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of Aesthetics

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POLITICS AND ART

Exploring the Intersection
of Aesthetics and
Political Economy

Edited by
Adrian Mróz

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Introduction

The volume at hand presents a critical engagement with art, aesthetics, and the socio-political fabric of contemporary society. The research contributions delve into the complexities of how art operates within industrial structures, examining the essence of art and its commodification, the political aesthetics of boredom as a critique of capitalist society, and the role of the artist and art production. The contributions in this volume collectively underscore a study of art's place and function in a contemporary, hyper-industrialized world.

Inspiration for this volume arose from Annie Le Brun's critique of what she calls *globalist realism* in *Ce qui n'a pas de prix* (2018), highlighting the pervasive influence of market-driven forces on aesthetics and emphasizing the resultant homogenization of artistic expression and a standardized feeling or aesthetic. Her call for a reevaluation of the amateur artist and an emphasis on aesthetic experience over commercialism is a plea for preserving the singularity and integrity of art in an alienating, increasingly entropic world. To paraphrase Le Brun, it's intriguing to observe the historical irony wherein the Soviet Union's socialist realist art, aimed at molding public sensibility, finds its contemporary counterpart under neoliberalism. Globalist realism thrives not on propagandistic representations but on integrating art into the neoliberal market's mechanisms, thereby replacing ideological tyranny with a seductive, systematic commercialism. Le Brun's framing allows us to witness artists transforming into entrepreneurs, embracing the capitalist framework, not just in the production but also in the strategic dissemination and control of their art. Figures like Damien Hirst and Anish Kapoor exemplify this shift, gaining notoriety not solely through artistic innovation but through their savvy navigation of the art market, thereby marking globalist realism as an art form that, while echoing the subversive spirit of 20th century modernism, primarily blurs the lines between artistic value and market valuation. Such a discourse finds resonance in the documentary film directed by Nathaniel Kahn, *The Price of Everything* (2018),

which interrogates the complex relationship between art's intrinsic value and its market price, further stressing the tensions between artistry, economics, psychology and philosophy of art.

In the opening, exploratory article titled "Remissions of Disturbances Aesthetics," Roman Bromboszcz outlines a descriptive theory of noise—with diverse types, relationships, and applications. He writes about artistic, axiological and arguably transcendental reasons for making noise and distinguishes between diverse types. A distinction is made between intentional noise made by performers as a result of artistic activity and the kind that is disruptive or results from a sort of breakdown of communications. The author focuses on three types of noise in aesthetics and art: epistemic noise (as the plurality of messages from fragmented communication), structural noise (underlying art's breakdown of established structures), and probabilistic noise (arising from choice and randomness). In the paper, artists, production and reception techniques and practices, and the language used to describe noise are considered, notably semiotic and cybernetic analyses of terms encapsulated by the notion of disturbance, including error, glitch, trash, damage, failure, loss, and so on. As an aesthetic value, liminal noise can be made deliberately or by accident, and the distinction can be challenging to the recipient of noisy artistic activities. To go beyond the discussion, I think it can be extended to the camouflage tactics of social media marketing designed to "blend in" with low-quality, home-made, practically zero-budget *amateur* content online as opposed to "standing out", as is the case with the aesthetic of professional, highly produced and edited media pertinent to the dominant advertising industry. Let's call it "amateur-washing," which aims to obscure source, origin or essence, placing bite-sized media within epistemic noise and the experiences and techniques artists cultivate with noise such as distraction, perceptual disturbance, sensory after-effects, or hallucinations. The article suggests an aesthetic transformation between various high and low entropy states in the context of cultural comprehension. For instance, through the process of symbolic acquisition, we learn to identify meaningful patterns amid apparent chaos, rendering our understanding contingent upon this ability to discern and assess. These evaluations position us within the discordant, often truth-indifferent narratives that pervade an increasingly disrupted, disinhibited and unbound *polis*. Viewed through this lens, the elements of political and marketing rhetoric, along with their accompanying cacophony, evolve into integral modules and short-circuits that contribute fundamentally to cultural programs.

Next, Eugene Clayton Jr in “On the Political Aesthetics of Boredom” argues that this feeling qua concept emerges as a philosophical issue precisely at the advent of capitalist modes of production. Historically, boredom has shifted from indicating the leisure and non-productivity of feudal elites and aristocrats to signaling the lifelessness and burdensomeness of existence under capitalism, highlighting the class nature of boredom and the decadent movement’s rejection of the aesthetic subjugation to capitalist imperatives. For Clayton, boredom is a symptom and product of capitalist society. It represents a “revolt of the subject against the total determination of his subjectivity by the objectivity of capitalism.” This revolt indicates the potential for an aesthetic redemption within capitalist society. The analysis covers several key points. Boredom is fundamentally linked to the demand that we be continuously entertained, positioning entertainment as boredom’s dialectical opposite. The conventional bourgeois separation of “entertaining” as play and “boring” as work masks a material truth under capitalism—that the concept of ‘playful work’ is an inherent contradiction. Boredom should be understood as one of the core contradictions within the capitalist system, pivotal for the socialization and theoretical comprehension of society. In capitalist society, “boring” signifies those social structures where relations have become completely predictable, calculated, and reified, in contrast to the aesthetic value of artworks following an immanent, conceptual logic that is necessary yet unpredictable. This unpredictability, mystery not commensurable with mystification, is crucial for the political significance of aesthetics in late capitalism. A potential dialectical response is the creation of “boring” aesthetic objects that challenge the culture industry’s insistence on entertainment, exposing and critiquing the bourgeois ideology that dismisses boredom as an irrational subjectivity devoid of broader societal implications.

In “Social Art: The Work of Art in Capitalism,” Michael Broz reveals the essence and commodification of art within the capitalist paradigm, guided by the philosophical insights of Martin Heidegger, Mikel Dufrenne, and Karl Marx. Broz sets out to unravel the intricate relationship between art and its economic functions, steering clear from a purely historical account to focus on the philosophical underpinnings of art’s essence. Broz argues—by drawing upon Heidegger’s distinction between the essence of art and the work of art, and Dufrenne’s phenomenological perspective on aesthetic experience—that art’s essence is rooted in its ability to convey truth through a process of unconcealing. This process, grounded in the artist’s craftsmanship and the spectator’s engagement, allows art to transcend mere utility and assume a form that is both purposeful and integral to its being. The in-

teraction with art, hence, becomes a labor of phenomenological significance, revealing the inherent *techne* and motivation behind artistic creation. The article further delves into the political economy of art, employing Marx's critique of capitalism to examine how art is assimilated into the commodity form, subject to the dynamics of labor, value, and surplus-value. Broz meticulously analyzes the transformation of art's unique creative energy into a commodified object within the market, emphasizing the nuanced distinction between art's labor-power and its manifestation as a stored value in the goods market. This commodification process not only impacts the production and perception of art but also reflects broader cultural and economic controls exerted by capitalism over artistic expression. By highlighting the interplay between phenomenological elements and Marxist economic theory, Broz elucidates the profound implications of capitalism on the development and valuation of art. In doing so, he offers a compelling narrative that bridges the gap between the philosophical essence of art and its socio-economic dimensions, prompting a reconsideration of art's role and significance in the contemporary capitalist society. The discussion culminates in a reflective outlook on the future of art, pondering over the evolving pressures and systems that continue to shape its trajectory.

The authors navigate the tensions between art's intrinsic value and its market valuation, shedding light on how the forces of capitalism, marketing, and political rhetoric shape the production, reception, and perception of artistic works. Through interdisciplinary lenses, ranging from philosophy and phenomenology to Marxist economic theory, these articles ask the reader to question the transformative potential of artistic practice in the face of the dominant sociopolitical structures. Ultimately, this collection invites us to engage in a deeply thought-provoking dialogue about the future of aesthetics and feeling, the capacity of emotion to subvert, confront, and reimagine the very systems that seek to constrain singularities and mystify art and artworks.

Adrian Mróz

Roman Bromboszcz*

Remissions of Disturbances Aesthetics

Abstract

In my text, I attempted to compile a list of artistic works, movements, concepts and interpretations in the field of bruitism, failure, error, glitch construction as well as deconstruction, especially in art. I presented an outline of a theory that describes mainly three types of noises. I aimed at presenting to what extent they are used and how they intertwine. Also, I indicated a wide field of manifestation of human activity, both social and technological at the same time. It is a city resembling an organism with its institutional derivations. I listed two such sectors, namely, advertising and politics. It is on their basis that one can experience with their whole body an increasing quarrel, disturbances and intersecting trajectories of advertising content.

Keywords

noise, glitch, failure, art, technology

In this paper I intend to continue with the investigations gathered in a book titled “The aesthetics of disturbances” written in Polish in 2010. It was a publication of doctoral thesis prepared under the title “O szumach. Wielość praktyk wykorzystujących szum w twórczości artystycznej a ich odbiór estetyczny” [“On noises. The numerosity of practices applying noise in artistic creativity and its aesthetical reception”] in 2007. This kind of subject is very close to my artistic path of research and is connected with the artistic environment which I am involved in, and which is a subject under my scrutiny.

My aim is to propagate ideas, theory and nomenclature presented in the book. Furthermore, I would like to develop proper semantics and to point out new fields where the notion of noise is applicable. Besides, it will be worth making a few steps further because of the revision of sources as well as finding other interesting dissertations.

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1. In search of the optimal category in aesthetics

While trying to obtain a proper answer to contemporary art as a series of certain questions, one could find it difficult to apply a specific kind of dictionary. Which key terms should be qualified as relevant? Which categories might be found more precise than others? There are proposals of notions from different perspectives, which involve and embrace intermingled fields of both spontaneous and analytic practices within contemporaneity.

Noise is an element of communication, which is permanently present as a correlation of information. Similarly, it could be described in terms of mathematics and acoustics, in relation to text, music and image analysis. There are many kinds of noises but in short I would like to name three of color: white, colorful and pink, and three of subject: epistemical, structural and probabilistic.

