

Visions of Violence



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Nazi Germany's book burnings, its campaign against "degenerate art," and its persecution of experimental artists pushed the avant garde to the brink of extinction. How the avant-garde came back, finding a new purpose in the wake of the war, is the subject of "Visions of Violence." An extreme faction of aesthetic modernity intent on bulldozing contemporary life, the avant-garde has regularly employed visions of violence in their push for societal and cultural renewal. But in the shadow of unparalleled war and genocide, such aesthetic violence lost its force. This book explores the reconfiguration of the avant-garde in response to the violent transformation of European reality. Citing the emergence of independent avant-garde practitioners in the place of the previous collective, Richard Langston considers six individual exemplars of Germany's post-fascist avant-garde--works that span the last six decades: painter, writer, and filmmaker Peter Weiss's appropriation of French surrealism in the fifties; writer Dieter Wellershoff's coterie of "new realists"; artist Wolf Vostell's mediation and conflation of the experiences of the Auschwitz trials and the

Vietnam War; poet and novelist Dieter Brinkmann's collages from the seventies; the multimedia displacements of Alexander Kluge; and the performative engagements of dramatists Christoph Schlingensiefel and René Pollesch. Taking stock of the evolution of Germany's post-fascist avant-gardes, Langston's book shows how the movement from Weiss to Pollesch exhibits the problems that both modernity and postmodernity pose for an aesthetic engagement of Germany's violent past."

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