of Life**

From this point forward, unless otherwise stated, the article by Gavin Grindon is utilized. In the article, entitled “Surrealism, Dada and the Refusal of Work: Autonomy, Activism and Social Participation in Radical-Avant-garde”, Grindon proposes a rethinking of the radicalism of the Dadaists and Surrealists from the perspective of autonomist Marxist theorists such as Antonio Negri and Mario Tronti. This rethinking emphasises the *success* and *possibilities* of the avant-garde movements against narratives of failure. This article analyses the theme of refusal of work in the context of Surrealism and Dadaism. It begins by examining how the avant-garde utilised the autonomy of art and established a relationship with cultural practices beyond this. It demonstrates that these two movements gained an activist character by joining radical leftist movements and formed a form of anti-capitalist resistance through the refusal of work.

According to Grindon, the concept of autonomy in art played an important role in the Dadaism and Surrealism movements. The autonomy of art attributed a supreme value to the artist and the artwork itself, positioning the artist as a sovereign figure. However, with the advent of changing class relations, the artist's sovereignty encountered a crisis. With the transition to bourgeois society, a distinction emerged between the social autonomy of art and the autonomy of art as a value. Grindon writes of this situation as follows:

But, in Modernity, the class relations which support this sovereignty altered and threw it into crisis, in the separation which emerges between art's social autonomy (artistic production's functional, institutional separation from its earlier economic basis, in the move from aristocratic patronage to a market system - that is, a move into more openly performing a social role) and the ideological value, or cultural capital, which remained around this work and its products: its autonomy as a *value* (2011, p. 82).

The distinction of value that Grindon emphasizes here is quite important. According to Grindon, Peter Bürger emphasized that the autonomy of art is an ideological value and a function of the commodity form. However, despite the basis of this view, artistic autonomy creates a value beyond exchange value, that is, beyond the commodity form, through its connection to social forms and relations. Grindon positively evaluates this value in the form of autonomous labor embodied. Accordingly, autonomy as a value has enabled the rejection of traditional roles such as the artist-worker identity and the creation of new subject positions through social subjectivity. At this point, Grindon discusses the clarification of aesthetics as a separate field of knowledge and the conception that artistic production is separate from other social productions around concepts such as work-play. In Grindon's view, the advent of a sovereign aesthetics in Romanticism, as exemplified by Kant and Schiller, can be understood as a consequence of the attribution of an ambiguous and reverse ideological value to labour. This value reconciles the rational and sensory aspects of human beings, thereby paving the way for the emergence of a sovereign aesthetics:

[T]his ambiguous tension between aesthetic play and capitalist work meant that it was possible for the notion of art as play to be reactively articulated against work.

The sovereignty of art, expressed in autonomy-as-a-value's ideal of free play, could be imagined as allied with attacks on other forms of sovereignty, such as that of capital or the state (ibid., p. 83).

It can be understood that Grindon, in contrast to Bürger, attributes a positive value to the autonomy of art. According to Bürger's theory, art defines itself in terms of exchange value and thus autonomy in art serves to validate and consolidate capitalist society. However, Grindon argues that autonomy as a value can also be interpreted as a language and a means to open up new imaginaries. In this way, it demonstrates the potential to challenge the status quo of art institutions and the commodity form.

From the late 19th century to the early 20th century, it has been mentioned that the meaning of the concept of play changed. Grindon also underlines this transformation in his article. Grindon underlined the emergence of a distinction between work and leisure time in urban mass culture. This distinction has given rise to the emergence of new spaces, practices, and objects of non-working leisure. As a result of urbanization and industrialization, play concept has been pushed out of the sphere of high culture. According to Grindon, in these historical developments, avant-garde movements evaluated play within new conditions. In this context, the aspiration of Dadaism and Surrealism to unite art and life became evident as a desire to offer an alternative to the capitalist working order and the lifestyle it brought. Against the capitalist way of working, which constrains individual liberty and creativity, the Surrealists and Dadaists sought to establish new forms of existence through social participation, collectivism and activism. In this direction, they both subverted artistic norms and revealed the contradictions of the capitalist order by playing with the adjustments of the traditional approach of work and production. The Dadaists and Surrealists rejected conventional work practices, establishing a (play)land where emancipation and creativity could flourish independently of bourgeois values and capitalist production.

One of the areas that should be underlined in Grindon's article is the social participation of the Dadaists and Surrealists through activism. Grindon emphasizes the contribution of both movements to the action repertoire of social movements through their artistic practices and the cultural relations they produced. Accordingly, both movements used their art as a tool

for social and political critique and, more importantly, for a social utopia. In this context, while the Surrealists were more indirectly involved in social movements by addressing social change and individual freedom with emphasis on dreams and the unconscious, the Dadaists were more directly involved in social movements and used protest as a performative model. Grindon explained the “artistic social performance play” of the Berlin Dadaists as follows:

[...] not only did the Berlin Dadaists draw more specifically on the art forms of social movements, of public parades with music, costumes, banners, stickers, and posters; but the functional framework of these forms became that shared by social movements [...] For the Berlin Dadaists, it was not only a case of misperforming the role of artist-worker, but also a case of artist-citizen in a context where the public sphere was deeply threatened and contested. The Berlin Dadaist reiterated the art of activism as one of the fine arts. By increasing the play-element of their production, which Ford had excluded from factory work, they conducted an avand-garde experiment with, and re-imagination of, the art forms of social movements (ibid., pp. 90-91).

In the social movements of the 1960s in Europe and America, a number of instances of neo-dada practice emerged, combining the avant-garde direct action of the Berlin Dadaists and the Surrealists' rhetoric of refusal to work. Grindon mentions Provo, Diggers, Kommune 1, Black Mask, Chicago Surrealists among these neo-dada groups. In the contemporary era, a number of collective groups may be identified as contemporary representatives of the aesthetic political action adopted by the neo-dadaists. These include, for example, the Yes Men, The Church of Stop Shopping, Reverend Billy and the Centre for Tactical Magic. These collective groups, particularly those that emerged in the anti-capitalist struggles that commenced in the 1990s, are groups that incorporate festivity and play into their actions.

## **CONCLUSION**

This paper concentrated on the radical transformative effect of the concept of play. The concept of art has been investigated in a variety of artistic forms and productions, demonstrating that art and aesthetics themselves are not free from political considerations.

This approach has revealed the political aspects of the concept of play in the praxis of art and life. In terms of its essence and function, play can be considered both existentially philosophical and instrumentally political. As a category of concept and action pervading all aspects of human experience, play can be seen to exist at the centre of the human condition. At the same time, its use in a way that challenges traditional forms of art and expression can be understood as a form of subversion, both in terms of artistic theory and practice.

The playful elements present in Dadaist and Surrealist art manifest in various forms. Of greater significance is the fact that play is a fundamental aspect of Dadaist and Surrealist art, representing a desire to reproduce life. Apart from performances that are both provocative and shocking, these two movements employ a festive style of play that is associated with freedom and based on imagination. In fact, this style was adopted by various movements throughout the 20th century.

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