In the Polish language there is a strict division between a measure of quantity in knowledge, density of structure, probability and physical experience of hearing loud phenomena. There are two clearly opposed terms (“szum” and “hałas”) but in the English repertoire of categories it lacks such clarity and it needs navigating between clusters of family similarities. It includes, on the one hand, disturbances, errors, glitches and failures, and on the other, peaks of volume, throbs, shouts, bursts. The former series belongs to description of communication process. In opposition to it, the latter is derived from conscious hearing and maneuvers of performers. What I have in mind especially are musical acts such as free improvisation, contemporary dance choreography and expressive voice modulation in theatre spectacles taking place on a stage.

Noise in the second sense is a state of audial environment and causes uncomfortable emotions, feelings, and at the highest level, pain. Nonetheless, even with the enumerated qualities the noise could cure and play a role of weapon against immaterial forces (Lichota 2016, 82-88). There are many examples of musical activity where the two aspects of noise meet. The list of groups and composers is long and encompasses the *no wave* style with Swans, Sonic Youth, Buthole Surfers, *grind core* with Napalm Death and Brutal Truth, Japanese *noise* scene with Merzbow, Tetsuo Furudate. In Poland this kind of artistic activity was undertaken at the Alt+F4 festival in 1990s with Zbigniew Karkowski, Robert Piotrowicz, Jacek Staniszewski, Anna Zaradny and projects such as Viön&Mem. In a rather lighter and brighter form not causing obvious discomfort or extreme experience, the aesthetics is continued by Arszyn, Emitter, Zenial, Aleph.

Aside from all presented theory, one should consider other key terms: disturbance, error and glitch or even trash (Kane 2019). The first one is a phenomenon which appears between the sender and the receiver or source and destination in a framework of communication model. If it is a symbol or a sign route of exchange, then it needs to be named semiotic, otherwise, in relation to signal exchanges from a source to its destination, there is a cybernetic level of analysis. I have taken a notion of disturbance as an apt metaphor to classify the whole field of my investigation.

In another path of general semantic tree introduced as a multigraph of permanent, pervasive sense of noise there are: error, glitch, damage and failure. In all of them one is dealing with a sort of loss, which could be dialectically elevated to obtain a value of composition and appreciation comparable to a piece of art. The glitch style is a poetics of music composition where hits, punctuations and scratches as an output of cut and paste technique, soundwave manipulation or plundrophonics are found. Japan is famous for Ryoji Ikeda, while Pan Sonic are famous in Europe. As for glitch, it could be not only heard but also seen.

Some theoreticians and practitioners use quite different names to discern the same qualities. As an epitome let it serve *data bending* or *data moshing* and *circuit bending*, which perfectly exemplify redirection of knowledge to hardware and software manipulation. Similarly, glitch and data bending are in use in the description of sound, image and video pixelization, interlacing, cracking, stripping into pieces and remaking them. This kind of activity is mainly based on using raw data, chosen software and cut and paste of code in free choice strategies (Mitchell 1998, 166-167). It could bring effects but in the same way there is a high probability that one might face failure. Besides, there are plug-ins and add-ons, implemented features in commercial tools, which play the same role with the reliability that can be attributed to the above-mentioned tools. Furthermore, on the whole, the error tracking process could be described as an algorithm and run in such environments as Processing and Pure Data (Shifmann 2008).

There is a little difference between an unnoticed crack, mechanical or electronic damage caused by an accident or mistake and data moshing oriented practices. On the side of the spectators taking part in a performance results could be undecidably similar. On the side where we are dealing with an access to the source and preparation of the error and its arrangement, the situation seems obvious. There are two clearly distinct, separate behaviors, without common context situations.

There is one more noticeable conjunction between the two fields. On the one side, one deals with contemporary digital strategies, which are looking for glitches, cracks, errors, lacks of sharpness and effects of incongruence, on the other side video art, avant-garde film and experimental music based on tape manipulation techniques. On the other side, video artists especially equipped with digital tools fulfil parallel results, and Malcolm Le Grice could be a prior example of such comparison (Meigh-Andrews 2008, 317-318).

In film we face a phenomenon called *found-footage*. It is a certain treatment of finished, closed and appreciated artistic forms ready to be projected or found in the dustbin or in archive. In music, a term in frequent use is a collage, which is semantically broader. Found-footage refers to cut and paste logic with mixing different film sources in a vast horizon from official propaganda through documentary to narrative pieces. Bruce Conner with his "Report" and "Mea Culpa" is one of very famous artists, who stems from this kind of production.

In relation to this activity I prefer to use a category of "epistemic noise", which describes a situation where a spectator is confronted with the plurality of messages derived from fragments of communication acts. In confrontation with such immense, truncated structure a receiver of a film form is forced to synthesize audiovisual flow personally, individually and partially at once. In Internet based art works where a data basis played a crucial role there is a resemblance of such effort because of fragmented, portioned, unformed sequences of experience (Jelevska 2015).

To obtain a proper insight into the realm of music on the basis of the presence of noise we should introduce the notion of collage. The last category is suitable to many endeavors undertaken by the second avantgarde movement and is still in reservoir of critical tools. One of the pioneer of collage in music is John Cage with his "Rozart Mix". This piece is classified as a work which inherits the contemporary music in disguise because of its borderlike nature. At this point, it is worth referring to cubism, which violates the pure, painting form by sticking to canvas the elements of everyday life and dadaist photomontages comprise of cut newspapers. Between them one should place intermedia compositions with both collage logic and epistemic noise character of experience. For such reason, it is worth referring to "Merz" by Kurt Schwitters, combine paintings of Robert Rauschenberg, performances of Mercy Cunigam and syncretic actions of Andrzej Matuszewski.

We should state that in the recently mentioned works a double or triple play of opposite processes is inhibited. There in artistic creation, where multitude of possibilities appear simultaneously or consecutively, we are faced

with epistemic noise, but very often its emergence has a reverse side of structural noise. The second is present in destruction, annihilation, deconstruction and rewriting of borders and laws of exhibition and productivity. Sometimes alongside these opposite and complementative forces underlying art the third drive appears. It arises when in an artistic act there are aspects of choice programmable by artist or a user. This kind of noise, which is called probabilistic, is obvious and trivially induced by data basis, net art based on generative mechanisms or randomness. We can find it in aleatoric forms, in Oulipo (Bénabou 2006; Queneau 2005) algorithmic literature and in experimental music, for example in “The Book of Changes” by John Cage (Strzelec 2014, 209-210).

Another field where epistemic noise becomes an active and irresistible force of experience is *op art*. The extraordinary aspect of presence of such works lay in opposition, a struggle between appearance and interpretation. On the one hand, we perceive a form of shapes and color, which is done because of human sensual apparatus contravened into certain extends. On the other hand, on the basis of one’s knowledge of illusion, paradoxes of vision, afterimages, we do not trust the represented content. In confrontation with a piece of art representing *op-art*, the spectator starts to play on both sides between the brain molding sensitive data and the mind criticizing the depiction on the basis of what is known about illusion and human perception.

We may consider a set of effects definitive to this genre through an oeuvre of Julian Stańczak. What is often included in his paintings is a deep contrast of color and between foreground and background as in “Constant Return I” (1965). It brings a hallucinatory strength to build an illusion of detaching the content from a surface partially. Smooth lines are brilliant and space intervals are minute, which causes a vibrant structure which creates the third dimension by illusion. As in other works of art in “Brim Two” (1972), there are presented qualities which induce illusory movement of composed structure, their vibration and subtraction because of contrast. It is described as a geometrical ambiguity (Châtelet 1995). The artist engages a series of oppositions on the basis of color, shape and location. The color tones which are chosen are often fluorescent, pink, velvet, yellow or black and white.

There are many indexed and described, static and dynamic patterns which have the ability to deceive human perception but its jurisdiction is contrived into geographical and cultural borders. Optical illusions and paradoxes are not universal in all extent. It is worth noticing that some of them are parallel to the object of interest in the field of experimental, avantgarde

film. Especially in a movement of structural film with such figures as Paul Sharits and Józef Robakowski can we find the occupation of intensifying participant experience. This is concentrated on afterimages, treatment of camera, cadre and usage of still images. In the piece titled „Film”, by a Polish artist, we face an epistemic struggle induced by illusion of color and with scratch effects for both audio and video.

Let us put it in question whether literature has been delayed during decades of contemporaneity in practicing noise. It could be rewritten in categories of experimentation and novelty, discovering and both merging the borders of disciplines, genres with vast horizons of taste. What is in visual arts a strategy of broadening of form embodied in collages, intermedia and multimedia as literature has its impact on the level of montage equipped with possibilities of attaching and integrating allogenic content, symbols.

An eruption of reconfiguration in expectations addressed to literary forms has started with a few spontaneous eccentrics such as James Joyce, Samuel Beckett and Witkacy and reached its peak with Witold Gombrowicz, Alain Robe-Grilliet and Ronald Sukenick. All of them blur their characters, loose a chain of events intentionally gathered in a whole in a reader's imagination. It goes towards unillusionistic effects, questioning reality (Budrecki 1984). We need to add to these qualities metaartistic, selfreferential, deconstructive attitude of an instance, which we expect to be a teller of a story. To some extent such borderline annihilations of preoccupied, sedentary hierarchies of values, are a revelation of mingling and migrating. Graphics, score, sketch, script, drama, poetry, tale, play and scenario could touch here together, aspiring to absolute art (Goodman 1969, 177-201). Nonetheless, none above-mentioned produced literary artifacts have a privilege of being it since the reader's imagination creates that object.

2. For what reason do people make noise?

We took a short but a concise journey within the contemporary art with an aim to gather different kinds, genres, artists and pieces being a proper representation of a set which consists of noise probes and samples. I put stress on this term because it has the broadest family of meanings and uses. It is also a base because of its logical necessity in a theory of communication. My role in reframing the theory on the aesthetic, axiological and cultural ground is to replace its position from margin, edge, insect and parasite position to the screen of perception, to the sore eye of the stage where one's sensorium is working together. My division taken into the notion brings a possibility

to gather such a vast scenario of contemporary art evolution that it is not a false assumption to say that noise is a general subject, concealed but revealed, unconscious but reminded.

Interesting questions have been raised during my elaborations of facts, artifacts and correlated values upon them. For what reason do people make noise? Why do they use it as a tool of axiological and symbolical exchange? How could one understand the act where power and strength, even violence, destroys the integrity of a work of art, and brings one to a point where annihilation meets creation? Would anybody expect one or many ideologies from behind a surface where noise is a regent and reigns on its territory (Gracyk 1996, 209)?

For many reasons we should say that noise has a potential to emancipate, and using it moves one toward such a value as freedom. The proofs to that opinion are discernible through analyzing an existence of borderlines in arts and in society. First of all, there is a need to talk about a fact that initially noise is something which is outside the music. Some theorists prefer to establish a change in dodecaphonism of Vienna artists such as Schönberg, Webern and Berg (Attali 2002). Others would move a source of innovation and a beginning of revolutionary thoughts in music and art to futurism with Rusolo, Pratella and Marinetti (Kahn 2001).

With these avantgarde movements, the shape of outstanding conception on composition started to change instantaneously. To emancipate and to break free from constraints means here an absorption of non-European scales, instruments, techniques of playing and sets of musicians, as well as invention of graphical scores and incorporation of generative based sounds. At the peak of this process we have a possibility of creating musical pieces from all sounds which can happen and might be amplified, recorded and post-produced within technical apparatus. The equipment consists of generators, mixers, filters, synthesizers, stereos and other digital devices.

There are two basic interpretational axes which could be useful in understanding of the gathered problems and questions incorporated in this paper. The first is derived from a very long lasting opposition between life and death, creation and annihilation or devastation. For some reasons, people see in them extreme differences, but there are other arguments which should help one to become conscious that life and death, creation and annihilation are to some extent reversible. They are a verse and reverse in one movement of values appearing, propagating. We should say that there is no possibility to designing something without demolishing it or disobeying some other thing. Additionally, in a backward direction, destruction and

taking back the very existence of something is a ground for the distribution of values, their birth and dispersion. The famous figure, a deity from the Hindu pantheon, which correlates with this kind of reflection is Siva Nataradza (Hegel 2006, 367-368).

The second important interpretational axis is attached to a key term entangled with knowledge and wisdom. A basis for this aspect is a polarity between conquering sources of information and experiencing something which could barely be translated into bits, theory, concepts. A great work gathering prejudices and misconceptions about ecstasy, violence, scapegoat, experiences on the extreme conditions could be underlined with a sentence that language and calculus is not exchangeable with certain kind of situations (Bataille 2002). This problem arises probably within mysticism and many religious ecstatic movements across the world where more is reached through active, physical approach than through text or thought itself.

As far as noise generated by mankind is considered, the above mentioned bipolarity is accomplished mainly in what cannot be uttered, and it moves in the direction from order to disorder, from a preoccupied and clearly preconceived framework to a disrupted, chaotic, crippling state. What is striking in such process is the layer responsible for values retention. On the border of what can be uttered or expressed communicatively through speech, approaching entropy and beyond the human reasoning other aspects of human experience come to the forefront. We can talk about shivering, trembling, being intoxicated, high or subjugated into a role of a victim, slave. In intimate occurrences there are a few more states striving for sense, an unbearable need for ground, a lack of maturity, dissipative collection of nodes.

Especially in contemporaneity, where there is a propensity of new media and communication values in human environment, these translations, equations, transductions between forging and freezing, fruiting and polluting, composing and decomposition, fertile and barren states are active, strong and proliferated. Their useful power is untouched by common virtual machines which give the users and abusers at the same time some extraordinary tools to reverse all structural, culturally embossed binary codes. Experience appears as some kind of redemption or equilibristic tax on these conversions. It all happens on the base of economy of signs where some disbeliefs are transformed into frustration, which has its reverse of permanent ecstasy.

3. The attempt to reach beyond the field of art

My analysis goes further into some aspects, sectors of contemporary culture. Until this point of switch I introduced a framework of theory juxtapositioned with artistic practice and axiological interpretation. I have tried to broaden and surplus a collection which was made before (Bromboszcz 2010). Since the publication of this dissertation I have taken into consideration an actual interest in data bending, bugs, cracks and malware in programming environments. What must be underlined are two remarkable interpretational axes, which have been here written anew. What has not been discussed yet is the endeavor which reaches beyond the field of art and is partially or illusorily freed from aesthetic prejudices.

In my opinion, certain operations on noise, its manifestation, can be referred to the organism that is the city itself. It would be an outcome worth campaigning to siege over contemporaneity with pre-scripted algorithms of bending, glitching, found-footaging. It aspires to be truism that the city is a playground of noises where the role of advertising and broadcast is strikingly obvious. The public space planners, urban designers, cultural studies figures, politicians are formatted by the market conditions of media circulation to measure audiovisual pollution, meme propagations, the viral spread of advertising. The presence of billboards, city lights, cinemas, advertisements at bus stops, corporate logos and trademarks is different but similar in producing experimental noise source effects for residents and for each other.

We may look at the public space as an arena of political propaganda, clashes of different opinions especially within the borders of politics and advertising. The city is an excellent example of the multidirectional struggle between economic forces and the market of ideas against consumers. In this current tide we are able to engage into fight for law to city managing. The city as a dynamic organism is also a growing capital through reaching transactions of lands, taxes and citizens are capable to organizing liberation front (Harvey 2012). This movement can be likened to a revolution but at the moment we should be careful about a notion of class and effects of emancipation.

The city as an arena of noises derived from different sources took its shape because of political debate, which is in its own arena. In this case we should consider a field where groups of different beliefs collide. There is a question whether a process of differentiating the public opinion in public debate is lacking truth. We can find proponents of such kind of view

(Sepczyńska 2015). I may only pose a question without giving an answer. It is commonly known that the political negotiations of aims and values lead to dissent, a performative game in the place of trustworthy unity of beauty and good. While analyzing facts of political change, one faces a phenomenon of opposite interpretations and evaluations given by people from different parties. Some of them are hateful in nature and do not hint any dialogical tools.

At the end of this short excursion through different areas of city and its proper social realities, which I call atoms or sectors, we should focus our interest on advertising. It is an interesting and influential kind of symbolic exchange. In the context of noise propagating and its measure it is noticeable that every piece of advertising has its own rules of appearing, its own figures and gestures. They could be compared to possible worlds. Any billboards, city lights, posters might be interpreted as a door with the message sent to the recipient. It is an invitation without wait. This kind of simultaneity provokes trembling, and to avoid its overdose partially because a danger of viral consequences, we could limit it by ecology, both urban and of senses (Barry 2010, 187).

Culture is a scene of the struggle where different tastes, opinions, ideas meet together and fight for users. Some theoreticians suppose that a popular culture is a construct of needs, goods and values in circulation. This process is deeply entangled with the so-called relations of power. Human culture expresses its structure in daily acts of appearance, shopping, choosing from menu, etc. (Fiske 2010, 21). The sedimentation of these acts give a framework of custom behavior, which might not be satisfactory to everyone. In such kind of situation a noise making in opposition to currently accepted norms is a strategical tool in the way of liberation or even revolution. This could be useful and can be introduced at once on religious, market and military levels (Ackerman 1996, 11).

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Eugene Clayton Jr*

On the Political Aesthetics of Boredom

Abstract

This paper challenges traditional approaches to understanding boredom, typically conceptualized as either a physiological, existential, or ethical phenomenon, by insisting upon its historico-materiality. It critically examines as a false dialectic the ideology that positions entertainment as the abstract immediate and boredom as the negative concrete. I contend that boredom must not be conceived merely as a subjective, irrational experience but rather as an objective phenomenon produced by capitalist rationality. The paper concludes by adducing concrete examples from various art forms of a true dialectic of boredom.

Keywords

Aesthetics, Boredom, Historical Materialism, Marxism, Political Philosophy

The Origin and Dialectics of Boredom

First subsumed under philosophy by Kantian ethics, boredom becomes an object proper of philosophical inquiry with Schopenhauer and Nietzsche in the 19th century. This is to say, boredom becomes a philosophical problem at the historical moment of the capitalist mode of production. Contemporaneous with this philosophical conception is its conception in modern art as *l'ennui* in the work of that lyric poet in the era of high capitalism, Baudelaire (Benjamin 1997). If this is so, if boredom becomes a conceptualised object at this precise historical moment, this is because boredom is a product of capi-

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talist society, and the subjective consciousness in which it appears as a phenomenon is precisely that of the proletariat. It is for this reason that a historico-materialist analysis is required.

The first moment of the aesthetic judgment that 'This book, composition, film, etc. is boring' is the subject's demand that the aesthetic object affect him. The general principle of this demand, then, is that all aesthetic objects, the aesthetic object as such, must be subjectively affecting. However, such a principle must be grasped, not as it is proposed, as an abstract generality, but historico-materially, that is, in the historico-material conditions that produce such a demand. At this historical moment, in demanding that the aesthetic object not be boring, that it affect him as subject, the proletariat is asking that the object re-endow him with an aesthetic sense, a sense which he has necessarily lost in his objectification as labor capital. In demanding that the object not be boring, that the object affect him as subject, the proletariat asks that the object prove to him that he is still a subject as sensible being. The truth the proletariat's demand recognizes is that if the object can be intuited as an object, an intuition that already requires an aesthetic sensibility, then dialectically, the subject is thereby posited. In the object's acquiescence to the subject's demand that it be subjectively affecting, it would thereby be proved that the objective is in fact determinable by the subject. The thesis that the objective is determined by the subjective is one which, in the total determination of his subjectivity by the objectivity of capitalism, the proletariat recognizes as not at all necessarily true. As the revolt of the subject against the total determination of his subjectivity by the objectivity of capitalism, the proletariat's intolerance of boredom gains its truth, and thereby points toward the aesthetic redemption of capitalist society.

On the other hand, by reproducing capitalist ideology, the proletariat's demand that the aesthetic object not be boring is directly falsified. For the aesthetic judgment that 'This book, composition, film, etc. is boring' is reducible to the demand that the subject be entertained. As Adorno and Horkheimer have already demonstrated, entertainment is boredom's dialectical negation: 'Entertainment is the prolongation of work under late capitalism. It is sought by those who want to escape the mechanized labor process so that they can cope with it again' (Adorno & Horkheimer 2002, 109). If the proletariat demands entertainment, this is due to the unremitting boredom of 'the mechanized labor process.' Insofar as the mechanized labor process is not recognized by the proletarian consciousness as its historico-material determining ground, that is, insofar as this consciousness is not reflected into itself, its demand becomes false in its abstraction.

For the subject under capitalism, the historico-material determining ground of the concept of boredom is the labor process of the working day. If something is 'boring,' this is because it reminds him of work insofar as it demands a conscious effort of the subject. As such, the entertaining can only be that which does not demand any conscious effort of the subject. Thereby, in the labor process of the working day, boredom as a subjective phenomenon is first socially and objectively produced. The abstraction thus produced within the proletarian consciousness becomes entertainment as the abstract immediate and the boredom as the negative concrete.

If boredom has become a focal object of aesthetic philosophical enquiry, this is because capitalist ideology has reduced the totality of all possible aesthetic categories to the false dialectic of either the entertaining or the boring. It is this ideology Kantian ethics reproduces when it claims that, 'All occupation is either play or work' (Kant 2001, 154). The aesthetic conviction that work must necessarily, *ipso facto*, be boring, and because of this, the aesthetic object must necessarily, *ipso facto*, be entertaining is what gives birth to the culture industry. For this is the definition of the culture industry: a field in which all aesthetic objects, the aesthetic object as such, must submit *a priori* to the principle of being entertaining.

However, the abstract separation of the entertaining and the boring produced by bourgeois ideology is false. Firstly, it is false because it is abstracted from the historico-material conditions, meaning the capitalist mode of production, that produce it. Bourgeois philosophy is resistant to tracing the subjective phenomenon of boredom back to the labor process as its determining ground as this would entail a critique of capitalist society. It is likewise resistant to a historico-material analysis of entertainment. It will not consider entertainment as a moment in the total process of the reproduction of capital. The capitalist needs the proletariat entertained in his off-hours in order to extract still more surplus-value from him. Firstly, by being entertained during his off-hours, the proletariat will arrive recovered from the previous working day and will thereby be able to continue to produce surplus-value for the capitalist. Secondly, by being entertained during his off-hours, the proletariat will be distracted from any thought which would critique this same capitalist system. Entertainment is thus one of the most essential ideological means by which capitalism ensures its reproduction. Otherwise said, capital does not merely determine the hours in which the commodity is actively produced; capital's rationalized determination tends to totality. For capital is inherently limitless, as proven by Marx in the chapter 'The General

Formula for Capital' in volume one of *Capital* (1982, 247-258) and by Rosa Luxemburg in the chapter 'The Adaptation of Capital' in *Social Reform or Revolution* (2006, 11-20).

Secondly, the abstract separation of the entertaining and the boring produced by bourgeois ideology is false because it allows no mediation: 'All occupation is either play or work' (Kant 2001, 154). Entertainment falls to one side and boredom to the other. By means of this unmediatedness, each moment is preserved still more securely in its self-identity. The preservation of each moment in its abstract self-identity only means the preservation of the totality that requires such unmediatedness in order to reproduce itself: namely, capitalism. The undialectical conception of the entertaining and the boring is thus proved to be an instance of ideologically false consciousness.

Nevertheless, as a piece of bourgeois ideology, the abstract separation of the entertaining as play and the boring as work dissimulates a material truth. The material truth it attests to is the fact that, for the proletariat, capitalism has laid down for it, as a law, the impossibility as a *contradictio in terminis* of 'playful work'. This is why Adornian aesthetics raises the playful or the ludic to the level of a philosophical concept: 'the element of play, without which there is no more possibility of art than of theory'; 'Art has a latitude of play in which models of planning can be developed that would not be tolerated by the social relations of production' (Adorno 2002, 39, 305 et al.). The playful is the conceptual redemption of the merely and falsely 'entertaining.'

When Adorno insists on play as a concept, he is pushing the third critique further than Kant himself will go: "The spontaneity in the play of the faculties of cognition, the agreement of which contains the ground of this pleasure, makes that concept [purposiveness of nature] suitable for mediating the connection of the domain of the concept of nature with the concept of freedom in its consequences, in that the latter at the same time promotes the receptivity of the mind for the moral feeling' (Kant 2000, 82). Play as such however is not to be found in the subsequent table. Although Kant recognizes that it is only in the practice of play that any mediation of the faculties is at all possible, Kant himself will not raise play to the level of a concept. The conceptualization of play by Adorno is a critique of Kantian aesthetics.

For, if Kant's prioritizing of the faculties and principles excludes proposing the conceptual importance of play, this is, above all, due to his bourgeois standpoint. As we have seen, the systematic unity of the higher faculties requires the mediation of both the work of the faculties of cognition—and assuredly cognition is work—as well their play. However, when bour-

geois ethics lectures that 'All occupation is either play or work,' it is only the theoretical unmediatedness that is reproduced (Kant 2001, 154). This can therefore only be an attempt to deny the lectured subject the systematic unity of the higher faculties. Bourgeois ideology does not wish for the proletarian consciousness to achieve a true mediation of nature and freedom. For, by such dialectical thought, the proletariat would theoretically and practically liberate itself. Aesthetic judgments of the proletariat such as 'This Varda film is boring', or 'This Ligeti composition is boring' are only proof of the fact that bourgeois ideology has denied the proletariat the systematic unity of the higher faculties. This is to say, such judgments have their origin in class, meaning not any sense of a supposed highbrow-ness inherent to the aesthetic object itself, but rather the precise sense of the bourgeoisie's ideological domination over the proletariat. To attribute to the aesthetic object a condescending highbrow-ness, and to indict it on these grounds, is to make it lie for the reified social relations of capitalist society. It is to fall victim to the fetichism of the commodity.

The Material Truth of Boredom

Were boredom to be conceived historico-materially, as the part of political philosophy that it in fact is, a true mediation of nature and freedom within the proletarian consciousness would become possible and this consciousness would thereby theoretically and practically liberate itself. It is for this reason that bourgeois philosophy must insistently subsume boredom under ethics. It is precisely this subsumption of boredom under ethics, the determination boredom as an ethical concept, that Nietzsche criticizes when he writes: "What is the task of all higher education?" To turn men into machines. 'What are the means?' He must learn to be bored. 'How is that accomplished?' Through the concept of duty' (Nietzsche 2008, 57). By proselytizing the resignation to boredom as an ethical duty, bourgeois ideology ensures the reproduction of capital. For, not only is the subject thereby ideologically conditioned for the tedium of the working day. More importantly, by conceptualizing boredom as an ethical duty, boredom becomes an *a priori* practical necessity. Conceived thusly, as an *a priori* practical necessity, boredom no longer has any sensible relation to phenomenal conditions. Boredom, the subjective experience of boredom, cannot thereby be used as a criticism of actual society. Boredom ceases to be a subjective reflection of objective conditions. Ethics does indeed produce 'the good life,' but it is the good life for the capitalist.

Boredom has hitherto been refused its historico-material conception, and instead been insistently subsumed under bourgeois ethics, because such a historico-material conception would demonstrate its relation to liberation. For boredom can only lead to 'the good life' for the proletariat if it is comprehended theoretically as one of the contradictions immanent to the capitalist mode of production, as one of the contradictions by means of which the socialization of society becomes possible. In this case, it is the necessary aesthetic contradiction immanent to capitalist society of the omnipresence of entertainment and the total determination of time by mechanical, repetitive tasks, so much so that entertainment itself becomes such a task. As one of the contradictions immanent to capitalist society by which the socialization of society becomes possible, the aesthetic contradiction is no different from, and is a reflection of, its economic contradictions, e.g., the contradiction that inheres in the commodity between use-value and exchange-value.

It is now evident what renders all previous, bourgeois conceptions of boredom false. Hitherto, analyses of boredom have fallen into one of three conceptions. The first is that which conceptualizes boredom as a physiological state of the subject, a clinical symptom of some mental deficiency. This is the physiological conception of boredom. To this belongs O'Brien's article 'Boredom' in *Analysis* (2014, 236-244). The second is that which, taking after Kierkegaard and Heidegger, confers upon boredom a metaphysical significance: the existentialist conception of boredom. The third chapter of Svendsen's *A Philosophy of Boredom* is dedicated to this school (2005, 107-132). The last is that which posits boredom as an ethical problem. To this conception, Svendsen's final chapter and Elpidorou's *Propelled: How Boredom, Frustration, and Anticipation Lead Us to the Good Life* belong (*ibid.*, 133-152; cf. Elpidorou 2020). This is the ethical conception of boredom. The objection to all, and what these conceptions have in common, is that they treat of boredom as a mere subjectivism. Boredom is always to be attributed exclusively to the subject: as a physiological state of the subject, as a mode of the subject's being in the world, or as the subject's insufficient dutifulness. Thus, they repress the dialectical relationship between the subject and object: that whatever is found in the subject must be determinately reflected in the object. For the subject is not the world as such, as the socio-historical totality over and against it proves, and neither is the subject immediately the subject as such, but rather always the subject as mediated by the object.

In its exclusionary attribution to the subject of the blame of being bored, such philosophy implicitly affirms the sufficiency of the world as is, thereby proving itself a reactionary piece of bourgeois ideology. However, boredom

is not the irrationality of a contingent subjectivity. As has been demonstrated, boredom, as well as its dialectical other, entertainment, is an objective product of the capitalist mode of production. If the contemporary subject, meaning the subject under capitalism, feels bored or entertained, this is due to the total rational determination of the socio-historical objectivity.

Definition of the Boring

We have thus arrived at boredom's objective nature from the side of the subject. However, the objective nature of boredom is still further proved from the side of the object.

The boring cannot be that which is unmediated. The boring object is not the abstract immediacy of sense certainty (cf. Hegel 2018). Indeed, the object of abstract immediacy is always ahistorical and, therefore, novel; if it were to possess a history, it would be concretely mediated and, therefore, precisely not an abstract immediacy. Otherwise said, if one never hears the judgment 'This tree is boring,' or 'This sun is boring,' but only ever rather 'This book, composition, film, etc. is boring', this is because the binary aesthetic categories of bourgeois philosophy of the boring and the entertaining are only valid for the products of its society. By means of this subjective reduction of aesthetic categories, the objectivity that can be qualified as aesthetic is thereby reduced to those products determined by the capitalist mode of production. By means of this false binary aesthetic philosophy, bourgeois ideology seeks to foreclose any objectivity not totally determined by the capitalist mode of production. If it is only possible to conceive of objects as either entertaining or boring, a thought which is not totally determined by bourgeois ideology becomes impossible.

If the boring cannot be that which is unmediated, the boring must be that which is thoroughly mediated. The precise quality of being thoroughly mediated is what the proletariat's labor time and a symphony of Théodore Dubois share in common. The boring is precisely those structures in which the relations have become totally reified. This is why the boring is that which is predictable. It was Lukacs who, in 'Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat,' clarified the theoretical relationship between reification and prediction: 'For a system in the sense given to it by rationalism—and any other system would be self-contradictory—can bear no meaning other than that of a co-ordination, or rather a supra- and subordination of the various partial systems of forms (and within these, of the individual forms). The connections between them must always be thought of as 'necessary', i.e., as

visible in or 'created' by the forms themselves, or at least by the principle according to which forms are constructed. That is to say, the correct positing of a principle implies—at least in its general tendency—the positing of the whole system determined by it; the consequences are contained in the principle, they can be deduced from it, they are predictable and calculable' (Lukacs 1971a, 117). In the same way that, by means of bourgeois thought which tends toward total rationalization, the production output, and thus profit margins, of the capitalist mode of production become ever more predictable, by means of this same thought, the movements of the aesthetic object become ever more predictable. The aesthetic object becomes a commodity, not by the contingent possession of any sensible attribute, but by its subjection to the total rationalization of bourgeois thought. The judgment that an object is boring is the reified thought of the bourgeoisie confronted with its own reified structures.

The criterion of the aesthetic work must then become its movement according to that which is immanently necessary according to the conceptual logic of the aesthetic material, however not predictable according to the reified structures of bourgeois thought. The aesthetic work finds its life in what is necessary yet unpredictable. Thusly, it resolves the antinomy between the necessary and contingent. In its proof of a necessity that is not predictable from the reified structures of bourgeois thought, the aesthetic work points toward a historical redemption. This is the political significance of the aesthetic in late capitalism.

The Boring in Art

If bourgeois philosophy has hitherto closed its eyes to the class nature of boredom, this class nature is gleaned still more evidently in its French translation, *l'ennui*. When the aristocracy of the *Ancien Régime* feigned *ennui*, that which they sought to prove was that they did not need to be entertained. For the need to be entertained, the need for a moment of levity, betrays the burdensomeness of a coarse life.

That which *l'ennui* had been under feudalism, namely, a witty proof of the leisure of one's life, this same *l'ennui* cannot be under capitalism. That is to say, the concept is determined historico-materially. The concept undergoes a historico-material change with the increasing domination of the capitalist mode of production throughout the late 18th and 19th centuries. The proof that one did not need to earn a living becomes proof of the lifelessness of living.

In its mimetic absorption with *le semblable*, bourgeois philosophy has ignored the fact that it is *l'ennui* and not *le semblable* which not only of all the sensationalist catalogue Baudelaire compiles is the worst of the lot, but which, more importantly, is the only one capable of undoing the world as such:

Il ferait volontiers de la terre un débris
Et dans un bâillement avalerait le monde;

C'est l'Ennui!

Baudelaire 2019, 13

Rape, poison, the dagger, etc., may disrupt the laws and order of bourgeois society, but they do not put the world at ontological risk. The philosophical problem becomes: how precisely does *l'ennui* as a historico-materially determined conception of boredom threaten to undo the ontological as such?

Capitalism is characterized by 'progress, which permits an enormous increase in production within a shorter and shorter amount of time' (Marx 1982, 544). *L'ennui*, on the other hand, is characterized precisely by its lack of productivity. For the object the subjective posturing of *l'ennui* is meant to negate is precisely progress: 'j'entends par progrès la diminution progressive de l'âme et la domination progressive de la matière' (Baudelaire 1999). It is an objective domination that threatens to become total, an objective domination which at this historical moment can only be that of the capitalist mode of production. The admonition to 'just do something' upon the admission of boredom is then the attempt by capitalist ideology to bring the wayward subject back into the fold. This finally is the material truth of the latter half of Kant's ethics: 'Better to be occupied in play than with nothing at all, for in that way we at least continue to be active' (Kant 2001, 154). That which such bourgeois ethics recognizes and would preempt is that the subjective posturing of *l'ennui* is the subject's negation of the objective domination of the capitalist mode of production.

Otherwise said, the Decadent movement is the rejection of the subservient subsumption of the aesthetic to the total determination of the capitalist mode of production. This is the theoretical basis of the aestheticism of *l'art pour l'art*. However, this theory, by abstractly and mechanically removing art from the social, directly becomes false. For not only is art—as all manifestations of spirit, including reason, the ethical order, and religion—a product of

the social, but more importantly, by thusly abstracting art, any possibility of a dialectical mediation with the social is impossibilized. Art and the social fall apart. Art, just as the social, becomes the abstract immediacy of *une donnée*: "Their [exact sciences] underlying material base is permitted to dwell inviolate and undisturbed in its irrationality ('non-createdness,' 'givenness') so that it becomes possible to operate with unproblematic, rational categories in the resulting methodically purified world' (Lukacs 1971a, 120). The aestheticism of art and the exactness of the sciences share their theoretical basis precisely to the extent that they are bourgeois. Nietzsche makes 'the concept of the "selfless" [...] the distinctive sign of decadence' because the world, as a given datum, becomes an objectivity upon which the subject denies himself any influence (Nietzsche 2000, 790). The objectivity of the world becomes without subjectivity. For the artist, this is because the given objectivity of the world cannot be allowed to be determinate of his subjectivist aesthetics: the given objectivity of the world must be neglected at all costs. For the scientist, this is because subjectivity cannot be allowed to determine his objectivist findings: the given objectivity of the world must be preserved at all costs. In either case, the world becomes the difference of the operation of the subtraction of the subject.

Thus, the subject and the object grow further apart historically until they are severed the one from the other. This is the philosophical truth of such artistic representations of the type of Ramón Casas's *Joven decadente*, van Dongen's *Woman on Sofa*, etc. One can, in practice, rest unbothered precisely because one has already, in theory, cut the world off. In poetry, this is represented in Mallarmé's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*. The sleep of the fawn is proof of the subject's disengagement with the world, while the however many nymphs are only so many worlds, which, as world, are without consequence for the subject. This is why the question of their reality is beside the mark and doubt, reaching its historical moment of absoluteness, ceases to be, as it once was for Descartes, a problem:

Aimai-je un rêve ?
 Mon doute, amas de nuit ancienne, s'achève

Mallarmé 2021, 234

The non-consequence of these worlds is heard in Debussy's music: the music changes keys from D \flat major to E major, to C major, to E \flat major, and so on. None of these changes requires either harmonic preparation nor har-

monic resolution precisely to the extent that they are non-consequential for the subject. This music is within the subjective consciousness of the fawn; it is the music that he is hearing.

We can now understand why, according to Baudelaire, boredom alone is capable of undoing the world as such, why boredom puts the ontological at risk. The objectivity of the world becomes without subjectivity. However, as a dialectical relation, there is no objectivity without subjectivity. In the subject's abstraction from the world, in the subject's divorce in thought and practice from the world, the latter falls into non-consequence. Any logic of the *ontos* becomes impossible, for a logical argument requires the concept of consequence.

Conclusion

Of course, given the false abstract separation of work and play promulgated by bourgeois ideology, it is only by falling into the sleep of pure subjectivism that the subject can enjoy any 'free play of the imagination' at all (Kant 2000, 103). The problem remains, however, that, as the negative infinity of absolute subjectivism, the subject's redemption of the objective as its dialectical reflection is thereby made impossible.

A true dialectic must be found. Given the definition of the culture industry as a field in which all aesthetic objects, the aesthetic object as such, must submit *a priori* to the principle of being entertaining, one possible dialectical solution is to produce aesthetic objects that are boring, that is, to produce aesthetic objects that do not submit *a priori* to the principle of being entertaining. For this is not merely abstract negation. Such a practice is not reducible to mere abstract negation because the social totality is reflected in the work of art. The negation is determinate: it is a negation precisely of the aesthetic principle of bourgeois society. In reflecting the social totality, a dialectic between the aesthetic and the social is materially produced. This is why the mind-numbing inanity of certain moments of Shostakovich are true, not in spite of but, precisely because of their mind-numbingness. The dullness of a Shostakovich symphony is more true than the entertainment of a Disney film.

In his aesthetic judgment of Shostakovich, Boulez merely reproduces bourgeois ideology: 'Well, Shostakovich plays with clichés most of the time, I find. It's like olive oil, when you have a second and even third pressing, and I think of Shostakovich as the second, or even third, pressing of Mahler. I think, with Shostakovich, people are influenced by the autobiographical

dimension of his music' (Boulez 2015). Its theoretical manoeuvre is to attribute the music's clichéd quality as the cause of its boringness, to the autobiographical, meaning to the merely subjective. This thereby betrays itself as merely a means to disallow the conception of boredom as an objective product of the social totality.

Even if, in a kind of Pierre Menard exercise, Shostakovich had reproduced Mahler note for note, the same aesthetic object produced during the late romantic era of early capitalism cannot be the same as this object produced during the modernism of late capitalism. That is to say, an object's historico-material determination is inherent to the object itself. To affirm the contrary would be thoroughly ahistorical, dismissing the historico-material nature of consciousness. The difference is between that of a thought which is not yet totally reified and one in which reification has become total. If, in the 18th and 19th centuries, the *Ländler* could still represent a naïve conception of nature, by the late 20th century, the concept of nature could only be that of nature as, in Lukacs's words, 'the historico-philosophical objectivation of man's alienation from his own constructs' (Lukacs 1971b, 64). What was once comforting can today only be heard in its hideousness.

To adduce a final instance of a possible true dialectic, we turn to film. As we have seen, *l'ennui*, which began as the negation of capitalist progress, soon devolved into a mere aesthetic languor. Certainly, such an *ennui* is represented in the films of Antonioni. In his celebrated long tracking shots, that which Antonioni stages in such films as *L'Eclisse* is precisely this subjective aimlessness, the wandering character at dawn. To stop the analysis here, however, would be to fall into the trap of subjectivist readings, which recommend as the sole concern the abstract internality of the protagonist as a means of forestalling all reflective thought of the objective. Such readings thereby betray the reactionary nature of all such non-dialectical thought. They are the theoretical attempt to cordon off the objective from any dialectical subjective interference and thereby render the objective unalterable. For the essential here is that this aimlessness has as its backdrop, that is, has as its historico-material conditions, the construction of bourgeois apartment blocks taking over the outskirts where the laborers' children once played. Subjective *ennui* is situated precisely within the midst of the objective limitless expansion of capitalist society. This is precisely because the one is the cause of the other, that is, because they are dialectically related. It is the non-teleological nature of capital which objectively produces the non-teleological *ennui* of the subject. By mediating the two moments that have, in the reified thought of the bourgeoisie, become abstracted the one from the other, Anto-

nioni re-dialecticizes the two moments and makes them true again. The bourgeois ideology which would claim boredom as merely a particular and contingent irrationality of the subject, that is, as having no reflection on the objective totality of capitalist society, betrays itself as merely a means to preserve this same objective totality and is thereby proven to be false.

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Social Art: The Work of Art in Capitalism

Abstract

While not considered the focus of Marx, aesthetics, and art have become a project of Marxism. But understanding art in a Marxist world requires taking Marx's philosophy and understanding how art behaves in capitalism. I transplant the artwork to a Marxist analysis by investigating art as described by Heidegger, Dufrenne, and Merleau-Ponty, how art relates to the idea of the commodity in Marx, culture in Deleuze, and art in modern capitalism through Marcuse.

Keywords

Art, Aesthetics, Marxism, Capitalism, Martin Heidegger

1. Ontology of Art

To properly conduct this project, we need to establish a working concept of art—primarily as it exists in capitalist systems. Art continues to evolve in contemporary times as it re-engages in artistic pursuits. While philosophic writings often play catch-up, two significant texts have solidly described a more recent exploration of art. These are *The Origin of the Work of Art*, an essay by Martin Heidegger, and Mikel Dufrenne's *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, a text exploring the aesthetic quality of art.

I will explore the concept of art in its explication by Heidegger and Dufrenne. Before moving into this text, we should note that while the diversity of art is seemingly endless, I will focus on visual forms of art for this project. Visual art is the section of art with the most coverage, historically since the rise of capitalism (a critical reference point for the project). As a result, that

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is the section of art found in the market dynamics of economies in contemporary times. This gives us a unique set of information to work with. We can trace the commoditization of art throughout history—from ancient art to industrialization—and trace its economic and social function. As a note, I am focusing on art while not committing to a historical project. Therefore, I will stick primarily to art as it has been situated in capitalism and not older market systems, such as feudalism or primitive communism.

Heidegger and “The Origin of the Work of Art”

In Heidegger’s essay “The Origin of the Work of Art,” we are confronted with a working concept of art and the nature of its origin as a work of art. This isn’t to say that, in some way, Heidegger explores the birth of art in a historical sense. Instead, he writes, “Origin here means that from which and by which something is what it is and as it is. What something is, at it is, we call its essence” (Heidegger 2008). This idea of origin implies that we can understand that art has a particular essence that can be dissected and explored so that we may say something about its composition. Early in the text, Heidegger explains that the essence of art is also “the origin of both artist and work” (Heidegger 2008).

At first glance, this second quote seems to say nothing different than the original assertion, except maybe a division between artist and work in the body of art essence. But on closer inspection, we see that Heidegger has subtly introduced the second aspect of his meditation, a vital piece of our project. That is, we need to determine both what art is and what is a *work of art*. To be a work of art is a particular kind of essence that is much more specific than art.¹

But how do we see this particular “work”? It is not found in some professional sense that art critics or even philosophers assign. The work of art is found, instead, in the art itself. As Heidegger says, “Art essentially unfolds in the artwork” (Heidegger 2008). To more closely understand the work of art, Heidegger explores an ontology of things and thingness, which he considers a telescoping from the more specific to the more general. Heidegger moves to understand how the parts make the whole, specifically regarding the idea of equipment. He writes, “...equipment displays an affinity with the artwork

¹ The notion of art can be expanded into a great many directions, but to restrict it to the *work* means it is deeper and more specific than a mere artistic venture. It codifies and categorizes it into a space in capitalism that is important to our project.

insofar as it is something produced by the human hand. However, by its self-sufficient presencing, the work of art is similar to the very thing that has taken shape and is self-contained” (Heidegger 2008). This helps further refine our understanding of the work of art because we now know that crafting by the artist has design, intent, and utility—all-important notions that also go into creating the work of art.

To further expand on this argument, Heidegger says, “The equipmental being of the equipment consists indeed in its usefulness. But this usefulness itself rests in the abundance of an essential Being of the equipment. We call it reliability” (Heidegger 2008). This reliability is the *techne* of equipment because that is what it aims toward.² When looking at art, we can see that to find its *techne* is also to find its motivation and projection. Art, then, serves a purpose that is visibly part of its essence and, therefore, contributes to its origin. Heidegger says later, “Art is actual in the artwork. Hence, we first seek the actuality of the work. In what does it consist of? Artwork universally displays a thingly character, albeit in a wholly distinct way” (Heidegger 2008). This is an important connection between equipment and its nature. Because equipment, in this case, is a thing, and so is a work of art. Therefore, we can see that the thingly character of the equipment radically alters our perception of the art and how it leads to being available to our perception.

Heidegger, further developing his concept of the work of art, explains the importance of truth in finding the nature of art. In this case, the work of art must communicate a sense of truth (*aletheia*). This argument means “Truth means the essence of the true. We think this essence in recollecting the Greek word *aletheia*, the unconcealment of beings” (Heidegger 2008). This unconcealment is vital to art because it is how we reveal the truth. By interacting with art, we connect to the craft in a way we would phenomenologically call being-in-the-world. Finding ourselves a part of the art creates an unconcealing that reveals the truth of the work. Heidegger writes:

For Greek thought, the essence of knowing consists in *aletheia*, that is, in the revealing of beings. It supports and guides all comportment, towards beings. *Techne*, as knowledge experienced in the Greek manner, is a bringing forth of beings in that it *brings forth* what is present as such out of concealment and specifically into the unconcealment of its appearance; *techne* never signifies the action of making (Heidegger 2008).

² *Techne* here means a type of nature of craft and craftsmanship that many Greeks used to refer to the artists as well as other types of craftsman.

This is an important note. Our interaction with the work drives the unconcealing. This is a type of labor mirrored by the creation of art. Furthering this labor allows the experience of the artist, art, and spectator to flourish.

This interaction is clear later, as Heidegger explains:

Art, as the setting-into-work of truth, is poetry. Not only the creation of the work is poetic, but equally poetic, though in its own way, is the preserving of the work; for a work is in actual effect as a work only when we remove ourselves from our commonplace routine and move into what is disclosed by the work, so as to bring our own essence itself to take a stand in the truth of beings (Heidegger 2008).

This interaction between the spectator and the artistic work is how art comes to reveal the truth. We find ourselves experiencing a work of art when we view it. We remove ourselves from the background noise and truly experience the work.

Dufrenne and the Phenomenological Elements of Art

Mikel Dufrenne is another prominent voice in the conversation about what constitutes art. While Heidegger focuses on the essence of the work of art, Dufrenne takes a phenomenological view of art and describes it in a more physical sense. Dufrenne describes the general goals of art in his book *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*:

These are the general conditions common to all the arts through which the work can: (1) assume formal determinations, especially spatiality, which will constitute it as an object by giving consistency and harmony to the sensuous; and (2) say something and manifest (through an internal movement which confers on it a certain temporality) its aptitude for a type of expression which surpasses the explicit significations which the work sometimes presents (Dufrenne 1973).

There are several arguments in this excerpt; each one is worth analyzing: The first section of this quote suggests that art must occupy space and position that phenomenologically orients into being recognized as artistic. This does not mean that art must occupy a space at a gallery or museum, but it does mean that art needs to be constituted in a particular structure that uses materials in a certain way—that this production is, in fact, a work of art. The second half explains that art must present itself as art and occupy a place in time. Art must have a quality that engenders a reaction in the viewer that may cause effects beyond the assumed; i.e., a painting engenders a response to its concept other than the notice of color and form on a canvas.

Dufrenne calls these components “matter” and writes, “Every work possesses a matter which constitutes, properly speaking, its sensuous nature” (Dufrenne 1973). He continues, “The matter of music is sound and not the instruments which are the means for engendering sound” (Dufrenne 1973). This quote reveals more clearly what matter is: the expression of the product of creation ultimately constitutes matter. In turn, the shaping of this matter creates what Dufrenne would call “an aesthetic experience.” This matter becomes what Heidegger would consider the work’s essence, which means that its nature is how we experience the work (in a phenomenological sense).

Before diving further into the essential components of the work of art, we must define what constitutes an aesthetic experience. According to Dufrenne, we first become involved in the aesthetic experience when we recognize the aesthetic object in the work of art itself. He describes the aesthetic object as “always relative to consciousness, to *a* consciousness, but only because consciousness is always relative to the object, coming into the world with a history in which it is multiple, in which one consciousness crosses another as it encounters the object” (Dufrenne 1973). Therefore, this object is a conduit by which we engage in art. Engagement lets us enter the same world in which art exists. We are led into the aesthetic experience when we recognize the object and consciously interact with the art. Essentially, the aesthetic object is our way of entering into the experience of art. This includes developing a sense of art as an object of the gaze.

Dufrenne devotes an entire chapter of his work to “The Structure of the Work of Art in General.” As noted above, a fundamental part of the work of art is its sensuous nature or matter. As Dufrenne stated, this is not necessarily the physical components used in creating the art (paint, instrument, ink, etc.) but the underlying sensuous engagement of the art with the spectator viewing it. Dufrenne defines this process when he writes, “The artist wrestles with his materials so that they may disappear before our eyes as materials and be exalted as matter” (Dufrenne 1973).

There is also the ontology of this matter to become the “represented object.” As Dufrenne writes, “The represented object is not necessarily a real object which would serve as a model for the creative enterprise. It can obviously, also be a creature taken from the universe of the fantastic or the legendary” (Dufrenne 1973). This is the object of the art that leads one into it, the central image that drives the interaction with the work. This leads to a more intimate viewing of the work and gives us an understanding of the artist’s meaning. As Dufrenne notes, this object need not be a gathering from

sensible objects we experience regularly but instead constitutes a version of art that can excite the imagination and the senses and bring the viewer into the fold of fantasy as profoundly as an image of everyday-level recognition.

Moving more deeply into this relation of the object becoming an aesthetic object, Dufrenne explains, "Aesthetic perception can become acquainted with the aesthetic object only if it is an object and its sensuous qualities are attached to a support which they qualify" (Dufrenne 1973). What this means for our work of art is that it brings perceptive resonance into the fold when we interact with the aesthetic object—more clearly defined here as the object of the art that converts from seeing to viewing. This work of art is more clearly in line with Heidegger's notion of the work of art because it is a movement toward the truth of the piece and its unconcealed components that we interact with within the viewing process. Dufrenne explains:

It is not that the doctrine is the truth of the work but, rather, that the work is the truth of the doctrine. For the work does not need to be proved; it does the proving itself. Ideas are formed on the basis of the work and possess value only if they can be rediscovered in the work (Dufrenne 1973).

In a Heideggerian sense, this doctrine makes the truth available and relatable for the spectator. Dufrenne argues, "The painting must be understood in itself" (Dufrenne 1973). This is true, however, for all types of art—the painting, the musical piece, the dance performance, and the written story—they must be independent of the outside to stand on their own. This does not mean that art does not relate to or interact with the world around it—on the contrary, one of the critical features of artwork is that it places itself in and of the world. By this, Dufrenne means that the work of art must be a single being in itself and not directly rely on outside stimuli to deliver its unconcealing and, ultimately, the idea of the truth.

Heidegger and Dufrenne provide us with tools/arguments, but Karl Marx shows how we gain the context to understand the art process. Heidegger helps us know the essence of the work of art and its almost spiritual composition. Dufrenne presents us with a more phenomenological and commonsense notion of art. However, both perspectives are critical to understanding art beyond the single viewer.

2. Marx and the Commodity

A unique aspect of capitalist production is that almost all goods, including art, require some physical exertion to contribute to or complete a finished good. Therefore, art does not have a different relationship to the market than other finished goods. To further crystallize this relationship, I will explore the notion of commodity, labor, work, use-value, and surplus-value in this section. I will endeavor to understand how the capitalist system has turned almost all human activity toward the world of production while subsuming art from a historically unique position into the ever-thicker folds of capitalist economies.

We can argue that the artist's surplus-value is found and kept as this type of creative energy deposits itself in the work. As Heidegger said, "The artwork is, to be sure, a thing that is made, but it says something other than what the mere thing itself is, *allo agoreuet*. The work makes public something than itself; it manifests something other; it is an allegory" (Heidegger 2008). This analysis reaffirms our previous claim that a work of art is not merely the physical canvas and the paint on it or the dancer and their stage. Instead, it is a deeper element that transcends physical lines of communication and draws upon the more significant part of consciousness to transmit from the artist to art and from the art to the viewer.

For Marx, economic activity is social. Therefore, it is crucial to understand commodity placement within an economic system or marketplace. For Marx, this is primarily done through the distribution system of capitalist production. Marx supplies a detailed discussion of this process in *Grundrisse*. The capitalist distribution system delivers a commodity from a production item to a final good. This exchange is driven by the most important commodity: money. Marx writes:

The simple fact that the commodity exists doubly, in one aspect as a specific product whose natural form of existence ideally contains (latently contains) its exchange value, and in the other aspect as manifest exchange value (money), in which all connection with the natural form of the product is stripped away again—this double, *differentiated* existence must develop into a *difference*, and the difference into *antithesis* and *contradiction* (Marx 1973).

This notion of exchange value is central to understanding Marx's ideas. Essentially, it is the value of a good relative to other goods, broken down into a measurement of labor-time. However, as Marx notes above, there is also

exchange value as it relates to the exchange commodity (money). Money occupies a unique position as an exchangeable commodity in that all other commodities can be exchanged for money.

I arrive at an opportunity to systematize how the work of art exists in a Marxist economic position. Even if we remove the labor cost of producing a painting, we can assign a value (even if not congruent with the labor theory of value). This value depends on a cash zero-sum (i.e. gather the cost of paint and canvas and all other producing materials and then assign a value as such, once again disregarding labor input as value-added). Therefore, we find our first possibility to import the notion of art into value.³

Commodities and Marxist Political Economy

For Marx, the body is the source of labor-power, meaning it is the source of the energy and output that allows labor to be performed (Marx 1976). He believes the worker sells his labor-power to achieve subsistence, which turns the labor-power sold into a commodity (Marx 1976). Marx defines a commodity as “first of all, an external object, a thing through its qualities satisfies human needs of whatever kind” (Marx 1976). This notion of a commodity shows us that labor can become a commodity that creates other commodities.

In general, we do not consider art to be a commodity, at least not in contemporary definitions. However, Because art satisfies human needs, it meets Marx’s basic criteria for commodity. Yet the problem is more complicated: the labor-power input into art is unique and ever-changing, making each work of art a unique piece that operates as a stored value in the market for goods. This unique value will be explained further on, but for now, suffice to say that art can be an activity that consumes labor-power and has a unique value regarding its creation.

The time and energy it takes to create this finished product (commodity) are what labor theory of value refers as labor-time. As Marx writes, “A given quantity of any commodity contains a definite quantity of human labor. Therefore, the form of value must not only express value in general but also quantitatively determined value, i.e. the magnitude of value” (Marx 1976). This section shows that value is derived from labor-time and the values of

³ Discussion of labor input value and further exploration of what this means in Marxist labor theory of value will be discussed in-depth in further sections. For now, I merely understand that value is created by inputs and although I am not noting it here, labor is indeed an input and indeed adds value to the work of art, as in all other finished goods.

the inputs that are utilized to create a commodity. This value system is central to Marx's description of how labor can take disparate ingredients and create something new. We cannot develop a system of value where we merely take the cost of the inputs and add them up to find the cost of the product. Instead, it's the inputs and the special commodity of labor-power that create the value of a finished commodity.

This labor, as I discussed earlier, can be put into place for the creation of art as well. The creation of art, like any economic production, requires inputs, a process by which those inputs are united, and at least one laborer who undergoes an act of creation to take the inputs and create a newly formed object—a commodity itself. This process takes time, or what Marx calls labor-time. Each unit of labor-time (typically expressed as an hour) has a certain cost, and that cost is embedded in the value of the final product. Therefore, those items that require similar inputs and similar time and energy should be relatively equal. There is a great deal of debate over the accuracy of labor theory of value, but in this case, it proves very useful because it helps take the creation of art, a diverse activity, and puts it on equal footing with other forms of labor in the sense that art can be reduced and picked apart to equally measurable units, even when comparing painting to writing a poem, for example.

Use-value refers to the measurements of the productivity value of the labor or inputs. In labor theory of value, use-value is a concept developed in labor that essentially takes the components of a commodity and describes these components in a standardized way. For the sake of generality and ease, I will call the measure of this use-value utils instead of money since varying costs and representations of money can make a standardized measurement difficult. The notion of utility is vital to our understanding of commodity production and how it distributes inputs, money, and labor-time to various tasks in the creation of a commodity. If a painter is preparing to create a painting there are necessary and unnecessary items. The unnecessary items may cost more but yield more utils in the end and therefore have enhanced use-value. That may cost more but bring more utils to the project and, therefore, have enhanced use-value and can be applied in a different measure than the necessary items.

In the scenario above, Marx may conclude that this creative value that erupts from the labor of the artist is in some sense a part of its surplus-value. Indeed, Marx argues that surplus-value arises when the laborer works past the point of subsistence to generate extra value that is in turn absorbed by the capitalist. In a similar way, we can argue that the artist's surplus-value is

found and retained as this type of creative energy that deposits itself in the work. As Heidegger said, “The artwork is, to be sure, a thing that is made, but it says something other than what the mere thing itself is, *allo agoreuet*. The work makes public something than itself; it manifests something other; it is an allegory” (Heidegger 2008). This analysis reaffirms our previous claim that a work of art is not merely the physical canvas and the paint on it or the dancer and her stage. Instead, it is a deeper element that transcends mere physical lines of communication and draws upon the greater part of consciousness to transmit from the artist to art and from the art to the viewer.

Now that I have defined the terms of our debate, it is time to return to the real world to generate a new theory. For Marx, because economic activity is social in nature, it is important to understand the placement of commodities within an economic system or marketplace. For Marx, this is primarily done through the distribution system of capitalist production. Marx provides a detailed discussion of this process in *Grundrisse*.

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This is where I arrive at an opportunity to systematize how the work of art exists in a Marxist economic position. Even if we remove the labor cost of producing a painting, we find that we can assign a value (even if not congruent with the labor theory of value) dependent on a cash zero-sum (i.e. gather the cost of paint and canvas and all other producing materials and then assign a value as such, once again disregarding labor input as value-added). Therefore, we find our first possibility to import the notion of art into value.

In this section, I have laid forth a significant amount of theory necessary for my project. The notion of art as a commodity and that commodities are subject to capitalist control of culture will show us the power that capitalism has over the artist and how such a level of control drastically alters what the work of art is and how it is presented. In the next section, I will expand this theoretical framework and develop the commoditized system of art and the artist's labor.

3. The Social Laborer (Artist)

In this section, I will explore the action of creating art, and its subsequent viewing, in greater depth. In the first part, I will draw out the theoretical model of this action and explore its relation to the body—the source of labor. In the first two segments, I will draw lines around the body and demarcate for its ability to experience, even in capitalism, individual responses. In the third segment, I will take up Gilles Deleuze, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Herbert Marcuse to explore how the particular artist described in the former two sections has a unique but still captured existence in capitalism.

Art and Artist as Process

Although Heidegger's conception of art is compelling, it is incomplete because it does not account for the viewer. It is not enough for art to exist—it must be perceived and appraised by viewers to be considered art, even by only one viewer. This is the case because art is continually expanding as a concept. However, what has remained true is that art is both created and recreated in spectating. It is not enough to paint a beautiful self-portrait and keep it hidden away from all onlookers. This would make it nothing but the combination of inputs and creative energy—ingredients for art, but not enough to establish something as a work of art on its own. Only once the painting is seen for the first time does it become a work of art, as Heidegger would describe it.

Art can also have a complex nature in its expression. Heidegger asks, "But perhaps the proposition that art is truth setting itself to work intends to revive the fortunately obsolete view that art is an imitation and depiction of something actual" (Heidegger 2008). He further states that "the work, therefore, is not the reproduction of some particular entity that happens to be at hand at any given time; it is, on the contrary, the reproduction of things' general essence" (Heidegger 2008). This movement in conversation over art

is imperative to understanding the nature of the work of art. Art is not merely copying things around us—instead, art is an interpretation of the essence of things. This leads to a deeper conversation in which the work of art channels something of our mimesis and grasps a more central component of the subject. Heidegger cites the example of Van Gogh’s painting of a peasant’s shoes. While this is merely a recreation of a pair of shoes on canvas, Heidegger argues that it is still a unique work of art because we capture the essence of these shoes and its representation stimulates the viewer (Heidegger 2008).

This approach to art is not a singular system, though. Gilles Deleuze, in his book *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, effectively synthesizes Bacon’s works and the philosophical ideas that are embedded in Bacon and all artists. This work on sensation in paintings becomes his central project and analysis of Bacon. Deleuze, in a prescient moment to our topic, writes “The figurative (representation) implies the relationship of an image to an object that it is supposed to illustrate; but it also implies the relationship of an image in a composite whole that assigns a specific object to each of them” (Deleuze 2004).

Deleuze seems to be saying that when we create art, we use the figurative form that draws on experience to suggest emotions, action, and movement. Also, when I take this analysis further, it becomes clear that we divide our understanding of art by being a series of objects that create a whole message. It is also essential to recognize that the whole leads us to specific objects. The painting has a unique role in drawing us into it with a focus and a powerful wholeness that creates each object as a single constituent of a more extensive system. Deleuze explains further that “The contour, as a “place” is, in fact, the place of exchange in two directions: between the material structure and the Figure, and between the Figure and the field” (Deleuze 2004). But what are the field and Figure, and how do they relate to the material structure?

In Deleuze’s analysis of Bacon, the Figure is the body or the object of flesh. The field it engages in is the painting, the likeness taken from it, and the landscape it evokes. So where should we situate material structure? Material structure is the formalized markings of the painting. It is the areas of the painting that frame and center The Figure, creating a recognizable space to arise as the field after given thought. For our project, it is helpful to look at this information and see what kind of experiences seem to be at play in painting and their effects on the body. Deleuze rightfully says this is an area of exchange because it is the movement of the eye and the attention that the

contour directs, which specifically creates the activity necessary to make an exchange “between the material structure and the Figure, and the Figure and the field” (Deleuze 2004).

But what does all of this mean about the methodology of the painter? Creating a work of art that can evoke such qualities cannot be done without forethought. Deleuze seems to believe that a distinctive element of painting makes this happen. He says, “...when sight discovers in itself a specific function of touch that is uniquely its own, distinct from its optical function. One might say that painters paint with their eyes, but only insofar as they touch with their eyes” (Deleuze 2004). This methodology means that to view art is to touch it and to create art is to feel it with your eyes. This perception of art as touching and interacting engulfs the senses and merges viewership with experience. In this sense, we understand art as more than a projection of thought onto canvas, but in many ways, physical interaction with a type of creation.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty gives a compelling sense of this interpretation and the interaction we have when interacting with art in *The Visible and the Invisible*. He says:

A certain red is also a fossil drawn up from the depths of imaginary worlds. If we took all these participations into account, we would recognize that a naked color, and in general a visible, is not a chunk of absolutely hard, indivisible being, offered all naked to a vision which could be only total or null, but is rather a sort of straits between exterior and interior horizons ever gaping open, something that comes to touch lightly and makes diverse regions of the colored or visible world resound at the distances, a certain differentiation, an ephemeral modulation of this world—less a color or a thing, therefore, than a difference between things and colors, a momentary crystallization of colored being or of visibility (Merleau-Ponty 1968).

Merleau-Ponty is saying here that when we approach the visible world, one that would include paintings, we see that from the deepest recesses of our minds, we generate ideas about the images we see. In a phenomenological sense, we would observe the painting as merely uninformed objects collected in a single space. But as the sediment sifts into our perception, we begin to see a tighter connection to the painting. That said, for this project, we can directly see the value of our interacting with the visible by finding the archaic images in our consciousness that reach out and interact with the objects of our perception.

But what precisely does this do for our project? It helps that the reasoning behind it is developed further in yet another Merleau-Ponty essay titled “Eye and Mind.” This essay by Merleau-Ponty is focused on painting. It forms the notion of art and painting relating to image and perception. He says:

The word “image” is in bad repute because we have thoughtlessly believed that a drawing was a tracing, a copy, a second thing, and that the mental image was such a drawing, belonging among our private bric-a-brac. But if in fact it is nothing of the kind, then neither the drawing nor the painting belongs to the in-itself any more than the image does (Merleau-Ponty 1993).

This description of our perception is that we have difficulty claiming that we can see art and immediately perceive it as it is—its in-itself, as Merleau-Ponty describes. We thought the painting of shoes was merely a picture of shoes, just a painted copy of something in the tangible world. This is a misleading notion. We are not as in control of the object and our perception as we would like to think. What Merleau-Ponty wants us to take away from this is that our perception is of the world and in the world. This means we perceive things a certain way without concentrating effort. For Merleau-Ponty, all art is a kind of interpretation, and all viewing of art is an interpretation of an interpretation.

I have extensively analyzed art as it is presented to us in the world and our perceptual experience. From here, it becomes clear that the bodily experience of art is beginning to look more and more apparent as a type of sensation for the artist and the viewer. That said, our experience thus far with experiencing art has been insufficient. Further ahead, we explore how art and the artists exist in the system of capitalism.

Process, Viewing, and Capitalism

To wit: Does capitalism affect art? If so, why and how?

To answer the first question: of course. Any system will always affect artistic output because it drives the cost of inputs for art, the free time the artist has away from life-sustaining labor (if the artist is not a full-time artist, which I will not consider now), and often the subjects of the art. If we accept that art is affected by a system, then all art made in that system will have some relation to the art already created, shaping new meanings and subjects that reflect the effect of a system.

Herbert Marcuse argues in *One-Dimensional Man* that capitalism drives people towards conformity and to chase profits. The search for profit is potentially one of the most understated threats of capitalism. It drives workers to accept lower wages in pursuit of “future wealth”—what Marx refers to as the Reserve Army of Labor. This is part of capitalism’s protective reflexes to keep laborers working while blaming their poverty on personal rather than systemic failures.

Marcuse writes:

Under the conditions of a rising standard of living, non-conformity with the system itself appears to be socially useless, and the more so when it entails tangible economic and political disadvantages and threatens the smooth operation of the whole (Marcuse 1991).

This excerpt can be misinterpreted in isolation but describes the exact mechanism described above—capitalism manipulates primarily through its ability to instill fear in losing wealth. This heresy has been guarded against not just by the promise of wealth but by piecemeal reforms disguised as progress when they are simply reifying the capitalist order. Shorter work weeks, no child labor, and the like (at least in the Western world) have made much of the labor force believe it has won the battle over who controls the lives of the proletariat. However, as Marcuse, Deleuze, Marx, and other thinkers have shown, capitalists have lost the battle to win the war.

Suppose we reframe this analysis and focus on its place in art. In that case, we see that art is not only subject to the general energy of capitalism but receives particular focus and allowance by capitalism due to the fear that art has often reflected the feelings of the lower class before rising (the French Revolution comes to mind). Marcuse notes, “Technical progress and more comfortable living permit the systematic inclusion of libidinal components into the realm of commodity production and exchange” (Marcuse 1991). While Marcuse is referring to the pervasiveness of sexuality in modern culture, in more general terms, he is alluding to the body and its process. As I noted earlier, art derives from the body, and therefore we can see that culture has come back to capitalism but only what is considered appropriate and non-threatening. This endorsement of the art of capitalism greatly changes the nature of art and threatens to suppress all art that disturbs this “comfortable living” that Marcuse notes.

As we can see, the development of art has been significantly impacted by the rise of capitalism and the ideas surrounding value and inspiration. As these influences have intermingled, new pressures and systems face the artist as they pursue their art. As we continue to move forward, these influences will wax and wane and help shape what art becomes in the future.

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